GEOGRAPHIES OF LEARNING IN THE BLACKFEET NATION

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

GEOGRAPHIES OF LEARNING IN THE BLACKFEET NATION

Though there is a wealth of theory and research on the relationship between space and identity, few, if any, investigations in geographic literature have examined the relationship between space, identity and education. This research asks the question: In what ways are the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation similar or different and how does this relationship affect the formation of the identity of the Blackfeet traditional student? For this project, students’ affiliation with traditional practice is defined by their self-identification and is not connected with their tribal membership status. In interviews, students discuss intersections of education and community and the ways in which the practices and content of learning associated with both spaces affects the learning experience and the self. The research employs a nonessentialist, constitutive phenomenological framework tempered by theories of the productiveness of power, focused on the disidentification of dominant categories through an analysis of: the performativity of agency, the multiple scales of historicity, the situatedness of experience, and the contingent nature of the production of meaning, for the purposes of exploring identity formation, based on the idea that this approach will lead to the elucidation of matters involved in the internalization of the motivation to participate in spaces of learning. The findings show that there is a strong relationship between three elements: spaces of the school that reflect significant aspects of spaces of learning in the community, positive student experiences, and motivation. Also shown, is that the rubric of analysis devised by the researcher, works to break down dominant beliefs regarding the success of traditional Blackfeet students in the school. Finally, a strong case is made for the inclusion of spaces of formal and informal learning in geographic analysis.

KEYWORDS: Identity, Space, Education, Blackfeet, Community
GEOGRAPHIES OF LEARNING IN THE BLACKFEET NATION

By

Kristin Kay Seery

Dr. Anna Secor, Director of Thesis
Dr. Anna Secor, Director of Graduate Studies
December 15, 2006
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GEOGRAPHIES OF LEARNING IN THE BLACKFEET NATION

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Kristin Kay Seery
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Anna J. Secor, Professor of Geography
Lexington, Kentucky
2006

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This research is not about Native Americans. It is about the Blackfeet tribe, a distinct social and religious group with a historical geographical location. They currently occupy one and a half million of the twenty two million acres of land that was their original location. They are one of the many tribes of North America that still has people who operate in the old way – with respect, for the good of the tribe. They are one of the many tribes of North America that still must work to heal from the symptoms of oppression. This research is done with the hope of assisting that healing. I do not claim to know all the ways that education could change for the better; I can only point to some of the reasons why it should change. Though the young people in my study speak so clearly about the things that they love about their tribe and see so clearly the ways in which the people of their tribe still suffer, the path to healing and wholeness, still, as it always has, must begin with respect for the elders and the knowledge that they carry.

Therefore, I dedicate this research to the Blackfeet tribe, particularly to all of the elders who are the keepers and teachers of the Blackfeet ways.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I heartily thank all those who made the completion of my thesis possible. I would like to thank Dr. Anna Secor for advising me in this process. Also, I would like to thank my committee members: Dr. Jane Jensen and Dr. Michael Crutcher. Thanks also to Dr. Beth Goldstein for her inspirational and understanding approach to education. Additionally, I would like to thank the University of Kentucky for the awarding of research support that made possible my trip to Browning to conduct this investigation.

I also owe a great deal of thanks to the Browning Public School District, especially Superintendent Mary Johnson and High School Principal Janet Guardipee for facilitating my research. Thank you also to the wonderful students who took the time to talk with me and who did their best to answer all of my difficult questions. My thanks and my affection goes to all the students, staff and faculty, whom I encountered during my years of teaching on the reservation – you have affected my life more than I can say.

This work would not have been possible if it were not for my auntie, my friend, my elder, Shirlee Crowshoe, who teaches me so many good things. Thanks also to Dr. Darryl Robes Kipp for reviewing the thesis and for telling really good stories. Also, I cannot give enough thanks to my parents John and Kay Seery who are my first teachers and my biggest supporters. Last, but certainly not least, thanks to my greatest love, the person who understands me the best, and has patience with me at my worst; who learns from me, and from whom I learn, Edward J. Kopp.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ iii

Table of Contents........................................................................................................ iv

List of Tables................................................................................................................ vi

List of Figures.............................................................................................................. vii

Chapter One: Introduction........................................................................................... 1

Chapter Two: Methods and Site
  Introduction.................................................................................................................. 7
  Participants................................................................................................................... 8
  Design of the Research............................................................................................... 10
  Survey Design............................................................................................................ 11
  Survey Implementation............................................................................................... 15
  Interview Design........................................................................................................ 16
  Interview Implementation........................................................................................... 17
  Interview Analysis..................................................................................................... 21
  Research Integrity..................................................................................................... 24
  Site of the Research.................................................................................................. 27

Chapter Three: Review of the Literature on Space, Identity, Education, and Native American Studies
  Theoretical Framework............................................................................................... 39
  Identity Work in Geography Pertaining to Education and Native American Studies................................................................................................................................. 48
  Identity Work in Education, Anthropology, and Native American Studies.............. 51

Chapter Four: Results Part I: Traditional Identity Formation in the Interviewed Population
  Introduction.................................................................................................................. 59
  Analysis of Observations and Scholarly Work: Historicity, Situatedness, and Contingency in the Formation of Meaning................................................................................................................................. 60
  Analysis of Interviews and Observations: Historicity, Situatedness, and Contingency Within Aspects of Traditional Identity Formation.................................................. 71
  Conclusion: Results Part I........................................................................................ 79

Chapter Five: Results Part II: Influences On Identity Formation In Formal and Informal Spaces of Learning
  Introduction.................................................................................................................. 82
  Definition and Discussion: Modes of Teaching......................................................... 83
  The Community: Informal Spaces of Learning.......................................................... 85
The School: Formal Spaces of Learning.........................................................91
Conclusion: Results Part II.................................................................106

Chapter Six: Conclusions, Implications and Future Directions
Conclusions......................................................................................108
Implications and Future Directions.................................................112

Appendices
Appendix A: Survey Instrument..................................................116
Appendix B: Interview Prompts.....................................................118

References.....................................................................................119

Vita.................................................................................................124
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1, Students and Faculty of Browning High School...............................9
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1, Map..................................................................................................................27
Figure 2.2, Along the Road South from Browning to Great Falls.................................28
Figure 2.3, South On the Reservation: Outside of Heart Butte.....................................29
Figure 2.4, Winter Plains West of Browning.................................................................31
Figure 2.5, Display Case in Browning High School Library........................................38
Figure 3.1, Mural in Browning High School Hallway....................................................58
Figure 4.1, A Browning Street At Sunrise.....................................................................78
Figure 4.2, A Browning High School Hallway...............................................................81
Figure 5.1, Frybread: A Food of Community.................................................................107
Figure 6.1, A Road From the Community to the School..............................................112
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This research, in general, is about space and identity. Specifically, it is about space, identity, learning and the Blackfeet tribe. The main research question is as follows: In what ways are the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation similar or different and how does this relationship affect the formation of the identity of the Blackfeet traditional student? In particular, this research identifies similarities and differences between the spaces of formal education located in the local public high school and the spaces of informal education located in the community of the reservation. Additionally, it examines specific ways in which students who self-identify as traditional, experience their formal educational spaces of the school, relative to their experiences of learning in informal spaces of education in the community. Further, it examines how the produced meanings of each of these spaces and the produced meanings resulting from the relationship of these two spaces impact the formation of identity in Blackfeet students who self-identify as traditional.\(^1\) This self-identification is based on the way the student answered question twelve in the survey. This larger research question leads to specific research questions, all of which assume the location of the reservation:

1) What does it mean to be a traditional Blackfeet person?
2) What are the similarities and differences between the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation?
3) What spaces, if any, in the school does the traditional student affiliate with and why?
4) Is school a space where traditional students feel good about expressing his or her traditional identity? Are there times and spaces that constrain or assist this expression?
5) In what ways do spaces created by informal education become reflected or excluded from spaces of formal education?
6) In what ways does the traditional student negotiate these differences? Do they tend to evaluate themselves or experience positive or negative emotion according to the framework of the formal spaces or the informal spaces or a synthesis of the two?
7) What are the results of these differences for the traditional student?

\(^1\) The student will define the meaning of traditional. In other words, I am not concerned with how the student defines traditional in order to select them as an interviewee. Instead, I am relying on the student to explain what being traditional means to them.
8) Is there any pattern that becomes evident from examining what helps individual traditional students be successful in school?

This research can be helpful in answering larger questions in the discipline of geography such as:

1) What is our understanding of education in human geography?
2) What is our understanding of school as space?
3) How are space, place and identity connected?
4) How does identity influence behavior?
5) How do we define, identify and pursue social justice?

On this larger scale, questions of identity, space and education informed by the discipline of geography should be pursued for a multitude of reasons. This research addresses only two of those reasons, specifically, if geographically informed research reveals the spaces of formal education in multiple locations to be significantly different from the local spaces of informal education, then an investigation into these similarities and differences and the resulting effects on the identity of the student, could have a significant impact on educational theory and policy, as well as contributing to the academic dialogues in geography concerned with questions of place, space, identity and social justice. Specifically, in the area of educational policy, if the field of education and geography can work together to reveal whether or not there are significant differences between the informal educational practices of a place and the formal pedagogy of the educational institutions within that place, this type of research may eventually lead to insights concerning relatively unexplored policy questions such as: does cultural sensitivity in pedagogical practice (both methods and content) and subsequent degree of valuing of subjected knowledges (by inclusion or exclusion) in a community affect students’ chances for success in their post-secondary pursuits?

Much of the design of this project is the culmination of my observations and experiences in the Browning community, where I taught high school from the fall of 1995 until the spring of 2002. This experience had a significant impact on my thinking regarding teaching and learning and planted within me the seed of curiosity that has grown into this investigation of educational spaces. During the time that I taught there, I contemplated the reasons that what worked in the classrooms of the high school that I attended in Kentucky’s Jessamine county, was very different from what worked in the classrooms of Browning High School. Additionally, I observed that
many of the students who were active in traditional activities, and who were very well regarded by the traditional community seemed to have a difficult time in school. This discrepancy led to my theorization locating an incomplete commensurability between the meanings produced and maintained in the spaces of school and the meanings produced and maintained in the spaces of the community. In other words, it made me wonder: Since the experience of learning occurs both in the community and in the school, what could account for the phenomenon of the existence of some students who excel in community learning having such a difficult time with school achievement? Furthermore, I noticed that a portion of very traditional students did not have this problem and excelled in scholastic achievement, and a portion of tribally enrolled Blackfeet students excelled in academic learning but expressed or displayed a hesitancy to become involved in learning within their culture of heritage. These additional phenomena further compelled an exploration into the factors that make the performed desire and ability to learn in formal or informal spaces of learning not necessarily transfer into the other of these spaces.

The research that has grown out of the previously discussed questions employs a nonessentialist, constitutive phenomenological framework tempered by theories of the productiveness of power, focused on the disidentification of dominant categories through an analysis of: the performativity of agency, the multiple scales of historicity, the situatedness of experience, and the contingent nature of the production of meaning, for the purposes of exploring identity formation, based on the idea that this approach will lead to the elucidation of matters involved in the internalization of the motivation to participate in learning experiences.

This research was based on a number of underlying assumptions, which influenced its design and implementation. These assumptions are as follows:

1) The standard measures of academic achievement do not measure all of the skills required for learning.
2) The standard measures of academic achievement do not measure all of the knowledge available to learners.
3) The perceived lack of academic achievement among Native Americans is not a case of cultural deficit or resource deficit.
4) The practices that reveal knowledge can be used to identify the traditional student.
5) The typical teenager’s ability to articulate aspects of his or her own identity is not yet fully formed and his or her sense of identity must be explored through a discussion of experience and emotion.

6) The cultural framework of the Blackfeet tribe is observably distinct from the cultural framework that influences American educational policy.

7) The differences between the cultural frameworks of the school and the community do not influence all tribal members in the same way.

8) Motivation for any pursuit depends on the emotions connected to experiences that the individual conceptualizes as relevant to the pursuit in question.

9) Many of the practices that I find to be of significance to the traditional student may be effective practices in any classroom, but will hold particular significance because of their relationship to the primary spaces of learning (family and community).

10) Maintenance of cultural knowledge is highly valued in cultures that have survived hegemonic forces that sought to eradicate them.

This investigation stems from the belief that learning is a human right and the pursuit of ideas that intellectually excite us is a human right of free thought. However, there is no “purity” of freedom in our thoughts since we are produced through our experiences, most of which are connected with other humans. Some of those experiences are positive and some of them are negative. So, bad educational experiences happen. I believe that most of the causes of negative educational experiences are rooted in a lack of understanding and a lack of ability to ascertain one’s own situated position and behaviors relative to the situated positions and behaviors of others. So, not only is it our human right to free our thoughts from the categories we begin to accept by virtue of their repetition – it is also our responsibility to permit and encourage freedom in the thoughts of others.

If a person’s goal is to free the ways in which he or she sees the world, to free the thoughts that keep us trapped in our own categories, then we are on the path to understanding our positions relative to that of the rest of the world. This path will also take us to an understanding of the others that we come in contact with. Understanding is the only way to approach the unfamiliar in the other person, without being controlled by the naturally occurring fear and judgment of the other humans who do not live in the same contexts that we do.
Notice that I say *live*. Notice also that nowhere do I use the word *accept*. To understand the other does not mean that we must give amnesty to those who engage in acts of violence, but in a refusal to seek understanding, particularly of the roots of violence, we tend to miss the point that understanding is dependent on a rejection of violence both to the body and to the mind. Thus, to truly pursue understanding, each person must abandon the idea that he or she is not capable of committing violence upon the other through judgment.

Understanding is our only hope of treating the other with compassion. Without it we will perpetuate the existence of oppression, which suppresses free thought by threat of violence against body and/or mind, and controls by demanding acceptance of the values of the oppressor. Freire explains this process of understanding as locatable in the difference between, what he refers to as, cultural synthesis and cultural invasion:

Investigation – the first moment of action as cultural synthesis - establishes a climate of creativity which will tend to develop in the subsequent stages of action. Such a climate does not exist in cultural invasion, which through alienation kills the creative enthusiasm of those who are invaded, leaving them hopeless and fearful of risking experimentation, without which there is no true creativity…In cultural synthesis there are no invaders; hence, there are no imposed models…In cultural synthesis – and only in cultural synthesis – is it possible to resolve the contradiction between the world view of the leaders and that of the people, to the enrichment of both. Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between the two views; indeed it is based on these differences. It *does* deny the invasion of one by the other, but affirms the undeniable support each gives to the other (Freire, 1970: 181, emphasis in the original).

Thus, as I see it, at the crux of this investigation are the problems created by the categories of the dominant Western paradigm that inscribes labels such as success, failure, good student, bad student, good teaching and bad teaching, based on the cultural context of the mainstream white, affluent American experience. However, individuals from a variety of cultural and class backgrounds, each with their own sets of meanings and values, are expected to participate in and be evaluated by an educational system that is based on one dominant set of meanings inscribed into the policies and procedures of American formal educational spaces. In this country, wherein we supposedly have equal access to education and our achievement is supposedly based only how hard we try, the actual reasons for the success of some and the failure of others are hidden within complex variables found in the intersections of the self, the other, the state and the nation. If we are to understand why standardized measures of achievement rationalized by the paradigm of an equal playing field continue to negatively label a
disproportionate number of students from marginalized groups even after all the implementations of programs and policies designed to equalize these effects, then we must make a concerted effort to examine not only our categories of evaluation, but our hidden assumptions about the students in our school systems.

To that end, I will be covering the methods used in this investigation, as well as a background of the Blackfeet tribe and of Browning in chapter two. In chapter three, I will cover the theoretical framework of the investigation as well as a review of related literature. In chapter four, I will explain the results from the portion of my research regarding my observations, interview excerpts and analysis concerning traditional identity formation. In chapter five, I will continue with the results of my investigation, focusing on interview excerpts and analysis regarding the spaces of learning in the community and the spaces of learning in the school. Additionally, I will explore how the differences and similarities between these two spaces may influence the formation of identity of the traditional student. In chapter six, I will conclude by showing that there is a strong relationship between three elements: spaces of the school that reflect significant aspects of spaces of learning in the community, positive student experiences, and motivation to participate in spaces of learning. I will also show that the rubric of analysis that I have devised works to break down common beliefs regarding the success of traditional students in the school. I will also show that a strong case has been made for the inclusion of spaces of formal and informal learning in geographic analysis.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODS AND SITE

I. INTRODUCTION

To begin, I will address the methods I am using in this research relative to the specific research questions posed in the introduction. Overall, in deciding on the methodology to be used in my research, I had incorporated quantitative methods in the form of a survey for the purposes of providing an overall picture of aspects of the traditional student. However, there were an insufficient number of respondents to provide me with a representative sample. That left me with qualitative methods, from which I chose interviewing as the most appropriate method to explore the experiences of the student. Below, for each research question, I outline the specific reasons for using a qualitative approach.

For research question #1: What are the similarities and differences between the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation? This question requires a level of complexity that can only be obtained through an in-depth interview. Further, content of the conversation will include culturally sensitive and personal information inappropriate for a focus group discussion.

For research question #2: What does it mean to be a traditional Blackfeet person? This question can only be answered through an interview since student experiences relative to self-identification are too complex to be thoroughly addressed in a survey and far too personal to be discussed in a focus group.

For research question #3: What spaces, if any, in the school does the traditional student affiliate with and why? This question is also complex and particular to the experiences of the student. Investigating this question is dependent on discussions concerning levels of comfort in different spaces of the school, which should only be explored through an interview as opposed to a focus group, since the conversation will include the student’s experiences with specific school personnel.

For research question #4: Is school a space where traditional students feel good about expressing his or her traditional identity? Are there times and spaces that constrain or assist this expression? This question is dependent on the answers to questions one and two, which have been established as questions that must be answered through an interview. Additionally, to discover particularities regarding affirmation or denial of identity through use of space in the school requires discussions regarding the numerous specific spaces. Also, since this question
will include discussion of high school staff and teachers it would not be appropriate to explore this in a focus group, since student opinions should be kept confidential.

For research question #5: In what ways do spaces created by informal education become reflected or excluded from spaces of formal education? This question also requires discussion of particular actors within the formal school district and within the community and must be answered in a confidential setting.

For research question #6: In what ways does the traditional student negotiate these differences? Do they tend to evaluate themselves or experience positive or negative emotion according to the framework of the formal spaces or the informal spaces or a synthesis of the two? And also for research question #7: What are the results of these differences for the traditional student? Self-evaluation is a very personal undertaking and so specific that a focus group format would work against understanding the dynamics involved in personal techniques of negotiation of difference, in experience of emotion and in the outcome of a student’s collective experience. Like the others, questions six and seven require the student to discuss particular people and would not be appropriate in a group format.

For research question #8: Is there any pattern that becomes evident from examining what helps individual traditional students be successful in school? This question is dependent on a collective analysis of the individual experiences, each of which must be conducted within the confidential setting of the interview.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: First, I will discuss the participants in the research. Second, I will discuss the overall design of the research. Third, I will review the design and implementation of the survey. Fourth, I will review the design, implementation and analysis of the interviews. Fifth, I will discuss how I addressed issues of research integrity. Sixth, I will discuss the site of the research by providing a brief history of the Blackfeet nation and discussing some of the contemporary dynamics on the Blackfeet reservation.

II. PARTICIPANTS

For this research I chose to use Browning High School students. I narrowed that population for the interview section of the research by choosing students who clearly self-identified as traditional from their answers in the survey. Thus, to understand the context of the
life of a Browning High School student I will discuss some statistical and contextual facts in brief, to be expanded more fully in the following section on the site of the research.

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Source: (PSR – BHS, 2005)

Browning High School students are predominantly residents of the Blackfeet reservation. At the beginning of the 2006 academic year there were 565 high school students. High school students on the reservation live in Browning or outlying areas of the reservation. Most of their parents also went to Browning High School, but very few of them continued on in higher education. Some parents have had experiences off the reservation through service in the military or by working in other cities. The major employers in the Browning area are the public schools, the Indian Health Service hospital, and the tribal offices. According to my observations, other employers include two independent schools (one Blackfeet immersion school and one Catholic school), an IGA food store, a dollar store, three gas stations, three gift and artwork stores, two lumber stores, one employment service (for contract and construction work), three restaurants, two hotels, a bingo hall, a liquor store, and the Catholic church.

The Blackfeet Youth Development website notes that for this reservation, “Unemployment is a large problem; the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported in the 2000 Indian Labor Force Report that of 5,359 employable civilians, 74% were unemployed and 22% of those employed were below the poverty level.” The site also notes that “only 37% of the adults on the reservation
have a high school diploma, and 12% have less than 9th grade education…less than 3% of the reservation population has a 4-year degree and 1% has an advanced degree…According to the 2000 US Census Bureau the Blackfeet Reservation (most of Glacier County) is 35th of the 100 poorest counties in the United States” (BYD, 2006). Of the 565 students who’s parents were mailed parental consent forms, there were 38 students for whom parental consent forms were returned, and 34 were surveyed. Of those 34 surveyed, ten were interviewed.

III. DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

I chose to take a two-pronged approach to the design of my research. First, to students from whom I had secured parental consent and personal assent, I distributed a survey the completion of which would provide two important pieces of information necessary to conduct the remaining portions of the research. Completion of the survey provided me with my pool of potential interviewees. I then used the survey as a means to identify traditional students. For this project, I selected students who considered themselves to be “traditional” or “very traditional” tribal members according to question twelve on the survey and who indicated in question thirteen that they participated in at least four of the ten traditional activities listed. Due to the constraints of time, the scope of this project did not include students who considered themselves to be only “somewhat traditional” or “not traditional.” Additionally, responses to question thirteen were designed to function as a tool for facilitating discussion in the actual interview.

In the second phase of the project, I conducted interviews with my selected population. Additionally I conducted participant observation in the community and in the school. My observations included and built upon knowledge that I had gained from my previous seven years of participation in the school and in the community that included participation in traditional activities and mentorship from a number of elders. Since I had about five weeks in Browning, I began participant observation immediately while waiting for the parental consent forms that had been mailed to be returned. Each envelope of consent forms included a stamped return envelope addressed to my Browning post office box. This ensured privacy and confidentiality for the return of the forms. The next two weeks were devoted to distributing the survey in several small groups, analyzing the surveys, and from the results, selecting and scheduling interviewees. The final weeks were primarily devoted to completion of the ten interviews. However, I continued to conduct participant observation throughout the entire period of research.
IV. SURVEY DESIGN

According to methodological work on surveying, surveys are usually used to measure attitudes, characteristics, change over time, differences and causes or frequency of behavior, within a clearly defined population for the purposes of studying causal relationships, ratios or testing hypothesis (Czaja and Blair, 1996; Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen, 1996). It was my original intention to use the survey to produce descriptive statistics regarding students’ success in school, family and friends’ attitudes toward school, family and friends’ attitudes toward traditional activities, and student’s attitudes toward traditional activities. My intent was to correlate those statistics with the student’s self-identification of his or her own degree of traditionality along with looking for correlations between the aforementioned categories. Since I am keenly aware of the discourse in the Blackfeet educational community critiquing the self-serving researcher (many of whom, like Douglas Gold\textsuperscript{2}, have done more harm than good), one of the main purposes of this survey was to give information back to the school district that I hoped would give a better sense of how high school students view themselves relative to the community and to the school.

I had hoped the survey would reveal the existence of a sufficient number of high school students involved in traditional practice, should the district need such numbers to support its continuing pattern of policies aimed at establishing a more culturally relevant institution.\textsuperscript{3} Alas, due to restraints of time and my own inexperience with collecting parental consent on the reservation, the 38 out of 565 parental consents that I did receive were not nearly sufficient to produce a representative sample, thus the original intent to include descriptive statistics was abandoned. According to my original research design, the survey did serve another purpose. It allowed me to select interviewee participants who self-identified as “traditional” or “very

\textsuperscript{2} In her 1997 dissertation, Dorothy Still Smoking cites Gold’s study as, “one of the most damaging studies ever done” on the Blackfeet (Still Smoking: 7). His findings centered on the “notion that the Blackfeet Indians were born less intelligent than white people” and based his findings on the “scientific” support of, for example, the opinions of the Secretary of the Interior and a survey that asked local whites to estimate Blackfeet intelligence (Still Smoking, 1997: 7-8).

\textsuperscript{3} Browning Public Schools Policy #5172 “Blackfeet Education for All” states: “Browning Public Schools will develop and implement an educational policy that promotes both core academic knowledge and Blackfeet cultural knowledge equally. Whenever possible, courses, curriculum and learning will include Montana Tribes and American Indian/Alaska Natives” (BPS-SDP, 2006).
traditional,” and to review some of his or her attitudes toward school and the community prior to the interview. This provided me with a preview of the student that I would be interviewing so that I could address them with at least a minimal understanding of his or her context as a student and a community member.

Despite the change, the survey was well designed for the students according to the principles of a good survey as outlined by Floyd Fowler in *Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation*, (1995). Fowler guides the writer of surveys with seven principles of design dictating that the survey questions must 1) ask about firsthand experiences 2) ask one question at a time avoiding assumptions and contingencies 3) use words that mean the same to all survey participants 4) prepare respondents fully to answer if the survey is in interview form (this did not apply to my survey) 5) make clear the parameters of an adequate response 6) make the survey as easy as possible to complete 7) orient the respondents in a consistent manner (Fowler: 78-103).

These principles of a good survey were carefully addressed in the design phase of my research, and will be reviewed in order of Fowler’s principles. According to principle one, all of the questions that I asked directly addressed the students’ own experience and opinions or their perceptions of other people. Following principle two, each of the questions were simple, asked for only one piece of information at a time, and included a range of responses that I took great pains to ensure covered the entire breadth of possible answers. For principle number three, I made sure to use simple, common language. Principle four did not apply to my survey since it was all in print. Principle five was accomplished through use of a) multiple choice questions b) for question 13 clear directives were included to circle ‘all’ that applied c) for questions 14-16 clear directives were given to ‘circle one’ answer in each question. Finally, principle six was followed since the survey included only thirteen questions that required any consideration, thought or reflection. The remaining three questions identified gender, age and enrollment status. My process for accomplishing principle number seven was thoroughly consistent and will be fully explained in the forthcoming section of this chapter on survey implementation. The survey that was designed for this project consisted of sixteen multiple-choice questions. I will discuss the inclusion of each of these questions and describe the type of information that I had hoped to get from each question had I used the survey to provide descriptive statistics. 

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4 See Appendix 1 for a copy of the full survey instrument.
First, I included the question, “What kind of student do you consider yourself to be?” The choices ranged from “successful in all subjects,” to “not successful in any subjects.” This question was important to provide a baseline of the student’s self-image regarding school. My intention was to provide descriptive statistics regarding feelings of success and correlate these with the various levels of traditionality, providing both the research and the school with a picture of how traditional students view their scholastic achievement. This question was designed to help answer research question #6.

Questions two and three asked the student about his or her confidence and ability to speak the Blackfeet language, and the spaces in which he or she felt comfortable doing so. These questions were designed to give me an idea of how comfortable the student was at this point in his or her life at participating in this aspect of traditional behavior. Since community discourse often focuses on the importance of not loosing the Blackfeet language, these questions were designed to reveal the degree to which the student feels confident in the performance of this critical aspect of tribal identity. These questions were designed to help answer research questions #4 and #7.

