

“How to approach collaborations?”

A Freirian journey honouring Cree relationships,  
skills and values

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## **Dedication**

I offer this dedication to Chief Rodney Mark. How can I express the gratitude that fills my heart when I think of the rewarding work we have shared together? Your unique perspective, your intelligence, and your humour are legendary. Many people, myself included, consider you to be a visionary in the true sense of the word. Your vision has guided you and the Cree Nation of Wemindji through your years of service as Youth Chief, Deputy Chief, and Chief. When I think of your future and all that you may accomplish I know I am privileged to count you as my friend and colleague. I have aspired to live up to your belief in me and will continue to do so. Your commitment to education and the future of Cree people, your allegiance with those willing to work hard alongside you, are a credit to the hopes and dreams you hold for the future of all Indigenous peoples of this land and their settler colleagues.

Chief Mark co-authored large sections of chapter 5 that have been previously presented and published. The "*How to approach collaborations*" guidelines and the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram greatly contributed to both my and the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group's research.

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Valerie Atsynia

Delores Blackned

Beatrice Cheezo

Marlene Georgekish

Minnie Matches

Annie Saganash

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## Abstract

This thesis presents research carried out in the Cree Nation of Wemindji (James Bay), Northern Quebec. Wemindji, not unlike other northern Indigenous communities, is living through a time of great social change. At stake are questions of Cree identity, customs, traditions, values and knowledge as the community attempts to shed the tethers of colonization and navigate new pathways for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two questions have guided and shaped this research: (i) how can collaborations between Indigenous and non-native research partners be improved?; and (ii) how does the changing social context in which the community finds itself affect the customary artistic practices of a group of women involved in the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group (WTSG) and how their work is valued? Participatory Action Research (PAR), derived from Freirian liberatory theory, was used to explore these questions because of its capacity to foster forms of collaboration that would allow the construction of reciprocal social relations that privilege Indigenous research methodologies, epistemologies, and agendas. In this respect PAR was informed by locally generated initiatives on research collaborations, particularly *The Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* project.

The thesis demonstrates how evidence of the group's artistic contributions and research processes are contributing to local and regional questions informing the practice of Cree artistic heritage. Using the examples of smoke-tanned moose hide and spruce bark basketry, the thesis asserts that the traditional practices involved in these processes are not only an expression of self-determination in the face of ongoing colonial pressures, but key to WTSG educational planning and

development as a local institution concerned with the preservation and advancement of living traditions serving Cree youth and future generations.

## Résumé

Cette thèse présente la recherche effectuée auprès de la nation Cree de Wemindji (Baie James), dans le Nord du Québec. Comme d'autres collectivités autochtones du Nord, Wemindji vit une époque de changements sociaux importants. Les enjeux sont les questions de l'identité Cree, ses coutumes, ses traditions, ses valeurs et ses connaissances alors que la communauté tente de se défaire de la colonisation et de découvrir de nouvelles voies pour le 21<sup>e</sup> siècle. Deux questions ont guidé et façonné cette recherche : (i) Comment améliorer la collaboration entre les partenaires de recherche autochtones et non autochtones? (ii) Comment l'évolution du contexte social dans lequel se trouve la communauté influence les pratiques artistiques coutumières d'un groupe de femmes impliquées dans le *Groupe Wemindji des Compétences Traditionnelles (Wemindji Traditional Skills Group ou WTSG)* et la façon dont leur travail est valorisé? La méthode de *Recherche-Action Participative (RAP)*, dérivée de la théorie libératoire de Freire, a été utilisée pour explorer ces questions, en raison de sa capacité à favoriser des formes de collaboration qui permettent la construction de relations sociales réciproques et qui privilégient les méthodologies de recherche, épistémologies et agendas autochtones. À cet égard, la RAP s'est nourrie d'initiatives générées localement sur les collaborations de recherche, en particulier le projet sur les *valeurs fondamentales Wemindji Iiyiyiuch (Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values)*.

En travaillant avec des partenaires du *WTSG*, cette thèse démontre comment les réalisations des contributions artistiques du groupe et les processus de recherche jouent un rôle dans les questions locales et régionales influençant les



pratiques du patrimoine artistique Cree. En utilisant les exemples de la peau d'original fumée et tannée ainsi que de la vannerie d'écorce d'épinette, la thèse affirme que les pratiques traditionnelles employées dans le processus ne sont pas seulement l'expression de l'autodétermination face aux pressions coloniales en cours, mais aussi un facteur déterminant de la planification de l'éducation et du développement par le *WTSG*, en tant qu'institution locale soucieuse de préserver et de faire avancer les traditions vivantes au service des jeunes Cree et des générations futures.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of Purpose**

This thesis and the fieldwork that supports it have emerged from a grounding in both practical and theoretical experiences. The core of the knowledge informing those experiences grew from local and land-based Cree heritage. It is a celebration of my collaboration with the Cree Nation of Wemindji and a group of Cree traditional artists.<sup>1</sup>

### **Organization of Chapters and Thesis**

One of the scholarly contributions I hope to make through this thesis is to further dialogue in order to increase understanding and improve collaborations between Indigenous people and their non-native research partners. Chapter One situates this work. Chapter Two lays out the methodological foundations of the thesis. It also provides an embedded review of how participatory action research, which evolved from concepts of Freirian liberatory theory drawn from southern perspectives. It has grown from its development with adult education and matured to a position where it could really open up spaces to accommodate collaboration with Indigenous peoples, research, methodologies, and knowledge. This thesis finds its place contributing to a dialogue at the crossroads where PAR implements more strident criteria articulated by participatory evaluation to meet Indigenous research ethics and protocols, which Indigenous scholars are demanding.

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<sup>1</sup> A council resolution was obtained at the onset of this research; a copy of it can be found in Appendix 2.

Chapter Three continues the dialogue begun in Chapter Two, extending my discussion of methodologies to articulate a growing understanding of Indigenous research methodologies, cultural paradigms, and epistemologies. If we can learn to better accommodate Indigenous research partners and to better understand Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies, perhaps we can redress, in part, the “jagged world views” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84) experienced by Indigenous people living bicultural lives, and make a real contribution to Indigenous self-determination.

Chapter Four raises issues surrounding the reconciliation process stemming from Indian residential schools. It features an account of listening experienced by myself and the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group (WTSG), which predates the Harper Apology. I extended an informal apology, expressing my sorrow, and have joined others to issue a call for settler Canadians to make gestures of reconciliation. I am suggesting that re-educating oneself and drawing on narrative threads to commit relevant and meaningful decolonizing acts can contribute to shifting the Canadian consciousness, to effecting real change in our day-to-day relations with the Indigenous peoples of this land. Indigenous peoples are providing many opportunities and support material for this to take place. (See pedagogical tools available on the Legacy of Hope Website: <http://www.legacyofhope.ca>).

Chapter Five discusses how Wemindji is taking control of its collaborative relationships, how the working relationship Chief Mark and I are engaged in began as an ongoing discussion about how to do things differently, or how to

improve collaborations. Communities surrounded by the dominant Canadian culture must lead the way to new respectful relationships. The *How to Approach Collaborations* guidelines, offered by Chief Mark, feature twelve discussion points to this effect.

My journey into understanding Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews, combined with Chief Mark's efforts to develop a vision statement for the Cree Nation of Wemindji (CNW), resulted in the creation of the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram. This diagram is an example of a local Indigenous paradigm, the development of which provided a tremendous learning experience. I trace my growing understanding, including personal decolonizing moments, of Cree worldviews in this moment in time and place through the various phases of the evolution of the diagram.

Chapter Six presents The Path of a Moose Hide, a research project the WTSG and I conducted, which allowed us to study the path of a moose from the moment it was hunted, to how the skins are traditionally tanned, the production of traditional moose hide products, as well as their sale. The research process proved to be an inclusive one, raising dimensions of human, societal, environmental, and spiritual welfare; it is both an indication of the group's values and a reflection of *Wemindji's Iiyiyiuch Core Values* – respect and relationship.

Chapter Seven recounts how, when working closely with Wemindji's Elders, the group recovered the skills required to begin experimenting with making spruce bark baskets. Through the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the group spoke with Elders in Eastmain and Chisasibi, who, by sharing

their skills, confirmed and built on knowledge offered in Wemindji. The group also studied baskets at the Museum of Civilization and took a birch bark basket-making course with Atikamekw artist Édmond Dubé. This project positively impacted how the community understands the WTSG's role in the community, which evolved from being seen as 'sewing ladies' to including research processes that reclaim knowledge interrupted by residential schooling. It illustrates that Indigenous and non-native collaboration can assume practical dimensions for Cree artists when it engages symbolic and practical socio-economic forms that contribute to the maintenance of Cree values in changing contexts; it supports reconciliation with the dominant culture and assists in processes of resistance and self-determination.

Chapter Eight offers my conclusions. I review the research in relation to the two guiding questions articulated in the beginning of this chapter. I discuss research limitations and the collaborative issues encountered. Examples of how the WTSG artistic practice maintains Cree values through transitions into a contemporary workplace conclude the dissertation.

### **Situating Myself**

I was born in Montreal, to immigrant parents of Austrian and British heritage. I am a teacher and an artist who creates mixed-media paintings. Prior to beginning this research endeavour, I taught Indigenous women (for the most part Cree and Inuit) early childhood education in the James Bay and Hudson Bay regions. As I delivered formal training programs, I helped communities organize the construction and opening of new childcare centres. Because I lived in the Cree

Nation of Wemindji, I was drawn to volunteer for the Wemindi Traditional Skills Group (WTSG), formally known as the Investing in Traditional Skills group. This was a natural extension of my own education and formal background in fine arts. Interest in the meaning of artistic production and how little is known about contemporary forms of traditional Indigenous art, beyond popular myths, combined with my experience in community development, became the focus of my doctoral research.

In this project, to honour Cree heritage and traditions, I chose to collaborate on work that grew from local perspectives and ways of doing things in a manner that the childcare initiatives did not. Unbeknownst to me, I had begun to seek opportunities to deepen my decolonizing aspirations and redress the failures and frustrations that we had negotiated in my previous work with the community.

### **Space-Taking and Sharing Space**

Writing a dissertation can be a highly active, personal space-taking project. One must actively engage in multiple forms of space-taking throughout the process to legitimize the contribution of one's work. Trying to write a dissertation that creates space for Indigenous voices and that prioritizes this voice and place is challenging. Conundrums emerge. Although we shared goals, the WTSG defined our projects. The group owns the results and the local knowledge that emerges from it. I am grateful for the grace of my research colleagues who were at times puzzled when I would step back, hesitating to take my place, or when I agonised over presentations, papers, and owning my own voice therein, for real fear of assuming theirs or negating it. In practical and local matters I had

plenty of sympathetic support; I continuously sought permission and guidance over my place and role in our collaborations and the manner by which all information was shared and disseminated. In academic spheres, I consciously spoke to Indigenous artists, academics, scholars, and other graduate students from across this country to listen, receive advice, and to validate my understandings and the directions I introduced. I have deliberately included Indigenous academics, especially from the North American context, in order that I may offer an example of how one non-native graduate student can learn and grow from their scholarship.

While presenting our work with Chief Mark at an Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA) conference in Melbourne, Australia (Stocek & Mark, 2010), special efforts were made by conference organizers to gather Indigenous scholars together. I realised, through sharing this academic space, what a wealth of wisdom, intelligence, clarity, creativity, and humour we miss in our institutions that have not, as yet, been able to include many representatives from Indigenous communities as members.

