

Aboriginal Students Speak about Acceptance, Sharing, Awareness and Support: A Participatory Approach to Change at a University and Community College*

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The qualitative participatory action research on which I report in this paper represents a bicultural partnership venture between myself and Aboriginal Students at two post-secondary educational institutions in North Eastern Ontario; Nipissing University and Canadore College. It was undertaken, in part, to generate an information base for the teaching and learning of Aboriginal students. This type of forum has the potential to develop into a model change process which could be implemented by other universities and colleges as a means of responding to the rights and needs of Aboriginal students. It was also hoped that the research process itself would be beneficial to the participants, including myself, by providing a forum for dialogue. Perhaps most importantly, the research provided an opportunity for the students to tell their stories and to be heard in their own voice, both by me, by each other, and by the people who read the research account. This enables the reader to better understand the people being interviewed. (Reinharz, 1992) The importance of gathering and documenting Aboriginal students' voices cannot be over emphasized considering the silencing effects colonization has had on Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Participatory Research and Decolonization

Hearing Aboriginal voices is also essential to cultural revitalization, to reclaim our own history, tell our own stories. No academic analysis, regardless of how thought-provoking or pro-empowerment of First Nations, can any longer be understood as speaking for us. In these days of identity politics, a paradoxical aspect of this publication is the amount of space that appears to be taken up by non-Native theorists. Let us continue to break free of academic colonialism, and tell our own stories, the whole story, the full details, no edits please. (Graveline, 1994, 106)

The relationship between Aboriginal people and the educational institutions of the dominant society in Canada is rooted in the history of the European colonization of North America. From the early missionaries onwards, education has been viewed as the primary vehicle for assimilating First Nations people into Euro-Canadian culture. In Canada, The Indian Act was the legal force behind the imposition of a foreign education system upon Aboriginal children. Religious orders combined education with religious "conversion" and through residential schools effectively broke up the children's experiences of not only their culture but also their families and communities. In the last thirty years, Aboriginal organizations have increasingly asserted the need to regain control over the education of future generations if their cultures and traditions are to survive (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Assembly of First Nations, 1988). Until recently, the focus has primarily been on elementary and secondary education. As more Aboriginal people aspire to professional and technical positions within their communities, the demand for post-secondary education has increased. Also contributing to this trend is a desire on the part of First Nations communities to regain self-government, and this includes the positioning of Aboriginal workers into decision making positions where once non-Aboriginal workers were placed. Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are attending post-secondary institutions, and if Aboriginal people are to be well served by these institutions, serious issues must be addressed: high drop-out rates, concern about the relevance of courses and programs, cultural differences in organizational styles, community control of programs and services,

and the receptiveness of institutions to change are just some of the issues which require addressing. (for example see Alcoze and Mawhiney, 1988; Brant Castellano, Stalwick and Wien, 1986)

In 1988, the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) initiated a Native post-secondary education strategy, which included an MCU Native Advisory Committee, to oversee the short-term efforts of post-secondary educational institutions to increase access and retention rates for Native students as a part of the national context of First Nations people working toward the reattainment of self-government through a Constitutional amendment which would recognize their inherent right to be self-determining. Ministry guidelines stipulated that at the individual institutional level, Native Advisory Councils were to be established in order to ensure appropriate Native control over the development and delivery of Native specific programs and services.

While the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities recognized its strategy was a short-term measure designed to provide immediate benefits before Native control of Native education is fully implemented, it raised some important questions about the relationship of Aboriginal students to post-secondary institutions and the role of the university and community college in assisting with the decolonization process. (Ministry of Colleges and Universities Native Advisory Committee, January 1991) Aboriginal students have been largely absent from post-secondary institutions until very recently (A CAUT document from October, 1988 states that enrollment of registered Canadian Indians and Inuit in post-secondary institutions rose from 3,500 in 1977 to 12,000 in 1987). While enrollment statistics are increasing, statistics suggest that there are problems with the relationship between Aboriginal students and the schools that they attend. Native communities must be involved in assessing policies and programs within post-secondary institutions which have an impact on enrollment and retention and outline specific criteria to ensure that this occurs.

Connecting Research and Culture

Given the above considerations, it is important for researchers to analyze the institutional structures and barriers which impede progress in the direction of decolonization and social development. The primary questions of this research are "what are the experiences

and needs of Aboriginal students at Nipissing University and Canadore College?" "What needs to be changed in order to meet these needs and how can this be done?" What programmatic and structural changes are required in post-secondary institutions in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal students?

In using research as a tool in the decolonization process the first step is to examine and redefine the knowledge generation and dissemination process itself. Traditional social science research has often viewed Aboriginal people as objects rather than as active participants and has often been rooted in theories and methods that have denied or ignored the validity of the worldview held by Aboriginal people.

It is also important to acknowledge that while each First Nation has its own particular set of traditions and beliefs, some universal themes transverse most Aboriginal traditional beliefs. For example, Native people have always looked to nature for guidance in learning how to live in harmony with the world. They see that many things exist in circles, either in actual shape or in cyclical patterns (in Neihardt, Black Elk 1975, Bopp et al, 1985, Dokis, 1990); hence, the circle is paramount in Native symbology.

The medicine wheel is sacred in Native spirituality and while there are many forms of medicine wheels, some which refer to learning and others to healing, each one is characterized by its four equal component parts. The philosophy of harmony and balance is another important aspect of Native spirituality; it is thought that in order to heal one side of the circle, the other side must also be healed. (Dokis, 1990) For example, a traditional Native approach to families in which violence is taking place would incorporate strategies which deal with the needs of the offending person as well as the victim. (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989) As Mercredi states:

We use the Elders to deal with the source of the problem, not just the symptom, and to correct the imbalances in the community by healing both the victims and the offenders. The focus is on healing and restoration, not the adversarial process and punishment. (Mercredi and Turpel, 1994, 101)

Given the emphasis on balance, harmony and healing of the whole community, it is clear that changes within the Aboriginal community toward cultural rebirth and self-determination necessarily involve

concurrent changes on the part of non-Native people and institutions as well.