Questions five and six ask about the degree to which students like Blackfeet classes and the degree to which those classes seem to be taught in the same way as other classes. If a student really likes these classes, that tells me something about how he or she feels about the current policy of including Blackfeet heritage into the school system. I also expected the answers to provide me with a direction for my research in that if the traditional or very traditional students correlated with liking Blackfeet classes, then I could proceed on the assumption that the inclusion of Blackfeet content in some way embraced by him or her. If this correlation did not exist, then I would know that I needed to explore the possibility that the student had some disagreement with the content or manner in which the information was being introduced. Also, since I knew that all these classes were being taught by people who are considered by the community to be traditional people, by trying to ascertain if the majority of students see these classes as being taught in different ways than other classes in relation to how much students liked these classes, I expected that it would give me grounds from which to begin to ascertain if students’ like or dislike of Blackfeet classes was generally due to teaching style or to some other variable. Thus, I expected this question to provide me with insight into the accuracy of my original hypothesis that the multicultural approach of providing culturally relevant content was
important but insufficient to create spaces of belonging for students. These questions were
designed to help answer research questions #4, #5 and #6.

Question seven was designed to tell me if the student was personally driven to involve
himself or herself in community education and comfortable doing so, since I asked if he or she
sought time with elders, learned from them only when convenient, sort of enjoyed this kind of
experience or avoided this experience. The degree to which he or she seeks out time with elders
is a reflection of the degree to which he or she feels comfortable in the spaces of community
education. This question was designed to help answer research question #6.

Questions eight through eleven were designed to give me an idea of the student’s
perception of the influences of others on his or her formal and informal educational lives. I
asked about the degree of importance of traditional activities and of school education to people
in the student’s family and to the student’s friends. These questions were designed to give me an
idea of the degree to which the student felt supported in his or her traditional participation or
school participation by those around him or her. Additionally, I was interested in knowing how
many of the traditional students’ families and friends encouraged his or her performance in
school. These questions were designed to help answer research questions #3, #6 and #7.

Question twelve asked the student to what degree he or she considered himself or herself
to be traditional. Question thirteen asked the student to circle any of the ten traditional activities
that I listed that he or she participated in on a regular basis. I left the interpretation of “regular”
up to each student, as I know from observation that some activities are only done at particular
times of the year. This was important for me to investigate, because in my time on the
reservation, I observed a great deal of community discourse surrounding what it meant to be
traditional. It seemed to me that to be traditional one must actually participate in traditional
activities. These questions were designed to help with the interview.

Questions fourteen through sixteen asked them to identify gender, age, and whether or
not the student was enrolled in a tribe. These were included so that descriptive statistics for the
above questions could be looked at in terms of gender, age, and legal identification of tribal
membership. These questions were designed to help with the analysis of data.

As a group, these questions were designed provide statistical support, but not ultimately
utilized, in answering research questions seven and eight. In addition, I wanted to know if, on a
geographically bounded reservation where the majority of the residents are officially identified
as tribal members, a student’s self-identification as traditional or not was in any way correlated with their self-identification of success, their comfort in participation in Blackfeet activities or classes, or the messages they were getting from friends and family regarding the importance of school and community. In other words, is tribal enrollment enough to make Blackfeet issues important to a student? A statistical answer to these questions must wait for future research, however, an interview-based investigation into these issues has been conducted which will be reviewed in chapter four. For now, I will continue with the implementation of the survey.

V. SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

Before I arrived in Browning, parental consent forms to participate in the survey and, if selected, in the interview, had been sent to every parent of every student enrolled in Browning High School at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year. As signed parental consent forms arrived by mail, I arranged with the principal to survey the first group of students. She found a teacher who was willing to let me use her reading room during an hour when class was not scheduled there. Students were collected by attendance personnel and escorted to the room where each student was asked if he or she was still willing to participate in the survey. Two declined on the first round of surveys.

After all the students were present assent forms were handed out. I read the assent form out loud and told the group that if each of them were still willing to participate to please sign and print his or her name in the spaces provided. I then circulated the survey forms asking students to not look at them until I asked the group to begin. The survey forms were pre-numbered and as I passed them out, I recorded each student’s name on a separate piece of paper next to his or her survey number so that later on I could identify each student that I wished to interview. I then asked the group to begin the survey.

This format was followed during each round of surveys in order to address Fowler’s seventh principle of design, which is concerned with orienting each respondent in a consistent manner (Fowler, 1995). All students were done in about ten minutes. I asked the first group if there were any questions that were unclear or difficult to answer. They each responded that the questions were easy to answer. I did some interviews in the following days while waiting for enough additional consent forms to arrive to survey at least a group of ten at the same time. The last round of surveys was done in the second to last week. Thus, interviewees were pulled from
both rounds of surveys. Thirty-four students in total completed a survey. There is no evidence to indicate that this group of students was significantly different from or similar to the remainder of the population, especially since investigating thirteen separate personal variables produces too many categories on which to speculate. The concerns regarding drawing conclusions from the survey results will be discussed further in the section of this chapter on research integrity.

VI. INTERVIEW DESIGN

I.E. Seidman’s *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (1991), provides a full and practical approach to planning and implementing the interview as a tool for qualitative research. He explains that, though the interview is not the only way to accomplish qualitative research, stories relate the basic human experience and despite the views of some researchers that the use of story may not be scholarly, methods other than interviewing can sometimes incorporate more assumptions about the experiences of others than does interviewing (Seidman, 1991). Since investigations of identity and space involve the complex processes of making meaning through social interaction, I chose to use interviewing in my research regarding educational spaces since the individuals’ stories of their experiences in the spaces of learning would provide the most direct route to an individual’s situated meanings and prevent too heavy a reliance on my own assumptions about his or her experience. The voice of the individual’s experience is crucial if we are to understand the roots and routes of behaviors. Thus, I chose to use the interview as my main research tool because as Seidman states: “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of the behavior” (Seidman, 1991: 4).

Today, understanding meanings and behaviors in spaces of learning must be even more reliant on individual experience. Quantitative research has done an excellent job of establishing the existence of educational inequality; so much so, that we are in an era in which discourse regarding inequality in the school system is so pervasive that it becomes popular literature such as with Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* (1991). Nevertheless, the continuing discourse of meritocracy has located an explanation of these failures in a rhetoric that “easily drifts into the worst form of racism when it appears that groups can be ranked by the achievement of the people to be identified with it” (Varenne and McDermott, 1988: 211). If we are to remove ourselves from the illusion that achievement belongs to those who are more worthy and that our system for
determining merit is fully functional, then we must use qualitative approaches to understanding scholastic achievement and its apparent geographical distribution. Since there does exist the sense that achievement is not (or at least should not be) dependent on where you grow up, or what color your parents are, or your anatomy, then there must be other reasons that achievement continues to appear unevenly distributed with respect to race, class and gender for which the quantitative approach establishes connections, but neither explains nor provides direction for improvement. The point I wish to make here is that quantitative analysis of educational process re-produces essentialized categories of race, class and gender that are abstractions pulled from the dominant Western paradigm of achievement. By virtue of what such categories exclude, they cannot be used as explanations for failure, or as a basis for developing solutions. What may be even more productive (in the Foucauldian sense) of these dominant essentialist categories is the continued reproduction of quantitatively produced categories in qualitative research. This tendency will be demonstrated in my literature review, in a discussion of an article by Penrose.

Thus, the individual, not the group, must be the basis of investigations into the uneven distribution of achievement within the American educational system. To understand an individual’s experiences in the spaces of learning, we must remove ourselves from bounded categories and seek understanding of the situated meanings of the individual, which are formed through experience. Seidman can clarify this argument; “Individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people” (Seidman, 1991: 1).

VII. INTERVIEW IMPLEMENTATION

As far as the methodology of the implementation of the interview, I knew that following experiences of other researchers such as Deirdre McKay, who advocates an exchange of personal information to create common ground with an interviewee (McKay, 2002), would not be appropriate or practical since it is difficult enough for teens to talk for sixty to ninety minutes without me adding extra time to that length. During the design phase of the research, while considering the importance of creating a comfortable environment for my interviewees, I decided that, not only am I a familiar figure in the community after teaching most of these students’ older siblings and relations, but I have also learned the tacit signals of giving space, use of language, conversational practices and dialect of the reservation. Thus, I felt secure in my ability to use
non-verbal cues to identify myself as part of the community, or at least as one who is sufficiently familiar enough with Blackfeet ways to not be a complete outsider, in a matter of minutes. Additionally, I am highly aware of the sentiments of my Blackfeet friends who have expressed in a number of ways that, though a person who knows how to listen can understand much and even come to be respected as an adopted member of the tribe, that there is a line one can cross since ultimately Blackfeet culture is Blackfeet property; if you didn’t grow up on the Rez, you don’t know, and if you haven’t lived here you have no idea. Luckily, I have lived there - with my ears and eyes open - and as a result feel confident enough in my abilities to be sensitive to tribal concerns to have sought local permission and guidance in conducting this research. McKay herself experienced resistance from suggesting too much similarity (McKay, 2002), a misstep that I could avoid making due to my previous observations of Blackfeet students who shut down in the presence of someone who is acting, in the colloquial, “fakey,” which basically means, as I understand it, trying too hard to be something you are not.

Instead, my interview approach utilized Steinar Kvale and I.E Seidman, both of whom discuss methods informed by phenomenological philosophy (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1991). Kvale clarifies this approach by first reviewing other types of conversation to distinguish such forms from the interview. Kvale defines the interview as a semi-structured conversation where the interviewer begins with an open-ended question, prompts the interviewee to describe a situation, and then may further explore the interviewee’s response through the use of questions targeted to obtain “cognitive clarification” of the interviewee’s experience (Kvale, 1996: 27-29). Kvale goes on to describe the aspects of the qualitative interview. One of these aspects is, “deliberate naïveté,” described as the removal of both presuppositions and previously fixed categories of analysis (Kvale, 1996: 33). I knew this aspect would be a particular challenge for me relative to other researchers who usually spend months, a year or two at the most, with their research populations. Thus, I strove to eliminate my presuppositions and to be highly vigilant in my awareness of my own assumptions. One way I accomplished this was to focus on each interviewee as an individual. Another was to ask for input from my traditional mentors regarding the traditional activities that I listed in the survey and later used as talking points. Even then, in the course of the interviews, I discovered that I had left off horsemanship, which in retrospect seems too obvious to miss since every single parade I have seen on the reservation has several herds of horses, many of them dressed in full traditional regalia. Additionally, I continually
reminded myself to listen carefully to what was being said as well as paying attention, as Kvale warns, to what is not being said (Kvale, 1996).

Seidman also provided excellent and practical advice on the entire process of interviewing, though I did not have the time to follow his advice to do three different interviews. He advocates this practice to establish “repeatability” and to increase “validity” by using the first interview to develop a life history, the second to concentrate on the interviewee’s experience relative to the research study, and the third to elicit the meanings the interviewee connects with his or her previously related experiences (Seidman, 1991:10-17). Instead, I tried to mimic his targets by asking the student to begin by telling me about himself or herself, following with asking him or her to tell me about each of the traditional activities he or she had participated in, and to conclude by comparing his or her experiences in the school and in the community so as to elicit meaning. I found this to work quite well, but most helpful to me was his chapter on the common pitfalls of the unseasoned interviewer which saved me from many probable mistakes.

Seidman advocates listening more and talking less, using note taking to keep your focus and using those notes to ask questions when you don’t understand, letting those questions come from what has been said (Seidman, 1991). He also encourages the researcher to be sensitive to the difference between exploring and probing and to ask questions to which you do not think you know the answer already (Seidman, 1991). He wisely cautions the researcher not to insert meaning into the question with the use of leading questions, but instead to ask open-ended questions and not to interrupt the interviewee’s response (Seidman, 1991). Particularly helpful was his advice to ask the participant to tell a story and to “reconstruct” an incident instead of asking him or her to “remember” (Seidman, 1991: 64-67). I found that this worked very well with teenage students since most of them know that each story needs a beginning, middle and end and the prompt to reconstruct seemed to help elicit the use of detail in the story. Best of all was his very insightful tip to avoid continually using “uh huh” or “yes” throughout the interviewee’s response and to tolerate silence (Seidman, 1991: 67, 70). After reflection, I also realized that using these behaviors would be culturally relevant since I have observed that traditional elders remain silent when listening and use long pauses before responding which was a technique that I mimicked in the interviews and it seemed to work very well. Seidman’s discussion of using the interview prompts cautiously and following your hunches, which he explains usually stem from the non-verbal cues of the interviewee (Seidman, 1991), helped me to
identify important sub-questions that I had not previously considered, but added during the course of the first two interviews.

Interview prompt questions were designed to help the interviewee explore his or her experiences in the spaces of school and the spaces of learning in the community. The first question began with a confirmation of the self-identification (question number twelve) from the survey. I then asked when and where the student had first learned to participate in the activities circled in question number thirteen so I could note who was doing the teaching and so I could refer to each of these people in the remainder of the interview. This question was designed to help the student relate stories about learning experiences in the community. The second question asked the student about places in the school where he or she felt most comfortable and why. It was designed both to help identify the spaces in school where the student felt most comfortable and to assist in responding to the next question. The third question asked the student to compare and contrast his or her learning experiences in the school and in the community. This question was designed to help clarify the similarities and differences that begin to surface from questions one and two and to give the student a chance to identify similarities and differences that may not have come up in the previous two questions.

As I have mentioned previously, my pool of interviewees came from students who self-identified on the survey as traditional or very traditional and who also circled at least four of the traditional activities. My goal, which I accomplished, was to interview ten students, which is within the range of Kvale’s observation that most contemporary interviews use about five to twenty-five subjects (Kvale, 1996). In the interview, I began by reminding the student how he or she self-identified and by asking for confirmation of that self-identification. I then used the activities he or she had circled as a talking point. I asked the student to tell me stories about learning about each activity. Thus, I began the interview by hearing the student’s reconstructions of his or her learning experiences in the community. I then asked him or her to reconstruct some of his or her learning experiences in the school, to tell me about the spaces in the school in which her or she was most and least comfortable and to discuss his or her reasons for feeling that way about each space. The interviews were conducted in a counselor’s office and were tape-recorded.

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5 See Appendix 2 for a list of interview prompts and revisions
I was able to interview nine students that self-identified as traditional or very traditional. Due to scheduling problems, I also interviewed one student that self-identified as somewhat traditional and only circled two of the traditional activities. In the midst of scheduling problems, I took this as an opportunity to explore Seidman’s suggestion to select some participants who are outside of the range of the research and who can be considered “negative cases” (Seidman, 1991: 43). I did this for my own curiosity as a researcher, to remind myself to incorporate this technique in future research, and did not include this last interview in the analysis.

VIII. INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed, coded, examined for thematic similarities and analyzed using multiple methods. From the interviews and observations, themes were developed for spaces of learning, examining in particular the qualities and uses of the spaces of informal learning compared to the qualities and uses of the spaces of formal learning. Observations from my years of teaching as well as fieldnotes gathered during my research trip were used to inform each stage of the analysis. Influencing the methodology of implementation of this analysis are works by Kvale (1996); Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995); and Rose (2001).

Kvale offers a very organized overview to the various approaches used in interview analysis including “categorization of meaning, condensation of meaning, structuring of meaning through narratives, interpretation of meaning and ad hoc methods” (Kvale, 1996: 187). In addition, he outlines the steps of analysis and reviews issues in the analysis process including a summary of a theme present throughout his book, namely, that analysis actually begins from the moment of design and continues through every step of the interview and analysis process (Kvale, 1996). According to Kvale’s categories, I used an ad hoc approach to my analysis, combining methods of condensation of meaning, structuring of meaning through narratives and meaning interpretation in that order in the process of my analysis.

Kvale explains condensation of meaning as a method that is very similar, but much simpler, than one explained in another of my consulted texts, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, (1995), which I review below. Kvale’s condensation of meaning is explained as a phenomenological five-step approach that involves reading for overall meaning, identifying subject meanings, thematically organizing these meanings, questioning the themes relative to the research study questions, and lastly tying the themes together in a statement (Kvale, 1996).
followed this five step approach, but instead of only identifying subject meanings, I also approached each step using meaning structuring, explained by Kvale as identifying the temporal social and meaning dimensions of the stories in the narratives (Kvale, 1996) made possible by my elicitation of narratives in the interview process. Further, the hermeneutic approach of meaning interpretation, explained by Kvale as moving beyond the apparent in the text to “structures and relations of meaning” (Kvale, 1996: 201-203) was accomplished by using considerations of scale, contingency, situatedness and historicity to theorize the multiplicity of forces influencing the development of each interviewee’s identity revealed in each narrative addressed.

Also influencing my theoretical approach to analysis is Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw’s *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, (1995). This indispensable handbook for ethnographic field researchers provides recommendations and practical assistance focusing on writing and working with fieldnotes, but also covering analysis and writing ethnography (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). In their chapter on processing fieldnotes, they advocate an process beginning with reading all notes; an overlapping process open coding for all ideas, focused coding which turns open coding into themes, writing theoretical memos on the themes; the process of making “integrative memos” to synthesize thematics; and how to move this work into creating theory (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995: 142-168). Their next chapter explains how to use the work done with the fieldnotes to create an ethnography, focusing on the development of themes, how to use fieldnotes and analysis in text, and how to approach and structure the finished ethnographic text (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). Though my methods focused on the interviews and used observations as an enhancement, I had utilized their approach in previous academic ethnographic work and found it easy to transpose to a structure for reading, coding, analyzing and narrating text from interviews. Especially helpful were examples of how to code and analyze thematics and their advice for formulating integrative memos, which I did after recoding the interviews for themes generated from my first round of coding. Most of this process can be shown through the examples that they provide, but as I have found, must be learned through trial and error and a constant re-examination of text and themes.

Rose’s innovative and accessible work on discourse analysis informs my methodology of analysis. In *Visual Methodologies* (2001), Rose uses two chapters to discuss two different forms of discourse analysis, using Foucauldian concepts to develop and anchor a methodology for
“visual images and verbal texts” and to explore a methodology for examining the “practices of institutions” while cautioning there is no clear division between the two (Rose, 2001: 135-140). She defines discourse as referring “to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it” (Rose, 2001: 136). Examination of discourse requires an examination of intertextuality, discursive formation, power, and the intersection of power and knowledge as routes to discovering the way in which discourse structures meaning and influences behavior (Rose, 2001).

Her discussions of Foucault’s concept of power as it intersects with knowledge inform my research in a number of ways. First, by linking discourse and power, identifying discourse as the operation of the production of the self (Rose, 2001), the discourse of the reservation community and of the school become sites of the productive function of power through the discursive formations that they both produce. Second, she illuminates the Foucauldian intersection of knowledge and power as revealed in discourse and “in terms of the productiveness of their social effects, depend on assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true” (Rose, 2001: 138). My examination of the issues of scale locates dominant discourse both in the macro and in the micro since both claim truth, though the Blackfeet are more centrist and ecumenical in their truth claims than the state or the school. Third, in methodological concerns with discourse analysis one, Rose discusses the importance of the structure of discursive statements focusing on how those statements describe, produce, blame and categorize, as well as addressing the importance of the context of the discourse for examining the “production of meanings and things” (Rose, 2001: 149-151). This aspect of her methodological approach works brilliantly for research that focuses on the dynamics of meaning creation in identity production that occurs in two distinct contexts and was therefore employed in the formation of this research. Fourth, her discussion on the emphasis of complexity and contradictions inherent in all discourse (Rose, 2001) affirms my analytical incorporation of multiple scales of historicity, situatedness and contingency, and the performativity of agency with the goal of nonessentialist disidentification of dominant categories as a theoretical framework for examining identity production. Fifth, her recognition that an institutional location can energize a more productive (in the Foucauldian sense) discourse than can a discourse which emanates from a “marginalized”
location (Rose, 2001: 158), lends credence to the very design of an investigation into two spaces of learning relative to individuals who’s identities are partially, but firmly defined by the more marginalized and non-institutionalized of the two spaces. Sixth, her discussion of reflexivity and modesty in claims hits a bit of a bump around the idea of critical reflection of the researcher’s practice, since her Foucauldian framework does not allow for an autonomous researcher since all subjects are constituted through discourse (Rose, 2001). However, as a member of the community and as the researcher in this project, I occupy an interesting position: I analyze the discourse while admitting my own presence within it as former teacher, researcher, and community member. Additionally, my emphasis on the multiplicity of forces and scales in identity production carries with it the implicit notion that there is no essential force that produces the individual and thus my analysis will always be incomplete. Perhaps Rose would say this is more modesty than reflexivity, however I see the reflexive act as being built into the design of the research. Lastly, Rose argues that in most analyses that focus on discourses and images (her discourse analysis one), usually ignore the contexts, social practices, and institutions that are parts of those practices which she examines in the next chapter on the second type of discourse, based on Foucault’s concepts of the techniques used by institutions to produce subjects (Rose, 2001). My research puts me in the interesting position of being able to bridge the gap between these two forms of discourse analysis since I am examining text (interviews) and an institution.

IX. RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Since my study population consisted of minors on a reservation, the UK Office of Research Integrity deemed my project to carry greater than minimal risk. Since I had a limited amount of time in Montana, and to ensure that I was compliant with the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky, I arranged with the school district that I would send to them the pre-prepared stamped envelopes which contained consent forms, cover letters and self-addressed stamped return envelopes. They then generated the mailing labels, labeled the envelopes and returned them to the post office. The returned consent forms were delivered to me at a post office box that I had secured before hand. If I had it to do again, I would have not used mailed response as it turned out to be an enormous amount of wasted effort and expense for me. What I should have done, but didn’t do, would have been to focus on arranging my time at Browning to maximize the number of parental consents obtained, perhaps by arranging with
school personnel to assist me in visiting homes and places of work, meeting with parents, explaining the project and obtaining consent right then and there would have almost certainly helped me to increase the level of participation in this project. Perhaps if I had been working outside of my own categories and instead paying attention to the tacit behaviors of the town I love so well, I would have realized that the Blackfeet mode is to go visit; if you’re not there it can’t be that important to you. Our dominant categories certainly are tenacious. Next time, I will be wiser and perhaps be more aware of the subtle aspects of my own Westernized behavioral patterns.

The consent forms gave permission for the student to participate in both a survey and in an interview. Each student was also given an assent form before participating in the survey. Separate forms were used for assent before the interview. The assent forms before the survey were read out loud to the students since, from personal experience, I know that many of the Browning High School students face challenges in their reading comprehension and some of the required language in the assent form is less than common and is certainly dry reading. Before the interviews, I also verbally reviewed the content of the assent forms, as well as checking that the student was comfortable being taped. I took great care to convey to them that any names or religious specifics that he or she revealed during the interview would not be included in the final project as well as explaining to them that an elder would check my work to make sure that no personal, sacred or inaccurate information was being used. This was important because from my observations there are traditional considerations regarding sharing certain information. By reassuring them that an elder would check the content of the research, I hoped that each student would experience a comfortable arena in which talk about personal experiences.

I have struggled with the possibility of drawing some sort of estimation or speculation based on the small group of survey participants, representing only 6% of the high school population, but upon serious reflection, I believe it would be inappropriate and culturally insensitive, with students from community experiences so different than my own high school years, and with this sensitive of a population, to attempt to make any generalized speculations about the traditional or academic tendencies of Browning High School students.\(^6\) I think most of

\(^6\) For a confidence level of 99% a sample of this size would have the enormous confidence interval of \(\pm 22\%\). Even for a confidence level of 95% a sample of this size would still have the unacceptable confidence interval of \(\pm 17\%\).
the parental consent forms returned to me are from families who know me, or at least know
enough about me to know that I will treat their students in the way they would want them to be
treated. “The researcher” is not a popular figure in Browning; everybody knows Douglas Gold’s
name was removed from the elementary school because he argued that Blackfeet children were
inherently less equipped than white children for academic pursuits. I remember lengthy and
animated local discussions that came across to me as happy and a bit triumphant after the school
board decided to change the name to Napi Elementary. Thus the Blackfeet local categories of
meaning produced in part by a long and strong history of generally misinformed or ignorant
researchers making wild claims, influences my decision not speculate on the distribution of
variables among the population. However, I can assert one generalization: I believe, as a very
conservative estimate, that more than half of the students at Browning High School have a
collection of experiences based in Blackfeet modes of teaching (discussed in the results chapter)
strong enough to warrant a serious consideration of how to encourage and increase Blackfeet
modes of teaching in the school.

7 Napi is the central figure in a multitude of popular Blackfeet stories
X. SITE OF THE RESEARCH

FIGURE 2.1

The Blackfeet Reservation (at the top right of the above figure, in yellow) is located in the upper northwest corner of Montana, directly east of Glacier National Park (at the top middle of the above picture, in green). It comprises the majority of Glacier County that had a population of 13,247 in 2000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB-GCMAG, 2000). It is set amongst the rolling foothills of the Rocky Mountains and is roughly two to five hours from four urban centers. To the west is the Flathead valley that draws millions of tourists every year to Flathead Lake and the Glacier Park area. To the south are Great Falls, Helena and Missoula, all three of which are active urban centers and each of which is home to a university.

Browning is a remote, Native American community. Of the 4,313 households in Glacier County in 1999, 53.4 percent of those households earned less than $30,000 (USCB-GCMID, 2000). It is relatively isolated from basic resources in that regular activities such as shopping require long trips. For example, the closest department stores are in Great Falls, a drive that I have found to be a good two hours or more each way, depending on the weather.
The tribe is rich with history, tradition, and tenaciousness. In the early to mid 1800’s, the Blackfeet mastered the horse quickly and became a local military power (Ewers, 1958). That rise however, was cut short in large part by escalating disease, culminating in the starvation winter of 1882 and the year of disease in 1883 (Raczka, 1979). The location of the agency where the Blackfeet, neglected by the government, camped while waiting for rations that never arrived, was similar to the one pictured above. These winters are still talked about frequently enough for me to have noticed them as a pattern of discourse among members of the reservation.

Since the cosmological structure upon which Blackfeet life is based is so unique, it is important to realize that the history of the tribe begins long before written history. An understanding of this background is important. Without it, one runs the risk of seeing the Blackfeet, or any other tribe for that manner, in a way that generalizes an affinity with nature instead of valuing the unique and particular history, background and beliefs of the tribe. The Blackfeet currently live along the eastern border of the Rocky Mountains, which they refer to as

8 All photographs in this document are the work of the author.
the Backbone of the World. Their history begins with the creation story. The following is a summary of the much longer story as told by Percy Bullchild in *The Sun Came Down* (1985).