### **Clarity and the Use of Terms**

Indigenous people have been referred to using many terms, including Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Native, and Indian, to name but a few. There is a great deal of diversity in the application of these terms. Within this thesis I have favoured the use of *Indigenous* in its broadest sense as it refers to First Peoples/place internationally. In Canada, *Aboriginal* refers to both Inuit and Native populations, but as Alfred notes (2005), the use of the term Aboriginal has

shifted, now referring to a “legal and social construction of the state. . . it is disciplined by racialized violence and economic oppression to serve an agenda of silent surrender” (p. 23). Wilson (2003) clarifies the need to capitalize the term Indigenous:

Capitalizing Indigenous serves to distinguish this word from its usage by dominant-system people to describe something that is home-grown. For example, settler Australians may claim to have an indigenous psychology that is unique to Australia; however, this usage does not include or refer to the original peoples of the continent. (p. 175)

I have maintained the term Indigenous when citing many authors’ opinions. Many authors use the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations interchangeably.

Non-native people, such as myself, are often referred to in the scholarship as *settler Canadians*. I draw on Regan’s (2010) definition, which includes Canada’s multicultural population who continue to define and contribute to the dominant Canadian context. Settlers include those who arrived generations ago and those who have only just immigrated. Within this population many individual groups have been subjected to being othered, but it is their arrival and aspiration to become a part of Canadian culture that includes them within the broadest application of the term.

My colleagues were far more knowledgeable than I, and it is with humility that I have been accorded the space of a peer, one amongst the group. When referring to my research cohorts, made up of Cree women artists and Cree



professional men and women, I often use the terms colleagues, research partners, and collaborators. I have done this to deliberately remind myself and my readers that our partnership was not equal; however, I did my best to balance what I had to offer our work with the wealth of information and wisdom Cree people and Indigenous academics contributed.

### **Conceptualizing Traditional Artists in Contemporary Times**

Being labelled as an artist today means diverse things. If you are an Indigenous artist, the territory is fraught with misconceptions and popular stereotyping myths. Jonaitis (2008) asks “do the categories ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ really mean anything when applied to Native American art being produced today?” (p. 57). Practicing traditional Indigenous artists are actively creating new work today. I use the term traditional art to refer to artists whose work draws heavily on artistic forms that have grown from collective knowledge and skills from one’s heritage. These artists do draw on and are inspired by many peoples’ heritages. In this thesis the term traditional artist most often refers to artists of Cree heritage accessing their own local knowledge. The term traditional art honours the collective, land-based sources of knowledge that contribute to the actual materials, techniques, values, and the variety of forms artistic expression assumes.

Traditional artists practicing today are also contemporary. Contemporary artists are those artists, Indigenous or otherwise, who may work from their heritage as well, but who notably practice their art drawing on forms of art that have evolved from Western, European, or other broader bases in art history. Cree

traditions are not static but are products of agency, which are reformed by each new generation. The main point here is not to limit our understanding and appreciation of an artist's work by a label but to actively pursue an accurate understanding of many knowledges in our pedagogical and research practices. Labels provide context, but contexts mix, and crossing borders is a deliberate choice artists make. Many Indigenous artists are bicultural or pluri-cultural in their artistic practice, just as they have had to be if they want to participate within the broader Canadian context.

In the early 1990s Canadians were presented with an unprecedented number of Contemporary Indigenous exhibitions. The so-called 350<sup>th</sup> /500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Montreal/landing of Columbus raised questions of whose territory this was and how long people have been living here.

Contemporary artists from the Americas came together to exhibit their work throughout Montreal in a number of exhibitions, including New Territories 350/500 Years After (Tétrault, 1992). Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada (Nemiroff, Houle, & Townsend-Gault, 1992), and Indigena, at the Canadian Museum of Civilisation (McMaster & Martin, 1992), brought examples and issues of contemporary Indigenous art to the forefront of the Canadian art world.

Dana Alan Williams, assistant director and associate curator on the New Territories exhibits (Tétrault, 1992), cautioned viewers concerning the variety of perspectives in Indigenous art. Not all artists of Native ancestry accept or acknowledge the notion of contemporary Indian art or Indian art. Instead some

choose to be seen as artists in the very contemporary sense. Such labels are seen as “ghettoizing” artists’ ideals and creations, as well as their individuality (p. 21).

The terms craft and craftsmanship, as applied to Indigenous art, also require mention for the sake of clarity within this dissertation. The term craft has emerged from different historic locations, Western, European, and Asian. It is associated with several movements that sought to focus attention on the heritage, skills, and artistry across different mediums which were being undervalued. In European and then Western traditions the hierarchal distinction between art and craft was a conceptual one that occurred late in the Renaissance. Colonization carried this distinction, and its inherent biases, throughout the world. Against this backdrop, Irwin and Farrell (1996) have noted that:

First Nations peoples and Aboriginal communities did not practice art per se. Rather, life was viewed as an integrated activity and much of that activity accessed skill, beauty, form and function. It was not important to separate out and describe or interpret these characteristics from daily life activities. . . . Theoretically this does not necessarily mean that these cultures did not practice art, but rather that their conception of the world and of visual forms of expression was fundamentally different from others. (p. 56)

In this thesis I use the term traditional art to refer to what is more often categorized as craft, in order to side-step the common hierarchical notion that the ‘craftwork’ produced by contemporary and/or traditional artists is somehow of

lesser value. Traditional art being produced today is often contemporary; contemporary Indigenous artists do benefit from traditional art and its heritage.

### **Dual Research Questions**

As the research partnership between the Cree Nation of Wemindji and myself evolved, the dual nature of this dissertation grew increasingly clear. Of equal importance was the selection and development of a research methodology and form of collaboration that would allow Indigenous and non-native partners to collaborate in a mutually meaningful manner that fundamentally privileged Indigenous agendas, objectives, forms of research, means of communication, and values.

This thesis has two main guiding research questions:

- (i) How can collaborations between Indigenous and non-native research partners be improved? and,
- (ii) How does the changing social context in which the community finds itself affect the customary artistic practices of a group of women employed by the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group (WTSG), and how is their work valued?

Wemindji, not unlike other northern Indigenous communities, is living through a time of great social change. Questions of identity, Cree articulation and clarification thereof have profound implications for the community's ability to prosper in a healthy manner. Evidence of the group's artistic contributions is essential to the Cree community not only for self-esteem and as a record of their heritage; it is also key to the WTSG educational planning and development as a

local institution concerned with the preservation and advancement of living traditions that serve Cree youth and future generations.

### **Methods and Logic of Justification**

As noted above, this thesis is an attempt to further the discussion concerning improving research collaborations between Indigenous and non-native partners. Many methods were used within the guiding theories of participatory action research from a Freirian, southern perspective. How this thesis engaged Indigenous methodology and methods cannot be separated from a discussion of Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies. This work, specifically the project of illustrating a local Indigenous paradigm featured in chapter 5, explores this discussion in-depth.

I have also located this work and Indigenous knowledges, as do Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000), within an anti-colonial framework, as opposed to a postcolonial framework. Our research and its meanings, the cultural context from which it was carried out, and the identities of my colleagues all feature accounts which grew from the daily lives of local people who rise each day to meet the challenges of colonization. Anticolonial theorizing rises out of “alternative, oppositional paradigms, which are in turn based on indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference. All knowledges and discourses are heavily coloured by situations and relations of power, but every knowledge form is constructed differently” (Sefa Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000, p. 7).

Research methods employed by my Cree colleagues in Wemindji were for the most part locally determined. At times they joined me to carry out work that drew from a wide range of academic qualitative choices. When engaged in research as artistic practice, we employed hands-on explorations of materials, often without the benefit of careful observations, because we were only able to collect verbal descriptions of the art processes we were exploring. This required the group to experiment beyond their comfort zones. I conducted initial interviews with each participant who brought with them an art object they had made with which to introduce themselves. My colleagues also conducted interviews with Elders and experts from the Cree Nations of Wemindji, Chisasibi, and Eastmain. We carried out a local CNW survey to determine community expectations of the WTSG, in collaboration with the economic development branch of the CNW administration. We travelled to Montreal and Ottawa to the McCord Museum of History and the Museum of Civilisation to conduct archival research into moose hide work, embroidery, beading, and paint designs, as well as basketry. The WTSG took courses from other Indigenous artists in basketry and moose hair tufting. We carried out consultations, listened to Elders, and often carried out their instructions, trying out skills Elders reported hearing about but had not themselves practiced due to interruptions caused by residential schooling. Elders were repeatedly consulted through every phase of Cree skill research; we invited them back to observe and comment on our work.

It is worth noting that when we first began our collaboration we had agreed that our work remain anonymous. Due to the amount of positive feedback

from the media, and the public face the WTSG has assumed, members requested a change. My ethics approval was revised to celebrate the contributions of Elders and the participants as members of the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group. This respects both participant contributions and the location from which their knowledge originates and emerges.

### **Dissemination of Collective Work**

Work was disseminated through the local radio, in regional Cree magazines, the Cree Nation of Wemindji annual report, community anniversary publications, and even featured on a CBC North Cree culture/language documentary television program called Maamuitaau. The WTSG attends and has helped host a Cree Native Arts and Crafts annual conference. The most popular method, after reclaiming the making of Cree art, is taking pictures. This dissertation has been recorded as a visual photographic journal, as well as through personal entries I wrote to record key moments, discussions, and decisions. In the beginning several WTSG members reviewed the digital photos and deleted the images they did not like. Ninety percent of my research data was shared and distributed immediately with my colleagues; the remaining 10% mapped personal written responses that are best kept private.

### **The Cree Nation of Wemindji**

The Cree Nation of Wemindji is located in northern Quebec, Canada. It is one of nine officially recognized Cree communities and is situated along the east coast of James Bay at the mouth of the Maquatua River. It has a population of approximately 1,300 people, many of whom continue to practice Cree traditional

activities such as hunting and fishing on family trap lines and territories, which reflect their deep attachment to the land, ways of life, and worldviews that have supported Cree ancestors for generations.

Wemindji comes from the word *wiimin uchii*, meaning red ochre mountain, where Cree people now live together year-round. Prior to settling in Wemindji, during the summer people gathered at Old Factory Island. Old Factory was established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1685 as a small fur trading post. The historic summer event is commemorated with an annual summer cultural gathering.

Some Cree people had lived in Wemindji territory prior to their move from Old Factory. Permanent housing began to be established in 1958. The James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement conferred this area with class 1 native territory status in 1975. This process added greatly to the expansion of local housing. Since this period, there has been a shift from family members spending nine or ten months on family hunting territories, to spending the bulk of the year in Wemindji itself, a process that has forever changed their hunting/gathering lifestyle. Wemindji is a growing community with a well-developed infrastructure and host of services.<sup>2</sup> The Cree people who live here, who also call themselves *Iiyiyiuch* in the Cree language, which means the people, are committed to ensuring that Cree traditions form part of their living heritage. The banner on the community website declares, "Cree Nation of Wemindji: A community where tradition lives on".

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<sup>2</sup> See the Cree Nation of Wemindji website for full details:

<http://www.wemindji.ca>



Wemindji is taking control of its collaborative relationships. Northern aboriginal communities working within marginalizing systems require new respectful relationships. Pressures from the encroaching mainstream society have pushed the community to adopt measures to balance long-term economic development, cultural resource enhancement, protection of lands, and diverse forms of education, as well as the traditional skills of local artists. In pursuing this agenda, Wemindji is negotiating new forms of alliances by drawing on the Cree values of respect and relationship. According to Chief Mark

we want to be in a position to control these projects as much as possible through collaborative processes with outside expertise. Outside expertise is valued when it means sharing specialized knowledge that contributes to . . . our self-determination and to our aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of these collaborations is featured in chapter 5.