Participatory Action Research and Aboriginal Communities

Participatory action research provides a vehicle for such changes because it explicitly connects knowledge with action (In this case, through the participation of the Aboriginal students in the research undertaking). The action component of research is often considered unimportant or even inappropriate within a traditional research paradigm which emphasizes the generation of "objective" data for its own sake. In contrast, Aboriginal self-determination requires changes in societal structures and relationships. Colorado refers to participatory research as an ideal form of research to bridge Native and Western Science. (1988, p. 53) Gilchrist, advocating for a critical ethnography, suggests that it is likely the only form of research that will be acceptable to Aboriginal people, since they are not inclined to participate in research unless they see some benefit in it. (1994, 1997)

Webster and Nabigon, referring to the 1989 work of American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research have recommended the following principles as a means of empowering subjects in the development and implementation of First Nations research:

- That cultural values and belief systems of the host community be understood and respected
- That clear articulation of informed consent as a community right be recognized
- That development of a community consultation process which ensures First Nations participation and validation of the research design and methodology criteria be established
- That traditional leaders be recognized as sources of local expertise
- That a training component for First Nations communities be made available
- That confidentiality rights be extended to participating First Nations communities
- That publication and presentation of community research be under First Nations control

- That decisions about the public disclosure of premature study results be under the control of the community
- That employment practices related to the research project reflect Native preference and be under local control
- That ongoing community consultation be maintained in the development of policy, organizational action steps, research design, and fiscal support
- That the primary document for a presentation and dissemination of research results be made available in the Aboriginal language of the community (1993, p. 161-162)

They portray native communities as existing on a continuum from "traditional, transitional, or contemporary-adaptive" (pg 164), by recognizing the differing extents to which cultural practices and traditions exist in various communities and recommend that researchers be aware of the native world view which includes such aspects as the medicine wheel and the four sacred directions and colours. Webster and Nabigon conclude:

By engaging native communities at every level of the research endeavour - from the definition of the research problem, the conceptualization of the model, the conduct of field work, the integration and application of the results, scholars (native and non-native alike), can contribute to a deeper understanding of the native experience. (pg 167)

Similarly, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples adopted a participatory approach to its research agenda arguing that:

In the past, research concerning Aboriginal peoples has usually been initiated outside the Aboriginal community and carried out by non-Aboriginal personnel. Aboriginal people have had almost no opportunity to correct misinformation or to challenge ethnocentric and racist interpretations. Consequently, the existing body of research, which normally provides a reference point for a new research, must be open to reassessment. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, undated pamphlet, p. 2)

This mandate for a participatory approach to research with Aboriginal

people is echoed by Dara Culhane. She states "In order to involve as many community-based people as possible, as well as developing more culturally appropriate and sensitive approaches, we are committed to participatory methods of research." (1993, p. 6)

Maguire portrays participatory research as representing a three part process which shares the creation of social knowledge with oppressed people. These parts are 1) Social Investigation 2) Education 3) Action. The key to understanding this research model is the action stage. For "rather than merely recording observable facts, participatory research has the explicit intention of collectively investigating reality in order to transform it" (Maguire, 1987, p. 4).

Participatory research developed new popularity during the late 1960's and early 1970's when issues of social justice and political restructuring were surfacing in North America and in the "developing" world. It is not coincidental that this research model was emerging at a time when Aboriginal people in Canada were struggling against the Federal government's assimilationist policies because the main goals of participatory research include changing power structures and relationships and empowering oppressed people (Maguire, 1987).

Critical to understanding the difference between participatory research and traditional social science research is the underlying difference in research paradigms. According to Maguire, there are two main paradigms associated with social science research: the dominant and alternative world views. Traditional positivist social science research has been grounded in empirical inquiry and technical knowledge and tends to reject alternative research methods as being less rigorous and hence, less scientific; however alternative research paradigms, while giving full recognition to qualitative research methods, can still accommodate the use of empirical, quantitative methods, depending on the research question. The real conflict between the two paradigms is based on differing assumptions about knowledge creation and its purposes:

Traditional research paradigms follow 'politically neutral' theories about social affairs which support the status quo [Fay, 1975]. In contrast, alternative paradigm research supports the production of knowledge for emancipatory interests. (Maguire, 1987, p. 17)

To contribute to the decolonization process in Canada, a participatory

research model is consistent with the shifts in power required for Aboriginal people to achieve self-determination.

The Research

The Nipissing University/Canadore College Native Student Association represents the joint interests of Native students within both of these two institutions. A modest estimate of Aboriginal student enrollment at Nipissing and Canadore indicated a potential membership of approximately 500 in this organization in 1992. Considering that these students come to North Bay from a wide catchment area ranging from Northern Quebec and the James Bay Coast to Eastern and Southern Ontario as well as from the North Bay area, they represent a wide range of experiences and opinions concerning post-secondary education.

For this project, 35 current and former students of Nipissing University and Canadore College were interviewed individually (12) or in 8 research circles between May 1993 and March 1994. The individual interviews and research circles were face to face and relatively unstructured although certain open ended questions were used to facilitate dialogue during the individual interviews. This research approach is consistent with the oral traditions of Native communication. Brant Castellano, a member of the Mohawk Nation, in the book Educating For a Change reinforces the importance of assessing individual experiences as a foundation for grounded community action:

"Indigenous knowledge is seen to be personal knowledge, in that elders, who carry particular responsibility for teaching the younger generation, do not claim to define an objective reality. They share, rather, what they have seen or validated in their own experience. Knowledge is expressed as perception, derived from a particular perspective, rather than as concept, to which general validity is attributed...." (Arnold et al, 1991, p. 150)

While the research project working title used the term "Aboriginal" to describe the student participants, the students themselves use the term "Native" to describe themselves and this was the term most often heard during the circles and interviews (and

indeed during most meetings and conversations) so I used this term interchangeably in the writing up of the results. Also, participants self-identified themselves as Native people - no attempt on my part was made to categorize them as “status Indians”, “non-status Indians” or Metis, considering that the important criterion was that the participants identified themselves as Native people and the above categories were externally imposed on First Nations by the federal government through The Indian Act. Although age was not asked for on the research participation agreement, most of the participants identified themselves as being mature students with families. 23 of the participants were women and 12 were men. Of the 35 participants, 24 participated in research circles only, 6 participated in both research circles and an individual interview, and 5 participated in an individual interview only. One person took part in two individual interviews. An additional seven people signed research participation agreements but did not participate in the research either because they moved before I could schedule and interview or because I could not reach them to schedule an interview. A few other people expressed interest in the research and said that they would have liked to have been involved but had become very busy with their responsibilities. The number of participants present in the research circles ranged from three to nine, plus me. Two other research circles were scheduled but not held due to lack of attendance.