Long ago, before there was anything, the Creator gathered dust, spat in it and formed a ball of mud that he populated first with snakes. He destroyed these snakes and made grass to grow on the mud ball. Two of the snakes escaped. He then made a mate for himself who bore him seven sons. But one of the sons of the snakes that had disappeared turned himself into a man and had a long affair with Creator Sun’s mate, Moon. Creator Sun killed the snake man, so Moon went crazy and tried to kill her sons so Creator Sun had to kill her. He burned the body, but a little piece of her escaped and she came back to life four days later. But Creator Sun had foreseen this possibility and had given each of his sons a little bag or an item. As she chased them and tried to kill them, they threw the contents of their bags or their items in front of her one after the other. The first son had been given a bladder of water and as the furious Moon chased them, Creator Sun told him to throw it down. This made it rain, just on the woman and slowed her down for a while. As she caught up to them again Creator Sun told his next son to make a line in the dirt and this became a great canyon, which slowed the woman down as well.

FIGURE 2.3

![Image](image.jpg)

SOUTH ON THE RESERVATION: OUTSIDE OF HEART BUTTE
This chasing went on and each son threw something down. A rock made a great mountain range, a stick made a giant forest, a bag of air made a great wind, each one giving the sons more time to get away. The last two sons threw a bird, which made lightening, and a bladder of water, which made an endless sea. Creator Sun cut Moon’s leg off so she couldn’t chase them, but she grew it back. He tried to calm her but she wouldn’t listen. So he made her barren and put her in the sky and took the Earth as his new bride and from their relations sprang all life on the planet. Creator Sun made Mudman and Ribwoman so they would never die. But Ribwoman became lonely for her children who never visited, so she asked Creator Sun to make death to make people more sentimental. He didn’t want to, but after she kept bugging him, he did it for her anyway, even though he knew it would bring people pain (Bullchild, 1985: 5-71). That, of course, is only part of the story, but it is all that will be told for now.

To recount the history of the tribe, I have chosen to draw primarily from sources that I know to be accepted in the community. Still Smoking is a member of the tribe, Farr’s book is used in the schools, the schools published Parson’s book and Raczka is a non-Indian who has been accepted within the tribe. Though there are quite a few collections of traditional Blackfeet stories, journals from traders, archives of ethnographic work, and examinations into small portions of Blackfeet history, there is not to my knowledge a full history of the tribe to the present (or even close) currently in publication.

In her dissertation (1997), Dorothy Still Smoking provides a history of the Blackfeet tribes beginning with the chiefs, bands and society history and continuing on to the horse and gun days in which the Blackfeet became excellent horsemen and through this accomplishment, one of the more powerful of the plains tribes (Still Smoking, 1997). In 1851, the Laramie treaty imposed boundaries on the Blackfeet even though they were not involved in the making of the treaty in any way (Still Smoking, 1997). Government agents arrived on the reservation in 1855 seeking Blackfeet signatures after the Sioux had already signed (Still Smoking, 1997). This treaty marked the beginning of white education for the Blackfeet with the promise of fifteen thousand dollars a year for ten years for vocational and agricultural education (Still Smoking, 1997). This treaty marked the beginning of white education for the Blackfeet with the promise of fifteen thousand dollars a year for ten years for vocational and agricultural education (Still Smoking, 1997). Thus, from a treaty they weren’t even involved in making and giving them services they did not request, the Blackfeet were forced onto a short path to an oppressive situation. Over the next forty years would come a quick succession of events that would end with confinement to a reservation that would encompass only seven percent of their original territory. In 1869, the
boundaries of Blackfeet territory were pushed back to the Choteau area and then to Old Agency with this cycle of shrinking the land continuing intermittently over the course of a few years (Still Smoking, 1997). In 1870, amidst the rapid disappearance of their land, the first of many tragic events for the Blackfeet occurred with the January 23rd massacre of 173 Blackfeet, mostly women and children, leaving 140 people from the peaceful Heavy Runner Band in the cold and snow after the leader of the attack, Major Eugene Baker, found that they were suffering from smallpox, and that they weren’t the group he was looking for anyway (Still Smoking, 1997).

FIGURE 2.4

By the winter of 1882, the buffalo were nearing extinction and as a result came the cessation of hunting that had sustained the tribe (Still Smoking, 1997). In the winter of 1883, 600 Blackfeet died even though earlier that September the famous author James Willard Shultz had begged Washington to address the dire situation only to be met with a bureaucratic response stating that the allotted provisions for the year were gone (Still Smoking, 1997). Paul Rosier describes this starvation winter, “which killed nearly one of every four Blackfeet,” as being the event that “precipitated one of the most rapid demographic declines of full-blooded Indians in
the country” (Rosier, 1999: 4). By the winter of 1884 the buffalo were gone (investigators from the Smithsonian Institute record only being able to find 15 head) and the Blackfeet were disarmed and given rancid and meager rations (Still Smoking, 1997). In 1888, the Sweet Grass Hills treaty was signed after successive winters of what can easily be described as extreme duress, taking an area of Blackfeet land roughly equivalent to one quarter of the current state of Montana, which, not surprisingly, officially became a state in 1889 (Still Smoking, 1997). In one final blow to their territory the Blackfeet sold Glacier National Park in 1896 leaving them with what is now the reservation (Still Smoking, 1997). Though she does not mention it, there is a great amount of discourse on the reservation, the content of which generally says that this land was actually leased to the government for a period of 100 years, but by the time the lease was up, the government said, essentially, that now it was a national park and so it belonged to all the American people and they couldn’t give it back.

The issue of land is a sensitive one. Many of the traditional stories are connected with natural sites both on and off the reservation. Students grow up hearing these stories, which may leave a permanent imprint of the meaning and cultural ownership of the land. In their Blackfeet language and history classes they are introduced to the years during which the continued existence of these stories were threatened in the historic and pictorial account of The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival (1984), by William E. Farr. This historical account begins well after the one recounted by Still Smoking, but goes into more detail.

Farr’s first chapter begins after the 1870 Baker massacre and begins with a recounting of the end of the Buffalo Days. He continues with the push of the white culture westward that left many of the animals upon which the Blackfeet relied nearly exterminated by white hunters. Though trade began and trades such as blankets, materials and metal items were brought in, the Blackfeet land was chipped away, smallpox killed many, and rations, which often didn’t arrive, replaced the rich tradition of self-sustaining culture based on the buffalo with 1880-1881 being the last years the Blackfeet could sustain themselves. As the buffalo abruptly disappeared, the Blackfeet had no choice but to turn to the government at Old Agency during the Starvation Winter of 1883-1884, when the rations promised by treaty never arrived and the Blackfeet lost in one winter an estimated 600 members of the tribe (Farr, 1984).
Whatever parity might have existed between the two cultures evaporated with the disappearance of the economic base, the buffalo. It was also soured by white encroachment, then by disease, by alcohol, and, of course, by confinement away from their Canadian relatives. Isolated, losing numerical force, and pushed into dependency by hunger, Blackfeet people had lost their chance at gradual accommodation…it was more than a loss of a way of life, but was, confusing as it may sound, a loss of home in their own homeland (Farr, 1984: 8).

Farr continues his account, explaining that by 1887 the entire eastern portion of the reservation lands, reaching all the way across Montana, had been ceded due to the immediate concerns, and thus pliability of the Blackfeet elders. The seven different government agents that were charged with the care of the tribe had too much opportunity to swindle, steal from and defraud the Blackfeet. Though the Blackfeet knew dishonest practices were occurring, they had no education, held no cultural capital in the white world, and thus had no way to advocate for themselves. In 1895, the mountainous portion of Blackfeet land, what is now Glacier Park was ceded and the Blackfeet attempted to use the little money that trickled down from the dishonest agency to begin a program of ranching (Farr, 1984).

By 1890 an agency school had been established at Badger Creek, preempting the Jesuit attempt that had begun in 1859 to begin a mission school (Farr, 1984). Further complications in beginning a program of education were created by a religious feud between the Catholics and the Methodists as both groups sought to establish schools (Farr, 1984). As recounted by Jackie Parsons, in *The Educational Movement of the Blackfeet Indians: 1840-1979* (1980), the mission schools, initially, were a good experience for many Blackfeet children for whom these schools provided a relatively stable existence during a time when most Blackfeet were experiencing starvation and chaos. Mary Ground who attended mission schools is quoted as saying, “You could talk Indian, but not much. I had plenty to eat. They were the happiest days of my life” (Parsons, 1980: 9). Still Smoking explains that the process of assimilation had begun in 1819 when the U.S. Congress diverted funds to civilize the tribes (Still Smoking, 1997). The plan of Christianization began with the Jesuits who appeared in the 1840’s and continued through the turn of the century with the removal of children to boarding schools where military style discipline was often used to assimilate the Blackfeet children (Still Smoking, 1997).

During the time when the Blackfeet children were being taken away, Farr explains that traders had an easy job: “They had captive consumers – the Blackfeet – who could not leave the reservation without a permit and who were encouraged and often forced to buy at one of the
traders. Big profits were possible in this situation and when the trader extended credit, he would often recover his debt by taking horses or cattle issued to individual Blackfeet by the government” (Farr, 1984: 44). Problems with money continued during the turn of the century. Though 572 of the 2000 Blackfeet had cattle, encroachment by white ranchers was a major problem even after the reservation was fenced (with Blackfeet funds) in 1904 (Farr, 1984). Keeping non-Blackfeet from using reservation land as grazing grounds continued to be a problem and the congressional allotment order of 1907, giving land to individual Indians further complicated the issue, as did harsh winters and irrigation problems (Farr, 1984). “By 1919-20 two-thirds of the entire tribal population of some 3,000 relied upon government rations” (Farr, 1984: 101). In the years leading up to WWII, the Blackfeet stagnated in an “economic dead end” that left them dependent on a government that kept them corralled on a reservation without the means to support themselves (Farr, 1984: 102).

Farr explains that out of this dysfunction, and even through the terrible days of the Great Depression, the Blackfeet did manage with the bumbling help of Indian agents, to pull themselves out of starvation by the 1920’s with a collage of projects such as raising horses, ranching, and some farming, particularly in the Heart Butte area. The New Deal projects in the 1930’s provided much needed employment, as did logging in the National parks area. Part of these monies during the New Deal era also helped to build Government Day Schools on the reservation as well as expanding the first public school in Browning that had opened in 1920 (Farr, 1984).

Farr reviews the growing practice of education, beginning with a “moonlight school” established in 1932 and designed to help older Blackfeet learn the rudiments of reading and writing English (Farr, 1984: 128). He points out that bringing the adults to school was an excellent opportunity to convince the Blackfeet elders how important it was to send their children to school where painting, basket making, sewing and reading activities (as well as food) were provided (Farr, 1984). However, as Still Smoking explains, “In all the dealings with educating the Blackfeet children, there is no mention of their cultural heritage of the importance of instilling their Native language background, and of supporting family connections” (Still Smoking, 1997: 51).

Blackfeet tradition and modern ways continued to intermesh, but difficulty in identity caused rifts in the tribal fabric as some families retreated from the hubs of modern life looking
for ways to hold on to the traditional while some embraced the new as opportunity (Farr, 1984). But for those that continued the old ways, “it was done because, without pretense and selfconsciousness, it felt right, because it needed to be, not because Blackfeet individuals needed to become Indians through religious and cultural activities, but because they were Indians” (Farr, 1984: 170, emphasis in the original).

The effects of the decline in numbers of the full-blooded Blackfeet, caused by the starvation winter of 1883, are described by Paul Rosier in his unique work, “‘The Real Indians, Who Constitute the Real Tribe’: Class, Ethnicity and IRA Politics on the Blackfeet Reservation,” (1999). In his investigation, Rosier examines the political economy of the Blackfeet tribe following the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which made allowances for, among other things, each tribe who adopted it to create a constitution which would allow them to manage their own domestic affairs by creating economic and political organizations (Rosier, 1999). The adoption of the IRA however, came after years of tensions between full-bloods who saw themselves as the Real Indians and mixed-bloods who, by their sheer numbers began to outweigh the full-bloods in political and economic power (Rosier, 1999). The full-bloods and the mixed-bloods however, found common ground in the promise of economic development that passage of the IRA would give them, and worked together to have it pass by tribal vote (Rosier, 1999).

However, for the tribal election held after the passage of the IRA, the competition was fierce due to the financial gains that the IRA promised to council members; “Full-bloods routinely placed three to five men on the thirteen-member business council before the tribe adopted the IRA. The first post-IRA council, elected in January 1936, contained only one full – blood” (Rosier, 1999: 9). Requisite struggles over distribution of funds and their decreasing economic capital left the full-bloods with bad feelings about their more affluent mixed-blood neighbors who had adopted the white mans’ way with money; “Most full-bloods rejected those attitudes” and relied on the custom of the ‘give-away,’ which dictated that those better off assisted those less so” (Rosier, 1999: 11). Rosier recounts that the BIA refused the complaints of the full-bloods arguing that they had a democratic system in place that allowed them to change their tribal business council members every two years if they weren’t happy with the way things were going. This was an argument that didn’t help the full-bloods at all since they were suffering from lack of political strength as a result of their minority status - both demographically and economically (Rosier, 1999). However, through a series of efforts by full-bloods, and mixed-
blacks who supported their agenda, the full-blacks managed to use the IRA that had initially worked against them, to reassert their values by engendering support among their mixed-blood relatives in a number of key political decisions, that though not providing them with the status they once sought, increased their influence and positioned them as important tribal figures (Rosier, 1999). “Full-blacks ‘stayed Indian’ while becoming acculturated to democratic political life and exercising their rights as democratic citizens” (Rosier, 1999: 25). They used their rights to help promote the ideas of “tribal and Indian identity…by speaking for a heterogeneous group of Blackfeet, elders enlarged their constituency,” and “sought to preserve the tribe as a mechanism for social control, to restore the idea of the tribe as a ‘family’…rather than as a corporate body” (Rosier, 1999: 25). Thus, the elders of the tribe salvaged the core of the Blackfeet ways out of the political chaos resulting from the disruption of their civilization by the new white ways of being; “Although the dissidents did not succeed in amending the constitution, their grass-roots campaigns politicized the electorate, reoriented income distribution patterns, and ensured that the full-blood ethos of the past remained a constituent of the Blackfeet future” (Rosier, 1999: 26).

Religious freedom along with the recognition of Native American people as citizens were obtained only after a long struggle that was completed within the lifetimes of current tribal members. Amazingly, the tribe has retained traditional practice though they have in the past experienced significant religious and traditional repression from the US government. For example, a large part of Native Americans’ identity is expressed and solidified in the use of Native language, inexorably tied to religious ceremony, ceremonies that by policy and practice were actively and sometimes physically discouraged until 1978 (HM-RR, 2005). Specifically, as late as 1921, the Office of Indian Affairs asserted with “Circular 1655” that reservation superintendents should work with other officials and religious institutions to discourage Native ceremonies (HM-RR, 2005). Though Native Americans were officially given the right to practice their religion with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, government interference in religious ceremonies was not officially ceased until the 1978 Congressional hearings on American Indian Religious Freedom (HM-RR, 2005).

Concurrent with this slow move toward recognizing Native Americans’ religious rights was Native Americans’ fight for citizenship and voting rights (HM-V, 2005). With the passing of the Indian Citizenship act of 1924, Native Americans were supposed to be given the right to
vote, but with various states using their courts to bend rules of “citizenship” and “state residency” this right was not secured on all reservations until Congress passed the Voting Rights act of 1965 (HM-V, 2005). However, many Native Americans still must fight efforts of redistricting that would reduce their voting power (HM-V, 2005).

Thus, within the memories of many living Blackfeet, reside oppressive labels and hostile practices towards their traditional beliefs and toward their status as members of the United States. As a result, both regional and national labels reflecting positive levels of belonging were discouraged in the formation of identity among Native American tribes as a whole. This history of lack of religious freedom and other culturally oppressive practices (such as forced education through separation from the family unit) are part of the reservation’s history of the production of space and formation of the subject in at least the practice of religion if not also the space of school. From the first treaty in 1855, until today, tribal members have been forced to negotiate a use of space as dictated by governmentally imposed boundaries, schools run according to Western values, and spaces forbidding Indian religious practice, all of which are incommensurate with Blackfeet practices of use of space. In addition, the meanings inscribed on Blackfeet individuals within these Westernized spaces have produced subjects who still struggle to remove themselves from labels of savage, culturally deficient, and immoral while working to maintain their own culturally defined categories. The results of my research will discuss these forces of historicity, situatedness and contingency and the influence of these forces on the production of Blackfeet identity.

I have chosen to investigate the multiplicity of forces of identity production within the spaces of formal learning relative to the spaces of informal learning because the differences between these two spaces illuminate the complexity of the processes of social production. In my observations during my time as a teacher, it became apparent that the school had mainly Anglo teachers for the majority of its history. This knowledge was conveyed to me in many ways, but always with negative sentiment and discourse that asserted that most non-Indian teachers don’t or can’t understand Native students or their community. This negative history of educational experiences and subject formation continues to be part of the educational dynamics on the reservation, for good or ill, through the continuing discourse of those that it affected. Studies have not yet delved into the relationship between the informal educational spaces created by tribal members and the formal educational spaces created by public education and how these
spaces have contributed to and been affected by practices that contribute to the formation of identity of Native American people. Though there is now freedom to carry out traditional practices, I have observed that there is still a struggle to reflect community values and identities in the formal educational spaces of the reservation. Despite this struggle, the fact that Native language is now a requirement in many reservation schools is testimony to the immense transition that has occurred in a relatively short period of time.

FIGURE 2.5

DISPLAY CASE IN BROWNING HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY
CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON SPACE, IDENTITY, EDUCATION, AND NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The recent history of geographic investigation has generally witnessed an increase in the attempt to deal with the complexity of human behavior and a move away from the need to develop all encompassing “scientific” principles of human geography. As we move away from the heated years of the qualitative versus quantitative debate, the individual and the community have become valid loci of inquiry and have been incorporated in theoretical debates concerning subject formation and issues of power, the role of space and place, and the socio-cultural dynamic. Consequently, the exploration of identity has become a central concern in, what some would refer to as, the postmodern era of investigation in geography. One of the main currents in this discussion flows along lines of the relationship between identity, also referred to as subject formation, and space.

The dynamics of the relationship between space and identity are central to my investigation. In my research the central forum for this relationship is primarily in the formal learning space of the school, but also within the space of informal learning in the community. In Colin Brock’s 1992 dissertation, “The Case for the Geography of Education,” he defines formal education as “organized learning and teaching enabled by an official or recognized system of explicitly educational institutions,” with informal education defined as “enabled by gratuitous, casual or indirect contact (eg tribal, community, family and other personal contacts, ‘the media,’ the spread of ideas)” (Brock, 1992: 14). For this research I will utilize these definitions. Though there is little work that investigates this relationship between formal and informal learning, there is a significant body of work in geography that has dealt with related questions, both theoretically and through qualitative investigation.

Much of this work has grown out of early investigations of the construction of space produced by Lefebvre, a central architect of the concept of the production of space. For him, space is made from multiple layers of meaning produced by subjects through their interaction with their surroundings. For Lefebvre space is not static; it is constantly constructed by human energy. Space cannot be reduced to form, but instead is a social product (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, when examining space we must look for the meaning imbued in it by subjects. For my research, the production of space in learning is understood not only as what the space
functions as, but how it functions, and what meanings the subjects in the space associate with it and with the practices carried out in it. However, significant work discussing the nature of both space and identity has built upon Lefebvre, and more directly addresses my theoretical framework.

Theoretical concerns surrounding the mutually constitutive nature of space and identity are explored in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, (1993). In their first two chapters, Michael Keith and Steve Pile discuss the possibility that geographically and historically specific circumstances can “be understood as expressions of abstract social relations” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 1). They, like Lefebvre, see space as a dynamic forum in which place, politics and identity are being continually and mutually constituted through the socio-spatial dynamic. Keith and Pile continue to focus this theoretical framework further by exploring the polarized problematics that have been born out of this investigation, that of spatial relativism versus spatial immanence. To solve this dilemma, they suggest, “we must look to the sites in which these associations are evoked (spaces of representation) in order to understand the cultural production of the representation of space” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 24). Cautioning that though no spatiality is signified, there is a necessary “equivalence between historicity and spatiality,” since the formation of the subject is “constituted by the forces that oppose it (the constitutive outside)” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 27). This constitutive outside is understood to be a negativity whereby the subject is formed. However, since the relational field is never a closed system, “identities and their conditions of existence are inseparable” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 28). Thus, Keith and Pile explain, the formation of the subject is contingent upon the space and time in which it is produced and heavily influenced by what the hegemonic forces which are in that space and time say that it is not. Further, this identity is never completed and the moment in which we choose to examine it is an “arbitrary closure” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 28). By opposing essentialism through acknowledgement of multiple spatialities and thus an embracing of radical contextualization, they reject a relativistic approach by advocating a “move away from a position of privileging positionality towards one of acknowledging spatiality. Such a move takes us toward an understanding of identities as always contingent and incomplete processes rather than determined outcomes and of epistemologies as situated and ambivalent rather than abstract and universal” (Keith and Pile, 1993: 34).
Their theoretical work helps to focus my own in several ways. First, by acknowledging the multiplicity of spatialities, the assumption of a universal Blackfeet world-view is firmly dismissed and the approach to the diversity of experiences for Blackfeet youth, even within the group that identifies themselves as traditional, is cleared. Additionally, by making identity contingent with time and place I have a theoretical framework that galvanizes years of assertions by Native Americans: namely, the inaccuracy of the mainstream American tendency generalize the Native American perspective (usually within a nature/culture dualism) that, with hundreds of recognized, distinct and highly differentiated tribes, is clearly illusory. Thirdly, I apply the paradigm of the constitutive outside to my investigation of the formation of identity as a method of teasing routes of identity formation from the narratives of subjects, understanding that the constitutive outside can exist at multiple scales (discussed in more detail below). Lastly, from their discussion, I am able to employ a theoretical framework that does not privilege the particularity of the Blackfeet nation, but rather investigates the formation of identity for Blackfeet youth as contingent upon the relationship between the formal and informal spatialities of learning.

Additional key aspects of the identity and space debate central to my research are deftly explored through a non-essentialist, poststructuralist approach in Natter and Jones’ investigation of the essentialist nature of the “category” in their chapter in *Space and Social Theory* (1997), entitled, “Identity, Space and Other Uncertainties.” Since their discussion of a nonessentialized approach to identity and space is central to my theoretical framework, I will examine its particularities in depth. Rejecting essentialist notions of space by revealing that classification of difference (the category) is essentializing by means of the exclusion of absent categories, they explore a poststructuralist approach to space that can work with poststructuralist notions of identity (Natter and Jones, 1997). This argument is built through an examination of poststructuralist identity theory that they then apply to spatial theory (Natter and Jones, 1997).

To begin, they elucidate the difficulties of identity theory when encountering the “category,” namely the ability to function “outside an essentialism the polar moments of which are, at one end, a blindness toward diversity, and at the other end, the total disintegration of the category” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 145). Moving on to a review of nonessential identity, they incorporate the concept of the constitutive outside – the process by which the other, through constructing the boundaries of the category, inevitably leaves the marks of itself within the
category thus never actually separating itself from the categorization (Natter and Jones, 1997). Thus, they explain, “differences so sorted are never neatly contained, they are only maintained” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 146 emphasis in the original). Further, what brings this constitutive outside into poststructuralism is the recognition of the category, a technique of power, as contingently producing identity (Natter and Jones, 1997). They advocate a focus on the construction of the category rather than the effects of that construction, since without the deconstruction of the category its outcomes will be maintained anyway (Natter and Jones, 1997). To achieve this end, requires the inclusion of an historical dimension to demonstrate how the category has been built and maintained (Natter and Jones, 1997). “This involves an interrogation of the ‘cultural treasures’ put on display by the guardians of tradition wherever and whenever dense cultural capital is at stake” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 147). This can lead to the critical process of disidentification – “a critique that disrupts and rearranges “the pre-constructed categories on which the formation of subjects depend’” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 148).

Applying this theoretical framework, Natter and Jones explain the utility of thinking of space as “a lack to be filled, contested and reconfigured through contingent and partially determined social relations, practices and meanings” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 149). Natter and Jones go on to explain that in this process of construction, the hegemonic moment finds itself rooted in its own origin story, the power of which is an illusion, since both origin and meaning are vulnerable to resistance and contestation. Thus, the center and the periphery always contain elements of the other, imbuing each with power (Natter and Jones, 1997). Ultimately, space is both material and representational giving “unity of the object and sign, but also the possibility of their separation,” thus opening space to indefiniteness and contestation (Natter and Jones, 1997: 150). Even though the “naturalizing process of hegemony” is always at work, the categories it applies “to space already bears the marks of the other it aims to exclude” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 151). Thus, “the very process of exclusion that permits the category also permits oppositional moments to insert themselves into the object/sign system” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 152).

To utilize this framework in our investigations, the authors remind us, “hegemony not only perpetually processes identifications to which ‘identity’ may then become attached, it does so spatially, by disciplining the meanings and practices associated with any social space,” thus making the formation of identity and space contingent on each other and particular to the
contexts in which they are produced (Natter and Jones, 1997: 153). They provide us with two guidelines for nonessentialist work with identity and space. First, they admonishing us to abandon the essentialisms implied in the pursuit of “attainment of absolute consensus” and a “total reversal of hegemony,” which in turn implies an embrace of the multiplicities and ever-evolving contingencies in the production of identities and space both of which are never closed, only artificially so at the point of analysis (Natter and Jones, 1997: 154). Additionally, as we embark on our nonessentialist investigations, they encourage us to “cognize otherwise” and free the seemingly determined and ordered “dominant meanings and practices in social space” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 155), and as a result to “spatially disidentify praxis itself” (Natter and Jones, 1997: 156). In other words, instead of allowing hegemonic forces to contain practice, including resistance, the authors call for social movements to reach across space to other seemingly bounded and similar identities to disidentify the spaces in which they have been contained (Natter and Jones, 1997).

Natter and Jones’ compelling perspective on the nature of space and identity is particularly useful to my investigation. A nonessentialist perspective is critical to the investigation of learning if we are to acknowledge any learning that happens outside of a classroom desk. First the categories of school and community must be abandoned. The school is not just where we learn and the community is not just where we live. The two overlay, are contingent upon and constituted by each other and thus, an investigation into identity must consider the essentialisms that are propounded by each. A key step in this process is an investigation of the historical dimension of the construction of categories, both by the school and by the community. This historical dimension of category construction must be examined if we hope to disidentify accepted categories of meaning and space and re-examine the ways in which the socio-spatial dialectic currently functions to produce meaning, space and identity. In fact, by identifying a space as school, hegemonic force marks the community as a non-learning space, thus leaving its marks on the community and demonstrating the need for a non-essentialist, situated approach to learning. As Natter and Jones make beautifully clear, we must recognize political consensus as unattainable (Natter and Jones, 1997). Instead, our best hope for the diluting of hegemonic forces resides in our ability to recognize the situatedness of all identities and see the administration of complexity (in education as well as other institutions) not as an
insurmountable burden, but as a path to self-actualization, and empowerment for all the citizens of the democracy.