### **The Wemindji Traditional Skills Group**

In 2007, the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group (WTSG) a non-profit association, was created. The group was formerly known as the Investing in Traditional Skills Group, which began in 2001. This change established the official independence of the group, which was formally overseen by the CNW administration. I have been collaborating on a participatory action research project since soon after the group was formed. The members have changed; however, six women have formed the core of the group. These six women are recognized, as are many of the Cree women living in the community, for their talent in working

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<sup>3</sup> Field notes, verified by Chief Mark July, 2007

with traditionally smoke tanned moose hide. The group typically makes moccasins, mukluks, gloves, and mittens embellished with embroidery or beadwork. Wemindji's work is particularly valued for the fine skill of embroidery on hide.

Wemindji's artists prioritize making items for family and friends to use in bush and community life. This practice is consistent with the mixed economy that still plays a role in family life. Production of traditional arts has grown from needs originating within the community rather than catering to tourism. The objectives of the WTSG include producing the highest quality craftsmanship that will serve as a model and mentor for the next generation, reflecting the accumulation of Cree skill and understanding. Popular designs are seen often in the selection of embroidery or beadwork themes, but the quality of the original Cree form is never sacrificed. The group's orientation comes from the Cree peoples' strong connection to the land, their heritage, and respect for their Elders' teaching and mentoring, as well as their relationship with all living things. The inherent respect for materials drawn from natural local resources contributes greatly to the significance and meaning of their work.

The artists' project began as a band proposal in 2001 to create employment based on skills that already existed in the community. They have sold their products locally and in Montreal and Ottawa. The community is proud of how their work has been received. Understanding and appreciation of Cree culture is increasingly important to the community and to its youth, who will determine how their heritage will be carried on. Developing the group's mandate

has been one of the main objectives of our PAR project. The CNW Council wisely refrained from defining the group's mandate, opting instead to observe the group and see how they developed from the strengths and interests of both the participants and the community. The biggest change to date was the recent acknowledgement that the group would be best served under the CNW administration's cultural department as opposed to the economic department, although a representative from the economic department sits on the Board of Directors.

Consciously working from local values required the group to reaffirm their artistic practice and become familiar with business and entrepreneurial perspectives that were often highlighted in contrast to their own standards and criteria for practicing their work. It was at these moments that key decisions were made in the service of Cree heritage and culture to ensure the group had not become a tool for competitive 'better' and 'faster' principles. In this respect Wuttunee (2004) reminds us "that most programs for aboriginal peoples encourage them to enter the very market-based, capitalist system that has marginalized many of them" (p. 24; drawing on Salway Black, 1994).

Understanding what motivates consumer interest and what informs the group's own choice of what it should make has highlighted division and conflicting cross currents in the cultural politics of the group. One recent example of contention involves how the group has wavered on how to label their items for sale outside of the community. In the beginning of the group's mandate, the community's name was the only information indicated on labels. As the group has

evolved, they have subsequently experimented with individual names and/or the group's name. Attaching an individual name as opposed to the group name was perceived as claiming undue recognition as the 'inventor' instead of participating in traditions carried on by a long line of Cree artists. These decisions were also largely dependent on issues such as whether the item sold was a high-end item or not. Experience has taught the group that attaching an artist's name and biography can substantially raise the price of items sold outside of the community. For example, individual biographies were included with the sales of baskets at the Canadian Guild of Crafts. Recently, as high end items are sold out in the CNW, the group has opted instead to use their group name, enclosing a general description of the item's significance or how it was made.

The WTSG researches local art practices, consults with Elders, and mentors youth. Maintaining their high standards of skills celebrates the learning process necessary in acquiring these standards, practicing both popular forms of Cree art and those traditional skills that are in danger of being lost. The WTSG produces traditional clothing, as well as contemporary forms of these items, for use within the home. Collectively, they believe the values that support traditional Cree practices are key to Cree culture and its continued relevance in contemporary life. The work carried out by the WTSG ensures that Cree cultural practices and values form part of daily life within the community. Working in the former wellness centre or a storefront location where many people are free to drop in (and do), they are highly visible and accessible to all.

The WTSG makes a special effort to participate in the community's cultural events. Continuity, ensuring that traditions, knowledge, skills, and values are passed from one generation to the next, is a key component of the WTSG mandate. The group is also establishing new ways to reach out, experimenting with new arenas for traditional research, education, and ways to be more inclusive, using values less quantifiable than revenue but important on their own terms. Group members recognize that the manner by which Cree cultural practices were traditionally taught has gone through many changes in recent generations. While learning through observation and practice on the land continues, for many, the continuity or time required to become sufficient practitioners of Cree skills in that context is no longer possible. The WTSG supports women who practice Cree art from their homes but acknowledges that school and village-based employment increasingly structure the community's time. Therefore, the group strives to provide alternatives within community life so the living practice of Cree artistic skills continues to provide important opportunities for observation and learning in the daily life of its youth.

Traditional forms of education, in the CNW as in other northern Indigenous communities, changed when local schooling became available. Unfortunately, the time for the pursuit of traditional knowledge and activities has greatly diminished. Families spend more time living in town and less time pursuing traditional activities while their children attend the community school (Douglas, 1989, 1998). Traditional sources and forms of education continue to be altered (Battiste, 2000). Within the home and community, some individual family

members may pursue traditional bush activities and practice traditional skills key to subsistence hunter/gatherer lifestyles; others may be engaged in forms of wage-work and/or professional pursuits. Specifically, in the case of the WTSG, the women themselves are now removed from the home environment during the workday and are far less likely to pursue traditional art skills within the home after a five-day workweek. As one participant in the WTSG told me, she no longer has the time to make things for her family, “No time to make presents. I just make things here. I don’t have the time at home to make anything.”<sup>4</sup>

The men who contribute objects for sale to the WTSG are often in the bush and are thus separated from the younger generation who are in school and are, apart from seasonal periods, far less able to demonstrate their skills within extended kin-based family contexts. School and work slow down, or are suspended, early in the month of May during the spring goose break, permitting entire families to spend time together in traditional pursuits.

The community supports and encourages some Cree culture activities that provide educational opportunities, which encourage observation of skilled family and community members, carrying out activities that in times gone by would have been observed and learned by living on the land. Examples of some of the ways the community bridges bush and settlement life include the annual summer gathering at Old Factory, canoe trips for families and youth, as well as trips to family bush camps taken during the goose break. The WTSG has tentatively begun to identify a broader role within the community. The group wishes to

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<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork observations: participant no. 3, summer 2003.

develop an educational mission that will eventually contribute to easing the tensions between the fragmented opportunities that exist today, encouraging participation in traditional cultural pursuits.

Historically, the range and quality of ‘educational opportunities’ has been extremely varied. Some members learned particular Cree skills through traditional observation in the bush, others were taught in residential schools. Residential schools taught the ‘home’ crafts of the colonizing population; the materials were of poor quality, manufactured and often so limited that miniatures became popular. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, some members took craft courses funded by Indian Affairs. These courses were better suited to production line skills and often emphasized business trends and ideas that did not originate from local values or material resources.

The artistic and educational mandate of the WTSG is still evolving. The group understands that they can work to fill the gaps in education created by residential schooling. They have also discovered that they do not share the same objectives or philosophy of the colonial organizations that direct educational opportunities. Along with other communities, Wemindji has begun to share its concern over these issues. The group is now active at the regional level and hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual general assembly of the newly founded Regional Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association or CNACA. Members have consulted in regional meetings and are hopeful that regional support may serve as one avenue for resisting the commercial and colonizing ways that are distorting contemporary Cree culture.

Consequently, Indigenous communities are struggling with how to create new institutions that do not rely on forms of social organization and practice that are imported from the south (i.e., that are colonial). For an in-depth look at how the childcare centre was developed see Stocck and Mark (2010). These same challenges helped the WTSG reconceptualize the relationship between learning and organizations and better understand the power and dynamics of commerce to organize institutions. They discovered how success, in limited business terms, can conceal colonial practices to be counterproductive and ultimately destructive to Cree ways of being and knowing - to Cree livelihood.

Through its projects, the WTSG demonstrates how Wemindji is developing new collaborative partnerships that support the community's interests. Wemindji wants to maintain control and leadership; one of the reasons is to maximize employment opportunities for its membership while maintaining Cree values. All of these projects empower community and the people involved. They also offer alternative approaches to ways of learning and understanding different worldviews and new ways of doing things for Indigenous and non-native alike. They maintain Cree identity, which means maintaining all respectful relationships reflected by the exchange of knowledge and teaching.



## **CHAPTER 2: Participatory Action Research and Evaluation, Liberatory Theory and Indigenous Research Methods**

### **Participatory Research Strategies and Indigenous Knowledges**

Participatory action research or *PAR* is the research methodology that shaped and informed this study, specifically southern PAR with its historic roots in liberatory theory as imagined and lived by activist educator, Paulo Freire. My research colleagues' Cree identity and their dedication to their Cree heritage centre our work in Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, and relations. This heritage serves both to inspire and frame my own academic interest in Indigenous worldviews and methodologies. It was through the generosity of my Cree partners that I was able to engage in their world, from our common ground, to the extent that I did. PAR strongly served as a means to bridge some of the complexities that emerged from the types of partnerships that we formed.

Although PAR research calls for critical awareness of the dynamics in co-researcher relationships, some provocative and challenging questions still arise concerning the subject of Indigenous and non-native academic partnerships. What happens when Indigenous colleagues invite non-natives from academic settings to collaborate with them in Indigenous territory? Indigenous academics working in partnership with their non-native colleagues are calling for the recognition of Indigenous research protocols and methodologies and increasingly expect their research partners to decolonize their methodologies. How do Indigenous and non-native researchers work together? Tuhiwai Smith (1999) addresses these questions

in her seminal text. I have provided my own experiences with the WTSG as one example.

In this chapter I have chosen to review the developments and cornerstones of PAR, returning specifically to Freirian liberatory practice as change-oriented research and pedagogy supporting collaborative efforts between non-native and Indigenous researchers. Specific examples, offered in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven elaborate how PAR, from a conscious liberatory perspective can center Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous research methodologies. These supported our research and the development of our partnerships.

Indigenous academics expect that partnerships such as the one between the Cree people I was conducting research with and myself should become increasingly inclusive as the collaborative processes of the study grow, evolve, and adjust to the dialogues between researchers. We were very conscious of this as we created collaborative research projects. Together, we collectively defined the questions under study, discussed appropriate research methodologies, contemplated what forms of knowledge are respected on Indigenous territory and within academic settings, and importantly, learned how to listen, respect, and reciprocate, as we gather information from rich and diverse sources and from diverse worldviews.

The best method to decolonize collaborative research projects with Indigenous partners is to actively support Indigenous research protocols, Indigenous self-determination, and the emergence of Indigenous research methodologies from Indigenous knowledge bases. Equally important was my

continuous effort to centre the decolonizing quest within my daily experiences. In this chapter, I elaborate on how PAR and participatory evaluation (PE), supported by liberatory theory, can foster Indigenous self-determination and help non-native academics decolonize their research practice and the epistemologies that support it.

I understand PE as a specialized component of PAR. I found while working on a PE research project in Wemindji that the objectives and methodology specific to PE from a southern PAR perspective evoked an authoritative and exacting language that re-focused the parameters of PAR. The term southern here is used to differentiate PAR from action research, which as Finger and Asún (2001) state “make no reference to the southern development environment” (p. 89). Here PAR emerges primarily from a rural context. In this context,

Northern-style development is being imposed in its technological, cultural and political dimensions. Through this fundamentally colonial process, peoples’ endogenous knowledge is being or has already been destroyed, and replaced by Northern expert knowledge and corresponding Northern technologies, world-views and power structures. (p. 91)

This heightened focus helped me shift the balance of power increasingly towards decolonizing Western constructs that continue to plague PAR. My own decision-making habits came under a new scrutinizing lens. This directive force was foundational in serving the momentum I experienced trying to decolonize my research practice. Drawing on these developments helped me further the

objectives of my research partners. It was the specific language embedded in this form of evaluation and its political agenda that provided me with refined perspectives to check my own epistemology and orientation to our work, which I believe served Indigenous purposes.