The Aboriginal students became involved in the research on a voluntary basis. A combination of key informants, networks provided by the Native Student Association and the Aboriginal Councils on Education as well as classroom contacts helped to identify potential participants. Whether the information gathering sessions took the form of research circles, or were individual interviews, depended on the expressed wish of the participant. These students each signed a research participation agreement which informed them that the session would be tape-recorded, that they would receive a copy of their transcript and have an opportunity to participate in data analysis and any eventual proposal formulation, that the information would be compiled anonymously and that the information gathered would be presented to the Native Student Association and the Aboriginal Councils on Education for comment before any proposals for institutional changes were submitted to the university or community college, or elsewhere. It was especially important to respect cultural differences in both style and content of communication. For example,

in traditional Aboriginal cultures, the emphasis in learning is on the learner to listen, not on the teacher to explain. This means that Aboriginal people may be less inclined to answer direct questions with direct answers and it may be considered intrusive and impolite to insist on a certain type of response. (Spielmann, 1993) This is one of the strengths of a qualitative approach to research with Aboriginal people. Qualitative research is designed to build theory, not test theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967); hence, it is highly compatible with the active listening required of the learner in Native cultures.

A Circular Approach to Information Gathering

The individual interviews addressed such topics as the admissions process, classroom learning, relationships with faculty, students and staff, the meaning of education, family and community responses to the student's educational experience, enhancing and inhibiting factors in their educational experience and recommendations regarding changes that would improve the student's learning experience. The research circles were conducted in a less structured manner and most clearly represent the bicultural nature of the research. In the circles, after I introduced the research, participants were asked to first introduce themselves, talk about the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as students, and then comment on what they would like to see developed in the university and/or college. Participants' comments were not limited in any way during these circles; I provided this outline as an initial guide only. Much of the information shared by the participants was in the form of their personal life stories. Some of these research circles were opened and closed with traditional Native ceremonies and prayers; however, out of respect, these were not recorded and transcribed and are not included. Two data analysis circles were also held before I assembled the results chapter of my dissertation. Participants were provided with transcriptions of each circle that they attended and were invited to provide written feedback if they wished. Draft copies of the dissertation were circulated to all participants to read and comment on. All the participants were invited to a pre-defence circle as well as the defence itself at Wilfrid Laurier University. Some financial assistance was made available for this purpose. Two participants attended my dissertation defence in Waterloo; one who had been a significant helper throughout the research process and the other was the person

who had conducted the ceremonies in the circles. Eventually, final copies of the dissertation were provided to all participants although some people had moved, and I was unable to reach them.

The type of research described here was a "living" process that to some extent developed a character and body of its own through the influences of its environment. For example, because of the recommendations of members of the Nipissing University and Canadore College Native Student Association, instead of interviewing all students individually, students had the choice of either an individual interview, a joint interview with another person and/or participation in a research circle. The research circle was a variation of the Aboriginal tradition of meeting in circles for learning or healing. (Morrissette, V., McKenzie, B., and Morrissette, L., 1993) This provided participants a choice and was appropriate to the range of experiences with traditional Aboriginal cultures and Euro-Canadian culture that existed among the students. Some grew up in an urban environment, some in a residential school setting with little opportunity to experience or learn about traditional ways, while others grew up on remote reserves where traditional ways of life are more commonly practiced. Many had some combination of such experiences. For this reason, the research methodology needed to be sensitive and responsive to the different cultural experiences and traditions of the students. While there are often implicit assumptions made by proponents of participatory action research that qualitative methods are most useful for this type of research, the literature on qualitative research does not always reflect an inevitable tie to participatory action research. Compounding this gap, there is little written that directly links Aboriginal cultural and spiritual traditions directly with either participatory action research or qualitative research methods (Although there is a growing body of work that reinforces the importance of participatory action research for Aboriginal self-determination: see Colorado, 1988; Brant Castellano, 1993; Gilchrist, 1994). Feminist perspectives on research provided an integrating framework, primarily because of their acknowledgement of the importance of the researcher's experience in the research process and their assumption that research should contribute to positive social change. In this sense the connection between personal and political is realized through the research process (research as "praxis").

As a non-Aboriginal researcher, I hope to avoid misinterpretation and to reinforce the view that the participants are the

best assessors of their own experience. For this reason, I used the participants' own words to present their descriptions of their experiences rather than trying to interpret them in my own words. It is essential that as partners in this research process that the participants' words be given complete authority and credibility. The authentic rich description contained in them justifies their inclusion, particularly given the bi-cultural nature of this research. Proponents of participatory action research and the new approach to ethnography support this approach to data reporting (Stalwick, 1986; 1987, Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Te Hennepe, 1993).

Another important aspect of the bicultural nature of this research is that a circular quality has been incorporated into the design, implementation and analysis phases of the research. The circular research model reflected here is not an undifferentiated one but one based on the quadripartite organization of the medicine wheel. While the various components of the medicine wheel are related, they are neither hierarchical nor linear; they are interconnected and interdependent. Some of the implications of this circular approach to research are as follows:

- The research process is part of the research product - the collective traditional Aboriginal approach is both a research goal and a research tool.
- The action component of the research did not occur in a linear way - actions occurred more as "ripples" throughout the process and afterwards.
- The research process is never ending - it is part of what has happened before and will continue to be part of what happens in the future.
- Personal experiences are the heart of the research. The centre of the research medicine wheel is comprised of the participants - the place to start and the place to go back to.
- The writing up of this type of research requires a circular approach as well; the dissertation which emerged from this research reflects the "interactive", "spiral" structure identified by Hampton in his work (1993, p. 262).

Understanding and Presenting What The Students Said

Nishnaabe Kinoomaadwin Naadmaadwin

When the research has been conducted on a participatory, partnership basis, the key to understanding the results lies with the participants themselves. In the process of condensing over 800 pages of research circle and individual interview transcriptions plus 50 pages of transcriptions of two data analysis circles, I turned to the participants themselves for guidance. The seemingly obvious and reassuring response I received in the first data analysis circle was that everything was already there in the transcriptions. That is, I need look no further than what had already been said. This partially answers King's question "How do you know that the meaning you are attributing to the results is a true reflection of the reality of Aboriginal communities?" (1993, p. 94) As one participant said in the first data analysis circle:

Just thinking back to the first Circles we had, I skimmed the transcripts when I got them but I haven't gone into them in depth. Ah, I'm trying to picture those days - I think that the things that were said, they were clear, ah, as far as the transcripts go, should reflect those. I think those things will, will just stand out. Ah, we had a lot of, sort of in between discussions and we'd go off track sometimes but, but I think the, the basics were there. There was a lot of stuff that was, that was said at that time, the first time.