Though Natter and Jones’ nonessentialist approach is critical in conducting an investigation into the situated nature of space and identity in education, its utility in this endeavor can be strengthened by the incorporation of the concept of hybridity and the related issue of scale. Buried in chapter 13 of a collection devoted to studies of geographic education and curricula, is an investigation indispensable to my research, written by Jeffrey Lash and Pamela Wridt entitled “Geography, Culture and Knowing: Hybridity and the Production of Social and Cultural Knowledge,” (2002). Interestingly for my work, though not focused on all of education, Lash and Wridt point out that even geographic education “often does not situate the learning process within a particular social, cultural or physical context” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 159). Though some analyses of geographic education have focused on the classroom (the micro), “fewer studies investigate the interconnections between home, community and the larger socio-cultural contexts in which knowledge is produced” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 159). “This often leads researchers to neglect macro level changes in society and their impact on the everyday lives of learners in different places” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 159). “To illustrate the importance of place in understanding the process of education,” they discuss hybridity and its influence on “the production of social and cultural knowledge,” by encouraging researchers to incorporate “multiple scales of analysis, paying special attention to “third spaces”” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 159). Since examinations of educational dynamics are largely absent from geographic investigations and even more so from geographic theory, Lash and Wridt’s considerations are critical insights that will assist any research in space, identity and education.

Lash and Wridt examine hybridity, scale, social learning theory, social development theory and agency as a pretext to summaries of two empirical studies: one on tensions surrounding female students wearing of the niqaab at the American University in Cairo and the other on Queens, New York, middle school students, many of whom come from immigrant families (Lash and Wridt, 2002). As they explain, hybridity theories, though “rooted in the micro, or local scale of experience,” are also “influenced by the global political economy at the macro scale, and filtered through the meso scale of ideology” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 159). Citing Bhabha, Lefebvre and Soja, they explain that hybridity is the process of meeting of the fields of identity that creates a “third space” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 160) In the meeting of
cultures, the ensuing tensions activate not a “transferral of foreignness into the familiar,” but an understanding tempered by an awareness of incomplete knowledge (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 160). They go on to explain that social learning theory bridges hybridity and the learning process by explaining that learning, though rooted in observation, is a process between one’s own cognition and one’s own environment, a process which creates parameters for later decisions, and “thus can be highly influenced by the process of hybridity” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 160). Vygotsky’s theory of social development is cited for its contribution of the idea that social interaction develops consciousness, clarifying that along with the concept of agency, “social learning and the process of hybridization are similar in their focus upon an individual’s negotiation of ‘self’ and ‘other’” (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 161). Most compelling is the following:

Bruner argues that certain types of outcomes – such as understanding the ways in which ideas connect with one another, the possibility of solving problems on our own, and how what we know is relevant to what we are trying to learn – are the essence of education, and can best be achieved through personal discovery. Learning, both outside and inside of the classroom, advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge in everyday activities. In other words, learning is situated in time and place (Lash and Wridt, 2002: 161 emphasis added).

Thus, at this point we have established a nonessentialist approach to identity, to space and now to learning. If learning is indeed situated, then we have a multi-faceted dynamic to examine bringing us out of a space and identity dualism and into a realm whereby looking at the contingent/scaled/situatedness of space, learning and identity we will learn more about all three. Learning is actually what we are doing all the time and thus is integral to the social construction of space and to the development of the identity. Though it happens everywhere, all the time, the way in which we are accustomed to it: the tacit rules that apply, the methods of problem solving, the degree to which we are ready to work with others, and whether or not we are ready to achieve Bruner’s “essence of education,” etc., is largely dependent on the interaction between our first spaces of learning (the community) and our second and formal contact with learning (the school).9

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9 Also involved in this dynamic can be the non-formal experiences of learning, defined by Brock as “enabled by institutions or agencies that are not normally recognized as being part of an official and explicit educational system (eg the armed forces, banks, companies, television stations)” (Brock, 1992: 14).
One final theoretical consideration informs my research – that of emotional geographies. For this study it is important to consider how students feel in spaces of learning since their reaction will have a significant impact on how they feel about learning experiences in general (in its various forms), and influence decisions about their life pursuits based on where they feel successful. This concept is addressed in an editorial for the journal *Social and Cultural Geography*, entitled “Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies” (2004), by Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan. Along with reviewing recent literature in this area, they discuss the recent recognition of the impact of emotion on geography. Noting first that the body is our first geography wherein we experience feeling and emotion, they suggest that, “through an exploration of diverse *senses* of space, we could become better placed to appreciate the emotionally dynamic spatiality of contemporary social life” (Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 524). They also demonstrate the importance of emotions for how we make decisions and conceive of ourselves in the future. For students, the emotional impact of educational experience (both in and out of the classroom) constitutes a direct impact on their motivation in the present and their goals for the future, both of which are based on their emotional experiences in different learning situations. Davidson and Milligan state:

> Emotions can clearly alter the way the world *is* for us, affecting our sense of time as well as space. Our sense of who and what we are is continually (re)shaped by how we *feel*. Similarly, the imagined or projected substance of our future experience will alter in relation to our current emotional state (Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 524, original emphasis).

Though some in the academy may dismiss considerations of emotion as unimportant to geographic inquiry, even in the Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Kay Anderson and Susan Smith have noted:

> We have been forced to confront the glaringly obvious, yet intractable, silencing of emotion in both social research and public life. We are hardly alone in arguing that this suppression produces an incomplete understanding of the world’s workings, or in claiming that to neglect the emotions is to exclude a key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made (Anderson and Smith, 2001: 7).

From this review of the literature, it becomes apparent that there are considerations critical to the examination of space and identity in the forum of education and that education in all its forms (formal, non-formal, informal) must be brought into the study of space and identity. These critical considerations, if examined in situated studies of space, identity and learning, will
produce significant change towards the production and conceptualization of what it means to be an educated person - a requirement of a productive citizen in democratic society. I have formulated these considerations in the following manner as a rubric for analysis:

1) Acknowledgement of the impossibility of complete political consensus

2) Historicity – an analysis of the construction and maintenance of categories paying attention to the “cultural treasures” of the dominant (Natter and Jones, 1997: 147), as well as the historic perspective of the subjugated

3) Contingency and situatedness – a utilization of an approach requiring the researcher to analyze the past and present, dominant and subjected, micro, meso and macro influences that the continuously forming subject processes and acts from, requiring analysis incorporating at least all of the following:
   a. Category – a cognizing otherwise of dominant categories and a re-inscription of labels with the caveat of dual disidentification of space and identity
   b. Hybridity – an awareness of the moments that generate the inception, experience and results of the creation of third space
   c. Scale – an incorporation of the micro, meso and macro
   d. Modes of learning – analysis of the situated dialectic of tacit and explicit approaches to formal, informal - and where applicable non-formal – education, the messages transmitted in these practices and the content of the information relayed
   e. Emotion – an inclusion of how the subject feels about his or her experience

4) Agency – an incorporation of the power of the individual, and a rejection of the myth of the subjugated as a subject that only reacts to the constitutive outside of dominant hegemonic force and has no community or cultural values from which they produce their decisions and affinities, nor creativity in the formation of their actions

As many geographers have shown, an examination of categorical assertions can assist us in studying the techniques of power and how they give rise to both resistance and domination. However, we must move beyond a demonstration of these essentialisms and toward an analysis that incorporates the nine considerations above, as this approach holds the possibility of returning agency (and subsequently power) to the individual. However, geographic analysis that is non-essentialist (in considerations of identity, space and learning); scaled; situated;
incorporating agency, emotion, historicity and hybridity; and utilizing analysis of modes of learning, will only be effective for the production of the educated citizen, if they are put into policy and used to reform approaches to policy and procedure by those employed in the process of education.

II. IDENTITY WORK IN GEOGRAPHY PERTAINING TO EDUCATION AND NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

Much of the work on identity in geography has concentrated on gender, sexuality, race, class, age and other seemingly bordered categories. Some geographers have managed to incorporate the situated voices of their subjects alongside of dominant categories (see Secor, 2004). A handful of geographers have explored less tangible domains such as imagined or emotional geographies. Even fewer have looked at any connection between education and geography. One contemporary work in the intersection of geography and education is the collected volume, *Education and Society: Studies in the Politics, Sociology and Geography of Education* (1988), edited by Bondi and Mathews. However, the first section deals with educational provision and the politics that influence it such as issues of school choice and districting. The second section does explore social issues but in regards to employment, vocational education and the role of resource deprivation in educational attainment (Bondi and Mathews, 1988).

Craig Jeffrey is conducting some of the only active empirical work by geographers that incorporates issues of education. His work with Muslim and Dalit young men focuses on the way discursive formations surrounding these mens’ involvement in education are used as a way to socially position themselves as moral, respectful people (Jeffrey et al., 2004). Though occupational opportunities for these men are very low, they privilege their more refined speech, dress, and views of the world as reflective of a higher status than those of the less educated men of their social group (Jeffrey et al., 2004). Through case studies of some of these men Jeffrey concludes that ideas of development and a history of exclusion and discrimination lead men in like circumstances to attach high value to education due to the benefits that are discursively attributed to education, even though the necessary employment to create those benefits has all but disappeared (Jeffrey, et al., 2004).
Recently, Katharyne Mitchell has made some progress in elucidating the tensions at the intersection between education and geography. In 2003, she stated: “that the institution that is perhaps the most crucial in both the formation and maintenance of democratic communities (through the creation of subjects interpellated through the liberal values and norms of the modern nation) is the institution that is often the least studied in academia: the institution of education” (Mitchell, 2003: 389, emphasis in the original). In an examination of the increase in current political and ideological moves towards policies of assimilation and away from multiculturalism, Mitchell continues her work (see Mitchell 2003) on multiculturalism, identity and education. In “Geographies of Identity” (2004), she shows how policies designed to assist those who are not part of the dominant mainstream are systematically being removed. For example, the removal of policies supporting bilingual assistance, policies that actively exclude resident aliens from welfare (Welfare Reform Act 1996), and policies that result in sharp lines between the citizen and the non-citizen (Patriot Act 2001) all work against multiculturalism (Mitchell, 2004). But, perhaps more insidiously, the removal of such policies that protect difference “includes the differences brought about by poverty and inferior education systems in addition to differences of culture” (Mitchell, 2004: 644). Her research is valuable since she demonstrates the results of the academic and political retreat from multiculturalism including the denial of access that comes from a “new exceptionalism” that dictates that those who do not assimilate are choosing not to take part in citizenship (Mitchell, 2004: 648).

However it is my intent that this investigation is taken beyond an identification of the problem so that both educational and political reform can take place. We can see the fault in the logic of “new exceptionalism,” using Lash and Wridt’s framework to understand the production of the educated citizen. The process of education is not solely dependent on a curriculum (even one of citizenship), but also partially on the learner’s ability to negotiate third space, which as Lash and Wridt have pointed out, is the means by which we achieve the essence of education.

It is unfortunate, however, that some studies of space and identity so clearly demonstrate the need for a more nonessentialist viewpoint. In Jan Penrose’s article “When All the Cowboys Are Indians: The Nature of Race in All-Indian Rodeo” (2003), she asserts that the dominant notions of nature, culture and race have not only functioned to exclude Native Americans from the rodeo circuit, but that they have been utilized by the Native American community to build an all-Indian rodeo as a form of resistance (Penrose, 2003). She contends that though Native
Americans have resisted these hegemonic conceptions, Native communities have been embedded in these categories and as thus have also been dependent on them to build their identities as Indian cowboys (Penrose, 2003). Although she provides a thorough explanation of the dominant Western perspective, she does not utilize the framework of nonessentialism that Natter and Jones espouse and as a result fails to “cognize otherwise,” and misses a chance at disidentification resulting in an unwitting maintenance of hegemonic categories.

As she notes in her article overview, she examines “Indian responses to this marginalization” (Penrose, 2003: 688), a marginalization that utilized the notions of nature, culture and race to portray the Indian as inherently savage and uncultured. By locating the origin (historicity) of the formation of this particular aspect of Indian identity in Native response to marginalization (Penrose, 2003), instead of considering scale and historicity from the Native perspective, she may be missing a salient aspect of Native cowboy identity formation. For example, she contends, “it seems that Indians use hegemonic notions of ‘race,’ ‘culture/nature,’ and ‘history’ to legitimize all-Indian rodeos and the alternative Indian cowboy identity that they support” (Penrose, 2003: 700). She utilizes quotes from three Indian cowboys (most of whom talk mainly about respect for the horse) as basis for the assertion that “like the constructions employed to categorize Indians as the binary opposites of cowboys, the Indian construction of themselves as cowboys relies on the view that they are closer to nature than whites” (Penrose, 2003: 700, emphasis added). However, when I look at the quotes used, I see phrases like “you were raised around them [horses]” and “we respect them” (Penrose, 2003: 700). If we move the origin of Indian cowboy identity to the introduction of the horse into Blackfeet society,\(^\text{10}\) it becomes apparent that the horse was not a symbol of being “closer to nature,” but rather a symbol of wealth (Ewers, 1958: 95-96, 307). Additionally, horsemanship was a critical aspect of the path to chieftaincy along with generosity and success in war (Ewers: 39, 96-98).

Thus, what Penrose excludes are situated aspects of identity such as community (informal) learning as indicated by her interviewees when they say “you were raised around them [horses]” (Penrose, 2003: 700), and situated definitions of success, wealth and leadership as recounted by Ewers and confirmed by experiences I had living seven years in the community.

\(^{10}\) Incidentally, much of Penrose’s work comes from contacts with the Blood Indians who are actually part of the Blackfeet tribe. The Southern Blackfeet were separated from their Northern relations after the insertion of the 49\(^{\text{th}}\) parallel (Ewers, 1958).
The horse and rodeo in Indian cowboy identity might in fact have little or nothing to do with an Indian identity of being closer to nature, and more to do with Plains Indians categories of power. By utilizing a methodological framework dependent on essentialized categories, though incorporating a history of Native exclusion by white hegemony, Penrose ignores salient aspects of the tribal socio-spatial dialectic that could have been used to disidentify the Western nature/culture dual-essentialism. Thus, Penrose reproduces the very categories she seeks to weaken.

III. IDENTITY WORK IN EDUCATION, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

One of the major questions in education concerns the relationship of the success of the student to his or her emotional well-being. Many educational studies outline the need that students have to feel that they (their identities) are accepted by, reflected in, and specifically assisted by their educational experience. Some of these studies in education have outlined the need of ‘safe spaces’ in educational systems for marginalized groups.

For example, Richard Barry’s study of the safe spaces sought by gay, lesbian and bisexual students (Barry, 2000), Jasmin Zine’s study of Muslim youth and their struggle to maintain their religious identity despite negative social pressures in their educational experience (Zine, 2001) and Craig Centrie’s study of Vietnamese students who’s parents struggle to maintain spaces where their Native culture and language can contribute to the production and maintenance of identity for their school age children (Centrie, 2000). Studies such as those by Valerie Ooka Pang emphasize the continued existence of ethnic prejudice in America’s classrooms and the hurtful experiences that such prejudice produces. She elucidates ways in which the unintentional reinforcement of assumptions and stereotypes continue to be produced in the classroom and concludes, “Prejudicial attitudes often lie deep within the recesses of people’s minds and can be transmitted either nonverbally or unconsciously without malicious intent” (Pang, 1988: 379).

Few studies of identity, belonging and success in education have been done specifically regarding Native American communities. In a unique investigation, Tierney studies the college experience of Native Americans highlighting the extreme negative emotions sometimes experienced by college-going Native Americans (Tierney, 1993). Using Tinto’s model of social
integration, Tierney argues that the dramatic difference between the college community and the Native American’s community suggests, “organizations need to be constructed where minority student’s lives are celebrated and affirmed throughout the culture of the institution” (Tierney, 1993: 246). By establishing the difficulties produced for Native Americans within spaces of formal Western education, this study supports the need to examine the differences between the formal spaces of education and the informal education of members of tribal communities, as well as holding implications for any non-homogenized educational institutions.

DeMarris, Nelson, and Baker’s study of Eskimo girl’s practice of storyknifing supports the importance of the integration of traditional practices into the space of the school. In their study of Eskimo girl’s traditional methods of telling stories while drawing scenes in the mud they found that the encouragement of this activity actually led to an improvement in literacy and communication skills (DeMarris et al., 1992). Studies such as this one show the benefits of the integration of traditional practices into mainstream educational practices. For my purposes, this work supports my theoretical perspective that the integration of informal knowledge and modes of learning within a formal framework produces positive outcomes.

The importance of subjugated knowledges, the production of space and the formation of identity culminate in many ways in Varenne and McDermott’s Successful Failure, (1988). In this critical work they investigate “who and what are involved in the eventual evaluation of a life as a success or failure in school terms” (Varenne and McDermott, 1988: 3). They conceptualize failure as a product of the construct of success and advocate an investigation of the “conditions, rather than the constitution of politically identified failure” (Varenne and McDermott, 1988: 109). However, they caution:

…this difference has been interpreted as evidence for the existence of two worlds, two societies, separate and unequal, a dominant one to be emulated and a colonized other to be explained and transformed. There is another possibility: Both types of schools [good and bad] and all their children are part of one differentiated system that is the product of a complex and continuing cultural construction that has been made fact in the history of all concerned. We take the stance that both success and failure proceed from the same principles and that all individuals, families, and localities in the United States struggle with these same facts, American “cultural” facts that open particular social spaces for all (including us) to construct personal lives (Varenne and McDermott, 1988: 109).

This conceptualization of a “complex” and “differentiated system” that is part of a “continuing cultural construction,” is reminiscent of Natter and Jones’ nonessentialist approach
to space and identity. Success and failure are dominantly produced categories that, as Varenne and McDermott demonstrate in their work (though using slightly different terminology), must be reinscribed, not only for marginalized groups, but for all students (Varenne and McDermott, 1988). Their work suggests that the impact of deconstructing the success/failure paradigm and by, as they advocate, looking for the cultural constructions that constitute success/failure and not looking for the reasons for failure (Varenne and McDermott, 1988), that we may someday move forward in creating not only an educational system, but a society that begins to break down, instead of reproducing, labels and limitations that stick to our children and shroud their true successes – even the successes that are situated in time and place or those that cannot be empirically tested.

In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (1998), Holland et al., develop and explore an approach to identity theory that is not fully reliant on constructivist conceptions of the formation of identity, nor fully reliant on culturalist ideas of identity construction. Through an investigation of historical and ideological treatments of the respective notions of identity, the authors lead the reader to an understanding of the discussions that have come to bear on theories of identity and its relationship to behavior (Holland et al., 1998). Investigations of identity formation are then examined, leading to a revelation of their final proposed theory of “identity in practice” (Holland et al., 1998: 271).

To accomplish this task, the distinction between the culturalist vision of identity and the social constructivist vision of identity is elucidated so that other influencing visions of identity can be incorporated into the conversation (Holland et al., 1998). Culturalist positions are explained as viewing identity as functioning by shaping the individual to fit within the pre-constructed world according the culturally given meanings emanating from within that world (Holland et al., 1998). On the other hand the constructivist position is explained as viewing identity as enacted in the negotiation for social claims within interactions that impose situational levels of restraint on the individual (Holland et al., 1998).

Explaining that though both culturalist and constructivist views explain some aspects of identity formation, they are problematized and informed by the concepts of heuristic development (in the text referred to as improvisation) that reveals individuals as “not just products of our culture, not just respondents to the situation, but also and critically appropriators of cultural artifacts that we and others produce” (Holland et al., 1998: 17). Arguing that though
the culturalist version of the self becomes essentialized through practices and the constructivist
self changes according to position, these two views can be reconciled by a concept of the self
recently modified in three important ways (Holland et al., 1998).

First, the cultural and social discourses must be seen as “living tools of the self” that do
not reify the behavior of the self according to culture, but rather view behavior and identity as
open-ended (Holland et al., 1998: 28). Second, what is required is a view of the self as practice,
conceptualizing discourse as a positioning force and yet also as containing the tools that the self
can use to address situations (Holland et al., 1998). Third, recognizing the sites of the production
as plural and as such, in competition for influence (Holland et al., 1998). Demonstrating the
ways in which this view of the self plays out, mediating devices, agency and activity, and
heuristic discovery are discussed as ways the world is remade by the self (Holland et al., 1998).
After an examination of investigations that take such theory into account, the authors conclude
that identity is continually made in multiple and constantly forming social contexts (some more
influencing than others) and from self-authorship over long periods of time (Holland et al.,
1998).

This work supports my own in several ways. First, by reconciling the culturalist and
constructivist views, making the self and the corresponding identity into constantly forming,
socially based, but creative entity. By investigating personal experience, I am examining not
only the way that culture has shaped identity, but also how the individual negotiates the forms
associated with it. Next, by observing the plurality of places of production, the structure of my
research that is dependent on a plurality of spaces is supported. Last, the remaking of the self
and the self as a force of remaking supports my view of the spaces of school and the spaces of
community as non-reified. Though they are spaces influenced by historic, social, and contingent
forces, they have changed over time, hold varied meanings and have the potential to change in
the future through the practices of self that are enacted in those spaces.

In “Research in American Indian and Alaska Native Education: From Assimilation to
Self-Determination” (1997), Donna Deyhle and Karen Swisher review and critique research
accomplished in the last thirty years that has focused on culture and power relations for Native
American students, families and communities. Their findings strongly support the central aspects
of the design and results of my own research. Deyhle and Swisher point out that until recently
most of the research conducted on Native students has done very little to improve academic
achievement and has relied on frameworks privileging a “deficit model” of Native people (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). Deyhle and Swisher go on to explain that this deficit model is typified by assimilationist notions that view the Native student as needing change to become more like white students (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

After reviewing this history of assimilation research, parent and teacher roles are discussed, citing evidence that supports the assertion that teachers have an immense impact, both positive and negative, on Indian children (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). Additionally, they cite evidence that Native parents, previously viewed as apathetic, have in recent research been typified more as resistant to assimilation (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). Recent changes in these views have called into question theories, popular in the 1960’s, based on “cultural deprivation” that viewed poor students as limited in their backgrounds and needing the enrichment of Eurocentric knowledge (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). From this conceptual framework came many damaging conceptions: of Native language as an obstacle to learning; of Indian youth as damaged, of the community rather than the school as a barrier to achievement (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). In recent years there has been a shift in the focus of Native education research: “Although not numerous, studies of the social environment of the school and the classroom established causal references suggesting that the structure of schooling presented obstacles to learning. The classrooms in which Indian students were members were not conducive to feelings of security and acceptance or to scholastic achievement” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 125).

After a long discussion on the issue of Native students’ dropout rates, including gendered perspectives, Deyhle and Swisher move on to research challenging previous assimilationist perspectives. Most interestingly, the research they cite was conducted on an enormous variety of tribes from many different areas. First they discuss research interrogating the position that traditionality is a barrier to success, in its totality suggesting that it is not the case that cultural difference between home and school is correlated with greater difficulty, nor is it the case that traditionality is correlated with failure (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). Instead, their review of the body of research leads them to argue that cultural difference is not the root of the problem, but rather the path to the solution; “We believe that an environment that communicates the fact that cultural differences are strengths and not deficiencies is the first step in addressing the education needs of American Indian/Alaskan Native and Canadian Indian students (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 139). Additionally, leading educators to understand how Native students
“come to view and learn of their world,” will result in “educational practices that are more sympathetic and effective,” an approach that is “not supported in the analytic-competitive model of the public schools” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 139).

Reviewing research on Native students and learning, Deyhle and Swisher demonstrate that a significant range of research reveals Native students to be learners through observation, products of egalitarian controls, and socialized in forms quite different from those expected of them in classrooms (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). However, much research in this area still focuses on cultural difference as cultural deficit and few of these studies support an assertion that an understanding and valuing of student context will lead to student achievement, also noting that “scarcely researched is the impact of Indian teachers teaching Indian students” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 150).

Most importantly, in their next section they state “research grounded in critical theory focuses on institutional inequities, moving the analysis away from a deficit perspective while capturing the dominant group’s role in creating educational inequities” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 154, emphasis added). After reviewing the body of research incorporating a framework based in critical theory, they conclude that culturally relevant curriculum alone is not sufficient:

…rather, cultural differences intertwine with sociostructural conflict to create an educational context that ensures failure for many Indian students. Of particular importance is how cultural differences are treated within the schools Indian students attend. While we will not argue that a ‘culturally relevant’ curriculum will ‘solve’ the dropout problem, we take the position that within the large social and economic climate that discriminates against Indian students, the inclusion of culturally specific information, Native languages, and culturally matched pedagogy can have an impact on what teachers do to Indian students and how students react to their schooling…These bodies of research give legitimacy to looking both outside the school, into the local community and the broader society, and inside the school, within classroom interactions to identify the roots of educational failure or success (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 163-164, emphasis in the original).

Deyhle and Swisher’s review of literature and critique of findings supports not only the design of my research, but my outcomes as well. By arguing for research based in critical theory that evaluates school, community and society for the purpose of understanding classroom interactions, they describe my entire research approach, which relies on a theoretical framework to examine the historicity, situatedness, and contingency of meaning in both school and community for the purposes of understanding the development of identity. Since my conclusions
will show that neither culturally relevant curriculum, nor assimilationist methods serve to fully affirm the student, Deyhle and Swisher’s entire review of the successes and failures of Native education research supports my work.

Finally, I must mention Alan Peshkin’s work, *Places of Memory: Whiteman’s Schools and Native American Communities* (1997), since it planted the seeds of inspiration for my own research. Peshkin, in his full length ethnography of an Indian high school populated mostly by Pueblo, highlights the tensions felt by Native students attempting to occupy the two, often conflicting, worlds of their school and their community (Peshkin, 1997). It also explores reasons that despite the best efforts of educators, parents and even students, the students of the high school do not exhibit as much “success” as the community would like. (Peshkin, 1997) Perhaps, by disidentifying our categories of success, failure and education we can create alternative measures to evaluate needs and achievements.

Thus to accomplish my analysis of space, identity and education on the Blackfeet nation, I begin with the definitions of informal and formal education from Brock. I will structure my analysis by beginning with the concepts of multiplicity of spatialities, the relationship between space and identity, and the constitutive outside from Keith and Pile. Using Natter and Jones, I will apply a nonessentialist approach including concepts of disidentification, historicity, situated meanings and contingent production of meanings. Issues of agency, scale, hybridity, social learning theory and social development theory will be applied from Lash and Wridt’s discussion. Finally, concepts of emotions and identity as outlined by Davidson and Milligan will be incorporated into my analysis. Though few, if any, investigations have taken this approach, I am confident that this comprehensive framework will be beneficial to academic discussions and possibly to policy reform in several ways.

My analysis will contribute to the geographies of education by bringing education into the study of the relationship between the production of space and the formation of identity. Additionally, the rubric that I will use to guide my study will help to minimize the errors in analysis appearing in investigations that utilize frameworks that rely on essentialized categories. Also, my investigation will help to establish the dangers of the recent move toward assimilation in educational policy. In the discipline of education, my study will assist in demonstrating the efficacy of the incorporation of theories of identity and space in the pursuit of effective
educational reform. Lastly, my investigation will help to bring critical issues of Native American education to the attention of geographers and educators.