To support my views, I begin by discussing the development of participatory research, PAR, PE, and liberatory theory. In this chapter I discuss how PAR and PE, as an extension of liberatory theory, support the integral use of Indigenous protocols and serve the emergence of Indigenous research methodologies (IRM). I revisit specific Freirian concepts as they emerge from and are changed by Indigenous knowledges (IK) and Indigenous epistemologies. It is my submission that collaborative research projects can provide the space to decolonize non-native research partnerships that further the cause of Indigenous self-determination in academic contexts.

Before moving ahead with my discussion of qualitative research methodologies, it is important to acknowledge concerns raised by Kovach (2010) over the seemingly “good fit” (p. 30) of IRM into qualitative research. She cautions against oversimplifying the introduction of IK into academic discourse, even when ethically including a decolonizing perspective in the service of a critical paradigm. While PAR may be a viable starting point for researchers working in Indigenous community research due to its transformative aims, Kovach outlines two limitations which did manifest in how our collaborations played out. I have included a lengthy citation in order to adequately represent the

critique and the serious nature of the problems as Kovach (2010) presents them because they can be readily applied to this dissertation.

The first centres on form or. . . the language that holds meaning in epistemological discourse. Indigenous knowledges have a fluidity and motion that is manifested in the distinctive structure of tribal languages. They resist culturally imbued constructs of the English language, and from this perspective alone Western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far. This is a significant difficulty for all those, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who do not speak the tribal language yet are inquiring into the nature of tribal knowledges. The other matter relates to knowledge itself. Indigenous epistemologies are guided by tribal knowledges, and tribal knowledge is not Western knowledge. Knowledge is neither acultural nor apolitical. . . . At present, there is a desire to give voice to Indigenous epistemologies within qualitative research, yet those who attempt to fit tribal epistemology into Western cultural conceptual rubrics are destined to *feel the squirm*. From my perspective, Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research at best form an insider/outsider relationship. Although most qualitative researchers intuitively understand the dynamics of this relationship, it is here that we encounter the messiness of the work. The tension of the insider/outsider dynamic will persist until Indigenous research frameworks have methodological space within academic research dialogue, policy, and practice. (pp. 30-31; italics added)

Kovach (2010) cites Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson, who declares that as “Indigenous researchers we need to move beyond these. . .dominant western system research paradigms, beyond merely assuming an Indigenous perspective on these non-Indigenous paradigms” (p. 31). While these critiques are difficult for me to face, I have had to. More importantly my Cree colleagues, who understood long before I did what this would mean in their work, still invited me to work with them and to keep returning. Perhaps it is their leadership role as artist-researchers, and not academics, that make infringements less painful from within their community than if we were working from within an academic context, off Cree territory, or away from their home. I contributed strong pedagogical elements to our work, hence their open invitation, and they reassured me that I contributed a valued dimension to our success, as well as helped navigate our failures. We began from common ground; I believe that what they and our experiences taught us will help Indigenous researchers who wish to continue this research in the future, from within their territory, as well as serve those who are called to work towards opening up and creating new spaces for Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges in both traditional Western academic and Indigenous institutions. I do take pride in our work and comfort from the discovery that our contributions outweighed the difficulties. I hope that as we negotiated our collaborations, at best we mitigated the potential for colonial loss, and at worst, tolerated problems rising from colliding worldviews.

As I will show in this chapter, PAR is a methodology that is in alliance with the demands and dynamics of Indigenous peoples. It provides a place where Indigenous and non-native research partners can source entry points between epistemologies, where the tensions between perceived binaries can be pried open to disrupt and construct mutually beneficial forms of dialogue, research, theories, and action in order to foster the “distinctiveness of cultural epistemologies [to] transform homogeneity. . . . Indigenous methodologies disrupt methodological homogeneity in research” (Kovach, 2010, p. 12). Kovach goes on to acknowledge “the most effective allies are those who are able to respect Indigenous research frameworks on their own terms” (p. 13). Many academics interested in Indigenous methodologies are ready to move beyond the dualities found in Indigenous-settler relations, as is illustrated in the next chapter. Kovach believes that

Indigenous methodologies can be situated within the qualitative landscape because they encompass characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches (e.g., feminist methodologies, participatory action research) that in research design value both process and content. This matters because it provides common ground for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to understand each other. (2010, p. 25)

In order to commence a process of decolonizing one’s own position, an analysis of the politics of knowledge and a conscious understanding of one’s own personal choice of epistemology needs to be addressed. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) proposed a decolonizing lens that highlights the depths to which Indigenous

knowledges have been marginalized within Western research. Although not often applied, this proposal is hardly contestable.

Within the academic environment, part of the difficulty lies with a theoretical positioning that, in its very name, obscures historical analysis. For example, critical theorists argue that *postpositivism*, *postmodernism*, and *postcolonial* universalize marginalization and work to diffuse sites of contestation. Tuhiwai Smith critiques the ‘post’ in postcolonial and suggests that ‘naming the world as “post-colonial” is, from Indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business’. In focusing on the ‘post’ perspective, it frees one from historical analysis. Within a Canadian Aboriginal context, this is problematic because the non-Indigenous majority are adept at forgetting this country’s colonial history, thus maintaining its reproduction. . . Postcolonial? There is nothing *post* about it. It has simply shape-shifted to fit the contemporary context. (Kovach, 2010, pp. 75-76; italics in original).

Steinhauer (2002) writes that while some inroads have been made by Indigenous researchers in academic contexts, one can still commonly find Indigenous epistemological systems being accorded no relevance at all as valid sources of knowledge or equated with ‘cultural exoticism’ and thus shunted off to the side while the real work gets done. Kovach (2010) worries about this state of affairs, arguing “it can lead to a dismissal or disbelief by Western academia that Indigenous knowledges have relevancy within the construction of knowledge” (p. 79). She notes that there are some who challenge this construct; there is a “small



community of non-Indigenous scholar-researchers in the academy who wish to support Indigenous research frameworks. However, at present, there is a dearth in the literature on Indigenous inquiry, which slows decolonizing efforts” (p. 79).

Semali and Kincheloe (1999) argue that “Indigenous knowledge is a rich social resource for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change” (p. 15). Believing in the transformative power of Indigenous knowledges, Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai Smith (2008) call for a “re-visioning of critical pedagogy, a re-grounding of Paulo Freire’s (2002) pedagogy of the oppressed in local Indigenous contexts. . . . calling this merger of Indigenous and critical methodologies critical Indigenous pedagogy (*CIP*)” (p. 2; italics in original). Indigenous scholars affirm that a variety of qualitative methodologies may suit Indigenous research; however, many Indigenous scholars have specifically been calling for increased incorporation of the ideas and practices of Freire into Indigenous research (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Clements, 2004; Gilchrist, 1997; Sinclair, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

Although I understand the call for criticality put forward by Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai Smith (2008), I resist and am uncomfortable with claiming the name (CIP) for the combination and process. From my perspective, it is too soon. The naming will emerge, as Indigenous epistemologies become known, understood, and practiced by increasing numbers of Indigenous scholars and their academic allies within Indigenous and Western academic spaces. Surely this naming should come from voices expressed, in their own terms and languages, as they gain momentum and space, as they cautiously draw the non-native into the

places they have known for millennia but are only now being heard. Naming this newly emerging space from age-old Indigenous places is a long overdue Indigenous right. Non-native researchers claiming a name for it seems to be yet another way of re-colonizing research practices, even as it appears to be critical of the power relations that colonized it in the first place.

### **Key Developments and Tenets of Participatory Research**

In 1977 Hall was a founding member of the *Participatory Research Network*, which was based on shared perspectives that locate ‘people as experts’ supported by the International Council for Adult Education. This council was instrumental in bringing together researchers and disseminating information concerning the growth and development of participatory research (PR).

Hall (1981) states that PR stresses “the educational aspect of social investigation as central to its conceptualization. . . and is committed to the empowerment of learning for all those engaged in the process” (p. 6). He goes on to define PR as an “integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action” (p. 6). Hall argues PR must be of “direct and immediate benefit to the community” (Hall, 1993, p. 7). In its broadest framework PR combines three processes: *research*, *education*, and *action* (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hall 1981, 1993). Building on the definitions of others involved in PR<sup>5</sup>, Hall emphasizes (i) the importance of the people or participants being understood as researchers in their daily lives; (ii) the means for solidarity in collective action amongst all participants, (internal/external, academic/local

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<sup>5</sup> Various authors, who are credited in Appendix 3, offered these definitions.

expert) and in collective action that results from local inquiries; (iii) liberating knowledge and power that enables groups to develop their projects and socio-political thought processes in ways that are locally acceptable; (iv) dissolving the hierarchy between researchers and participants so knowledge derived from action contributes to the conscious education of all; and (v) reflecting local knowledge production and the validity of local knowledge systems that may serve as one guide but not necessarily dictate action.

Activists and practitioners at the *1980 International Forum on Participatory Research* described several other attributes that they saw as being definitional to their roles as participatory researchers. First, they *commit* to seeing the project through to the end. They *avoid actions* that endanger community members while supporting the position of subordinate groups within the community. They describe learning and developing through the educative process *despite commitments that run counter to professional 'class' interests*. One of the biggest challenges of PR from their perspective includes building new understandings and realities to *ensure that the researcher is no longer an outsider*. These activists and researchers describe the need to bring new information to the research as well as the challenges of *helping to raise funds* for the development of technical skills; and building an *Indigenous* capacity for collective understanding of new knowledge by the people involved. My own experience with PR resonates strongly with their definitions, as does the summary offered by Hall, Gillette, and Tandon (1982), which has been particularly helpful in charting the evolving guidelines and understandings of PR projects of the time, as well as the

foundations of PAR and PE projects today. I have paraphrased Hall's summary in Figure 2.1 below.

- 1) Research processes and results can provide timely and direct benefit to a community.
- 2) Theories are not proposed from the researcher's perspective beforehand; theories of reality are developed by the community.
- 3) Research forms part of a complete educational experience serving local needs, awareness of both problems and solutions; research, education, and development planning are integral.
- 4) Research is a dialectic process that evolves over time. Gathering and interpretation of information is continuous characterized by i) community-researcher interaction and ii) interaction between gathering and interpretation, both reciprocally reinforcing the need for new information.
- 5) The object of research, as in education, should be the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources for the resolution of social issues. People should be at the heart of these processes.
- 6) Research has ideological implications. Knowledge is power. Research that engages popular involvement and analysis may lead to conflicts which in turn may ask a researcher to side with one group or another.

**Figure 2.1: Key tenets of participatory research according to Hall**

Researchers who aim to decolonize research methodologies have to rethink how the work is conceptualized and proceed with extreme caution. Despite being carried out in Indigenous contexts, colonizing forms of education and social investigation continue to structure the core of PAR. I find that there is considerable confusion that all too quickly equates work in research or education from inclusive and critical theoretical perspectives, which accommodate Indigenous worldviews as somehow being equal to challenges best understood from Indigenous paradigms. I elaborate further on some of these concerns

throughout this thesis; however, considerable work still needs to be completed in this area.