Presenting oral communication in a written form always impedes the communication of feeling, phrasing and texture to some extent. While some of the participants first language was Cree or Ojibway, in many cases participants had not learned their Aboriginal language and had learned English or French as their first language, or in some cases had originally learned an Aboriginal language but had lost it through their residential school experience. It is significant to point out that even when an Aboriginal language had not been learned or practiced, some of the participants felt that their use of the English language was different from that of non-Native people. This is consistent with the notion that culture and language are linked - cultural values and traditions will be expressed in language - even when that language is not the one originally associated with a culture. King states:

Language, according to psycho-linguists, is a people's window to the world. Our Odawa language is a gift from the

Maker and as such expresses our reality in terms of the order that the Maker gave. Our language embodies and conveys our world view. We express and talk about the world in ways provided by our language. Therefore, an Odawa speaker sees the world through a different window than those with other Mother tongues... (1993, pg. 85)

Further, just as cultures differ in the structure of their languages, they also differ in the structure of oral discourse. Learning to communicate means learning what to say (ie. words, phrases, meanings, structure), who to say it to (ie. role perception, status hierarchies), who you are (self-concept), how to say it (affective components, non-verbal cues, interaction, stress), why you say it (intentions, values, assumptions, attitudes), when to say it (time), and where to say it (place). Language is not learned in isolation from the cultural context to which it naturally belongs. Odawa individuals, as children, learn all of the above - mentioned aspects of communication. This is part of what Odawa students bring with them to your institutions. (1993, pg. 87)

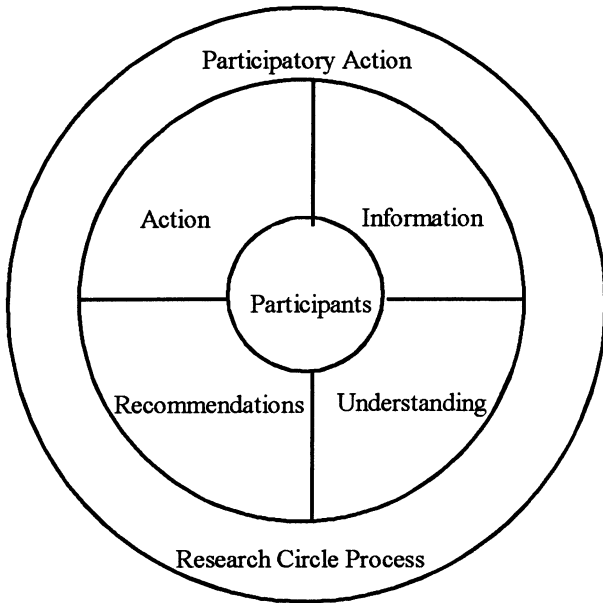
For these reasons, I considered it important to present the participants' words exactly as they spoke them, given that their use of the English language reflected their own cultural experiences and ways of viewing the world, experiences and world views that I may not even be able to recognize.

A Participatory, Circular Approach to Data Analysis and Presentation

A circular research process differs from a linear research process in several profound ways. Thus, the data analysis circles were not task oriented (i.e.) focussed directly on determining the significance and meaning of the information contained in the transcriptions which everyone present had received. These two circles were continuations of previous circles, and people spoke about things in a similar way as they had in previous circles with one difference - I spoke a great deal about the research process and directly sought their input into this process. After the first data analysis circle, I looked back to the research process for answers as to how to proceed

with the data analysis. Figure A represents the diagram that I drew of the Participatory Action Research Circle Process.

Figure A: Model of the Participatory Action Research Circle Process



At the centre of the research circle are the participants who remained the driving force throughout each phase of the research. The first quadrant I named "Information" to represent the data which has been gathered with all of the participants. The second quadrant I named "Understanding" to represent the meaning and significance which we came to associate with the information. The third quadrant is called "Recommendations" to represent the ideal courses of action which emerged in response to the understandings that we developed. The fourth quadrant I named "Action" to represent the proposals which may be developed and acted upon in response to these recommendations.

To some extent this "research circle process" which I am describing mirrors the "Popular Education Learning Cycle" described by Stalwick. He states that "as the diagram suggests, information in this guide is linked by a circle where there is movement from how we examine experience (practice), to our critical analysis (theory), to collective action". (1986, p. ix) This circle suggests a continuous learning spiral because the learning cycle begins with theory and vision and continues with rethinking and remembering based on experiences. Significantly, Stalwick, using an adaptation of Freire's work, outlines three categories of sorting information gained through this research process: "1. Denaming or naming what is wrong; 2. Announce or say what is hoped for and how things ought to be and 3. Go beyond (Direction for action)" (1986, p. 77). These categories closely parallel the directions I gave to research participants at the beginning of each research circle. Circle participants were asked to comment on both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as well as on those things that they would like to see changed/added or remain the same.

In taking a bicultural approach to this research, it followed that the data analysis needed to be done in a bicultural way also. Looking to the medicine wheel for direction was a way to ensure cultural integrity in the presentation of the research results. Inherent in the symbolism of the medicine wheel is the idea of the balance of opposites, which fit the direction given to the participants to speak about both their positive and negative experiences. Authors such as Colorado (1986), Webster and Nabigon (1993), and Hampton (1993) have employed the medicine wheel when writing up their research data. Battiste and Barman's important book First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds contains several chapters in which

authors organize their thoughts and writing around the medicine wheel (1995).

This challenged me to develop a fuller understanding of traditional teachings about the medicine wheel and to try to use these in writing up the results chapter. Many of the participants understood the tension that exists between traditional linear approaches to research and the research model we were using. In the second data analysis circle, I received support and encouragement for writing up the data analysis in a more circular way, using the teachings of the medicine wheel as an organizing framework. When I said "It would make sense to try and use the Circle or the medicine wheel as an organizing principle in writing up the material. I have to...admit though I'm not, I feel a bit, you know, that I'm not, um, knowledgeable enough, you know, to talk about the medicine wheel is very, you know, I, I don't want to do any disservice to, to it either by misusing it or using it in a...", one participant responded, "There is not, there is nothing wrong in the way you used the medicine wheel... If you believe, if you believe that's the way it should go in your mind, as long as it's good. You use it that way. Sometimes it might be backwards (laughs)"; then another person said "Sure and like before, everybody's at a different place...even ourselves we're at a different place, you know, in the main teachings. Like when we talk ourselves we're saying "where I am now" and the expression is "as I have come to understand it" and that's the way we understand it now. And probably in five years the understanding is, ah, still there but it's grown or it's either changed, ah, you know, same thing when, I have a teaching when we were 20, ah, it helped us at a certain time when we were 20 and when we were 40, it, it helps us in another way, you know, you see it, see more out of that teaching. So the way you would use, would be how you see it, how you, ah, feel about the Circles like, ah, even, you know, cause I mean...as long as you're honest and true learning..." Two points finally emerged as being important guiding principles regarding the organization of the information; first that it was important to present the information in a way which would minimize resistance and defensiveness amongst non-Native readers (in a "positive way") and secondly that it made sense to try and find four main themes under which to organize the information (following the medicine wheel principle that a circle inherently contains four parts).