FIGURE 3.1

MURAL IN BROWNING HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS PART I: TRADITIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE INTERVIEWED POPULATION

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to answering research question number one for the students in this study: “What does it mean to be a traditional Blackfeet person?” as well as providing a context, through an examination of historicity and discussions of discourses producing situated and contingent meanings, that will assist in the next chapters’ examination of the remaining research questions. When examining the historicity of education in the spaces of learning on the Blackfeet nation, one must avoid the temptation to only look at the production of dominant categories and aspects of subject formation resulting from resistance to the constitutive outside. The incorporation of scale is critical because without it, (not only including forces of subject production at the macro scale but also at the meso and micro scales), only the dominant categories (usually typified by an obtuse, if not absent, consideration of pre-existing meanings, the practice of which is caused by placing origin at points conducive to the legitimization of the aggressive party) will be analyzed, resulting in an analysis mired in a reproduction and maintenance of dominant categories. To avoid this common misstep, I will look at the history of learning for Blackfeet and other Native Americans (not only post-reservation, but also pre-reservation), as well as excerpts from interviews that shed light on this oft overlooked aspect of the socio-cultural dynamic. As Henrietta Whiteman points out,

Contrary to popular belief, education – the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills – did not come to the North American continent on the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. Education is as native to this continent as its Native people. We Native Americans have educated our youth through a rich oral tradition, which was – and is yet today – transmitted by the elder of the tribe (Whiteman, 1978: 105).

It is important to remember, however, “Even the best current tribal histories are derived from the recorded encounters of the tribe and the white man. Little credence is given to tribal myth and folklore” (Deloria, 1978: 23). Nevertheless, existing social practice as well as contemporary observations of Native American scholars can be consulted in place of text recorded by first-contact tribal members since 1) there has always been a tradition of oral history carrying values and practices extending into today, as well as 2) socio-cultural methods of learning reproduced at the level of the community which, though impacted by institutionalized education, was continued in traditional practice as a reassertion of identity and can be reflected.
on by members of that community. It is my intention to weave analysis of historicity, situatedness and contingency into thematic elements that have surfaced as a result of my investigation.

II. ANALYSIS OF OBSERVATIONS AND SCHOLARLY WORK: HISTORICITY, SITUATEDNESS AND CONTINGENCY IN THE FORMATION OF MEANING

If we are to consider issues of scale and historicity, we must consider the way in which Native Americans have been framed educationally by the dominant discourse. However, an even finer point may be fashioned from the issue of scale for the purposes of this investigation and may be used in other investigations into the relationship between space and identity. Though the micro is referred to as the scale of the community, the meso at the filter of ideology and the macro as the nation/global (Lash and Wridt, 2002), if we look at the productiveness of power and how it functions at multiple scales we may obtain a better view of how the constitutive outside functions, where the constitutive outside can be located, as well as revisiting the way scale is considered.

In the Blackfeet nation, for example, though there are two meso filters that can be located in the ideology of America, and in the ideology of the tribe there is also a particularity in the tribal meso since there is contention regarding “the right way” in all categories of traditional practice. From my observations, specific liturgy of ritual and particularities of practice are part of the ongoing community discourse as are definitions of Indian-ness. Therefore, in an examination of the historicity of categorization, considerations should be given to the macro nation/state, the macro tribal (discourse of the entire Native American community), the meso non-Indian, the meso Native American, the meso Blackfeet, the ‘micro-meso’ Blackfeet (as described above), the dominant micro (or local dominant), and the micro (which could also be referred to as ‘circles of influence’). Let us first turn to the macro dominant categories produced by the nation/state and the meso filter of non-Indian (Western) ideology, and the meso filter of Blackfeet ideology.

The notion of the Native as less teachable than the non-Indian student has been maintained in many ways by hegemonic forces, resulting in an approach to education that dictates the re-training of the Native community to achieve standards of education commensurate with Western benchmarks of the educated citizen. These include mastery of Western values that
may appear arbitrarily anti-tribal to the Native student such as punctuality, self-advocacy, accumulation of Western knowledge, and competitiveness. In the eras of religious and then federal control over Native education, failure to master these Western values within the context of tribal life (that valued family and tribe, the event, the moment, Blackfeet knowledge and group effort), led to a judgmental reaction from the constitutive outside that inscribed the Native as deficient in the dominantly valued categories, and therefore lazy, stupid, un-motivated, learning deficient, submissive and generally unable to understand what is “important.” This framework collectively identified the Native American as suffering from a cultural deficit from which he or she needed to be saved. The category of cultural deficit in turn rationalized assimilationist policies based on the mis-identification of Natives as culturally deprived (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 116, 126). The cultural difference was further mis-categorized by dominant (non-Indian) power by labeling Native practice as savage when compared to Western religious practices and Western concepts of civilization.

These differences, marked as deficits by dominant categorization, led to federal policies of provision that inscribed Native Americans as fit only to be workers and not thinkers. This aspect of the historicity is evident in the practice of teaching primarily vocational and agricultural skills to tribal members in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Since the Native American was seen as unfit for academic pursuits, “Native Americans were ‘absorbed’ into the mainstream at these institutions through militaristic rules, harsh discipline and compulsory attendance, along with a curriculum emphasizing industrial and vocational training” (Thompson, 1978: 5).

American ideologies of education have evolved somewhat but still carry the vestiges of value demarcations which continue to exert force on the development of identity of traditional students through dominant ideologies of education, delivered through state and national policy, upon which the district is dependent for accreditation and funding and transported in by teachers educated in American institutions. The research into issues of Native American education at these institutions of higher education in which most teachers are trained have, at best, been conducted in ways that have “made little difference in the academic achievement of Indian youth,” and “have tended to buttress the assimilatory model by locating deficiencies in Indian students and families” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997: 116). Further, this deficit model is often used
to explain the high dropout rates of Native Americans regardless of the existence of studies linking strong tribal identities to success in school (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

Along with the deficit model, the Western concept of the good teacher (macro and meso non-Indian) has had significant impact on the formation of identity for tribal youth. In my own training to become a teacher, the following Western values of the good teacher were emphasized. First, one had to know their subject. Knowing anything outside of the subject was good, but not integral to the process of education because of the convention of compartmentalization of knowledge. Second, one had to have excellent classroom management, which is a phrase that can be roughly translated as control. If you have good classroom management, you will be able to quiet your students when they need to be quiet (which should be most of the time), you won’t let anybody get too out of hand, you will make your expectations and consequences for failure to fall in line with these expectations clear. You are taught how to prevent cheating and whispering and fighting. Though assisting in the production of an independent learner is proffered as an ideal, it is clear that your contribution to the improvement of test scores is just as important. You should be able to make your classroom fun and engaging, but when I was in teacher training, these were vague ideas that were backed with little real assistance. Finally, you are expected to be able to stick to your district’s curriculum while assessing what students already know and making a plan for how to get them to your curriculum benchmarks, proved through testing.

In all these values of the good teacher are inscribed the dominant educational values of (erudite) knowledge, competition, individual achievement, performance, testable outcomes, compartmentalized learning, discipline and punishment, and perhaps even creativity. Though I will not debate the educational legitimacy of these values here, I will argue that all, except perhaps the last, are at odds with Blackfeet values of learning. This is not to suggest that Blackfeet youth are compartmentalizable entities produced by some teleology of harmonious tribal existence. They are affected by the values they see in the media, the culture they encounter in other Montana towns, and the Westernized values that were imposed on their older family members. Nevertheless, informal practices of learning on the reservation are still guided by a local dominant meso filter heavily influenced by Blackfeet historicity. The continuing existence of this distinctly Blackfeet ideological filter is due to both geographic isolation and to historic active resistance to the partial victory of the hegemonic agenda of assimilation, prompting those with still-intact tribal identities to intensively teach the Blackfeet way, the Blackfeet history, and
the Blackfeet culture, to their children even though they knew they were strongly, sometimes physically intimidated from doing so by enforcers of the dominant policies.

Additionally, while the non-Indian is part of the macro, the discourses and practices of other tribes are as well (macro Native American), carrying significant influence on the development of the Blackfeet nation rivaling the constitutive outside of national policies. An example of this can be found in the development of a Blackfeet language immersion school on the reservation. Working outside of the macro (the constitutive outside of United States educational practices), one of the founders, Darryl Kipp, incorporated rationale and practice from Native-run Hawaiian schools as an alternative to functioning off of the Western paradigm of education. In the same vein, though there are macro level policies and discussions of best practice at a national scale, there are also policies particularly directed at Indian people as well as discussions of best practice among Native American educational theorists and researchers. These discussions of Native American education function more at a macro level than micro, but their influence would be lost if we consider the macro to be confined to Western (American) paradigms of teaching. Thus, scale can be thought of less as concentric forces of influence and more as nodal points of influence with geographical, chronological and ideological proximities affecting the degree of influence on the individual.

Consequent to issues of scale, we must look at Native American perspectives on education (macro and meso Native American), Blackfeet perspectives on education (meso Blackfeet and dominant micro) and their contingent relationship with Western values of education. In *The Schooling of Native America* (1978), a collection of essays surrounding issues of elementary, secondary and higher education for Native Americans, Thomas Thompson cites an early response of Native Americans to an offer of education from William and Mary College in 1774: “We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges,” continuing by thanking them for the generosity of their proposal, “But you who are wise must know that different Nations have different conceptions of things, and you will, therefore, not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours,” and continues by explaining what happened to some of their young people who went to Western institutions, “when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods…Neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing” (Thompson, 1978: 7). The tribal elders quoted have a clear understanding of the
situatedness of learning. This acknowledgement of situatedness has survived in the meso Tribal and meso Blackfeet ideologies and is revealed in the rhetoric of Native scholars who advocate the acknowledgement of the framework of the Native community and the inclusion of tribal perspectives, values and history into Native American educational policy and provision. (See Deyhle and Swisher (1997), for a review and critique of a multitude of these Native voices.)

The tribal perspective is one that has been cited by many Native American scholars as diametrically opposed to Western values. As Vine Deloria Jr. notes: “There is no cultural tradition which binds Indians to the rest of America outside of John Wayne movies and popular books on the wars of the Plains Indians. Our religious traditions are greatly divergent. Cultural attitudes toward history, language and social forms are almost polar opposites” (Deloria, 1978: 22). However, there is some contention regarding an overall Native perspective in the Native American community since the perceived salient differences are not fully generalizable due to the existence of hundreds of distinct tribes, each with their own unique, contingent, situated and historic circumstances.

Let us avoid like the plague the pitfall of attempting to arrive at a composite of Native American cultural values. Such old saws as “cooperation versus competition” and “present time orientation versus future time orientation” have been bandied about so long they have become as trite as the assumption that all Native Americans have a common culture and heritage. Cultural values vary from group to group and there is no way under the sun that these variations can be swept away in the interests of administrative neatness. Let us accept the diversity that exists and let each group capitalize on its own cultural heritage as it sees fit (Platero, 1978: 49).

In her dissertation, “Tribal Education: A Case Study of Blackfeet Elders” (1997), Dorothy Still Smoking reviews the core Blackfeet cultural values as expressed by Blackfeet elders. After interviewing some 20 traditional elders, Still Smoking concluded that Blackfeet ways of knowing that are important to elders in the community could be divided into seven categories: Blackfeet life, family relationships, names, ceremonies, language, education and transferring knowledge (Still Smoking, 1997: 77). To provide the reader with an introduction to the particular cultural framework of the tribe, I will review this work briefly focusing on important categories of meaning, which will assist in the understanding of locally dominant categories that contribute to the formation of identity in the traditional student.

Many of the important elements of Blackfeet life as described by Still Smoking from her interviews with elders, focus on the importance of place in the Blackfeet world. For example
when discussing Blackfeet life with the elders she notes the importance of each Blackfeet community in their lives as locations of community gatherings and social functions, “The various communities and locations were very special and important to the old people, and each had a name” (Still Smoking, 1997: 78). Still Smoking goes on to explain the importance of family relationships focusing on the extended family, the concept of teaching grandchildren the Blackfeet language and ways, the importance of teaching through allowing the child to watch holy ceremonies, and the practice of keeping children at home and away from mission schools for the dual purpose of keeping them from the harsh discipline in those locations as well as maintaining family ties (Still Smoking, 1997). Next she discusses the importance of names, conceptualized by the elders as giving the individual a purpose in life and power. Additionally, she adds, names are given only once, endowing the individual with poetic meaning and uniqueness (Still Smoking, 1997). She goes on to discuss ceremonies as sacred and conducted only in the presence of tribal members because of the implications of the knowledge and power that they carried. She explains the ceremonies as being conducted according to a certain strictness and protocol that must be shared through the experience of the ceremony (Still Smoking, 1997). Further, the human is weak and power resides in the supernatural, which can come from visions and dreams and is typically symbolized through an animal (Still Smoking, 1997). She relates that the elders are concerned about not having enough space and time needed for the children of today to become familiar with tribal ways (Still Smoking, 1997). These concerns regarding recent changes have a focus, throughout the dissertation, on the loss of the language. In her next section on the language she relates how the elders see the devaluing of the Blackfeet language by the prohibitions toward speaking it as having an effect on many people (Still Smoking, 1997).

The generation before the elders, which was made up of the elders’ parents, literally had to protect the Blackfeet language and ceremonies by hiding this knowledge (Still Smoking, 1997). Crucial punishment was rendered whenever anyone in school spoke the language including acts such as kneeling on a broom stick, hands and knuckles being whipped, or through other means such as going without food and standing in a corner for a long period of time (Still Smoking, 1997). “Speaking the language meant too many negative experiences for many older Blackfeet; therefore, English prevailed…It can be said that the Blackfeet people gave up
speaking the language because they loved their children…The parents did not want their children to be beaten by authorities” (Still Smoking, 1997: 95-96).

Still Smoking goes on to explain that language is also closely tied to cultural meanings as well as being one of the many ways of showing respect since respect means doing things in a proper way (Still Smoking, 1997). She goes on to locate education as another important element to the elders, but notes that this construction was imposed on the elders since going to the school is what the authorities told you to do and going against authorities resulted in bad things (Still Smoking, 1997). Today, however, the elders are expressing a need for Blackfeet people to go to school and do research from a proper tribal perspective (Still Smoking, 1997). Finally, Still Smoking relates the importance of passing on tribal knowledge to the children as a great concern for the elders and relates that they are especially concerned for children who don’t know the language (Still Smoking, 1997).

Thus, if we look at the Blackfeet perspective from Still Smoking’s work with the elders, we can see that place, family relationships, names, ceremonies, education and the transfer of knowledge are important, but all of them depend on the continuing use of the language. Early education for the Blackfeet focused on the eradication of the language for the purpose of creating English speakers, leaving the tribe with a several generations of non-speakers and a struggle to reclaim language use on the reservation. Additionally, the way that things were taught to Blackfeet children was very different than the way things were taught to them in school since the parent was the primary educator and related to the child within a cultural context (Still Smoking, 1997).

There is however, one final element of Blackfeet life that I have observed to which the reader needs to be oriented. A Native American scholar, Arthur McDonald, who is a member of the Ogalala Sioux, discusses what he refers to as “generalizable cultural values that produce conflicts” (McDonald, 1978: 80). Though I agree with Platero that there are few, if any, general statements that can be made of the hundreds of Native American nations, I do think that since McDonald is a member of another Plains tribe that had frequent contact with the Blackfeet, that the values that he sees as general may have at least been regional, thus accounting for a historicity of similarity between values that he is familiar with and values that can be observed in Browning. Among the values that McDonald discusses that I have also observed in practice on the Blackfeet reservation are the values of time and extended time.
McDonald explains that in Native practice, time is qualitative whereas in non-Indian practice, being on time is critical. In Native practice, as it has been explained to me by my Blackfeet aunties and uncles, it is the event that is important, which means that the previous event is important as well. If attendance at a function is delayed, it is assumed that other obligations slowed the individual’s arrival; it is being present that matters, not punctuality. This cultural difference leads to difficulties for traditional students regarding attendance in schools (McDonald, 1978). Thus, many Native American students have been inscribed by the dominant institution of education as lazy, unmotivated or not dedicated to their own success if they are tardy or absent more often than the school says they should be.

The tensions produced by this type of conflict between meanings are reflected in the identity practice of the tribally traditional student, often requiring a nearly impossible juggling of social rules or a forced choice of one or the other. At times students would arrive late to my class with the reason, “I had to help my (family member).” The choice to help a family member at the risk of being late to school is necessary if they are to maintain status in the community. However, if a student is tardy and the school’s policies are enforced by the teachers (who may feel they have little choice as employees), the student’s identity as a responsible family member will stand in opposition to the one produced by the dominant local (functioning as a constitutive outside) as tardy, and therefore irresponsible. If being tardy or absent despite reason is linked to punitive discipline, they are further inscribed as behavioral problems, a label that stands in sharp contrast to their fulfillment of identity as a respectful family member.

In Browning too, students receive conflicting messages regarding punctuality. Though all of their cultural activities are run on “Indian time” (as the locals refer to it) their school is run on a policy of punctuality. Many students find it difficult to negotiate this difference and as a result get in trouble and accumulate negative emotional experiences, which may impact their identity as students. The typical end result is that they avoid the site of the production of these bad feelings (the school) and inevitably fall behind on their work leaving further progress and graduation in jeopardy. In this, as in many other areas, the school is caught between the Western paradigm of education enforced through state requirements and the situated identity of traditional students.

McDonald goes on to discuss the concept of expanded time as another tension-causing difference in Native and Western thought. He notes that in Native culture, behavior is geared
“primarily to being responsive to the day-to-day world,” whereas the dominant culture focuses on preparation for the future (McDonald, 1978: 81). McDonald explains, “Indian values preclude the concept of sacrifice and training for a future end. It is very easy to see then that the student from the reservation is difficult to motivate when standard traditional academic values are assumed, because those values simply are not self-motivating for the Indian student” (McDonald, 1978: 81). I disagree with McDonald’s assessment that Native values prevent the concept of sacrifice or training. From my observations, it is not that the future does not exist in Blackfeet conceptualizations, but rather that consideration of it must be contextual to the moment. Thus, asking a kid to ‘learn this stuff because you’ll need it someday,’ does not work as well as a story or an example or some other demonstration that helps them to connect what they know and experience now to what may happen in the future. Future goals need to be contextualized and demonstrated in the moment. I would concede that the moment for the traditional student holds more capital than the future. This is because the concept that frames value judgment is not the individual (as it is in Western culture) but the tribe and family. Thus, the moment (and the student’s response to it) may be of greater importance; if your family needs you right now, any future goal fades in importance.

It is understandable that the school would have a phenomenally difficult time incorporating these aspects of traditional identity into their system, since to remain accredited students have a minimum number of days in which they must attend school. The difficulty, however, does not remove its impact from the formation of identity for the traditional student. From my observations some highly intelligent and very conscientious traditional students had family complications to which they felt invested and they simply could not make it to school enough of the time. This is not a cultural deficit, but a cultural difference for which the policies dictated by the dominant culture do not leave room. From my observations, this inflexibility has left many students with no choice but to either abandon their identity or abandon their pursuit of a high school career. The former of these choices is virtually impossible for anyone.

McDonald also advances the family and tribe framework as another general cultural value that, though I hesitate to apply it to all tribes, I do think that it is important enough to the Blackfeet framework to revisit before proceeding into the analysis of the interview thematics since everything - the language, the practices, the use of time and space – all point back to the overarching principle of the importance of the family and the tribe and as such, create a
significant impact on the formation of identity of the traditional Blackfeet student. Furthermore, McDonald discusses the framework of family and tribe in relation to the lifelong pursuit of education giving his discussion particular applicability to my study.

McDonald argues the difference between responsibility to family in Western culture and the responsibility to the family and tribe in Native culture by explaining Western culture as one which frames the adult as independent, and “the greatest good has been the development and perpetuation of the self,” resulting in “an extremely competitive, consumptive, exploitative interaction with the environment and with other people” (McDonald, 1978: 82). Indian culture on the other hand “has as the ultimate good the survival of the tribe…Thus, in many cases the principle of higher education and the credentializing process is hard to incorporate into the sharing concept because it is seen as individual and personal gain with little applicability to other people” (McDonald, 1978: 83).

In recent years on the Blackfeet reservation there have been an increasing number of tribal members who pursue degrees in higher education. Many of them face enormous financial, social and academic obstacles that may slow or stop their progress, but those who do succeed, often matriculate in Indian Studies. From my observations, this tendency is viewed by many non-Natives as somehow less valid than a degree in the sciences or other humanities; to some non-Natives, a degree in Indian Studies by a Native is redundant and cheapens the value of the degree. However, from conversations I have had with Native people who pursue such degrees, I have observed that they see it as a chance to become credentialized by the dominant institutions giving them the legitimacy in academic circles to speak about Natives from a Native perspective thus disrupting the white monopoly on cultural studies and infusing the discourse on Native America with culturally legitimate perspectives. Though they see the achievement of a degree as an asset to the tribe, participation in higher education sometimes leads to a backlash from other tribal members.

From my observations, sometimes tribal members that have attended higher education are referred to as “apples,” locally explained as being a Blackfeet that is red on the outside, but white on the inside (in their actions and values). They are seen as pursuing what is good for them and getting rich while their family and tribal relations remain without employment. Though, in my first year of teaching in 1995, first-year teachers were earning less than twenty thousand dollars per year, new Native teachers were still living well above the standard for most Blackfeet,
around sixty percent of which were unemployed at the time. Even though an increasing number of families encourage students to do well in elementary and secondary educational pursuits, the traditional students’ identity is mired in tension as a result of these conflicting messages. For the analysis of the interviews, it is helpful to remember that all of the student interviews cited were done with four students that self-identify as very traditional, and five students that self-identify as traditional according to surveys completed before the interviews began.

The framework of this analysis is dependent on the assumption that internalized identity categories (produced by contingency, situatedness, historicity, and agency) are connected with emotional meanings and affect behavior (or performativity of identity) which in turn is re-filtered by contingency, situatedness, historicity and agency, resulting in an overall move of that aspect of identity toward re-inscription or disidentification of the existing internalized category. This common and continual process makes the dynamic nature of identity production an observable phenomenon. It is important to remember that no aspect of the construction of identity discussed here ever reaches a terminal point. However, it is probable that aspects of identity that are continually re-inscribed over time, especially at multiple scales, are more likely to be resistant to change.

To remind the reader, the major research question is stated thusly: In what ways are the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation similar or different and how does this relationship affect the formation of the identity of the Blackfeet traditional student? In light of the framework discussed above, the research question explored in the analysis of the interviews will be addressed in a way that dictates a discovery of the categories expressed within the phenomenon of the experience of the student, instead of seeking to use the dominant essentialized categories typically employed in analysis since these often result in the maintenance of positions of oppression. Also I will pay special attention to the productiveness of power wherever it may reside and not assume it is only transferred in actions of the dominant. The formation of identity and the spaces of formal and informal learning will be examined by considering all of the following: 1) the historicity of dominant categories (as well as locally dominant categories) that have contributed to the contemporary formation of meanings on the reservation; 2) the situatedness of experience of all actors, all of whom have agency and the power of its performativity to become involved in the formation of meanings; 3) the formation of individual meanings and their contingent relationship to meanings within
discourse and practice. The locations and elements of many of these discursively generating meanings have been discussed in the previous pages in this chapter, and more will be introduced in the following analysis of the interviews and observations.

III. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS: HISTORICITY, SITUATEDNESS, AND CONTINGENCY WITHIN ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

The first thematics regarding the formation of identity of the Blackfeet traditional student are that of the identification with the label of Blackfeet, the emotions resulting from participation in activities that fall under this category, and the discourse of disappearance that is often linked to discussions of Blackfeet-ness. This inspection is critical since many students on the reservation are Blackfeet before they are students and the meanings assigned to this category travel with them explicitly or implicitly for the rest of their lives. The categorizations of being Blackfeet or traditional are produced not only by social discourse, but also by elements of Western historicity that survive in community memory and are transmitted by surrounding non-Native communities through interaction. A student’s concept of what it means to be Blackfeet, to be traditional and to be part of a disappearing or threatened culture and the emotions attached to this identification may influence not only how he or she responds to the spaces of learning in the school, but as a result of this aspect of situatedness, may affect all of his or her choices in life.

To begin the analysis of these themes are excerpts from an interview with a sixteen-year-old female who self identified in the survey as traditional. She is discussing the experience of learning Blackfeet dance from her grandmother.

K: And, uh, I know you said you were seven or eight at the time, so I know it’s a little far back, do you remember how it made you feel?

A: It made me feel proud of what I am and like what I come from and to be somebody and know where I come from.

Later in the interview she discusses the use of the language:
A: ...Because its kind of going out, this new generation. A lot of people don’t know how to talk Indian, that’s really sad. And they don’t know about culture ways, that, like, (garbled), hardly anybody knows how to speak Indian and talk it. And, you know, it’s just like fading away cause all the elders are passing away and they probably didn’t pass it on to their children.
Further on in the interview she talks about her experiences at Blackfeet ceremonies:

K: And, um, let's talk about being [at a ceremony]. How do you feel when you are going to a place like that, when you enter the area?

A: I feel I guess glad, proud, of what I'm going to do and what I've learned and I guess where I come from and I'm glad that we could go up there...

K: ...What about when you go to [different ceremony], was that a different feeling?

A: Yeah I guess it was because, [describes physical and spiritual components of ceremony] I guess I feel the same way as going up [to previously discussed ceremony].

Further on in the interview she discusses the use of the language:

K: Do you ever speak the Blackfeet language?

A: Yeah I know some of it.

K: Where do you normally speak it?

A: To my grandfather I guess you could say. And to his people and to aunts and uncles and just the people that know it.

K: What do you mean by his people?

A: Like his family, like the side of his family. They're very traditional and they speak it all the time. Like my one aunt, she does not know English at all and we just have to go on and speak Indian and she'll understand. And if we're talking to a person who doesn't speak Indian I'll tell them what she said and I'll tell her what they said.

K: Your survey you said you speak it around certain people only. Is that family circle that you speak around?

A: Well, and then I guess people that know it I guess and that, if they're talking Indian I'll tell them, 'hey I can talk Indian too.' It's just, I don't know, it just comes natural I guess.

K: Your speaking comes naturally?

A: Yeah.

After being asked about what it means to be Blackfeet:

A: And my mom says, my mom always told me, if you wanna, she said you aren't an Indian unless you participate in your culture and stuff because she said people that don't participate in their culture, it's just sorta like they're, they're not Indian. She'll say, like trash, like (garbled), like white trash. She's like, if you want to be a Blackfeet or if you want to be an Indian you have to participate and know who you come from, who your ancestors are, and you know, participate in.
**K:** How important is the ability to speak the language to her? Has she ever said anything about that?

**A:** How important it is? Well she just told me never forget it, never forget to pass it down to my kids and then they can pass it down to their kids and so on and so forth. And it won’t be forgotten in some people.

**K:** Does your mom speak Blackfeet to you?

**A:** Um sometimes. I guess. Maybe just when she’s talking to my grandfather.

**K:** Ok, so it happens mostly around them?

**A:** yeah

In the first section of excerpts, the student reveals the positive emotions that she experiences from participating in traditional activities noting that it made her feel “proud” of her heritage. Positive emotional experiences connected with participation in traditional activities have an enormous effect on the sense of belonging, which in turn contributes to the formation of identity in that we tend to affiliate with that which makes us feel good about ourselves. Notice also that she feels “glad” and “proud” about her participation in ceremonies. Considering Still Smoking’s research on the elders, it is evident that declining participation in ceremonies that utilize the Blackfeet language is one of the elders’ concerns. Considering her close relationship with her grandmother, grandfather and her ability to speak the language, it can be inferred that the dominant local discourse of the importance of participation in such activities has encouraged her own participation which in turn has inscribed her internalized, contingently produced categories of being a traditional Blackfeet youth who participates in Blackfeet ceremonies with positive emotional meanings.