### **Participatory Evaluation (PE)**

Understanding PE as an outgrowth of PAR becomes particularly important for understanding how PE can contribute to the theory and process of decolonizing research methodologies and supporting Indigenous self-determination. Hagey (1997), building on Brydon-Miller's discussion of successfully transformative areas of focus in PAR, notes that evaluative PAR may be sufficiently adaptive to include evaluative methods of research. This suggests that "evaluations may be the icing on the cake representing restructuring, and they may be instituted by the community to monitor satisfactory functioning of new facilities or relations" (p. 2). Key to the objectives of PAR/PE are concepts of procedural justice and relational accountability, which characterize the nature of this extension or cross-fertilization of participatory methods. They are essential to understanding how recent developments in Indigenous research protocols, IRM, and IK can be provided space and actively implemented in research projects. Figure 2.2 (which follows later) outlines the criteria basic to PR and PE (based on research by Hall, 1981; Patton, 1997; and Stoecker, 1999) and principles common to the intent found in Indigenous research protocols<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Indigenous Research Protocols: Examples drawn from include protocols by ACUNS Ethical Principles (1997); Akwesasne task force on the environment (1996); Alaska Federation of Natives (1993); The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in

The following discussion of PE draws its theory and understanding from Patton (1997, 1999, 2002) and Stoecker (1999). PE is one way to carry out an inquiry, as it facilitates improvements and generates knowledge, while asking people to purposefully spend time thinking about what they are doing. PE is concerned with making the research and the results meaningful and useful to the people involved, as it better informs them when making future decisions and taking action, and often includes people from beginning to end. Participation of this nature democratizes the research process as it is organized in an emerging, ongoing manner to empower the voices of the people concerned. Therefore, self-determination and self-governing processes are engaged.

The agendas are not set by an outside research evaluator, but evolve through a collaborative process. Practical in nature, PE responds to needs, interests, and concerns as primary users identify and focus the process on outcomes they believe are important and that matter to the community; evaluators do not assume the role of ‘expert’ but rather may be part teacher, facilitator, collaborator, and participant in the process. When participants and the research/evaluator collaborate, the questions are established. The ways by which the information is collected and understood, how it contributes to understanding

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Indigenous Studies (2000); Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Appendix E: Ethical Guidelines for Research (2003); University Of Victoria Human Research Ethical Committee (2003); SSHRC Tri-council Policy statement (1998).

the conclusions drawn, encourages participants to become empowered and to take ownership of this information.

Participatory evaluation methods are important to the planning process, as they are interconnected and educative within the evaluation processes.

Participants must collaborate in making and controlling the research evaluation design, and as the findings are collected, the people involved can reflect on the issues and become increasingly interested in the results. This process also encourages participants to be responsible to themselves and their community. Results are carefully distributed; therefore decisions concerning issues can be made to improve the programs under evaluation. Here the goal is to provide information based on issues and questions from the people themselves, focusing on improvements, not judgment-making; the process evolves, participants assume increasing control by using the evaluator, who must be involved in the process, as a sounding board. To meet these goals, evaluation is not conducted yearly but on a continual basis and as the evaluation progresses, people reflect more on their practice. Often the evaluator spends considerable time initiating a project. Less of the evaluator's time may be required as the people assume the process, but it increases once again, supporting analysis, at the conclusion of the project.

It is possible to use participatory methods at different stages of the evaluation process, such as generating important questions at the onset or in developing conclusions. Conclusions can also be drawn from surveys, a more traditional method, useful for specific reasons in complementary ways. PE is a less rigid, more flexible process than traditional evaluation methods, and PE can

effect change within an organization or help a new group develop. However, it is more time-consuming than traditional methods that use a pre-defined set of agendas and goals determined by the evaluator in collaboration with one or two administrators. The people involved need the time required to participate and may also require some guidance to become integrally involved. Because they are recognized and valued for their true expertise, their input guides the process.

The multitude of evaluations has led to a conceptual slippage between forms and definitions of PE (Jordan, 2003). Patton (1997) offers an analysis of empowerment evaluation case studies presented by Fetterman (1996) as constituting exemplars of participatory, collaborative, stakeholder-involving, and utilization-focused frames of evaluation. Furthermore, Patton (1997) points out that the processes of facilitation and illumination are not exclusive to empowerment evaluation: “All participatory, collaborative and utilization-focused approaches emphasize a facilitative role for evaluators and include illuminative outcomes for participants” (p. 149). Patton also notes the emergence of another issue; that is, “the degree to which the language of empowerment is inserted into an evaluation, quite apart from whether any actual empowerment occurs or whether the evaluation process meets the criteria that distinguish empowerment evaluation” (p. 149).

Patton (1997) and Stoecker (1999) agree that PE differs from empowerment evaluation as presented by Fetterman (1996, 1999). Stoecker (1999) notes “participatory evaluation’s focus is also on empowerment, but includes the possibility of developing community self-determination rather than



individual self-determination” (p. 44). This is very important when considering forms of collaborative community research in Indigenous settings and represents one of the distinctive southern orientations of PAR. The collective nature of Indigenous paradigms that consider all relations in a holistic manner may be supported or negated. The distinctions raised in these debates are critical, depending if they are understood as manifestations along a continuum of participation within evaluation or as separate aspects that distinctly frame types of participatory evaluation used by researchers.<sup>7</sup>

### **Liberatory Theory and Its Implications for Participatory Research**

The seeds of liberatory theory are in the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator (1921-1970), and arguably the late 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most influential thinker on liberatory pedagogy. Freire (2002) considers “the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination*—which implies its opposite, the theme of *liberation*, as the objective to be achieved” (p. 103; italics in original). In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire embodies concepts that continue to open new spaces, where profound respect between adult educator and student relationships can emerge. Freire states, “oppression is when one person/culture hinders another’s responsible pursuit of self-affirmation even when hindered by false generosity” (p. 49). Freirian concepts became the foundation for new practices in international adult education and in participatory forms of research, the latter of which I will be discussing further in subsequent chapters.

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<sup>7</sup> See Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation (CJPE) Special Issue, 1999.

### **Freirian concepts and Indigenous research.**

In order to illuminate the celebrated spaces Freire's work created in critical pedagogy and research, I connect with ten of his concepts that are of particular significance to my own work, including: (i) humanization; (ii) dehumanization; (iii) praxis; (iv) conscientização; (v) the banking model of education; (vi) generative themes; (vii) dialogical method; (viii) unity; (iv) witness; and (x) cultural synthesis. These concepts have particular significance in the ways they have been translated in PAR/PE methodology and how they align themselves to serve the implementation of Indigenous research protocols. Despite the fact that I am destined to feel Kovach's 'squirm' when I attempt to illustrate the relationship between these concepts, I try to make these connections in Figure 2.2 because they have been so meaningful to my research. When Indigenous values and beliefs, stemming from Indigenous epistemologies, are centered at the theoretical core, IRM and project designs that include diverse forms of IK are valued.

Freire's work (2002), as expressed by Macedo, a long-term colleague and distinguished professor of liberal arts and education, addresses the needs of the oppressed by offering readers an opportunity to reconstruct their participation in pedagogical relationships. This new language, writes Macedo (in Freire, 2002), offered him the opportunity to critically understand the tensions, fears, hopes, and “‘deferred’ dreams that are part and parcel of living a borrowed and colonized cultural existence. . . [and the] critical tools to reflect on. . . what it means to be at the periphery of the intimate yet fragile relationship between the colonizer and the

colonized” (p. 11). Part of Freire’s legacy (2002) rests on his concepts of humanization and dehumanization and his ability to draw the colonizer in by way of empathy. Liberatory theory speaks to both the oppressed and the oppressor:

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. . . . This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which dehumanizes the oppressed. . . . the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. . . [the] humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors. (p. 44)

Freire believes that the oppressor, who is *dehumanized* due to the role he plays, cannot lead the struggle for freedom of the oppressed because it is the oppressed who must critically come to terms with their situation, objectify it, and act on this new understanding. This breakthrough must not remain merely an intellectual idea but must move into action, nor can it be restricted to simply taking action. As it necessitates an in-depth reflection, only then will it become *praxis*. Liberatory theory is a *praxis*. This is a complex activity whereby critically conscious individuals create culture and society. The process must revolve around action-reflection-action, the key to liberatory education. The main characteristics of

praxis must comprise self-affirmation, intentionality, creativity, and rationality.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this praxis, “it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason” (Freire, 2002, p. 66). Liberation cannot be bestowed or gifted in this sense; liberation is a human phenomenon and the result of a struggle for conscientização.

Perhaps Freire is best known for his concept of the *banking model of education*, a pedagogical approach where learners passively receive information, and the student’s mind is a receptacle for another’s approved form of knowledge. In contrast is the idea of *conscientização* or the process of conscientization. Freire described this as the process whereby a learner identifies and overcomes the mythologies of their context, thus transforming banking education. This is achieved by developing a new awareness of their oppression, and where they have been objectified through dialogue with others in similar situations, students become the subject and reclaim power by participating in the process of changing their context and by extension the world.<sup>9</sup> The goals of banking education encourage passive acceptance of the authority of their social and political context, provided through curricula that immobilize people within the existing system or at best promotes them to a position of leadership within the system. Knowledge in this form is conceived as a form of false generosity because this gift serves to

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<sup>8</sup> This Freirian definition of praxis was provided by the Sindh Education Foundation (2006).

<sup>9</sup> This Freirian definition of conscientization was informed by the Sindh Education Foundation (2006).

incorporate and improve the student as a form of oppression and is in fact a “cruel means of domination”.<sup>10</sup>

Freire’s position challenges often taken for granted power relations; teachers are no longer the sole voice of authority in the classroom. They must support their students’ freedom to evoke, in dialogue with other students and the teacher, the material to be considered. In contrast to the banking form of education, students set problems to be addressed by the curriculum. The role of the problem-posing student and educator is to evoke *problems of interest, not prescribe them*, which in turn evokes students and teachers to create new forms of knowledge within their own worldviews. Banking education stifles and inhibits creative power; problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality and the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention or conscientization. As Freire (2002) states, “authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and the world exist simultaneously: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it” (p. 81).

If students fail to generate themes from the problem posing process, then silence is expressed. Freire (2002) emphasizes that the *generative theme* cannot be found in people, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from people. . . . It can only be apprehended in the human-world

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<sup>10</sup> These Freirian concepts and their objectives were contributed by Peter McLaren (2001).

relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators. (p. 106)

Themes manifest in people and in their relationships to their world, not as an object outside people as if they were things themselves; the relationship between objects, objective facts, and the perception people have of these facts generates themes. The key factor from the perspective of libertarian education is for those involved to feel in control of their thinking and understanding of the world and to explicitly or implicitly manifest their own suggestions. This understanding is that education should not present its own program but must search dialogically with the people it serves.

Another key Freirian concept that has been influential in the design and process of this research is *dialogical method*, which is “characterized by cooperation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the roles of teacher and learner, demanding an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In this method all teach and all learn”.<sup>11</sup>

Thus cooperation leads dialogical Subjects to focus their attention on the reality, which mediates them and which—posed as a problem—challenges them. The response to that challenge is the action of dialogical Subjects

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<sup>11</sup> This Freirian definition of dialogical method was provided by the Sindh Education Foundation (2006).

upon reality in order to transform it. . . dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled. No one can, however unveil the world for another.

Although one Subject may initiate the unveiling on behalf of others, the others must also become Subjects of this act. The adherence of the people is made possible by this unveiling of the world and of themselves, in authentic praxis. (Freire, 2002, p. 169)

In Freirian terms the extent to which dialogic education successfully empowers both students and educators, as a consequence of liberatory education, is the extent to which it can be equated to the practice of freedom. Anti-dialogical action is manipulative and domineering; dialogical theory of action organization is a consequence of a developing unity.

Freire writes about the importance of unity and witness in the struggle for liberation. Witnessing requires consistency, boldness, radicalization (as witness leads to action), the courage to love, and faith in the people and in the community to whom witness is being made. To accurately function as a witness one must have a solid understanding of both the local history and the people's view of the world, as well as share a collective understanding of society's main contradictions. An example of how the process of humanization and witnessing powerfully combine through transformative acts is discussed in-depth in Chapter Four, which focuses on the compelling roles witness plays between Indigenous people and settler-allies.