The themes that I saw emerging from the data were not necessarily the same themes that the participants saw - and even when

they were, some participants preferred that I reframe them so that the headings used were expressed in positive terms. For example, in Data Analysis Circle #2, when I said that "racism was one topic too that stood out as a theme, I kept hearing over and over again - people's experiences of racism", one person said: "I don't know if, ah, like racism would be, a title to be used, like once a person reads it automatically they think it's negative thinking. Slip it in. (group laughs) Like talk about in a good way...the same thing with the acceptance. Question them about it... That way it'll interest the reader too, what is this person talking about? That isn't, get thrown in... Can you accept this person for who he is, or she is? The same thing...they'll find out like how...is this. Like when you put things in a positive way. That way, you're less likely to defend yourself, if the person is, if you put everything in a positive way..."

I replied "Well that's, that's interesting because I, I understand what you're saying, that it's important to present the material in, in a good way, you know, in a way that will, will, you know, contribute to, to unity rather than disunity. Um, on the other hand I'm, I don't want to deny, you know, the reality of some people's experiences which have been very painful, you know what I mean? there is a lot of pain..." This same participant responded, "that part would go probably in their sharing it... Reduce the pain when people are sharing it... And these are the effects that would, like it all, it all connects. And it's how we, like, put everything." Later in this exchange, another person said "I think like P1 was saying that it's, it'll interconnect, ah, after we understand what you're trying is, what you're talking about pain and, ah, you're going around and then it leads into acceptance within the Circle. And talk about it, you share it, and then there's a lot of acceptance, awareness and, ah, conscientization and wellbeing, wellness, so if..."

As the above comments show, I was challenged to reframe information in a way that connected with the participants' way of seeing things. A third participant commented on this change of thinking required on my part: "I guess, I feel for you, I think it's going to be a difficult, um, I think it's difficult for you be...like there is a difference, and I'm sure when you first started, the research...you had a different outlook on, on how we are, ah, like I know you've always known, known, but like I think just even when I'm hearing you talk, how it's changed..." Likewise, a fourth person said: "I remember telling R that, just, I guess this was probably after the first Circle or

even before the first one, R had some concerns about how things were going to happen, like P1 probably brought it up, R says, well I'm not sure and then we talked about it a bit, but, just that, ah, things happen differently...sometimes than you expect and I think we know that you're trying to put this information into a structure that you're very familiar with but, or you're, you're trying to balance them out. Okay, but we know that structure is so ingrained... We know it's going to be difficult for you...that, though, I think we do understand that and certainly appreciate the efforts that you're, you're putting into it. But that, ah, it is, it's a shift in thinking. And, when you're thinking shifts I think you'll find that it will come together."

Initially I used the categories Acceptance, Sharing, Awareness and Wellbeing on a medicine wheel as the main headings for the results. This wheel later evolved into one which included the participants at the centre and used the term "support" instead of "well being" as one of the four main categories of discussion. Wellbeing became the outer circle which encompassed all four categories plus the participants, conceptually implying that fulfilment of needs in each of the four categories would contribute to the students' overall well being. Figure B represents this model:

Figure B: A Medicine Wheel of Research Circle Participants' Experiences



The following presentation of the four main themes includes selected excerpts from the research circles in which the participants speak about their experiences and needs. Their words reflect the connection between the personal and the political and, conversely, between the political and the personal. They are empowering and inspiring. It has truly been an honour for me to listen to their stories. They are shared with you in the hope that they will contribute to increased acceptance, sharing, awareness and support for Aboriginal students at universities and colleges and to better understanding and greater acceptance between all people.

Acceptance

Acceptance is the term preferred by the participants to reflect their experiences of racism, discrimination and stereotyping as Native people. While these are often thought of as negative events, the participants in the data analysis circle chose to frame it in a positive way - questioning the level of acceptance that exists for them in the college and university and pointing out the dual nature of any experience. Acceptance becomes a challenge or a goal for us to work toward rather than the barrier or wall that racism is.

Acceptance is something that many of the participants have struggled with all their lives - both as individuals and collectively as Aboriginal people. Their hope is that by increasing understanding amongst non-Native people, and perhaps amongst some Native people themselves, about their history and experiences with racism and discrimination, and by developing a more balanced appreciation of the contributions of Aboriginal cultures and traditions to the world, increased harmony will result between people of all backgrounds. Lack of acceptance has been what many of the participants have experienced, and this is echoed not only in blatant acts of discrimination but also in more subtle ways such as in course content or organizational assumptions and practices. The following comments reflect this lack of acceptance:

"...they find it hard to believe"

"I think when you share some of the things from your cultural background with non-Native people they find it hard to believe. Like I know when the graphics class decided to have a party they said are you going to come and I said no and they said why? and I said because I don't drink, that sort of throws them

off..."

"Another thing is when you share some of the spiritual things they sort of look at you weird because they don't have that understanding of the sacred ceremonies ... they have that look on their face they find it hard to believe. When I made my presentation in class on sweat lodges ... it's too big for just one person ... they couldn't accept that there's something there that's beyond them, it has to be proven by some scientific theory. I guess it's the way they've been brought up - their own religious beliefs. I think we're all praying to the same creator. It all goes down the same. I guess it's hard for them to believe but I've learned to respect the other person's beliefs, they should be respecting yours in terms of what you are sharing with them. Try to understand ... that all the teachings are the same."

"...that stereotype is still there..."

"Yeah, along the same line there, how well of a reception would we get though because a lot people...like I just did a race relations questionnaire that was going around, and then everything on the Natives, all the Native questions eh you know "are they all drunks" or dah, dah, dah, dah...it's just a questionnaire that um F1, we're taking Multi-Culturalism eh, ethnic sensitivity for social workers, and ah one thing I found out - 90 percent of the people I interviewed, there is one question goes "do you think they all thrive on getting...living off of the government...off of the government money and do you think that ah that that's all they want" you know, like just to grow up to live off government funds, and 90 percent of those people said "yes". "That's all the Indians do; they just ah they get their welfare cheques and they go drinking eh", and that stereotype is still there, and I did over 50 interviews and you know, just in a short period of time the reflection that came back on me...he says you know like how well is you know if that's that high percentage with just that low a number of people, how many people in the school are going to be thinking about that? So we're going to have to...I don't know maybe just be careful of how much we do, I don't know, kind of, show them."

"I wanted to wear my Native dance dress to graduate..."