Next, her discussion manifests a common juxtaposition of positive feelings about traditional participation with negative feelings about, what I will refer to as, the discourse of disappearance with her mention of how it is “sad” that people don’t know how to “speak Indian,” a practice that is “fading away” with the passing of the elders. From my observations, this discourse of disappearance is highly prominent discourse in the Blackfeet community as well as in the larger North American tribal community. The historicity behind this discourse is clear: it is a deliberate response to an actual process of separation from valued cultural knowledge forced by historic hegemonic policies that separated young people from elders,
effectively halting the process of knowledge transmission for some tribal members. Since fewer tribal members had the knowledge to transmit, and others were stymied by the aggression against cultural practice, the percentage of the population able or willing to transmit knowledge decreased over time. Recognition of the results of this power dynamic has led to a renaissance of Blackfeet knowledge that began in the 60’s and continues to gain momentum today (for discussion of the shift in the 60’s see Deloria, 1971; and Dehyle and Swisher, 1997). However, the essential component of the Blackfeet language in the transmission of Blackfeet culture is still a major concern since the interviewee currently being discussed is one of the few speakers fluent enough to translate for an elder.

Her revelation to me that she is able to translate the language, combined with a consideration of her use of the discourse of disappearance in her recognition of how “sad” it is that people can’t speak the language anymore, is a way of revealing her pride in her ability to speak the language. This pride further reveals the positive emotions experienced by traditional students from their participation in traditional activities. As discussed earlier, the language is inextricably tied with culture. In this interview, the student labels her family members as “very traditional” linking this label contextually to their ability to speak the language thus in part defining for her what it means to be Blackfeet and influencing her identity through her performed ability to fit into this category.

It is important to note, that this student, like many others, confines her speaking of the language to family members and to others that she knows speak the language when she says, “if they’re talking Indian, I’ll tell them ‘hey I can talk Indian, too’.” If we consider the active suppression of the language during the period when Blackfeet children were removed to boarding schools, the history of the school-imposed moratorium on public speech of the language can be evaluated as a constitutive outside that has produced a history of negative emotion strong enough to continue to affect practice until today. Her grandfather, or at least other family members, most probably attended a boarding school since the reservation is so large. This student’s experience with language is common among members of the Blackfeet tribe, resulting in an historic effect on the transmission of the language and tacit rules affecting the use of the language. Thus, though to be Blackfeet and “really traditional,” one needs to speak the language, because of the historicity, this aspect of the identity of the traditional person
is linked with suppression and secrecy. As will be discussed later in the text, this history tends to affect students’ behavior in the formal spaces of learning.

Later in the same interview, the student defines being Blackfeet as being revealed in those who “participate in their culture” and thus is a category based on performativity as opposed to blood quantum, which does not depend on socially generated meanings, but rather refers to the fraction of Native heritage one has. When considering the imposition of political structure by the US government through the Indian Reorganization Act, the basis of this definition can be viewed as a form of resistance to the resulting contingently created meanings of belonging the tribe was forced to define after the adoption of the IRA. The “scientifically” defined meanings (which, for a variety of reasons, were not scientific at all) of belonging that relied on blood quantum ran counter to the meanings of belonging previously dictated by the tribal and family framework which focused on the individual’s dedication to the good of the tribe and to the family as the path by which his or her status was validated. Thus, the contemporary categorization of traditional that relies on participation is a way of asserting the values of the traditional Blackfeet framework over the values of the constitutive outside and its imposed dominant meanings.

Additionally, in the above interview excerpt, other important elements of identity formation are displayed in the revelation that the categorization of what it means to be Blackfeet comes from her mother. Primarily it demonstrates the central role of the family in the formation of the identity of the traditional Blackfeet student. Additionally, from my observations, the practice of saying who it was that taught you something, in other words, orally citing the source of your cultural information, is typical of an aspect of traditional Blackfeet practice. Thus, both the central role of the family in the formation of identity, and the validity of her definition of Blackfeet-ness are exposed through her reference to her mom as the source of her learning. Interestingly, her mother, to demonstrate what the Blackfeet are not, uses the label of “white trash.” Though the constitutive outside inscribes the Blackfeet with negative categories, it also inscribes portions of non-Indian culture with negative labels. Rather than using negative labels imposed on the Blackfeet to show her daughter what she should not be, the mother re-produces negative labels that will not impact her daughter’s identity in order to demonstrate to her the characteristics that she should avoid. Additionally, she has communicated that the frequency of participation does not affect whether or not she is Blackfeet, it only means that in her
participation she should try “one hundred percent.” Thus, the construction of the tribal identity may be largely dependent on family concepts of Blackfeet-ness.

Another interview with a fifteen-year-old female self-identifying in the survey as very traditional includes an interesting discussion of what it means to this young lady to be Blackfeet, revealing the variety of perspectives among traditional Blackfeet students. Additionally, two more aspects of the formation of traditional Blackfeet identity are revealed.

K: Well, you said when you were younger it was more traditional, so what do you mean by that?

F: Because like you had to earn it, you don’t just like get it like [snaps] there, you know. You get it like you have to earn it. Like how I earned mine was like, I don’t know, I did like I guess like kind deeds and all this stuff. [Goes on to describe the ceremony]…

K: …so you’ve told me some stories about traditional activities. Um, how does participating in traditional activities make you feel?

F: Makes me like feel happy because I wasn’t here in the past to know what my ancestors did, what the elders who were here before me and left did… You know I just hope we have this in the future because like it would really help us a lot to keep that culture, you know.

K: Why do you see keeping your culture as an important thing?

F: Because um, if you - some kids say, ‘Oh yeah, I’m Blackfeet.’ Do you know anything about that? ‘No. But I’m Blackfeet.’ And a lot of people just use that part of Blackfeet in them just to get the fifty dollars to get crap, you know. And fifty dollars don’t mean nothing - its just money. But like, if we had that culture and taught it to younger kids and then we’d hope they’d teach it to somebody else you know, so they know. Because we used to be a cultured people, we used to live on this earth for a long time before, not to be mean, before the white guys come. And then they slowly start dying from everything. And they didn’t have diabetes, we didn’t have all these diseases and now Indians are the main people who have diabetes and all these things. And if we had a chance to change it, had a chance to go back in time I would. But I can’t so, live for today and keep going.

K: So am I right in understanding that the way you see it, to be Blackfeet is not just being enrolled, its actually knowing something?

F: Well no, not necessarily, but, you know - I want to know something. At least I want to know about it, you know, and it kinda bugs me if I don’t know about it and if I don’t have the right knowledge about it. I mean, cause I can’t sit there myself, ‘oh yeah I’m Blackfeet, yeah, Blackfeet, I don’t know what that is but I’m Blackfeet, you know.’ I want to know.

K: So, It’s important to you to know things about your culture?

F: Yeah.
At the beginning of this interview excerpt, the student is discussing the practice of giving unique names to people and says that being “more traditional” involves the concept of “earning” instead of just being given that name. This practice was discussed in Still Smoking’s dissertation on elder knowledge (1997); “Names can change also throughout a person’s life depending on how one acquires recognition and accomplishments to earn another name…Names gave true meaning to the purpose in life for individuals and gave designated power…throughout their lifetime in times of distress, hardship and need for support” (Still Smoking, 1997: 32, 83-84). Thus, in the formation of identity of the traditional student, the possession of a name can be very important as a sign that they belong to the tribe, that they are protected and they are unique. Additionally, a name can be earned through accomplishments. The U.S. government labeled this practice as backward, but mainly, as I see it, because the possession of multiple names made the administration of the Native nations very difficult to accomplish. By imposing the rules of English on the Blackfeet, they could also impose the rule of one person, one name, but in doing so, oppressed a practice that tied the individual to the community while still acknowledging his or her uniqueness. Further, the traditional practice of earning a name reveals the dominant local traditional category of the human as a non-reified being who changes throughout life, a very advanced social theory to be inscribed into the fabric of a society labeled as “savage.” Thus, this student’s definition of what it means to be Blackfeet includes the possession of a name and includes the added provision that the “more traditional” way means that name will be earned and not simply given.

In her response to the question asking how participating in traditional activities makes her feel, this interviewee also expresses the positive emotions that she has experienced by participating in traditional activities as well as including the discourse of disappearance. Her discussion of the “fifty dollars” is a reference to the payments that all enrolled Blackfeet receive from tribal earnings and, for her, is a way of identifying enrolled members who know little else about their culture beyond the fact that by being enrolled they get a little money. However, she is careful not to judge those members when she negates my attempt to clarify that being Blackfeet is “actually knowing something.” She says that this is “not necessarily” true, but for her, she says, “I want to know.” Thus, for her to be truly Blackfeet, she must know about her culture, and yet this is not an expectation that she holds for others. In my observations, traditional Blackfeet people are careful not to judge others. Thus, the local tacit practice may be
influencing her traditional identity and influencing her to behave in such a way that does not infringe on other people’s uniqueness. Since she herself has been given a unique name, perhaps she intuitively understands her power to let others be without letting her feelings about what is important be transferred onto them.

Lastly, she adds to the discourse of disappearance the insight that “we used to be a cultured people” and that “Indians are the main people who have diabetes,” a condition that did not plague the Blackfeet before the introduction of government ration items such as sugar and flour. From my observations, traditional Blackfeet students are highly aware of the complex and sustainable culture that existed pre-invasion. The traditional student’s identity is in part formed by the awareness of this marginalized past and thus, he or she may become motivated to learn, since the knowledge of cultured ancestors works against the dominant construction of the Blackfeet as uncivilized and results in a partial disidentification with the persistent negative labels from the dominant paradigm that compete to his or her formation of identity.

FIGURE 4.1

![A Browning Street at Sunrise](image)
In conclusion, this chapter has focused on answering the research question: “In what ways are the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation similar or different and how does this relationship affect the formation of the identity of the Blackfeet traditional student?” I employed a nonessentialist, constitutive phenomenological framework tempered by theories of the productiveness of power, focused on the disidentification of dominant categories through an analysis of: the performativity of agency, the multiple scales of historicity, the situatedness of experience, and the contingent nature of the production of meaning, for the purposes of exploring identity formation. Specifically, I have analyzed the historicity, contingency and situatedness of the production of meaning relative to what it means to be Blackfeet, what it means to be traditional and what it means to be part of a culture that is threatened with disappearance. This investigation has shown that for a student who’s identity is dependent upon these categories, that participation in traditional activities results in positive emotional experiences. Additionally, these positive emotional experiences affirm the uniqueness of the student, influence the student to continue to learn about the tribe, weaken the negative labels produced by the constitutive outside, and strengthen the tribal and family framework that governs the Blackfeet categories of meaning. Further, participation in traditional activities is dependent on the guidance of an elder or elders and is, from my observations, saturated with discourse that emphasizes the importance of the language and the loss of proper cultural practice that has resulted from its’ decline.

Overall, the interviews that I have analyzed, the observations that I have made, and the scholarly work by Blackfeet and other Native American authors that I have reviewed, intersect in a consensus that locates the roots of the discourse of disappearance in the observable phenomenon of a decline in the use and transmission of the Blackfeet language. As Still Smoking has pointed out, the language carries within it essential cultural meanings and is necessary for the proper transmission of the practices of the culture and religion (Still Smoking, 1997). This decline in the language is not attributable to some failing on the part of the tribe, but rather, is the result of the power differential imposed by non-Indian policies of education over the course of many years. Because of the dominance in the community discourse, Blackfeet children know what boarding schools were and what attendance meant for tribal members in the past. Thus, the student incorporates into his or her identity the idea that the disappearance of the
language is a negative occurrence, and he or she more likely to experience stress if they feel he or she does not have the ability or situations of acceptable opportunity in which to speak it.

Ultimately, the historicity of dominant influence has constrained the transmission of language, but the historicity of Blackfeet identity, formed in the local dominant, demands the transmission of language. The effects of both these influences, as well as the combined influence, inscribe themselves into the formation of identity of the traditional student on the reservation. These forces may prevent some students that participate in traditional activities from seeing themselves as traditional if they do not speak the language or feel that they don’t speak it well. It may inhibit other students from involving themselves in traditional activities since they may view the inability to speak the language as a barrier to defining themselves through traditional practice. It may make students hesitant to perform this aspect of their identity if they can speak it if they have conceptualized being “really traditional” as an unacceptable category in certain locations.

Also influencing the formation of traditional identity is the concept of the elder as the holder of knowledge. In my observations of the spaces of informal learning, part of the local discourse surrounds the “rights” to participate in certain activities or make certain items. This practice of “earning” names and “being given the rights” to, for example, use or gather certain materials used in traditional items pervades the traditional discourse at a variety of levels. From the perspective of historicity, “rights” could only be given by those who had themselves been given the rights for that particular activity. This concept is still used by some people in some transfers of knowledge. Thus, from a historical Blackfeet perspective, transfer of knowledge unique to the tribe (and particularly knowledge used in religion) can only be taught by those who have already been properly initiated into the knowledge that they are conveying. In the formation of identity, this historicity affects the traditional student through anticipation of an elder or older community member as the one who may convey Blackfeet knowledge. By incorporating elder participation in formal educational settings (such as the recent district practice of having elders come into the elementary schools) the school has made progress in incorporating methods of Blackfeet learning that are located in the informal spaces of learning (community) into the formal spaces of learning (school) thus creating a safe space for the performativity of identity. I will refer to this practice of creating spaces in the school that incorporate methods and content reflected in the informal spaces of learning as mirroring. It will be demonstrated later in the text
in the discussion regarding the space of the school, that mirrored spaces that function to affirm the situated nature of traditional student knowledge are critical in garnering affinity from traditional students since they create spaces of comfort for him or her.

Thus, in the construction of identity for the traditional student, the very act of participation produces positive emotional experiences. Since positive emotional experiences affect future decision-making, if presented with the opportunity for continued participation in traditional activities within the spaces of the school through the process of mirroring, traditional students who have had positive emotional experiences connected with the informal spaces of learning may show an increase in motivation to participate in the spaces of learning. Likewise, the lack of mirrored spaces that affirm traditional identity in the school may result in the traditional student being heavily constrained in his or her expressions of traditional identity, and as a result experience stress and negative emotion. This type of tension will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

FIGURE 4.2

A BROWNING HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS PART II: INFLUENCES ON IDENTITY FORMATION IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL SPACES OF LEARNING

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to examining all of the research questions except question number one, which was addressed in the previous chapter. For the readers benefit, they are listed below:

2) What are the similarities and differences between the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation?
3) What spaces, if any, in the school does the traditional student affiliate with and why?
2) Is school a space where traditional students feel good about expressing his or her traditional identity? Are there times and spaces that constrain or assist this expression?
3) In what ways do spaces created by informal education become reflected or excluded from spaces of formal education?
4) In what ways does the traditional student negotiate these differences? Do they tend to evaluate themselves or experience positive or negative emotion according to the framework of the formal spaces or the informal spaces or a synthesis of the two?
5) What are the results of these differences for the traditional student?
6) Is there any pattern that becomes evident from examining what helps individual traditional students be successful in school?

This chapter begins by examining the informal spaces of learning in the Blackfeet community. These spaces are typically located in homes of immediate family or extended relatives, at community events such as ceremonies and pow-wows, and in geographic locations both on and off the reservation. Interviewees’ discourse regarding these spaces will be examined for the purposes of identifying situated meanings, contingently produced meanings and historicities that contribute to the ways in which learning is accomplished and how those ways relate to the overall local frameworks of meaning transmitted through the learning processes in these spaces. The first half of the chapter also helps to establish a context for the second half of the chapter, which is devoted to an examination of the spaces of the high school, focusing on the traditional student’s experiences of learning in these spaces. This will be accomplished by an analysis of the students’ discourse regarding the spaces in which they feel more comfortable versus the spaces in which they feel less comfortable, through an examination of the ways in
which the traditional meanings and categories in their identity are affected by the variety of disciplining practices of space and the resulting productions of meanings enacted by individuals of authority and by school policies.

II. DEFINITION AND DISCUSSION: MODES OF TEACHING

A major thematic regarding the formation of identity of Blackfeet traditional students are that of their experiences in the informal spaces of learning in the community. Not only does the content of this education affect the ways they see themselves as traditional people, but what I will call Blackfeet modes of teaching has a significant impact on their identity as Native people as well as setting up a framework through which they respond to their formal educational experiences. Modes of teaching can be understood as the collective tacit and explicit ways in which people transmit knowledge, values, meanings and socio-cultural frameworks. Modes of teaching arise and evolve from the meanings and categories salient in the discursive formations of cultural and institutional frameworks. Thus, modes of teaching can be transmitted, reproduced, contested and produced both within informal spaces and within formal spaces.

Formal modes of teaching are generated through educational theory reflective of the dominant categories by which an institution operates. Informal modes of teaching are generated by the situated meanings and categories of the individual doing the instructing and are reflective of the modes of teaching he or she has experienced in his or her spaces of learning, though each mode experienced does not hold equal influence over the mode of teaching that the individual enacts. Ultimately, modes of teaching can be thought of as an individual’s practice of transmitting knowledge if both knowledge and practice are defined as not only the signified content of the information and the observable practices of transmission but also as the values, categories and meanings inscribed within that information and within the practices of transmission. Therefore, every way in which an individual has had knowledge transmitted to him or her plus everything he or she has learned is dependent upon the modes of teaching he or she experienced.

For some individuals the modes of teaching encountered in life are relatively homogenized, for others, the modes of teaching encountered can be quite diverse. It is probable that the modes of teaching encountered in the primary spaces of learning in childhood define the ways in which we are most prepared to learn. Further, it is probable that the modes of teaching
encountered in our primary (childhood) spaces of learning form the foundations of identity through which all life experience is filtered. Though our identity is fluid, constantly forming and providing new filters for our experiences, the modes of teaching encountered in our earliest spaces of learning may form the most tenacious aspects of our identity and, as a result the most tenacious filters for our experiences.

Though Blackfeet modes of teaching in the informal spaces of learning are to some extent standardized and consistent since they are formed from a dominant local cultural framework that is dominated by a discourse of the importance of Blackfeet ways, all spaces of informal learning on the Blackfeet nation should not be viewed as completely homogenized since the modes of teaching vary somewhat due to, for example, historicity of family affiliation and individual experience. Some of this variation is due to cultural drift in intertribal families, some is due to variations in religious practice aligning with socio-religious affiliations with different tribal holy people, and some is due to the gaps in transmission of practice left by the active suppression of tribal religion, language and culture, first by those who practiced the Christianizing mission and then by government policy.

Informal spaces of learning can be examined by an analysis of modes of teaching, which as I have explained includes both practice and content. One way to identify Blackfeet modes of teaching is to facilitate a discussion in which the student talks about the differences and similarities that they observe in the modes of teaching used in the informal spaces of learning relative to the formal spaces of education. In the interviews, the most salient themes identified by students regarding modes of teaching used by community members revolved around issues of patience; understanding and persistence in instruction; observation and individual attention; hands-on learning experiences; Blackfeet knowledge and the significance of place. Additionally, all of these aspects of community learning experiences conceptually happen in context instead of being treated as separate aspects of the experience by the students. Many students relate their stories of learning as being initiated by an incident that requires attention or by being in a place that inspires the elder to relay information or begin an activity. This is reflective of the previous discussion regarding the thematic of significance of the moment and the cultural importance of context that governs values and decision-making.
III. THE COMMUNITY: INFORMAL SPACES OF LEARNING

Patience, understanding, the giving of time, persistence and hands-on learning as modes of teaching in the spaces of the community are revealed in an interview with a fourteen-year-old female, self-identifying as very traditional.

K: What about the way you’re taught?

C: Like from your parents... to your teachers?

K: Yeah. From your parents and schools, do you see any similarities or differences between, like, the way your math class is taught and the way you learn about your Native plants?

C: Your, like, aunties, and uncles and elders have more patience on teaching you stuff than with teachers. Because teachers want to get through it and get on to another subject where if you want to learn something from your grandparents or your elders, and you don’t get it, they’ll take the time to teach you, more - as long as it takes to learn that subject. Like about your plants, like, they’re teaching you the name of a plant and then you see another type that almost looks the same. And your like well, isn’t that the same thing as the first one? And then, it’s a totally different name. So, they’ll work with you and find the little things that tell the plants apart.

K: And how is it different in school?

C: They want to get through it right away, as much as possible as they can. A lot of times they’re like, ‘Well, I don’t have time to do this. You’re going to have to get help from a tutor or another teacher or a student,’ or something like that. It’s like the teacher just wants to move on. And after school they have other stuff to do so they don’t have time for you. Like their meetings, and a lot of teachers just want to go home, get out of here especially since a lot of them live in Cut Bank and East Glacier, they want to leave as soon as they can.

In this excerpt, the student identifies her community teachers as having more patience than her schoolteachers. Though spending time with a child may be common practice in many cultures, if we refer to Still Smoking’s work, there is significant support for the assertion that part of the Blackfeet mode of teaching is to intentionally spend time with a grandchild for the purpose of teaching Blackfeet ways (Still Smoking, 1997). From my observations, Blackfeet elders are incredibly patient with children, treating them with gentleness, understanding, low vocal tones, and slow and careful tempos of activity. If this is a consistent mode of teaching in the community, then the identity of the traditional student may be constructed with messages that prioritize his or her need for understanding and patient instruction, especially if in the presence of elders. Note also that she describes a situation where she goes back to her elder again and again and receives individual attention and answers to each of her questions. She identifies the
space of the school as a having a very different type of practice. Not only does she describe the teacher as not dealing with her in an individualized, persistent and patient way, but as persisting so little as to send her to someone else for help as well as getting through “as much as possible” during the allotted classroom time. Though this is understandable from the teacher’s perspective - he or she is told, first in training and then on the job that his or her job may depend on test scores, on staying with the curriculum, attending teacher meetings, and on increasing student achievement through measurable outcomes - this mode of teaching is clearly incommensurate with this traditional student’s expectations of how teaching should happen.

Additionally, all of the community learning that the student describes involves, what the students who I have observed refer to as, hands-on learning, which many have described to me as any learning that doesn’t make you glued to a book or a seat. They even consider discussion to be more hands-on than bookwork, and many, I would even say a majority, of students in my classes vocally expressed their preference for hands-on work. As revealed in the discourses I observed, this preference seemed to be viewed by many non-Indian teachers as revealing of the “less academic” culture of the students. The students were inscribed to some degree in teacher discourse as liking it for that reason. This is a good example of a discourse that maintains the dominant categories of the Native student as unable or unwilling to achieve. The attitudes toward the student that this lack of understanding creates can have an enormous impact on the modes of teaching that the teacher uses and probably results in a great deal of stress and tension for the student and may result in the internalization of negative identity labels.

The student also makes note of how the teachers “don’t have time for you” and “want to leave as soon as they can.” From my observations, this is a major issue that impacts many students on the reservation to the extent that they speak about it frequently using discourse which clearly frames this mode of teaching as one which negatively impacts their identity. Note that she says many of them live in Cut Bank or East Glacier. So that the reader may understand the significance of the places she is discussing and the teachers that live there, it is important to note that from my observations, most of the teachers who live outside of Browning are non-Indian with the exception of Blackfeet teachers who live in the Heart Butte area, on the reservation, about 35 minutes south of Browning. However, from my observations, these teachers, who were brought up in the cultural context of Browning, tend to use Blackfeet modes of teaching,
including the giving of time, despite the distance they must travel to their homes, discussed in
detail below.

Transportation time and road conditions greatly affect teachers who choose to live
outside of Browning, and from what I have observed, many of the non-Indian teachers make this
choice consciously due to inconsistencies in the availability of what they may consider to be
adequate housing on the reservation and/or a range of individual concerns regarding school
district placement for their own children. Additionally, an examination of the dominant discourse
in Browning reveals a framing of the label of white, with all sorts of negative labels due to the
historicity of oppressive practices. Though this discourse is more than understandable, it may
impact the identity of the white teacher with negative emotional experiences severe enough to
inscribe them with a sense of lack of belonging within the community. This negative emotion
may also contribute to the reluctance of some white teachers to live within Browning.

Cut Bank is a separate school district, a 45 minute drive to the east, the road to which is
usually less treacherous than the road to East Glacier since it heads away from the mountains and
receives significantly less snowfall. East Glacier, a 15-minute drive to the west, is served by the
Browning district but has a significantly higher proportion of non-Indian residents than does
Browning. It is situated at the southeast entrance to Glacier National Park, where, consequent to
Western values of the aesthetic of nature and access to recreational areas, land and housing
prices are much higher. Geographic concerns such as transportation time and safety are a factor
for teachers who live outside of Browning and a problem that is exacerbated in the winter when
darkness falls far before dinnertime and icy roads become treacherous. However, this only
partially explains the tensions revealed in the above excerpt. Though, as a teacher, I observed
that the school verbally encouraged teachers to live in the Browning area, many teachers who
choose not to do so evaluate this decision based on a framework of values and meanings not
fully commensurate with the framework of values and meanings of their students. These
tensions are further complicated by non-Indian teachers’ Western values of personal time and the
demands of faculty meetings. However, they may mostly be due to incomprehension of the
situated meanings of the traditional student. The relevant meanings in this situation are aspects
of Blackfeet modes of teaching involved in giving time and helping a student in the moment in
which they need help. The traditional student’s identity is heavily influenced by concepts of
being part of the tribe and family. In this context, the ideal expectation partially revealed in the
discourse above, is that when someone needs help, you give it to him or her. This is the way the elders act. If a teacher consistently does not do this, then the student’s situated meanings and categories may find it difficult to accept the teacher as an elder and as someone for whom he or she should have respect. The teacher may instead come to embody all the worst qualities of the white, self-serving invader, who has no concept of the tribe.

In another interview with a fifteen-year-old female her response to my request to tell me stories about her informal learning experience and where they took place demonstrates Blackfeet modes of teaching that utilize individualized attention, learning through observation, the initiated elder as teacher, the practice of persistence and patience in teaching and the practice of teaching in the moment.

F: …I remember I was really little, didn’t know how to dance, I didn’t have an outfit. What inspired me to dance was my sister [names her]. She was a really good traditional dancer... and she mostly taught me everything, her and my grandma... but for, like, hours, she would just take me and we’d be out at her house or outside, you know, and she’d always have her drum. We didn’t have a stereo, you know, and she’d drum and she’d make me dance and she learned me how to do the downbeats and everything so I would get them right on. When I was younger she died so [my sister] took over...

K: Where were you when you would learn these things?

F: Um, it would either be at my house, my grandma’s house, or we would be outside. Wherever we wanted to be you know. One time I remember we were swimming and we got out and she showed me how to dance more and it was like at [names two areas]. We were out there dancing around having fun.

K: Ok. So you got out of the water and she said what?

F: Do you want to practice dancing? And we were the only ones there and I was like, yeah...