Unity requires witness to the struggle or process engaged for liberation of this nature, as it is a common task. Therefore, liberation, as a common objective

must achieve cultural synthesis. Freire (2002) defines cultural synthesis as a means to action that confronts culture itself “as the preserver of the very structures by which it was formed. Cultural action, as a historical action, is an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture. In this sense, every authentic revolution is a cultural revolution” (p. 180). In cultural synthesis participants or teachers who come from outside the culture come not “to teach, or to transmit or to give anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about their world” (p. 180).

Freirian liberatory education is therefore an education where learners challenge the world collectively; learners, teachers, and the community together, through reflection, dialogue, decision-making, and action, seek to identify the contradictions and tension in their experiences for cultural transformation.

Freirian concepts of liberatory education are foundational to forms of participatory research and align closely to Indigenous research protocols, which are nested in Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges. The movement to redress lack of awareness, ignorance, and uncaring demonstrated historically by the abuse of Indigenous protocols is provoking a revolution between Indigenous scholars and how academic research and settings engage with Indigenous themes and work. How these relationships are formed and continue to relate in new ways is not static but a fluid manifestation of each project as they evolve. However, for the sake of the arguments I am putting forward, some comparison, analysis, and discussion is necessary. Figure 2.2, which appears later in the chapter, outlines the basic relationships between Hall’s criteria for participatory research, Patton’s



principles of participatory evaluation, and the principles common to the intent found in Indigenous research protocols. PE is considered here as an extension of PAR (Hall, 1981; Patton, 1999). Kovach's squirming is admitted only in passing as an acknowledgement of where we have come from and as long as it does not interfere with aspirations to further the cause of centering Indigenous epistemologies at the heart of all Indigenous related research.

### **Rejecting the colonialist subject/object binary.**

Indigenous research protocols require that the researcher/researched relationship be reconstructed where traditional research subjects become research collaborators integral to each step of the project; therefore, trust forged through an emerging relationship fosters equity and is integral to the partnership. McTaggart (1991) states PAR is not conducted on other people, but is research carried out by and for people. People are not treated as objects of research but are knowingly engaged in work as agents of change. Freire has eloquently described the dehumanization of both the oppressor and the oppressed, or in the case of research, the researcher and researched, where the notion of one partner originating and participating from some disadvantage not be positioned as contributing to the project from an ineffective or weak position resulting in the dehumanization of all engaged. PAR provides one forum where this power dilemma can be resolved. Simpson and Driben (2000), in their discussion of exclusionary approaches to research, describe how:

Aboriginal peoples are still reeling from the days when outside "experts" investigated First Nations communities without any thought of involving

their “subjects” in the decision-making processes that governed the work. The logic was self-serving: if the experts relinquished control, they maintained, there could be no guarantee that their research would be ‘objective,’ and that this would negate the results. They were mistaken. What they failed to appreciate was that their insistence on maintaining control reflected their own beliefs and values which promoted a kind of objectivity in which information is interpreted and organized in such a way that the views of a small group of people are presented as. . . ‘The Truth’. . . promoting European-Canadian interests at the expense of First Nations, but also generating results that are epistemologically unsound. Arrogance aside there is simply no reason to believe that Aboriginal peoples are incapable of designing sophisticated research projects and interpreting the results, either within the context of their own theories of knowledge or in the best tradition of Western Science. . . researchers who maintain a monopoly undermine their research by adopting strategies that silence those who possess the greatest insight into the nature of Aboriginal culture. (pp. 5-7)

Indigenous protocols address the process of dehumanization when calling for specialized knowledge from those outside the community not to lead the research process, although they may draw on their leadership abilities. Instead they assume a committed position with all participants as learners in the process, and leadership roles are shared within this context; the outside expert must extend Freire’s concept of the processes engaged through dehumanizing research

relationships by working to ensure that Indigenous research partners understand the necessity that they assume leadership roles that lead to action. PAR/PE involve all researchers in the entire process. Indigenous research protocols also require a more dedicated position in providing leadership for each step of the research process and the results reported. This necessitates an additional shift in power, which in Freire's terms would serve to humanize the possibility of an ongoing de-colonizing balance of power. Humanization also calls for faith in the people and the community, where all participants witness the process and gain a firm understanding of the local history, differing worldviews, and the issues involved in the domination of one culture over another, resulting in an authentic partnership where all respect and learn from each other.

### **Praxis, conscientização and Indigenous values.**

Freire defines praxis as the process whereby breakthroughs in intellectual ideas are expanded through profound reflection and move to action. Indigenous protocols are asking that the ownership and use of the research be negotiated along with the outcomes and that the process should involve specific needs expressed by the community. Therefore, PAR's research objectives benefit the immediate workplace. In addition, the goal of PAR is the structural transformation and improvement of the lives of those involved, as well as the wider community.

The concept of conscientização articulated by Freire is a process whereby local researchers come to understand how the dominating culture can alienate and transform their worldview and cultural practices. People's awareness of how these

processes take place, and how they are resolved through action, promotes those involved to gain or reclaim power through active participation in challenging or changing how these processes are understood and engaged. Outcomes, which may have been previously taken for granted or accepted as inevitable, are impacted. Negotiated Indigenous research partnerships clarify control issues to ensure that Indigenous community members first be accountable to themselves, then to the community. Indigenous values must be incorporated into the research design and methodology.

Methods are derived from specific Nations or local epistemologies and beliefs. PAR supports these protocols by ensuring that research objectives stem from the local context and that participant's focus on processes and outcomes of their choice. Kovach (2010) acknowledges that generalizability of Indigenous philosophical beliefs across Nations can elicit common ground for an Indigenous methodology. Local tribes or Nations, where knowledges are situated in place, must outline the methods used.

As Indigenous people we understand each other because we share a worldview that holds in common, enduring beliefs about the world. As Indigenous scholar Little Bear states, 'there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally' (2000: 79). Thus, when considering Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous people contextualize to their tribal affiliation. We do this because our knowledges are bound to place. (p. 37)

PAR works in opposition to predetermined objectives, which relates more closely to Freire's famous concept of banking education. Here the objectives are defined through collective inquiry, not from an outside authority. All research partners are understood as capable, understanding, and reflective research collaborators.

<b>Hall's Criteria for Participatory Research</b>	<b>Patton's Principles of Participatory Evaluation</b>	<b>Principles Common to the Intent Found in Indigenous Research Protocols</b>
Participatory research involves the people in the workplace or the community in the control of the entire process of the research. Research is a dialectic process, a dialogue over time, involving interaction between both the community and researchers and the gathering and interpretation process in an ongoing process.	PE involves participants at every stage of the research process.	Indigenous researchers, individuals, and communities should be involved as research collaborators in each step and stage of the research program, including opportunities to react and respond to research reports. Participants have control over results of the research process, including restricting access or withdrawing information.
Focus of PR is on work with a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups; immigrants, labour, Indigenous peoples, women.	PE ensures participants own the evaluation.	The ownership, use of, and access to research results should be agreed. Clear and accessible language should be used.
The problem originates in the community or workplace itself. PR is of immediate local benefit.	PE has participants focus the process on the outcomes they think are important.	Negotiation of outcomes should include results specific to the needs of the researched community.
Central to PR is its role of strengthening the awareness in people of their own abilities and resources and its support to mobilizing /organizing	PE facilitates participants to work as a group doing collective inquiry.	Trust should develop and serve as the basis for a partnership that does not privilege any one partner.
Participatory research involves the people in the workplace or the community in the control of the entire process of the research.	PE organizes the evaluation to be understandable and meaningful to all.	Indigenous values must be acknowledged by incorporation within the research design and methodology of a project.
The ultimate goal of the research is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved. The beneficiaries are workers or people concerned. Research is integral to education and broader community planning.	PE uses the evaluation to support participants' accountability to themselves and their community first and outsiders second, if at all.	As a negotiated partnership, control issues must be clarified, shared and continually monitored; the community's interests should also be taken into account. Communities should benefit from, not be disadvantaged by, research.
The term 'researcher' can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved and those with specialized training.	PE develops the evaluator role as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource.	All scholars shall assume responsibility to learn protocols and local traditions, ensuring sensitivity to cultural practices and issues that ensure respect and researchers' accommodation to local norms. All research partners should attempt to impart new skills into the community and include mutual sharing of research skills and outcomes.
	PE develops participants' roles as decision-makers and evaluators.	
	PE recognizes and valuing participants' expertise and helping them to do the same.	
Although those with specialized knowledge often come from outside the situation, they are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather detachment.	PE minimizes status differences between the evaluation facilitator and participants	Participants must be recognized and treated as equals in the research done, instead of as "informants" or "subjects".
A priori theories are not developed beforehand Reality is described by the community as it develops its own theories about itself. Research objectives should be the liberation/mobilization of human creative resources/potential for the solution of social problems.		Approaches should be consistent with Indigenous self-determination. All scholars should consider research processes that move beyond the dominant quantitative methods and empower Indigenous voice and skills.

**Figure 2.2: Connections between PR/PE and Indigenous research protocols**

Freire's concepts of generative themes and dialogical processes construct the content of the learning and research process. Generative themes originate from the people involved and the relationships they engage within their daily lives. These themes emerge from a dialogical process that is clearly called for in PAR and by Indigenous research protocols. Indigenous values are drawn on throughout the research process, and local norms are respected as research opens up to a broader range of worldviews and skills.

### **Holistic imaginings of change and hope.**

Imagine centering Indigenous worldviews as the principle force mobilizing Freire's concept of generative themes. Human-world relationships would include people's thinking about reality, action, and praxis. But it would also equally engage people's thinking about the environment, about nature, and *how the environment acts on the rest of nature including mankind*. This is a broader praxis that has been very poorly understood beyond Indigenous realms. People and the environment, therefore, act as co-investigators; human-world is understood as the *human-environment-world*. Indigenous scholars often refer to "all my relations" and how every thing is "animate", imbued with life. One can begin to understand the profound shift in perspectives, power, and reciprocity that accounting for Indigenous epistemologies and beliefs would bring to bear on Western thought, liberatory or otherwise. Similarly, dialogical methods are characterized by cooperation, acceptance, interchangeability, and mutuality of roles. Imagine acknowledging the environment and all its relations fulfilling dialogical roles. Imagine the possibilities inherent in processes of conscientização,

or conscientization, where Western thinking identified and overcame the mythologies of Western contexts to embrace Indigenous worldviews.

Conscientization could ease the need to speak about colonization. Graham Smith, a Maori scholar, admits that there is a real need to understand the politics of colonization, but he doesn't really like to use the term because of the ways this language perpetuates oppressive power structures (Kovach, 2010).

This is because such expression (colonization) puts the colonizer at the centre of the discourse and we are positioned to become reactive. I prefer to talk about conscientization rather than colonization because such a term is more positive. It puts the focus on us at the centre rather than colonizers, and it centres concerns about our development. (p. 91)

Imagine an epistemology that accords nature, the environment, and all living things with the same interchangeability and mutuality of roles expressed by dialogical methods and praxis. Imagine a broader cross section of Western thought that could think through and centre what it would mean to consider cultural synthesis as a praxis, as *environmental synthesis*. Mere inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies into Western structures of thought and methodology could incite a revolution in Western relationships; imagine what *centering Indigenous epistemologies* could offer. I put forward an example of the kind of thinking that emerges from a local Indigenous paradigm expanding Western conceptions of holistic perspectives in Chapter Five.