"I was a bit disappointed with that. I wanted to wear my Native dance dress to graduate...and I was told if I didn't want to pick up the regalia, I could not graduate. So I was...yes, I was disappointed. So when I...when I graduate from law school I'm making it a point, I will fight it because I want to have the honour

of wearing my dance outfit when I receive my diploma.”

“Somebody...that pulls a knife on you for no reason.”

“Yeah, like I told him... I'd be walkin town, in C12, and all of a sudden from across the street they'd go....(makes “whooping”), you know, so what does that make you feel, you know. I said, or somebody...that pulls a knife on you for no reason. You know, I've had that happen to me. Just minding my own business, just because of who I was, the colour I was, said, have you ever, some..., things like that ever happen to you? He said, no. Then I don't think you have no right to tell me, tell us, like, like you have to go through it to know, I said I don't know how to explain it, but you have to be in that group, minority group to understand what it is, you know. You know, I've had people just come and yell at me. Last year, at the mall there, I was walking by, a guy was drunk, in the mall I was walking by, Christmas shopping. He goes, oh, “Indian,” he goes to me. I go, oh, “Whiteman.” He starts to laugh. (Group Laugh) That was real funny, I laughed at him. I wasn't upset by that, I was just, I, I knew he was drunk but he started laughing. ...”

“But things like that, ah, you get used to it. ...”

“Like you, you, you learn to live with them. And I just don't bother with it, you know, I, I just accept them. The more you argue with it... ...”

“...it just creates more problems. ...”

A heightened awareness of organizational culture and how that relates to Aboriginal cultures is a key component in the movement toward acceptance. In Aboriginal cultures, acceptance is linked with spirituality, and we might ask if the lack of acceptance experienced by the participants is related to an absence of spirituality in universities and colleges. Self-acceptance is also something that some participants discussed. This also seems to be related to the lack of acceptance that the dominant society has granted to First Nations people.

Sharing

Sharing is the term suggested by the participants to reflect their experiences of pain, struggle and self-doubt. This term is also a positive one and suggests that expressing heartfelt feelings with one another in a circle helps to lighten the burden and provide support to each person. In Euro-Canadian culture, sharing often has material

implications; the use of this term to reflect an emotional process is indicative of the collective traditions which encompass all aspects of life in Native communities.

The sharing of feelings constituted an important part of the research process. It is evident that many of the participants have had to deal with a great deal of pain in their lives, and this pain is an important part of who they are:

"...your self esteem was never built up."

"Because of the white society though, and, and when you were being taught by nuns and priests, and then a certain system. It's, you know, like, you, you never had the confidence, your confidence, your self esteem was never built up. Oh she's just an Indian. You know. And, and you were so segregated, like my left hand was tied down in a classroom by a nun because I was left handed, and she forced me to write with my right hand. You know, like, and, and she just laughed every time she did it, you know, and it was very degrading, you know, to your, to your person. You know, and, and, like I mean, so, why bother staying into something that's like that, like you know. You know, like, like, I used to go home and tell my mother, and my mother would never believe me until one day I was able to, underneath the seat, I was able to get the rope, it was worn enough that I could break it off, and I stood up and I pulled the nuns veil off, and I kicked her in her shins and I ran out with the veil in my hand. (Laugh) And I went home and I said, see Mommie I told you, you know, and, and that was the, the last time that my hand was ever tied. But I went through Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, with that, being forced to write with my right hand, when I'm left handed."

In particular, the negative effects of residential schools were identified as a legacy brought by many Aboriginal students to College and University.

"...many of these students are from residential schools where they were told to keep quiet."

"I think one of the things some of the instructors should be aware of is that many of these students go back to residential schools- many of these students that they have at Canadore or...many of these students are from residential schools where they were told to keep quiet...You are probably aware that a Native person has a hard time going to the front of the class to make a presentation. I still have a

hard time.”

“...I think part of my problem is I've been degraded so much in residential school, punished for nothing.”

“But there was nobody, like, there was nobody, there was no Friendship Centre. There was nobody there to help me get by. Like I grew up in a residential school, and I think part of my problem is I've been degraded so much in residential school, punished for nothing. I used to be a real active person, make people laugh, I used to get on the table and sing. And the Supervisor would laugh at me, in front of the people. But what happens behind closed doors, she punishes me, she slaps me for making a fool out of myself. You know, and she tells me I shouldn't do that, and, that took away my self-esteem, you know, my, now I can't even talk to people, you know, cause I'm afraid that what I say might be wrong. So I keep everything to myself, you know, that's, I got that from, I never realized that until I started taking those, ah, behaviour courses, you know, how human behaviour, and social welfare, sociology. All those things started to come together, and I see, I picture myself where I stand, how my personality developed, you know, maybe I'm not getting anywhere in University but I picked up a lot of things there that made me understand me. And why I am the way I am. That itself is a big accomplishment for me because I started to realize, and I also understand the problems that, where all these problems are coming from, you know, on the reserve.”

Other social problems related to the colonization experience, such as alcoholism, low self-esteem and cultural disruption, indicate the importance to Aboriginal students of having opportunities to share their experiences with each other. This sharing was seen as an empowering tool particularly because some of the participants identified coming to university and/or college as part of their healing journey.

Awareness

Awareness is the term used to reflect the level of understanding of Native cultures and issues that exists amongst both Native and non-Native people in the college and university community. Again, the term is a positive one while the actual experiences of the participants often suggested a lack of awareness or inaccurate assumptions and beliefs. Increasing the understanding of

cultural differences and political aspirations is a goal for both Native and non-Native people.

Increasing awareness about Native cultures and concerns on the part of non-Native students, staff and faculty members was a high priority for the research participants:

"..when we speak of an awareness, I think it's...important that...they know the differences..."

"I think, ah, when we speak of an awareness, I think it's, it's important that, ah, they know the differences, attitudes, and, and one in particular, um, I've, I've come across this materialism, like we don't come from the same, you know, like we ... material things aren't important and there is I found coming into, ah, the school system, that was a number one thing that you're exposed to right ... you've got to do this because you can get all this. I meant, I'd want to do this because I want to be able to share it with my children, and, ah, I married into a French culture so I have to balance that at home and I, (excuse me), I see the difference within the home, so I, I know its' importance to understand these differences, and if the, the professors and, are aware of these differences it would make it alot easier once the student gets into the system, and, and we have to look at the barriers that are there created by these differences, you know, and from those barriers you are, you're, um okay, you're, these barriers are associated with social problems that alot of Native people have been through and, and coming in is, is for alot of Native students it's a first step and it's a big step and with their self esteem, and self worth has to be low too. Because when I was, first entered into college, I, ah, was doing some tutoring and I worked with ah, some of the Native students, and this is what I found, like, they're, they didn't feel confident enough to go on ... and there is always that constant reassuring, well we can do it, you know, we have to do it, and I think that's, that's, the support has to be there for the student ...to finish."