K: Ok. Um, what about where you learned beadwork?

F: … [Student describes various people that have helped her to learn beadwork at different points in her life] If they were beading and I was there then I was learning something.

K: Where would that be usually?

F: At their house during family gatherings, you know, parties, like my little cousins would ask my grandmas if they could have birthdays at their house cause they have a big house downstairs. So, we’d have a party and my grandma would be upstairs beading and watching her favorite TV show. So some of us girls would go up there and she’d start beading and look up at the TV, and
talk to us and it seemed like, you know, she never messed up. So we’d sit there and watch her and she’d go do it and she was like done when we got done talking with her or whatever...

K: How would she show you?

F: She had a little table and she would put all her beads out on the table and like...she’d tell you to come over and she’d tell you to hold it and she’d tell you to pick up the needle and you’d do some of it your own and you’d give it back to her and you’d watch her and she’d give it back to you. She’d watch you, how you do it. If you messed up she’d tell you what you need to fix before you go on. Then she’d take it back and finish it.

In this interview excerpt, the student identifies her grandmother as working with her “for like hours” until she could “do the downbeats” and “get them right on.” This aspect of Blackfeet modes of teaching may inscribe the traditional student identity with meanings that tell them they are important enough to work with until they master the information as well as inscribing the information with enough importance to approach teaching in this manner. It may also speak to his or her identification as one who is able to achieve. These identifications stand in sharp contrast to the historicity of the dominant inscriptions of the Blackfeet as cognitively deficient, a categorization that, from my observations, is maintained and reproduced within non-Indian discourse. As such, it may strengthen the tribal bond to the student by locating the tribe as one of the few places in which his or her potential will be taken seriously, thus creating meanings of Blackfeet knowledge that become linked with positive emotion on a variety of levels. Additionally, the fact that her grandmother is cited as her primary teacher of dancing and beading demonstrates the elder teacher as integral to the Blackfeet modes of teaching.

Her descriptions of practicing dance at a lake and of learning beading from her grandmother both reveal aspects of Blackfeet modes of teaching that center on persistence and teaching in the moment. It seems as though her grandmother took every opportunity to help this young lady perfect her dancing skills. Additionally, she is described as addressing problems immediately when the student says, “she’d tell you what you need to fix before you go on.” This use of time helps to inscribe the identity of the student with belonging and may be used to show respect for their efforts to learn. Respect is a key word in Blackfeet discourse and is described by the elders in Still Smoking’s interviews as doing things in the proper way (Still Smoking, 1997). From my observations, respect is also is connected with the idea of doing what is good and right for others in ways that will be meaningful to them. Elders are respected because they respect others. In Blackfeet modes of teaching, it is probable that the patience and persistence
used on a regular basis is a way of showing respect for the efforts of the learner thus inscribing
the effort to learn Blackfeet ways and to be part of the tribe with positive emotional experiences.

Lastly, her comment, “If they were beading and I was there, then I was learning
something,” suggests not only the previously discussed aspect of teaching in the moment, but,
combined with the description of how she would watch her grandmother, is revealing of the
aspect of the Blackfeet mode of teaching that inscribes the learner as observer. Still Smoking
also discusses this aspect of learning (Still Smoking, 1997). Deyhle and Swisher cite fourteen
separate studies among eight different tribes from diverse geographical locations, all of which
came to the conclusion that in Native child-rearing practices children are taught to be learners by
observation and imitation. Deyhle and Swisher explain that emphasis on observation is
functional since the child’s presence throughout the action would make the practice of verbal
instruction of Western society (where learning often happens outside of a shared, in-the-moment
context) unnecessary and redundant (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

Though the following interview with a sixteen-year-old female also reveals the use of
persistence, patience and individualized attention, it has the added quality of revealing the
consistency of Blackfeet modes of teaching used in the transfer of knowledge from one
generation to the next.

K: ...But where did you actually learn to dance?

A: In my house, in my grandparents’ house, I guess.

K: Can you tell me more about that experience?

A: How to dance? My mom always wanted me to dance and I was like about seven or eight and
my grandma made me a dress and she wanted me to start dancing and get involved with the
culture. First she made me a dress and when I was younger I’d fancy dance. And my cousin
from [neighboring state] learned how to fancy dance when I was little, but I just, I didn’t feel
comfortable doing it, I didn’t know why. And so my grandma showed me how to do the
traditional way and she taught me in the living room. And you’ve go to go to the beat of the
drum. So she put some Indian music on and she started dancing and she told me to follow her,
how she was doing it. So I started to follow her, how she was doing it and she made me repeat
over and over. And then my mom showed me how she did it and it was just the same way how my
grandma must have taught her. And it was in my grandma’s living room.

Since the Blackfeet modes of teaching involving patience, persistence and individualized
attention have been discussed in depth, I will examine the fascinating observation made by this
student in the second to last sentence. She sees such similarities in the way she was taught by
her grandmother and by her mother, that she concludes her grandmother must have taught her
mom in exactly the same way that she taught her. This is important because if Blackfeet modes
of teaching had changed to comply with Western modes of teaching since the introduction of
formal learning, there would be no reason to study the similarities and differences in formal and
informal spaces of learning because none would exist. But the differences do exist and they do
create problems for the student. As it turns out, there is evidence to suggest that modes of
teaching indeed retain historic forms. “Although American Indian communities have
experienced tremendous social, cultural, and economic changes over the past 100 years –
resulting in ‘traditional’ versus ‘nontraditional’ communities – ethnographic evidence suggests
that child-rearing practices continue to be much the same as they have been in the past” (Deyhle
and Swisher, 1997: 139).

Thus, an examination of the informal spaces of learning reveals some of the aspects of
Blackfeet modes of teaching such as patience, understanding, the giving of time, persistence,
hands-on learning, individualized attention, learning through observation, the initiated elder as
teacher, and the practice of teaching in the moment. Additionally, a case has been made for the
strong possibility that Blackfeet modes of teaching are remaining consistent over time, lending
credence to the assertion that the modes of teaching in these two spaces are distinctly different,
were produced by two different historicities, and will remain different for the foreseeable future
since they have retained salient differences for more than a century and a half (since formal
education was introduced to the Blackfeet). This leaves us with the theoretical Blackfeet student
whose formation of identity will continue to be affected by two different and often oppositional
frameworks of meaning. If education is to serve him or her in the best way possible, then an
examination into the oppositional contexts that he or she must negotiate, and the way these
differences affect his or her identity, is necessary. Thus, I turn toward an examination of the
remaining research questions that seek to clarify the ways in which these differences impact
student learning experience and identity in the formal spaces of education.

III. THE SCHOOL: FORMAL SPACES OF LEARNING

The last major thematic in this study regarding the formation of identity of the Blackfeet
traditional student is that of his or her experience in the formal educational spaces of learning in
the high school. This component of the student’s process of identity formation is contingent not only on social involvement with his or her fellow student, but in large part on interaction with the “other,” who is frequently a non-Indian teacher. The student’s identity within this space is further constructed by meanings contingently produced in the dialectic between the practices of the community (as detailed in the prior section) and the policies of the school district.

Though the school has made great strides to re-make itself into a more culturally relevant institution, there are still attributes of dominant categories within some district policies and procedures that are incommensurate with Blackfeet modes of teaching. This is not to fault the school district, since institutional disidentification of dominant categories cannot be expected to occur within years, or even decades. Additionally, there are still dominant categories reinforced by the structure of state policies by which the school is constrained. Though for the sake of positive experiences for the traditional student one can hope a fuller disidentification of dominant categories happens soon, for now, the productive techniques of power from the constitutive outside helps to highlight the effect of all of the scales of influence on the formation of identity of the student.

Currently, according to my estimations based on my knowledge of people that I knew who still work there and family names, of the seventy or so teachers, staff, administrators and support personnel listed at the high school, around sixty percent were raised in Browning (though not all of these are tribal members), whereas 97% of the students have some tribal affiliation. Though in theory, a mix of cultural backgrounds creates an opportunity for the creation of third space, and thus a chance to expand an understanding of the self in relation to the world, the inherent power differential between teacher and student results more in spaces of misunderstood meanings than it does in the creation of third space. However, some non-Indian teachers have bridged this gap through an intuitive understanding and utilization of tacit social rules, reflective of Blackfeet modes of teaching, in their classrooms. Further, some of the Native teachers (and even a few very perceptive non-Native teachers) are currently able to provide the traditional student with spaces of understanding, since the school district is actively seeking to promote ‘Indian-ness’, and encourages teachers to incorporate Blackfeet learning and culture. This incorporation of Blackfeet knowledge and modes of teaching functions as a disidentification of dominant categories and a taking of space as a form of resistance to the dominant paradigm. The resulting affinity many traditional students feel towards these teachers who function in
familiar modes works to strengthen the student’s tribal identity and provides a bridge over which
good feelings about community learning experiences can be re-experienced in the formal
educational spaces of the school.

One of the ways to focus on how the spaces of the school works either to affirm or deny
traditional identity, is to look at where students say they feel comfortable, why they feel
comfortable in those spaces and to examine the ways in which they think that the school could be
improved. These spaces of comfort or discomfort will be examined first, followed by an
elucidation of formation of identity through disciplining practices, since such conversations help
to reveal the students’ reaction to maintenance of dominant categories within the spaces of the
school. These practices of disciplining meanings and spaces are aspects of the school that are
still most vulnerable to dominant conceptualizations of “best” pedagogy and practice, and the
erroneous category of cultural deficit.

In an interview with a seventeen-year-old male, self-identifying as very traditional, the
issue of teasing is discussed. Also of interest is his discussion about a classroom where he feels
comfortable and his commentary on trust.

K: Let’s talk about school a little bit... Are there places within the school where you feel more or
less comfortable?

B: Yeah. Like in certain teachers’ rooms, I guess. Like, in the gym you feel comfortable because
that’s where everyone hangs out and plays ball. But in some classrooms you feel uncomfortable
because the teachers. Some teachers seem like they don’t even want to teach. There just here to
get a check and write referrals.

K: Can you talk about that a little bit more?

B: Well, in Mr. Inawasi’s room I feel real comfortable because... I know him real well. And his
room is always a good room to be in. It smells likes smudge all the time. And that always makes
you feel good. And he brings stuff from home to make you more comfortable, like a coffee pot.
He’s just a good guy and his classroom just seems it’s always like a very comfortable place to
be. But there’s other teachers, like I don’t want to say names, but, Mrs. Smith. Like last year I
hated going in there and I’d always have to skip it... And every day we did the same thing -
which was like almost nothing. She was like a Grinch almost to us. And it was uncomfortable in
there. Seems like she would get down on you a lot.... Just like the presence of somebody I think
can change your mind. Like if Mr. Inawasi was somewhat like her it could change my mind a
little bit, but the room would make me feel a little comfortable. All little more comfortable I
think.... And he knows Native humor, that’s probably the main thing. Teachers that can joke
tease with you. Take a joke and tease. We’re always laughing...

K: Which of your teachers don’t know how to tease?
B: Probably some of the non-Native ones. A lot of the new teachers that just moved here at first won’t know how to. But some of the non-Native teachers really catch on fast and are really friendly and get along with the students, but there’s others like Ms. Smith, like I said before don’t ever catch on to the teasing. And won’t get along with their students and their students won’t get along with them. I guess cause they didn’t catch on…

K: Are there ever any teachers’ rooms that you just hang out in?

B: Uh, yeah, sometimes Mr. Inawasi always leaves his door open to people who want to study and catch up on work. People go there. When I was a freshman I used to go to Ms. Benen’s room and kinda terrorize her a little bit. That was kinda fun. Joke around with her, she was cool about it. But usually teachers have class, most of the teachers have classes during our lunch. Cause its separated, so we can’t usually go into too many teacher’s rooms.

K: Is Ms. Benen one of those people who have learned how to joke?

B: Yeah. To me she’s just another Indian. She’s accepted...

B: Yeah, I think if your teacher has trust in you and you have trust in your teacher you can learn anything. You’ve got to earn their trust. Like a new teacher, like respect and trust you’ve gotta have. Teacher student must have respect for each other to get along I think.

K: What makes you trust a teacher?

B: Like when they joke and tease you know they are aware of the Native humor around here so you know they’re cool about it. And to trust them you’ve got to be comfortable around them knowing that they know a little bit about how your community and culture is.

In this interview excerpt, the student begins by mentioning the discomfort he feels in some of the spaces of the school. When asked to explain further, he mentions that one of his teachers brings in things from home (like a coffee pot) or practices smudging, which adds to the comfort of the room. To the non-Blackfeet teacher or student, these practices may seem unimportant as well as not falling in line with the typical Western value of the well-managed classroom which would not include food or drink and almost certainly no burning of anything. However, to the traditional student, they recognize the coffee pot and the smudging as important instances of mirroring. As a reminder, mirroring is the process by which teachers in formal spaces of education incorporate modes of teaching found in the community. So, in the community, when you go to visit traditional people, they offer you coffee or tea right away. Smudging is also a highly salient cultural practice. Olfactory memory is a powerful visceral experience that immediately connects the traditional student to home, family, tribe, religious and
cultural practice, etc. These types of mirroring of the home make a significant positive impact on the identity formation of the traditional student since the home is one of the primary spaces of informal education and the majority of Blackfeet values are rooted in the family and tribe.

Next, this student identifies one of his classroom spaces as uncomfortable due to the use of space and of disciplining practices that made his teacher seem “like a Grinch almost.” This discussion leads him to identify knowing “Native humor” as one of the main modes of teaching that creates comfort for him. From the interview and observations, it is clear that one of the important aspects of the methods of teaching with which traditional students identify is the ability of their teachers to “tease” in the Blackfeet way. Though this may seem of little significance, it is actually of immense importance as a sort of cultural currency through which non-Indians can purchase some cultural legitimacy and by which Blackfeet maintain the bonds of friendship and tribe. From my observations during the time I was a teacher there, I heard many times that, “If we don’t tease you, we don’t love you.” This is a shorthanded way of identifying local practices of teasing as a Blackfeet mode of teaching that functions to indicate belonging. From my observations, teasing can also be used as a method of discipline in Blackfeet spaces. If a child is doing something that needs to be pointed out, whether good or bad, teasing is a way to point out the behavior without overt judgment. Teasing calls attention to the behavior without inscribing it as fully bad or fully good. The individual being teased can decide if they want to be known for what they are being teased about or not. This is part of an attitude of respect for the individual within the context of a tribally focused framework of values. Additionally, this practice aligns with tacit rules regarding negativity and anger. In all my years on the reservation, I never witnessed any respected elder become angry or convey a negative attitude. The issue of displays of anger will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

It is also very interesting to note that this student identifies a teacher that did not grow up in Browning as “just another Indian” and that “she’s accepted” due to her ability to tease in a Blackfeet way. This teasing also serves another function as indicated by his discussion of what makes him trust a teacher. He says that “when they joke and tease” that this creates spaces of trust and comfort because that helps him to know that the teacher knows “a little bit about how your community and culture is.” Thus, teasing serves to affirm the situated identity of the student by the teacher’s mode of teaching that comes from a position of understanding that carries meanings of knowledge of the community. This is a powerful example of how
understanding of local modes of teaching can have an observable, positive impact on the identity of the traditional student, who in many spaces of formal education must find ways to negotiate positive senses of the self around the obstacles of negative dominant labels. Thus, as has been demonstrated by this interview and discussion, by becoming sensitive to the situated meanings of their students and mirroring Blackfeet modes of teaching, teachers can create an environment of respect, which holds immense cultural value on the reservation.

The next passage demonstrates the importance of allowing the traditional student to work and communicate with others. This aspect of Blackfeet modes of teaching is shown in an interview with a fourteen-year-old female, self-identifying as very traditional, highlighting one of the root causes of her discomfort in certain spaces of formal learning.

K: Ok. You said you also feel comfortable in Mr. Inawasi’s classroom. What is comfortable about his classroom?

C: Mr. Inawasi was a fun teacher. He likes to mess around with you and you can pretty much do whatever you want in his class as long as you’re getting your work done. If you don’t get your work done then that’s the end of everything.

K: What do you mean you can do whatever you want to do?

C: Like, you can talk to other people. Like, in most classrooms they’re like ‘sshh, get your work done.’ But in Mr. Inawasi’s classroom as long as you’re doing your work and getting it done then you’re allowed to talk and do a lot of things. And like, if you already have your work done he’ll let you get on the computer and look up stuff.

In this excerpt, the student notes that unlike other classroom spaces where she is forced to be quiet, the classroom that she is discussing is run according to practices of space that mirror the Blackfeet modes of teaching. In an examination of the practices of the disciplining of space discussed within the interviews, several of the traditional students relate being more comfortable when allowed to work with others. If we consider the historicity of the tribal framework, along with the macro dominant category that defines individuality and competition as desirable traits in the successful student, we can trace the root causes of the tension that traditional students may feel when they are not allowed to interact with others in the spaces of formal education. If their informal experiences of learning inscribe their identity with values of working together, looking out for each other, and helping each other, particularly where the ‘baby’ of the family is concerned. When new meanings are contingently produced for the traditional student from the
dominant Western modes of teaching, which include aspects of individuality and competition, the identity of the student may be thrown into contention, since he or she has to make a decision about what is right. But, when the space of formal learning, disciplined by the Western modes of teaching say that the ways he or she functions or believes are wrong, it is highly probable that this tension creates a great deal of discomfort and negative emotion for the student. In other words, within the local dominant frames of meaning, the student is being a good person; within the dominant meanings produced in the spaces of the school, the student is being bad. It is probable at this point that the students internalize categories in their identity that tell them that they are problems or not accepted, if not in totality, at least in some spaces of the school. The point I wish to make here is: if such intolerable tensions produced by differing modes of teaching affect even half of the students in predominantly tribal schools, then resolving these tensions through an examination and implementation of mirrored practices may drastically affect graduation rates.11

Also central to the Blackfeet modes of teaching are aspects of emotion. The following interview excerpt is from an eighteen-year-old female self-identifying as traditional and begins at the point in the interview when she is talking about the spaces of the school in which she feels comfortable and the spaces where she feels uncomfortable.

K: What is it about that class that you like?

E: Maybe how he teaches it. I don’t know. He is the teacher that I like. Plus the [names subject]. So it’s how he teaches it, he ain’t so strict, he’s more nice than most of the teachers that I know. So I guess you could say that I admire him as a teacher more.

K: What do you mean by nice?

E: Like he ain’t strict. Um, he ain’t mean, so.

K: What do other teachers who are strict and mean do?

E: They yell at you.

11 Deyhle and Swisher state that though American Indians are not considered as a separate group like African Americans or whites, making it difficult to calculate nationwide dropout rates, that a previous study by Swisher et al in 1991 reported that in 1988 the National Center for Educational Statistics put the Native American dropout rate at 35.5% and that a study by Coladarci in 1983 reported Montana Native American youth as having a dropout rate of 60% (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997:129).
K: So it’s the way he uses his voice?

E: Yeah

K: Ok - refrains from yelling. What else would make a teacher strict or mean?

E: Their actions – like, maybe they’ll throw a book down if they’re angry or something.

K: So, expressing anger?

E: Yeah...

K: Are there other teachers that you have that you like or don’t like?

E: No, I like every teacher, but Gardiner is the one that I admire the most - that is the most fun to be around. Like, to be in that class too. And probably Ms. Ipataki’s class, she’s [names type of class] teacher, probably because I learn a lot in there. And stuff that I didn’t really know and now I know it. And she’s also nice too. And she doesn’t loose her temper. She’s always laughing around with us. I like her too.

K: Who don’t you like and why? Like, who would fall at the bottom of the list?

E: Ms. Jones. She’s my [names subject] teacher. Well, she used to be but I switched out of her class because she’d always get mad at me for doing different stuff. And she wouldn’t ever try; she would always assume that we knew how to do the work. And every time I’d ask her how to do it, she’d get mad. Or anything like, I even have an example of what she said. And I told her, I was missing work from her class, and I told her I would come in during lunch and she said, ‘I’m not going to count on that.’ Or she had a little snotty remark like that, so I really didn’t - it was like she didn’t even want to try to help me. So that’s why I got switched out of her class.

K: By doing different stuff, what do you mean by that?

E: Like, one time I dropped her [classroom item] and she got mad because, she got mad and started going off and saying something, ‘Well if you would have did this it wouldn’t have happened,’ or something like that. And I was like, ‘everyone makes mistakes I didn’t mean to drop it, I’m not perfect,’ and I don’t know she got mad at me for doing it. And if I would try to ask her to help me on my work its like she didn’t want to help me. She would just, I don’t’ know.

An aspect central to addressing the Western modes of teaching and the practices of disciplining of meanings and spaces in the school are the impacts of displays of anger. This student begins by identifying expressions of anger as a mode of teaching that makes her uncomfortable and lack of anger as a mode of teaching that makes a teacher nice, even enough for her to “admire” him. From my observations, the use of displays of anger is almost non-existent among traditional elders of the tribe. In this case, the lack of mirroring this aspect of the
Blackfeet modes of teaching produces a significant resistance from the student to the teacher. Though anger may never be appropriate in any space of education, its use, even in raised voice or intense frustration, is highly significant to traditional Blackfeet students who experience it as the antithesis of their experience with their elders. It is interesting to note that neither Mr. Gardiner or Ms. Jones are tribal members, but clearly the first has understood what works for tribal students, whereas the second has not.

It is probable that expressions of anger complicate the creation of safe spaces for the student. If this is true, it certainly impacts the student’s identity as well. The range of the reactions among traditional students to expressions of anger probably varies greatly due to their own family history. Thus, if anyone in their extended circle suffers with anger issues, the student’s reaction to expressions of anger may have quite a range since, from my observations, people deal with extreme emotion in very different ways.

Her comment that “everyone makes mistakes,” is revealing of the situated meanings in her identity that have been reinforced by her experiences in the informal spaces of learning. From my observations, elders approach everyone with the attitude that mistakes happen and you just need to learn, even when the mistake is rather serious. As we will see later in this chapter in the discussion on discipline, the elder mode of teaching tends to be to talk and explain rather than to punish or react with anger. Additionally, the above passage re-enforces the previously addressed Blackfeet method of teaching that practices patience and persistence in teaching. This student’s experience in the formal spaces of learning are not mirrored in this way, therefore she does not show affinity for the teacher.

The following interview with a fifteen-year-old female demonstrates the importance of the aspect of Blackfeet modes of teaching that include cultural content. Additionally, her commentary on what she would change about the way school is taught eloquently demonstrates the importance she places on the affirmation of her identity as a traditional person in the spaces of formal education and describes the way in which this could be accomplished.

*K: Where in the school do you feel most comfortable?*

*F: Actually Ms. Yimmaki’s room.*

*K: Yeah? Why?*
F: Cause she’s [names role of teacher that provides extra-curricular contact with the student] and its peaceful in there because it’s Natives. You learn everything Native in there. It felt so good in there. Like, when I’m in there it feels good like somebody’s watching over you or something, but it ain’t. And you learn a lot of things there. And elders do come in there and watch us and that place gets smudged a lot, too...

K: …What about if you could change the way school is taught?

F: I’d have more cultural things in there. I’m not saying kick all the white teachers out. I’d keep them in still but teach them the basics of Indian stuff cause I know there are non-Indian teachers that are taking in college Indian classes and they’re trying to learn something about the kids even though they ain’t Native but the kids are. So they’re trying to find out some Native things that the kids are. I think it’s a good thing cause they learn some Indian words and ask questions. So, if the kids know that you know then they’ll tell ’em more about it. And like, they try to do a whole sentence sometimes in Indian and you know they’ll mess up and the kids will laugh at them but then they’ll try to help the teacher like, oh that’s not how you do it, I’ll show you, you know, I’ll tell you how you do it. And then, you know, the teachers are actually interacting with the students and their own cultural things, you know.

Thus the inclusion of Blackfeet content is a Blackfeet mode of learning that creates a sense of belonging, protection and peace and affirms the identity of this traditional student. The presence of elders can be analyzed as is important to her as well due to its contextual position in her commentary. What is most interesting is her plan for what she would do if she were running the school. She in fact uses the willingness to learn about her culture by the non-Indian as a strong reason not to reject him or her as an instructor. She has observed teachers that attempt to learn about the Blackfeet from what is arguably the most difficult entry point into Blackfeet modes of teaching, namely the language. It is probable that, since the Blackfeet language is valued at such an elevated discursive level, that her “very traditional” identity produces strong positive emotions regarding this keystone of culture. If a non-Indian is dedicated enough to crossing bridges of understanding to even attempt to speak sounds that he or she has never before uttered (not, at least, if they speak only English) it is likely that this attempt will strike a very deep chord with the traditional student – especially if the bumbling English speaker can laugh and joke about it. Thus, an honest attempt by a non-Indian teacher to acknowledge, understand, and experience the meanings and experiences of the traditional student may be enough to make a significant difference in the student’s positive emotional experiences in the spaces of the school.

Finally, it is important to look at practices of discipline in the formal learning spaces of the school and compare them to the practices of discipline in the informal learning spaces of the
community since that comparison will bring light to the significant difference in approaches to correcting behavior. These key differences are demonstrative of the core divergence between the Western and the Blackfeet modes of teaching. Whereas the Western mode of teaching relies on punishment that focuses on the individual and inscribes any offence as primarily affecting the individual, the Blackfeet mode of teaching relies on understanding that focuses on the impact on the tribe and family and inscribes offence as an impact on the whole, not just the individual. Thus, methods of discipline display the individualistic versus communalistic system of meanings that are at the heart of the situatedness of experience on this reservation. However, the historicity of imposition of the dominant paradigm has left its mark quite clearly on the practices of discipline in the spaces of the school impacting the formation of identity of the tribal student with highly divergent experiences of what it means to make a mistake.

From the next interview with a fourteen-year-old female self-identifying as very traditional, it is clear that the Blackfeet modes of teaching utilizing patience and persistence are intertwined with methods of correction.

K: ...What about if you do something wrong. What are the similarities or differences with how you’re treated in the community or the high school?

C: Well when you’re learning in high school if something’s wrong, your grade gets docked. You’re grade goes down. If you’re out in the community, and you do something wrong you may get a punish for it, maybe a little punish. Or they’ll try to re-teach it to you so you can learn it better. And, like, disciplinary actions while in school if you do something wrong there is ISS, OSS, detention and outside those pretty much you can get grounded or if you get a car, that can get taken away. Pretty much that’s what I can think. That’s all happened to me.

K: Ok.

C: A lot of times, they won’t punish you from your Native dancing or like your Native culture because they want you to know all you can know about it.

K: Can you talk a little more about that?

C: Like, if you get in trouble for doing something outside of school your parents won’t take away your dancing or your beadwork or learning of other things from your culture because its just a part of your life that you need to know about. And especially since it’s fading so fast.