## **CHAPTER 3: Colonizing Roots: Challenges to the Foundations of Western Academic Research in Indigenous Contexts**

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Research Paradigms**

In this section I will discuss current theory articulating Indigenous research methodologies by Indigenous academics from within and beyond Canada. To consider Indigenous methodology we need to first ask what Indigenous knowledge consists of and how Indigenous paradigms emerge as a result. To understand the reasons why these discussions are so important, I will first review the academic research contexts from which they have emerged, the role Indigenous people play as both *researched* and *researchers*, and the role non-native researchers play. It is important for non-native researchers to remain open to scrutiny and self-reflection when engaged in research that relates to Indigenous people if they are to take responsibility for the humanization and decolonization of their positions. Lather (1991) asks the difficult question all non-native researchers must ask of themselves when collaborating with Indigenous researchers: “how do our efforts to liberate, perpetuate the relations of dominance?” (p. 16). This has been a theme I have returned to constantly during the process of collecting and analyzing data for this study.

In answer to this question, I believe we challenge the structures of dominance when two key ideals can be achieved: (i) Indigenous academics can realize the vision of the roles they wish to play within academia and those they wish non-native researchers to fulfill when collaborating together; and (ii) when Indigenous researchers working from a community base other than the traditional

academic one can realize their objectives when they collaborate with non-native academics. Significantly, these research goals can contribute to decolonization and self-determination within academic spheres of research and within the communities the research has evolved from.

### **Meanings Lost and Appropriated in Cultural Paradigms**

Over two decades many researchers, adult educators, and oppressed peoples have articulated the need to globally reappropriate knowledge and knowledge production (Gilchrist, 1997). Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) argue that Euro-American academics are attempting to break down

hegemonic social science paradigms. . . . Critical voices both in the academy and in local communities are drawing attention to the situation that subordinated peoples' knowledges, histories, and experiences have been left out of academic texts. . . .or erased from them. (p. 3)

One of the main criticisms I share with these academics is that Indigenous experiences are filtered through another cultural perspective and value system, and the meaning can be misinterpreted, misrepresented, and lost. However, developments in qualitative research are gradually becoming more inclusive and participatory.

What follows is a discussion presenting some of the differences and exclusionary impacts that occur when one form of understanding knowledge replaces another and when quantitative and qualitative research is carried out in Indigenous contexts. Repeated applications of poorly aligned research paradigms in diverse cultural contexts continue to limit knowledge production and

marginalize academic and Indigenous advocates. A key question that needs to be continually addressed is this: *Who should be conducting Indigenous research?* In the next section I will discuss conventional forms of research structured by Western concepts and how these structures marginalize or discount Indigenous knowledges in research practice. Progress in research ethics has been made in establishing research ground in local Indigenous communities; however, work is still needed in the actual university setting and towards articulating and recognizing Indigenous research paradigms. Finally, from within the wider framework of self-determination and decolonization, I will address opportunities in research collaborations between Indigenous and non-native researchers.

Conventional research approaches are usually quantitative or empirical and based on positivist philosophy. Principles that characterize this approach include the neutrality of the researcher, value free findings, observability through the senses, and generalizability of results. Steinhauer (2001) describes that in Western knowledge there is a dissection between particular areas of science, art, and religion. Native knowledge bases integrated many areas of knowledge; science was both religious and aesthetic.

Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) note that, “Western science views the universe as a mechanical system and defines the ‘essence’ of society as a competitive struggle for existence” (p. 8). These authors acknowledge that Western science prizes quantification, rationality, objectification, reason and progress, the dualistic nature of thought, and the hierarchical ranking and certainty of knowledge. As they write, “[s]ocial phenomena are often presented in

structural forms that downplay the human element and the dimensions of emotion and intuition” (p. 8). In contrast to Indigenous value systems, Little Bear (2000) argues, “one can summarize the value system of Western Europeans as being linear and singular, static, and objective” (p. 82). He concludes that:

every society has many deep-rooted and implicit assumptions about what life and reality are all about. These assumptions are the guidelines for interpreting laws, rules, customs, and actions. It is deep-rooted and implicit assumptions upon which attitudes are based and that make a person say “This is the way it is.” It is these assumptions that make it hard for a person to appreciate an alternative way of thinking and behaving.  
(pp. 82-83)

Many qualitative researchers employ more open ended, flexible approaches to research design and data analysis, cultivating reciprocal relationships among all participants in a more holistic manner while focusing on details from the ground up. This research paradigm also supported the emergence of more participatory and collaborative forms of research methods, local development, and action, and, when used in a conscious and deliberate manner, can emancipate social change and therefore has been considered more appropriate to the needs of Indigenous communities in their struggle for self-determination. Kovach (2010) states that

it is here that we are able to access some of the strongest allied theoretical critiques. Non-Indigenous critical theorists are strong allies for Indigenous methodologies. They can assist in making space for Indigenous methods (protocols, ethics, data collection processes), but also for the epistemic

shift from a Western paradigm that Indigenous methodologies bring. In this effort, critical theorists will be asked to consider a worldview that holds beliefs about power, where it comes from, and how it is manifested, which will, at times, align with Western thought and at other times not. While this may pose a challenge, it is likely that even if critical theorists cannot fully embrace Indigenous methodologies, they would argue that doing so can be a legitimate option. (p. 86)

However, despite these allied developments, the Western legacy of colonizing research remains. Historically research has played a role in perpetuating colonial thought, as is well documented in the texts of Battiste (2000) and Tuhiwai Smith (1999). From an Indigenous perspective Tuhiwai Smith writes that

Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of Indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power. (p. 42)

### **Western Thought as a Cultural, Discursive and Disciplinary Device**

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argued that Western research goes beyond Western science to a larger system simply referred to as the West and makes her point by quoting Stuart Hall, “that the West is an idea or a concept, a language for imagining a set of complex stories, ideas, historical events and social

relationships” (p. 42). Hall (1992; in Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) proposes that the West is a construct, a language that serves to classify, condense, and provide models for comparison through systems of representation, as well as offer criteria for evaluation against which societies should be measured. Both quantitative and qualitative research is subject to these processes. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes, “[t]hese are the procedures by which Indigenous peoples and their societies were coded into the Western system of knowledge” (p. 43). Little Bear (2000) coined the term “jagged worldviews”, to describe the impact of Western on Indigenous forms of thought.

Colonization created a fragmentary worldview among Aboriginal peoples. By force, terror, and educational policy, it attempted to destroy the Aboriginal worldview – but failed. Instead, colonization left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview: their consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand. . . . Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values. (pp. 84-85)

It is not my objective to interrogate the constructs of Western knowledge or set up a false dichotomy between one form of knowledge over another; however, careful scrutiny is required when research methodologies which originate from one form of knowledge are employed in different contexts and perpetuate forms of colonization. What counts as a valid or invalid choice of research paradigm is

currently being ruptured by academics, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who are critical of the destructive effects these forms of research have on Indigenous communities. “Rather than the tired binaries of a monolithic West and some innocent Indigenous culture, the pressing questions are what it means to *claim the status of knowledge producer after so long being positioned as the knowledge object of powerful other*” (Lather, 2006 p. 42; italics added). Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous research methods need to be clearly articulated, be better understood and be accepted as legitimate ways of exploring, understanding, and knowing within academic circles and by the general population.

Fixico (2003) has written about the last three generations of Native scholarship in the United States and Canada. The Native voice is a collection of many Indigenous academic perspectives from various tribes or Nations and disciplines. One of the natural differences stems not from their cultural heritage but from between “the views of Native scholars in academia and Native scholars from traditional cultures, if the Native academic is trained in the Western science approach of the American mainstream” (p. 136). Nonetheless, Indigenous scholars have much to offer about their knowledge, different forms of research, and what has been written about them. As Fixico asserts, “Indians have not remained silent, but their voices have been ignored” (p. 131).

European colonizers venerated the written word as the primary basis of fact. Indigenous oral histories were misrepresented. Ethnographic studies of the ‘other’ portrayed another account of Indigenous people. Fixico (2003) writes that the debate over written verses oral history focuses on the premise that oral history is

not as reliable as history documented by written evidence. Fixico states that written accounts are deemed factual, “although they are subjective observations of biased minds filled with many influences” (p. 22).

Absolon and Willett (2004) concur and synthesize the thoughts of their colleagues:

“All my relations” is a popular phrase we use to acknowledge our relationship with all things on earth: plants, animals, earth, water, air, and other humans. As such, “the non-western forager lives in a world not of linear causal events but of constantly reforming, multidimensional, interacting cycles, where nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but all factors are influences impacting other elements of the system-as-a-whole (RECAP, 1996, Vol 4, Ch 3, s,1)”. (p. 10)

Essentially, Western thinking (especially quantitative research) locates knowledge outside of the self, whereas Indigenous peoples situate themselves within the practice of doing and living knowledge.

Battiste (2000, 2002) writes that ethical research must begin to replace prejudice with a new foundation aimed at eliminating Eurocentric bias. Much progress has been made towards establishing ethical research guidelines within Aboriginal populations. The traditional standards of academic performance have been consistently challenged by several Indigenous academics working within Canadian universities, such as noted scholars Battiste (2000) as well as McPherson and Rabb (2001).

Kovach (2010) writes



Conventional scholars have become formidable gatekeepers of this system by objectifying knowledge criterion-defined models, paradigms, and ‘truth.’ Yet within the academic research discourse, we are fortunate if we are able to engage in discussions of knowledge – what qualifies as knowledge?. . . As Bud Hall (1998) indicates, universities have claimed a monopoly on what does and does not count as knowledge. To assert Indigenous research frameworks, there is a need to critically interrogate this monopolistic knowledge enterprise. Applying a decolonizing lens prompts this action, thus becoming a quality of Indigenous research methodology. (p. 79)

### **Challenging the Belief Systems of Dominant Research Methodologies**

McPherson and Rabb (2001) acknowledge that Indigenous pre-contact spiritual values and worldviews are still practiced in Canada today but caution that while some have been able to

maintain a sense of self as Indigenous. . .the greatest threat to Indigenous identity has become the kind of university education being offered to a growing number of Native students. Universities today are inadvertently completing the job of assimilation begun by the residential schools. (p. 57)

Absolon and Willett (2004) argue that it is not the differences between Aboriginal and Western knowledges that require emphasis but acknowledgement that when these aspects are raised they merit the space, time, and language that contribute to forming unique research paradigms. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) concurs that it is very difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples together without

“having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices” (p. 2).

Qualitative research has offered researchers an opportunity to open up forms of research, to stand back and make room for Indigenous partners to take action and to participate. During the 1980s participatory research grew to be the popular way of working within the Aboriginal movement in Canada. Theoretical analysis was slim and leaned towards practice and techniques or methods. Wilson (2001) writes that once Indigenous people articulate beliefs that comprise “an Indigenous research paradigm, we can look at the use of specific methods that fit with our methodology. A lot of people have tried to decolonize research methods. But they are deconstructing a method without looking at its underlying beliefs” (p. 177).

One of the real benefits of my own experience as a non-native researcher has been the opportunity to grasp the scope of my position and imposition in Indigenous contexts, to begin to understand where and how my own participation in community development and research projects continues to structure colonizing forms of seeing and understanding through our work. Qualitative research and participatory forms of research are still subject to the critical issues Indigenous academics have been articulating. In the conduct of field research, degrees of participation do not adequately fulfill goals of decolonization and equity, nor can they be equated with the type of recognition and space Indigenous academics require and have been asking for within the university.

## **Biculturalism: Being the Researcher/Researched**

Who then should be doing Indigenous research and what are the implications of doing so? Indigenous academics debating this topic represent a wide spectrum of opinions. There are a number of issues giving rise to this question; the appropriation of knowledge and the debate over what constitutes knowledge in different settings; colonization and the conflicts engaged in “jagged worldviews” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84); and seeds of ethical practices that continue to result in structures that exclude.