"Put on my moccasins and walk a mile..."

"So I think it's really important for Professors to...to change their attitudes, of Native students.

And, and not to have this, ah, Columbus discovered...you know, attitude. ...And, and, and learn to appreciate that the, the Native people and the way their life is now, then, you know, and what it will be, you know, to, to, ah, learn to appreciate it. And, um, to understand, like I don't know, um, Profess..Professors should, maybe they should be attending workshops, or conferences that have Native

component to it. As a beginning. ...Because they'll never understand, or learn to appreciate what we have, until they sit down and listen. Maybe they don't take the time to do that.”

Some participants expressed the view that the degree to which Aboriginal people wished to incorporate traditional ways into their lives varied with the individual. Spirituality was seen to be an important part of increasing awareness, and this is an aspect of learning not often incorporated into university or college teachings. One student said:

“I think, when you, I think when you talk about the knowledge internally, I think you're looking at the spiritual part of yourself. This is the part that believes that these things do exist. I think that the person that looks at everything exter...externally, it's just like looking at the spiritual perspective. It doesn't mean that you have to follow this religion or this religion. I think the spirituality of the person has to come from within. It shouldn't be, that spirituality shouldn't be judged because of the standards these institutions have already set in place. That person has to find it within themselves.”

Some of the participants felt that learning about Native traditions was just beginning in their own communities because many Aboriginal people are not interested in learning about Native traditions due to the influence of residential schools and some churches in their communities. Many of the participants saw the Native Students' Association as having an important role to play in this awareness creation work, but they also identified courses, workshops, attendance at cultural events and self-sensitization by non-Native people as being important. Many expressed how their own awareness and understanding of Aboriginal traditions had been enhanced through their participation in such events.

Support

Support is the term used to reflect the participants' experiences with helpful or harmful influences. Comments in this category range from physical things, such as funding (or lack of it), to

emotional support from friends and teachers, to intellectual support related to course work, to spiritual support in the form of ceremonies and talks with elders. Many of the recommendations in this study arise from discussions about support or lack of it.

Support is a critical aspect of the participants' experiences at university and college. One of the participants stressed the need for Native counsellors who were able to provide academic, social and emotional support. Other important sources of support were other students, family members, and community members. To have a supportive post-secondary education environment, everyone who is involved with Aboriginal students must recognize the importance of providing support to them:

"...there's not a lot of support out there for them..."

"And there's not a lot of support out there for them, I mean there's the counselling units in Nipissing, I don't know how many Nipissing students use Native Students services at Canadore, I mean it's open to them, but, you know, and that's one of their, their complaints is that they're not prepared to deal with the type of counselling they're being asked to do. They're supposed to be education counsellors, but, you know, they're being hit with all the other, the other stuff. Well, like suicide, and some ... relationship problems or financial problems, or self esteem, whatever it happens to be. And they recognize that they are not prepared, or qualified to deal with those things. Ah, so the, you know, our proposal for that counsellor, and I think having that counsellor in Student Services not tucked away somewhere out of view, I think they do have to be visible, you know, it's part of the message for self esteem, ah, you don't have to have an office in this building because it's in the back and it belongs to Native students. You know, they should be with the other counsellors, visible from the hallway, it's also a statement on the part of the university, well yeah we are providing services to Native students."

Other students commented on the need for an elder at the university:

"...I would like to see an elder on staff at the university, I would like to see a Native counsellor..."

"...I would like to see an elder on staff at the university, I would like to see a Native counsellor, not stuck back there in the portable which is what has been suggested by the university, but in the

front office in Student Services where the other counsellors are. Those sort of things would go a long ways towards helping the Native students...and they are increasing in number. I think those are the things that...the things that are going to make a difference are those things and dealing with those things. When I say there is progress being made, but it is very slow and the real things that count are not being done; I don't think they're being addressed, other than by some individuals but I think as a rule, but not the...the majority does not feel that way. By having an elder on staff, I mean that would be a definite sign from the university that yes they are seriously interested in dealing with Native issues, in dealing with Native students and in having Native students on campus.”

Material support in the form of adequate funds was also identified as a factor which contributed to the participants' ability to succeed in school:

“...we need money...”

“..I guess what I find kind of difficult is when we as students come to school and ah instead we're in classes there and ah all of a sudden we need money...kind of run short on groceries and stuff like that and...like you kind of go on a diet for a couple of days (laughs)...stuff like that. Sometimes funds don't come in when they're supposed to. That's where one of the things that I was having difficulty with. And ah...no money for transportation and I guess as a result of that ah...I got disqualified from classes...my funding...because I didn't attend classes. And then I reapplied again, and now they put me on a waiting list, so I don't know if I'm going to be back at school this year, or not. And if I do, I'll miss a couple of weeks, I'll be a couple of weeks behind. It's pretty hard to catch up. Another thing too is like if we do stay after school or ah to try and catch up sometimes the computer doesn't work properly (laugh), and ah...there's no instructors around or nobody around to help you...that's what I found. It seems like, I don't know if it's, when you really need the help, they're not there, that's what I was finding. It sure got frustrating. As a result of that, I kind of gave up too. There was times that I didn't feel like coming to class at all. ...”

A lack of adequate money was experienced as stressful and often determined whether or not a student could attend school. Many participants saw their communities as having an important role to play

in the provision of support to post-secondary students.

Significantly, participants in the research circles saw the circles as an important source of support expressed a desire for them to continue after the research circles ended:

"...I really enjoyed what I heard today."

"Listening to, ah, what was being said today, ah, I really enjoyed what I heard today. And, ah, it made me feel a lot better about myself. And that, especially the comments you's made about, ah, being, ah, encouraged. Ah, and that also made me feel a lot better about myself and made me feel proud of what I've done in the past. And it also made me think about maybe real planning for school again. And, ah, I'd a good, a really good session for me. I got a lot out of it today. And I do, ah, I also would like to see, these Circles continue, you know. Even, if it's not talking about research, to support each other. You know, because these problems are going to be still, still here in the future. You know. And us being in this Circle today we can help someone else, you know. We can be the leaders, you know. And, ah, maybe, just, we can end by maybe the eldest in the group will close with a prayer. I would nominate P2 to do it."

Support can also be given by altering current academic and organizational practices so that they respond to the cultural, social, political, and spiritual needs of First Nations students. If the educational environment is designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, the degree to which they will need support in the form of remedial counselling will be reduced. This requires a proactive stance on the part of the University and College. [Note: A Co-ordinator of Aboriginal programs and services was hired at Nipissing University in 1994.]