This student identifies the Blackfeet modes of teaching as disciplining spaces of community learning through communication, explanation and rarely, punishment. She notes that in the community, mistakes are an opportunity for re-teaching whereas in the spaces of the
school, mistakes result in punitive consequences. In other words, whereas informal spaces of learning on the reservation inscribe the learner as lacking understanding, formal spaces of learning in the school inscribe the learner as lacking character. Additionally, whereas ISS or OSS removes the student from the spaces of learning, the community pattern of correction would not consider removing the student from the informal spaces of learning as is made explicit in her explanation that “your parents won’t take away” your traditional activity “because its just a part of your life that you need…” Indeed, the traditional student needs these activities to affirm his or her identity, but the “need” is also in part due to the discourse of disappearance and the importance of participation in traditional activities. Lastly, this “need” is also due to the previously explained paradigm of correction that serves the purpose of tribe and inscribes the individual as connected as opposed to removable thus strengthening and maintaining the concept of the tribe instead of weakening its dominant meanings of the value of the group by inscribing its members as disposable.

The final excerpt is from an interview with a seventeen-year-old male who self-identifies as very traditional. This interview section is indicative of one of the most common problems for traditional students.

**K:** What about discipline?

**B:** Like, here, we got a billion rules. For every little thing there’s all these steps and stuff and it seems like you concentrate on the negative and you get a negative result...here, it seems like that’s all that they concentrate on. The rules. They’ve got too many of them I think...

**K:** So how do they deal with breaking the rules here?

**B:** I don’t know there is so many different steps, all these different procedures and eventually your gonna get stuck in ISS which is all right I guess if you like to be alone and quiet, sit in class and do your work. Then they’ll finally kick you out of school, OSS, which is almost rewarding a student who doesn’t want to behave.

**K:** Have you ever had to go to ISS?

**B:** Yeah I went there a couple of times.

**K:** How did that feel?

**B:** It felt all right; the teacher was pretty cool. But I felt dumb I guess. I didn’t feel too comfortable.
K: What did you get in there for?

B: Walking across the street to Snack Shack, skipping class.

K: Do you feel you should have gotten in trouble for skipping class?

B: Probably yeah. I was skipping. I was supposed to be going to that Ms. Smith’s classroom. I skipped.

K: Oh, so you avoided the class that was making you uncomfortable? [Note: Earlier in the interview, this student had identified this classroom as one in which he was uncomfortable.]

B: Yeah.

K: Ok. Do you think that’s what happens to most kids?

B: Yeah, kids who don’t get along with their teachers, seems like they’re over there, they’ll skip a lot. Usually get in trouble doing something.

K: If you were the adult, and you had skipped that class and the adult had no idea which class you were skipping, how would you have dealt with you?

B: Probably take me back to class and try to talk with the teacher and try to get a better understanding of their ways I guess, try to figure out some kind of a deal we could make with each other, teacher and student...

K: How does your experience with Ms. Smith affect how you feel about yourself?

B: Um, I don’t know. Classes where you feel more comfortable, you have more confidence in yourself to do the work...

K: What kind of thoughts do you have about yourself in Ms. Smith’s class?

B: Well it feels like you’re an ant compared to her. You got no power at all. You don’t know how to do nothing.

K: What do you mean by no power?

B: Like, um, you have no say in what she teaches, you have no say in how she teaches, you have no say in the daily things you do, you have no control over what happens.

K: So am I to understand that you feel more of a sense of control in Mr. Inawasi’s classroom?

B: Yeah. You feel that way even though you probably - you won’t be in control. He lets you feel like you do have a say in things. Gives you an option. I think you do better if you have options.
K: How do you feel, being a traditional student in this school? Do you feel like you belong, like it’s accepted?

B: A lot of people don’t know about it, don’t know how to act about it I guess. They don’t go out and show it but they don’t hide it too much I guess.

In this excerpt the student expresses a portion of his identity and situated meanings through a strong negative reaction to the “billion rules” and, according to his meanings, judges this practice as productive of a “negative result.” He observes how the punitive measures of ISS and OSS are the practiced eventual end of all rules breaking. His discourse of these measures suggests he may see fruitlessness in these practices since he inscribes them as alienating and “almost rewarding.” I observed this young man in the community when he was a pre-teen and found him to be unusually mature and articulate for his age. Because of his traditional history with Blackfeet modes of teaching (and discipline) that have helped to form a solid identity as not only a good person, but a competent one as well, this may well be one of the first instances of getting in trouble that he has ever experienced. One can almost hear the despondency in his statement: “I felt dumb I guess. I didn’t feel too comfortable.” It is probable that he is still trying to make sense of his situated experience and traditional identity in light of his collision with the perpendicular trajectory of punishment.

Since this student has formed an identity marker of very traditional, it may well be that other aspects of his identity have been formed according to traditional practices of avoiding direct confrontation with those with whom you disagree, in this case, Ms. Smith. The enacted dominant value of attendance and punctuality do not allow for this particular performativity of identity within the formal spaces of education. Thus, a very perceptive young man ends up feeling “dumb” by acting in accordance with the local dominant values that were the primary influences on his formative identity.

His experience of feeling “dumb” is ironic especially in light of the ways he identifies the heart of the problem on which this thesis has focused. As a suggestion for a better solution he says that if he were the adult he would talk to the teacher and “try to get a better understanding of their ways.” As was stated in the introduction, understanding of the self and the other is the path that the individual must take to produce a cultural synthesis as opposed to a cultural invasion. He seems to describe a balance of power reminiscent of Freire’s concept of cultural invasion when he explains that “you have no say in what she teaches, you have no say in how she
teaches.” Girding the framework of this investigation is the idea of the modes of teaching that encompasses what is taught and how it is taught and he has seen through to the essence of the problem – quite the opposite of dumb. With this in mind, it is clear that Ms. Smith is a determined follower of the Western modes of teaching with little to no understanding of the Blackfeet modes of teaching, thus alienating students who do not function according to her dominant framework.

From my observations, young traditional people are given both guidance and a sense of freedom from which they are expected to make appropriate decisions. When they do not make appropriate decisions, they are re-taught, most often through a story, perhaps about the time the elder himself made a mistake, or someone he knew did and what happened. The Blackfeet modes of teaching function to send a message to the receiver while at the same time avoiding branding him or her. The feelings of loss of power that this traditional student experienced in spaces of the school are rooted in divergent modes of teaching. In this case, the Western mode of teaching does not produce a use of space inscribed with the techniques of trust or the practice of patience. Thus the student must negotiate the negative emotions, not only of his mistake but in addition the negative emotions that come from an incommensurability between modes of teaching. Disciplining practices that rely on punitive discipline as opposed to a development of understanding are the antithesis of the experiences in the local informal spaces of learning. The result of this judgment of agency enacted in the removal of the right of decision-making inscribes onto the identity of the traditional student a devaluation of the local dominant practice, leaving little safe space for performativity of traditional identity within spaces of formal learning.

This once pervasive inscribing of the traditional student by dominant practices of disciplining meanings and spaces is now being disidentified by a few teachers such as Mr. Inawasi, who, through the use of the local dominant Blackfeet modes of teaching, create spaces of acceptance for the traditional student. For the situated meanings in this student’s identity, Mr. Inawasi’s approach of letting “you feel like you have a say in things” even though “you won’t be in control” is most probably a mirroring of the Blackfeet modes of teaching. In the student’s more familiar ways of being, he is allowed a performativity of agency that is excluded from the spaces of the school by the “billion rules.” However, most interesting of all, to me, is how he articulates one of my most central beliefs and a driving force behind this research when he says “Classes where you feel more comfortable, you have more confidence in yourself to do the
work. In my introduction I stated that one of my assumptions was: Motivation for any pursuit depends on the emotions connected to experiences that the individual conceptualizes as relevant to the pursuit in question. Within this statement is implied a range of outcomes including the potentiality that positive emotions connected with experiences relevant to one’s goals, produce a confidence in one’s ability to achieve, from which the motivation to learn is born.

IV. CONCLUSION: RESULTS PART II

Thus the journey comes full circle. This chapter, specifically, began with the ways that situated experience, contingent production of meanings, agency and historicity all contribute to the modes of teaching enacted by an individual. Within that framework, an analysis of the spaces of learning in the community revealed salient aspects of Blackfeet modes of learning. Patience, understanding, persistence were shown to be used by elders when transmitting information, inscribing the traditional student’s identity with labels of worth. Hands-on learning, individualized attention, teaching in the moment, and the giving of time, were identified as Blackfeet modes of teaching the elder-teacher uses to respond to learner need and teaching opportunity. And the learner, because of the individualized attention by the elder teacher, was able to practice learning through observation. It was also argued that the Blackfeet and Western modes of teaching have remained quite consistent over time suggesting that issues arising from this difference should be addressed for the good of future learners.

In the second half of the chapter, ways in which Blackfeet modes of teaching were mirrored or excluded from the spaces of the school were explored. The interviews revealed practices that elicited strong emotional responses from traditional students, both positive and negative. The positive responses seemed to fall along the lines of mirrored modes of teaching such as: the use of teasing/humor, the use of traditional Blackfeet items connected with home and family, the permission to practice socially relevant bonding such as talking or working together in the classroom, use of an approach of understanding and patience for the learner, and the use of hands-on instruction. Likewise, the negative responses fell along the lines of exclusion of Blackfeet modes of teaching including: the use of anger, punitive instead of egalitarian discipline, punishment instead of re-teaching, and the application of negative labels to the student through maintenance of dominant categories. However, the attempt by the non-Indian teacher to understand the cultural meanings and values in their traditional students and
how those ideas manifest in behavior was welcomed with great enthusiasm by the traditional student. This move toward understanding, dependent on a disidentification with dominant categories and a desire to understand the situatedness of others’ meanings, is the path to providing positive educational experiences for, if not all students, at least Blackfeet students. It is my hope that the Blackfeet modes of teaching which value positive experiences and good for all members of the tribe will function to utilize my findings to foster discussions exploring the ways in which an institutional and social praxis of disidentification may begin.

FIGURE 5.1

FRYBREAD: A FOOD OF COMMUNITY
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I. CONCLUSIONS

This research has asked the question: In what ways are the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation similar or different and how does this relationship affect the formation of the identity of the Blackfeet traditional student? I approached this question by employing a nonessentialist, constitutive phenomenological framework tempered by theories of the productiveness of power, and focused on the disidentification of dominant categories through an analysis of: the performativity of agency, the multiple scales of historicity, the situatedness of experience, and the contingent nature of the production of meaning, for the purposes of exploring identity formation. I hypothesized that the aforementioned approach would lead to an elucidation of matters involved in the internalization of the motivation to learn. I have been successful in many aspects of this investigation, revealed in the responses to my research questions. As I respond to the research questions, however, my answers to these questions should in no way be construed as complete answers to these questions, but rather as partial and possible answers based on these particular students in this particular time.

Question 1: For the students in this study, what does it mean to be a traditional Blackfeet person? Though there is debate and discussion in tribal communities regarding the specific definition of traditional, for the purposes of this study it was important for the student to label himself or herself (which they did in the survey). This is because in an investigation of the formation of identity that seeks to disidentify dominant, entrenched categories, the researcher must elicit the experiences that have formed the internalized labels the research participant uses for him or herself, and then seek to understand what those labels mean in the context of his or her situated experience. My research has revealed that most of my research population view Blackfeet traditionality as including several major characteristics.

First, being traditional means that the person is engaged in activities that are particular to Blackfeet culture. From my previous observations I knew what many of these activities were: participating in Blackfeet ceremonies, Blackfeet dance, Blackfeet singing, beadwork, hide tanning, speaking the Blackfeet language, Blackfeet ecology and use of flora, learning from elders, and listening to and learning Blackfeet stories. In the course of the interviews I learned that I should have also included horsemanship in my list. Though participation seemed to be an
essential element of Blackfeet-ness for many of the interviewed students, there was variation regarding their willingness to label or judge fellow Blackfeet as traditional.

Student interviews also revealed that traditional performativity has levels of intensity (i.e. “very traditional”) corresponding with levels of ability to speak the language. Several students used this phrase “very traditional” when referring to fluent speakers. Because of the frequency of the discourse of disappearance, students are also highly aware of the importance of being a speaker. However many of them have not had the opportunity to improve their abilities in this area. To be a traditional Blackfeet person also means that one is aware of the loss of knowledge due to historical circumstances, of the continuing work to re-invigorate cultural practice, and that one has great respect for those in the community who have the power to perpetuate the culture in the proper way. Ultimately, to be traditional means to respect and learn from the elders in the community, to let them teach you what it means to be a good person and to let them teach you what it means to be Blackfeet. Of one thing, at least, I am certain: for the students that I studied, their discourse reveals that one cannot be traditional if one does not have respect for the elders of the tribe and the ability to demonstrate that respect.

Question 2: What are the similarities and differences between the spaces of formal education and the spaces of informal education on the Blackfeet reservation? And Question 6: In what ways do spaces created by informal education become reflected or excluded from spaces of formal education? From the student interviews it became clear that learning and teaching are intentionally driven in both spaces, but that learning/teaching in these two spaces does not happen in the same ways or with the same goals. In the community, the focus is on transmission of Blackfeet knowledge through the use of patience, persistence and understanding by the elder. The elder teaches through hands on, individualized methods and lets the student learn through observation. The elder uses the context of the moment and observation of student progress, needs and abilities to influence what and when they will teach. The Blackfeet modes of teaching used in informal learning also transmit the local dominant values of responsibility to family and tribe, cultural maintenance, respect, value of the individual to his or her family and tribe and the use of egalitarian social controls.

In the school, the focus is on a range of curricular content that includes Native knowledge. The ways in which the transmission of this knowledge occurs varies greatly from teacher to teacher. Some incorporate Blackfeet modes of teaching and some use fully
Westernized modes of teaching. Those who use Western modes of teaching, privilege the Western values of individual effort, competition, accumulation of erudite knowledge, punctuality, and regular attendance. The Western teacher uses punitive discipline to dissuade future infractions, views those who achieve as doing so because of inherent merit or sufficient desire to succeed or both, and views those who don’t succeed as failing to do so because they have not made sufficient effort or because they possess some variety of deficit.

The teachers who incorporate Blackfeet modes of teaching synthesize Blackfeet and Western modes of teaching focusing on transmission of curriculum and Blackfeet knowledge by using Blackfeet modes of teaching to help the student understand both the expectations of the community and the values and requirements of the outside world. They avoid punitive discipline as much as possible by mirroring Blackfeet modes and using respect to create spaces of familiarity and comfort, signaling to the learner that they are equally responsible for the social order of the classroom. They try to re-teach those who struggle, and affirm those who succeed.

Question 3: What spaces, if any, in the school does the traditional student affiliate with and why? And Question 4: Is school a space where traditional students feel good about expressing his or her traditional identity? Are there times and spaces that constrain or assist this expression? And Question 8: What are the results of these differences for the traditional student? The traditional student affiliates with spaces connected with friends, like the gym and the lunchroom, but they strongly affiliate with spaces occupied by teachers who mirror community modes of teaching in the classroom. I am not inclined to believe this is due simply to familiarity; it may occur because these teachers understand what is meaningful to the student and as a result are able to affirm that student’s identity, providing him or her with positive learning experiences and confidence. Thus, the student feels comfortable in the performativity of traditional identity in mirrored spaces due to the confidence that teachers, like Mr. Inawasi and Ms. Yimmaki, may instill in him or her simply by understanding the meanings and values connected with the student’s behaviors. However, teachers like Ms. Smith and Ms. Jones constrain the performativity of traditional identity by mistaking the behaviors of a responsible tribal member for the behaviors of a poor student. In addition, by not understanding or embodying the behaviors that the traditional student expects from an elder, they create spaces of mistrust and lack of respect. This further complicates matters by creating negative learning experiences for the student leaving him or her with less confidence, less motivation and less success.
Question 7: In what ways does the traditional student negotiate these differences? Do they tend to evaluate themselves or experience positive or negative emotion according to the framework of the formal spaces or the informal spaces or a synthesis of the two? My research has only partially answered this question. In reflecting on the question, I have realized that by not interviewing traditional students who have given up on the formal spaces of education I am thus missing too significant a segment of the population to fully answer this question. However, I believe that for the students that I did interview, there is revealed a range of techniques to negotiate these differences. Some push themselves harder, some avoid the classrooms of the teachers who make them uncomfortable, some drop out for a while to return and try again. Perhaps some of them use their Blackfeet educational experiences and apply their powers of learning by observation to clearly delineate the rules of these two spaces and consciously switch frameworks as they move from one space to another. Perhaps the techniques of negotiation that they use influence which contexts they use to self-evaluate. In turn, this decision may influence the degree to which they experience positive or negative emotion. This, however, is a tentative conclusion that would require further investigation to confirm.

My study has revealed a strong relationship between a mirroring of the situated meanings of traditional student identities within the spaces of the school and positive student experiences, as well as between positive student experiences and the motivation to participate in the spaces of learning. It also has shown a strong relationship between negative student experiences and avoidance of the spaces of formal education. Additionally, I have demonstrated the utility of my rubric of analysis in disidentifying entrenched dominant categories of meaning and recognizing situated categories of meaning for the purposes of understanding the factors influencing the formation of identity. Finally, I have demonstrated the strong relationship between space, identity and education and have made a case for the inclusion of spaces of formal education and spaces of informal learning within geographic analysis.

The findings are limited by research population, which was limited by time, and by my own understandings, which will always remain limited. If I were to do it again, I would spend more time talking with the students about how they came to understand themselves as traditional people. Additionally, I would approach my recruitment of participants in a more culturally appropriate way, involving some form of personal contact with the parents to collect consent. I also believe that interviewing parents and elders of the students to discover the community’s
experiences of teaching the student along with exploring the personal learning experiences of parents and elders would have strengthened my findings. Lastly, interviews of school personnel would function to provide a complete perspective on the community and school spaces of learning as well as clarifying the individual situated meanings involved in the complex dialectic between divergent frameworks of meaning.

FIGURE 6.1

A ROAD FROM THE COMMUNITY TO THE SCHOOL

II. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Any lack of understanding for the situated meanings of traditional students is not directly the fault of any contemporary person or entity. However, the traditional student’s difficulties and negative experiences in the formal spaces of education do have an origin. The origin of accountability for contemporary negative and destructive outcomes plaguing the tribe today resides in the policies of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. government as inscribers of the Blackfeet as helpless and ignorant. The imposition of Western values on the
tribe left the government with almost no understanding of Blackfeet frameworks thus unproblematically judging them as savages who would have to be trained to accept American education, food, political structure, and boundaries. The irony of the political policies that inscribed the Blackfeet as helpless, is that the outcome of those policies pushed Blackfeet people so close to the point of helplessness in the winter of 1883, that even though they had been anything but helpless before the arrival of the Great White Father, they were manipulated into situations that functioned to remove their ability to survive without government intervention. Thus, the dominant categorizing of the Blackfeet inscribed tribal members with labels of cultural deficit, dependent on the more “civilized” government of America to rescue them. This previously stable social structure (that had its own modes of teaching, ways of providing, methods of organization, diplomacy and bounded areas) was left in chaos from which sprang the symptoms of oppression (decline in health and increase in social dysfunction) which today obscures and disproportionately complicates the pursuit of happiness and social justice for all tribal members. Thus, government involvement imposed on the Blackfeet through Manifest Destiny in the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, was not the help it was framed as. Rather, the invasion of the Blackfeet culture by the U.S. government functioned as the tool by which the economic structure of the region was manipulated so that the government could force its will on the people instead of finding a way for social control to be by the people, a paradigm that most likely would not have permitted white settlement, and the resultant cultural invasion to occur.

Indeed the Blackfeet were far from helpless or dysfunctional, in fact, in light of the unsustainable and uneven development that plagues the globe at the foot of the twenty first century, I would argue that the Native populace of the Americas were highly progressive by virtue of their practices of sustainable living. In saying this I am not fetishizing some grandiose ideal of living with the land, as my rejection of the nature/culture dichotomy has made clear. Instead, I argue with Natter and Jones that acknowledgment of multiplicity and disidentification with dominant categories need not lead to an impotent relativistic paradigm, rather that these steps are necessary in the examinations of spaces and identities. Further, it is my goal to assert that active disidentification delivered through formal education, can lead future generations away from an administrative reliance on assimilation and into a discovery of the situatedness of
effective practices that can only be seen from a clarification of the situatedness of each person’s identity.

To demonstrate the attainability of this goal, I offer one last interview excerpt with a seventeen-year-old female self-identifying as traditional to show how one student stands at the doorway of understanding and disidentification.

H: The one thing I heard that was said back in the day was...never leave what we have, never leave our language... don’t give it up. It’s our ways - it’s our way of life... I’m a person that’s interested in it and I want to help out my Blackfeet people someday... right now we’re having lots of trouble with the tribe and stuff. Our council members are fighting against one another - and what is that?... We’re supposed to be called the Real People, right? And you’re not being real to one another at all...I don’t know for sure but I know I have heard that Blackfeet do get condemned...when they step off of this reservation... our people want to come back to the reservation and kick their neighbor and ridicule them. I think that’s not good...that’s not something that I think is right. One thing that I have learned from my father is - treat people the way you’d want to be treated and that’s a golden rule that is a rule that is in every religion, pretty much...I think our Blackfeet are loosing it - are losing the ways that we used to be, cause we used to help one another you know... like if I was living in a tipi, my husband had died or whatever and then I would be the only one there taking care of the tipi and the kids...And then my neighbor’s husband would give us meat to survive for the winter, you know...we shared. We looked out for one another...You look out for the baby in the family. So that’s one thing I think is good that we still have...Our community has really low self-esteem. I mean I don’t know why, but they do...

Though she has a clear understanding of the troubles within her tribe, she does not yet understand how the internalization of negative dominant categories used as techniques of power against her people have resulted in the “ridicule” of neighbor by neighbor. As is made clear by her lack of understanding of why her people have “low self-esteem,” she needs help understanding the situated nature and historicity of the sometimes anti-tribal behavior that she observes. She is very close to this understanding since she already sees the significance of history as revealed in her discussion of how “we used to help each other,” and she already sees some of the situated nature of experience in her observation that among some, this attitude seems to have been lost.

From this perspective can be understood the implications of my research. Namely, if people in positions of influence in the school can help students like her understand the historicity behind the low self-esteem that she has observed, perhaps those students can find ways to not reproduce the negative labels stemming from the dominant categorizations that have contingently produced identity labels resulting in negative outcomes – such as low self-esteem.
The young people see the problems on the reservation, but, in the manner of Freire, each must be assisted in obtaining a fuller understanding of his or her positionality and situatedness within the world and within history, so that they do not fall into dominant categories from which they are coaxed by contingent meanings to blame their neighbor from the illusion of deficit in each other. From the power to disidentify with dominant categories that one has internalized, comes the opportunity to replace those oppressive categories with one’s own particularity, from which comes self-confidence, which strengthens the power of performativity of agency. Without confidence in and awareness of one’s own uniqueness, self-actualization can never occur. Without self-actualization, the best educational materials that money can buy won’t help to produce the educated citizen, and without educated citizens, we do not have a democracy, we will have what we have now – a mediocre media-ocracy where what serves to inform most citizens are the winds of the loudest, most polarizing opinions.

I believe there may be implications for related research as well. Dominant categories of a negative nature weren’t just imposed on the Blackfeet tribe, or the Native American and negative categories do not exist only in the past. They continue to be imposed on my favorite gay couples, on my grandmothers, on my friend’s little boy labeled as learning deficient. My rubric of analysis could be used for any marginalized population to explore identity formation and to discover gaps in social justice and perhaps prevent a reliance on exclusionary concepts of humanity. I plan to continue this work myself, most likely in the area of indigenous issues, but always with observations of the immense impact that formal educational experience can have on individual identity.
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1) _____ What kind of student do you consider yourself to be?
   A) Successful in all subjects
   B) Successful in some subjects
   C) Successful in only the subjects that I am interested
   D) Sort of successful in some subjects, but not consistently
   E) Not successful in any subjects

2) _____ Regarding my ability to speak the Blackfeet language (or another Native
   language):
   A) I am very confident and speak it often
   B) I am not very confident but try to speak it often
   C) I am very confident but don’t speak it often
   D) I am not very confident and don’t try to speak it often
   E) I never speak it

3) ____ Regarding where you speak the Blackfeet language (or another Native language):
   A) I speak it in many different places
   B) I speak it in school only
   C) I speak it at home only
   D) I speak it around certain people only
   E) I never speak it

4) ____ Regarding Blackfeet language or history classes, I
   A) feel more comfortable in these classes than my other classes
   B) feel as comfortable in these classes as I do in my other classes
   C) feel less comfortable in these classes than I do in my other classes.

5) ____ Regarding Blackfeet language or history classes
   A) I like them very much
   B) I like them somewhat
   C) I don’t like them at all

6) ____ Regarding Blackfeet language or history classes
   A) They seem to be taught in a very different way than other classes
   B) They seem to be taught in somewhat the same way as other classes
   C) They are taught in the same way as other classes

7) ____ Regarding the things that I learn outside of school
   A) I enjoy learning from elders and seek out opportunities to do so (I make an effort to do this)
   B) I enjoy learning from elders and take advantages of opportunities to do so if they come along (I
do this but don’t go out of my way to do this)
   C) I sort of enjoy learning from elders and do so when it is convenient
   D) I don’t enjoy learning from elders

8) ____ The people in my family that I spend the most time with think that school
   A) is very important
   B) is somewhat important
   C) is not really that important
9) ____ The people in my family that I spend the most time with think that participating in traditional activities
   A) is very important
   B) is somewhat important
   C) is not really that important

10) ____ Most of my closest friends think that school
    A) is very important
    B) is somewhat important
    C) is not really that important

11) ____ Most of my closest friends think that participating in traditional activities
    A) is very important
    B) is somewhat important
    C) is not really that important

12) ____ I consider myself to be (in Blackfeet or other tribal ways)
    A) very traditional
    B) traditional
    C) somewhat traditional
    D) not traditional at all

13) Please circle all the activities that you participate in on a regular basis
    Native Ceremony (any)
    Native Dance
    Native Singing
    Beadwork
    Hide tanning
    Speaking Blackfeet (or other Native Language)
    Learning about Native plants
    Collecting Native plants and learning their traditional names and uses
    Learning from an elder (s)
    Learning/hearing Native stories

    Circle one for each of the following:
    14) I am a Male / Female.
    15) I am 13 / 14 / 15 / 16 / 17 / 18 / 19 years old
    16) I am / I am not a recognized member of any Native American tribe.
APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW PROMPT QUESTIONS

a. In your survey, you identified yourself as participating in traditional activities. When did you first learn how to participate? Where did you learn? With whom?
b. I want you to talk about school a little bit. What are the places at school where you feel the most comfortable? What about those places makes you feel comfortable?
c. Consider for a moment that your education as a human being happens both inside and outside of school. With that in mind, please talk about what you see as the differences and similarities in your traditional education and your high school education.

Interview prompts after revisions added during the first two interviews:

a. Would you begin by telling me about yourself?
b. In your survey, you identified yourself as participating in traditional activities. When did you first learn how to participate? Where did you learn? With whom? Could you reconstruct a learning experience for each of these traditional activities?
c. I want you to talk about school a little bit. What are the places at school where you feel the most comfortable? Could you reconstruct a learning experience you have had there? What is it about this space makes you feel comfortable?
d. Consider for a moment that your education as a human being happens both inside and outside of school. With that in mind, please talk about what you see as the differences and similarities in your traditional education and your high school education.
e. If you could change the way school is taught, how would you change it?
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VITA

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