It is obvious that the four categories, Acceptance, Sharing, Awareness and Support, overlap and interrelate. Experiences of racism and discrimination have led to a great deal of pain and self-doubt amongst the Native students who participated in this research. This pain reveals a need for increased understanding of Native cultures and of the historical relationship between Native and non-Native people in this country and elsewhere. Part of this increased awareness is being generated by the need of the Native students to understand their own past and position in the world. With this awareness will come the support that the Native students seek for themselves and for future generations of students - support that will benefit Native and

non-Native people alike by increasing both harmony and the wisdom that comes from true learning. Attention to all four of these categories will contribute to the overall well-being of the participants and the general university and college community.

Discussion and Recommendations

The participants in this research were women and men, status and non-status, reserve residents and off-reserve residents and represented various First Nations in Ontario and Quebec; primarily Ojibwa, Cree, Algonkian, Mohawk and Metis. Their unifying characteristic was their self-identity as Aboriginal persons. While gender and class characteristics are also factors that shape people's experiences, it was apparent that the participants in this research identify themselves first as Native people. Both men and women were included in the research to maintain a balanced perspective. An interest in holding women's circles at the college and university in the future was expressed by a few women. Some participants expressed the wish to expand the circles to include non-Native people as well. Both of these variations could be considered for future circles, as well as continuing the co-ed sharing circles for support purposes.

The colonization experience has been a central theme in the participants' lives as Native people. This experience must be acknowledged in the programs and services offered by universities and colleges. It is also important that universities and colleges actively participate in the decolonization process on a proactive basis. This requires faculty and staff in those institutions to become knowledgeable about the history and nature of the relationship between Native and non-Native people in Canada and elsewhere and to develop an understanding of the structural changes required in the facilitation of the social, economic, political and spiritual rebirth of First Nations communities. Education is a key to this rebirth, and as educators, we need to develop a vision regarding our role in the process. This shift in thinking and structure is particularly critical in schools of social work, which prepare continuing generations of social workers to work toward social justice.

Many of the Aboriginal students state that they are just beginning to learn about Native traditions and culture. Surprisingly, some students' first exposure to traditional Aboriginal knowledge and culture has taken place while they were students at Canadore and/or

Nipissing, either in courses or through cultural events. This suggests that universities and colleges have a special responsibility in the development and support of Aboriginal programs. This also speaks to the importance of having faculty and staff at universities and colleges who are knowledgeable about traditional Native ways and affirms the importance of hiring Native faculty and staff.

Some speak their Native language, but many do not - of these, many would like to learn it. Many students expressed concerns about their use of the English language, especially as it applies to writing essays and exams. Some saw this as a sign of the need for English as a second language programs for Aboriginal students. Others saw peer group writing labs as something that would be helpful.

Many of the participants identified the learning of their Aboriginal languages as being the key to reclaiming and/or retaining their culture. Given the location of Nipissing and Canadore and the fact that the majority of Aboriginal students in these institutions are Ojibwa or Cree, it was recognized that these are the two Aboriginal languages that first need to be offered as credit courses. [Note: Omushkego Etuskanaysewin, a community based first year Native Studies course was developed in partnership between the Moose Cree First Nation and Nipissing University for offering in Moose Factory in September 1995. This course covers the language and culture of the James Bay Cree people.]

As many of the participants pointed out, learning in Aboriginal cultures is something that is not isolated to one part of life. From an Aboriginal perspective, true learning must acknowledge and incorporate all four aspects of a person's being - the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. This has implications for how courses are taught and, indeed, what is considered to be post-secondary education. It is clear that in developing an understanding of Aboriginal approaches to teaching and learning, we will have to consider new ways of organizing programs and services that incorporate this holistic approach. The medicine wheel offers a circular model which has promise both for the content and form of Aboriginal programming.

The academic interests of the research participants reflect the need for social, economic, political and spiritual development amongst First Nations communities. Most of the participants expressed an interest in taking Native specific courses; when they were not available, the participants preferred to direct their course assignments

into the area of Native cultures and concerns. There is a strong interest in learning about Native traditions, even amongst people who may not have been raised with them.

Most students expressed a desire for more Native specific courses and programs that would be open to both Native and non-Native students taught from a Native-perspective. Tied to this was a concern for a stronger Native presence in general, especially at the university. The experiences students did have with a Native faculty member were generally very positive because they felt that they learned a great deal about themselves, their history and their cultures. The quality of the relationships that participants had with faculty members influenced their perception on the value of the courses generally. Many expressed the view that a Native Studies program at the university would be a positive step. [Note: In 1998 Nipissing University began to offer a Native Studies concentration as part of its Bachelor of Arts program. Two full-time Aboriginal faculty members currently offer Native specific courses in various disciplines in both the Arts and Science and Education faculties at Nipissing University.]

Some people questioned whether Native people could achieve their educational goals within existing post-secondary institutions, but many were willing to work toward the changes they saw necessary. It seems that the answer to this is partly related to the degree of self-determination that exists within the institutions. Self-determination is a concept about which many participants felt they were just learning; yet, implicitly many of them felt that they had the right to expect programs and services that were culturally sensitive and appropriate. The question of control is intermingled with the issue of cultural relevance and representation. The fact that education is seen as a healing force, both individually and collectively, has ramifications for both the nature of the curriculum and the programs offered. Community based programming has the potential to reach people in their natural environment and may avoid some of the hurdles presented by institution based programming. Additionally, it is important that universities and colleges recognize that traditional Native approaches to teaching and learning vary from Euro-Canadian practices and that they respect and honour the contributions that can be made by traditional teachers, such as Elders.

In conclusion, the process of conducting participatory action research with Aboriginal students has meant finding new methods that are culturally sound. While qualitative and feminist research

methodology provided a theoretical basis for departing from traditional positivist methods, the teachings of the medicine wheel provided the circular model which helped to integrate the research results, the research process, and my own experience of the research. This research contributes new knowledge to the literature on participatory action research by actively incorporating traditional Aboriginal teachings into both form and product. Cultural traditions affect the design and outcome of such a research process. The use of research circles to gather data and the medicine wheel as an organizing model for the results has had a significant impact on all research participants, including myself. Because of the circular nature of this research it might be said that "it has no beginning and it has no end". The repercussions of this research project have already been felt and will continue to be felt by all who have been involved in it.

Notes

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APPENDIX

List of Abbreviations Used in Excerpts from the Transcriptions

P	Participant
C	Community
EI	Educational Institution
F	Faculty Member
CM	Community Member
L	Language
R	Researcher

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