Indigenous scholars often describe the need for Indigenous students and scholars to be bicultural (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Couture, 2000; McPherson & Rabb, 2001). In addition, they note the difficulties Indigenous scholars have had in applying their knowledge to conventional research, the filtering of Indigenous issues through outside-view predicates, the complexities of double consciousness and incommensurable worldviews, as well as the need to establish research ethics in the face of intercultural knowledge exchanges. Indigenous academics prize their own research but recognize the need for non-native mentors despite the ongoing colonizing impact these relationships set up. At best, traditional research methodologies can be applied if the Eurocentric bias is carefully accounted for and corrected. Echoing the ideas of Hall (1998) and Patten (1997), this means that addressing the Eurocentric bias means that non-native researchers should only participate in Indigenous research if invited and the research is beneficial to the communities engaged.

Simpson and Driben (2000) state that what is needed are new research models imagined which successfully combine Indigenous and Western ways of thinking about doing research if collaborative projects are to move forward in meaningful ways. In their work with the Anishanabe, they report that their collaborative and participatory research project was designed to

dismantle the traditional power structure. . . allowing Anishanabe concepts and knowledge to come to the fore. . . anyone who understands how Aboriginal cultures come to “know” a problem will immediately recognize the striking similarity between the collaborative or cooperative approach and Indigenous ways of thinking, learning, and knowing. (p. 15)

Joseph Couture, who was the Chair of Trent University’s department of Native Studies at the program’s inception, wrote about the need for Aboriginal students to be bicultural to succeed academically. Native Studies has as an objective to “implement strategies for uncovering and describing the Aboriginal Story in all its dimensions” (Couture, 2000, p. 159). From these objectives came a secondary one, “that of moderating a university-based critical analysis” (p. 159). Implementing systems to record culture-based knowledge and skills evaluated alongside traditional teachings under the watchful eyes of Elders “sought a new existential paradigm, impelled by a culture-rooted sense of both worlds in all their dimensions, expressed as a bicultural survival” (p. 159). Couture goes on to quote Elders from Seven First Nations of Alberta sanctioning and offering their advice for this process in the early 1970s.

We would like to say that in order to survive in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we must really come to grips with White man's culture and with White ways. We must stop lamenting the past. The White man (sic) has many good things, Borrow. Master and use his technology. Discover and define the harmonies between the two general cultures, between the basic values of the Indian Way and those of Western civilization – and thereby forge a new and stronger sense of identity. For, to be fully Indian today, we must be bilingual and bicultural. We have never had to do this before. In doing so we will survive as Indians, true to our past. We have always survived. Our history tells us so. . . . On a given day, if you ask me where you might go to find a moose, I will say 'If you go that way you won't find a moose. But, if you go that way, you will.' . . . So now, younger ones, think about all that. Come back once in a while and show us what you've got. And, we'll tell you if what you think you have found is a moose. (p. 159)

The Canadian Native Studies program is one example of how to conduct research in Indigenous knowledge, and this process adapted by Indigenous and non-native academics created a means to study Indigenous knowledges and ways. The success of such partnerships, however, has been critically scrutinized by various Indigenous academics. With respect for the difficulties incurred by ongoing colonial pressures, a recurring question non-native researchers such as myself must ask is: *how much should we implicate ourselves when we strive to support new research developments in collaboration with Indigenous people, or should we leave Indigenous research for Indigenous people?*

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) believes Indigenous people should carry out their own research wherever possible and be increasingly involved in both key and senior roles; however, she points out that there are insufficient Indigenous researchers. Non-Indigenous researchers are needed to serve as “mentors of Indigenous research assistants” (p. 178). In New Zealand successful demands have been made by Maori communities to limit and restrict non-native participation.<sup>12</sup> Tuhiwai Smith notes this shift was due to several circumstances including cultural politics, government policy, and the opening up of more inclusive forms of space within academic circles.<sup>13</sup>

McPherson and Rabb (2001) cautioned that academic conventions and the lack of Indigenous academics can overwhelm and discount Indigenous knowledges and ways and are “convinced that non-native people can come to see things, at least partly, from an Indigenous perspective. Any suggestion to the contrary is due simply to a lack of imagination” (p. 69). They worry about encouraging students to pursue higher education only to find the system has let them down. This situation has contributed to the problem raised by Couture

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<sup>12</sup> Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses the shift in Maori research from “Maori people being viewed as research objects (to) Maori people becoming (their) own researchers” (p. 179).

<sup>13</sup> Tuhiwai Smith (1999) offers research examples from the Waitangi Tribunal and Te Kohanga Reo, as well as a discussion crediting the critique of positivist research by feminist and critical theorists that created favorable circumstances allowing culturally sensitive methodologies to be implemented.

(2000) and Fixico (2003) that occurs when native students trained in Western science have had insufficient opportunities to either gain traditional knowledge or apply it in their research. The training programs McPherson and Rabb refer to engage Indigenous issues through what they define as “outside-view predicates”.

It is much more than seeing yourself as others see you. It is permitting others to tell you who you are, fitting in with the plans and projects of others. . . it is, in a real and frightening sense, to lose yourself, to become. . .an alien to yourself. (p. 75)

Battiste and Henderson (2000) concur and refer to the “double consciousness”<sup>14</sup> this develops in Indigenous people; they describe “the sense of always looking through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt” (p. 88). Double consciousness takes place as “dominators reject the assertions of the colonized that they are human and insist on imposing the standards of the colonizers as universal and normal” (p. 88). Battiste and Henderson (2000) also state “at best, Canadian universities and educational systems teach this double consciousness to Indigenous students” (p. 88). This problem also manifests itself when the system and its processes are extended beyond the university into local Aboriginal communities through research practices. Like Battiste and Henderson, McPherson and Rabb (2001) conclude that even when today’s university strives to understand culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal students, they do not take into account that

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<sup>14</sup> Battiste and Henderson (2000) draw on scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (1903, p. 45) and Noël (1994, p. 149) for the definition quoted above.

the entire “non-native worldview may well be incommensurable with that of the students; the decisions reached may well result, not merely in misunderstanding, but in actual systemic discrimination” (p. 76). The kind of research required to cope with “the problem of neocolonialism is not going to come out of Canada’s mainstream universities as they are currently configured. . .the kind of research which still remains to be done requires Indigenous scholars working in and for Indigenous communities” (p. 76).

After having made their case concerning academic research abuses, McPherson and Rabb (2001) do offer a means for cautious collaboration between Indigenous and non-native research colleagues, stating that this new research “should, of course be combined with the more usual academic research, involving early contact literature and more modern ethnological analyses etc., in order, to serve as checks and counter checks on one another” (p. 77).

Marlene Brant Castellano (2004), in a discussion based on the then emerging field of ethics in Indigenous research, supports Couture’s concept of bicultural academics and the necessity in furthering Indigenous scholarship. Once again drawing on Little Bear’s (2000) concept of jagged worldviews, Brant Castellano cautions that these scholars are needed to assert control when worldviews collide when supporting efforts to establish control over Aboriginal research; otherwise, what has been accomplished in the field of research ethics will remain unresolved and lose momentum. She ironically raises the point that “despite post-modern critiques that research is captive already to the unacknowledged assumptions of researchers and their cultures, control of research



by interest groups is perceived as compromising the integrity of the research enterprise” (p. 107). This kind of control is precisely what Indigenous academics are calling for. Bicultural academics are therefore necessary when research is located within smaller communities faced by the larger society. Brant Castellano further states that it is essential that the criteria for ethical research be implemented in the face of intercultural exchanges.

Similarly, Battiste (2002) suggests bicultural scholars from Indigenous or Western backgrounds are needed and that non-Indigenous researchers who work in Indigenous research should learn the language and worldview rather than make ‘oracles’ of them. “As outsiders, researchers and scholars may be useful in helping Indigenous peoples articulate their concerns, but to speak for them is to deny them the self-determination so essential to human progress” (p. 41). Battiste also argues that the main principle for research practice must be that “Indigenous peoples should control their own knowledge. They should do their own research and, if they should choose to enter into any collaborative relationship with others, the research should empower and benefit their communities and cultures, not merely themselves” (p. 41).

Perhaps if these objectives become common place, Indigenous people will evaluate research being conducted in Indigenous contexts as having less to do with a colonizing non-Native or ‘white’ depiction of Native experiences and more to do “with the crucial issues that Indigenous peoples are concerned about: decolonization, Nation building, and how the past impacts the present” (Mihsuah & Wilson, 2004, p. 42).

## **Indigenous Knowledges**

Before any meaningful discussion of what Indigenous research methodologies involve, we must develop a deeper understanding of what Indigenous knowing is. Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) offer a good interpretation of the holistic perspective that is part of Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous knowledges are understood as the commonsense ideas and cultural knowledges of local peoples concerning the everyday realities of living. They encompass the cultural traditions, values, belief systems, and world views that, in any Indigenous society, are imparted to the younger generation by community elders. They also refer to world views that are products of a direct experience of nature and its relationship with the social world. (p. i)

Shiva (2000) writes that cultural diversity has suffered from the politics of knowledge:

Colonialism has from the very beginning been a contest over the mind and the intellect. . . .The priorities of scientific development and R & D efforts, guided by a Western bias, transformed the plurality of knowledge systems into an hierarchy of knowledge systems. When knowledge plurality mutated into knowledge hierarchy, the horizontal ordering of diverse but equally valid systems was converted into a vertical ordering of unequal systems, and the epistemological foundations of Western knowledge were imposed on non-Western knowledge systems with the result that the latter were invalidated. (p. vi)

Indigenous knowledges are situated in place and accumulated over time. Indigenous knowledges address issues of location, politics, identity, culture, and the history of people in relation to the lands they inhabit. As a dynamic form of living knowledge, it is not static but rather woven from inherited knowledges in relationship with new experiences. Knowledge is also passed on orally by trusted Elders, and is, for the most part, learned within informal settings and related to the earth and its people. The process of research and learning about Indigenous history and its culture is an act of political resistance to the processes of colonization and hierarchical ways of knowing. Indigenous knowledges are not fixed categories; commonalities addressed for the purpose of addressing the subjugation of complex experiences and social practices serve to rethink what has constituted valid or legitimate forms of knowledge. Brant Castellano (2000) outlines three sources of Indigenous knowledge, while acknowledging that knowledge is fluid, intersecting and comes from multiple sources. Three types of knowing that can be found in Indigenous epistemologies that are typically not part of the contemporary Western thinking include: (i) traditional knowledge; (ii) revealed knowledge; and (iii) holistic knowledge.

### **Traditional knowledge, revealed knowledge and holistic knowledge.**

Brant Castellano (2000) discusses different forms of Indigenous knowledge. *Traditional* knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next. It may comprise creation stories, relationships between ancestors, and animal spirits. It also contains the oral genealogies and ancestral rights to land, battles fought, and borders and treaties with other nations. In addition traditional stories

recount values and beliefs through heroic and cautionary tales. Many people accumulate empirical knowledge over long periods through observation in relation to nature. New information is continually understood in relation to existing knowledge. Knowledge developed through Indigenous processes embodies “a convergence of perspectives from different vantage points” (p. 23).

*Revealed* knowledge is acquired through dreams, visions, and spiritual practices. Indigenous knowledge has a timeless quality; ancient knowledge is understood as worthy and relevant or current. “Constant testing of knowledge in the context of current reality creates applications that make timeless truths relevant to each generation” (p. 23). Brant Castellano goes on to consider several characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. She acknowledges a consensus among people writing about Indigenous knowledge in the Canadian context concerning its transmission and content as engaging the “personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language” (p. 24) and describes the relationship between inner and outer reality:

Reality is experienced by entering deeply into the inner being of the mind, and not by attempting to break through the outer world to a beyond. This positions the native person in ‘communion’ with the living reality of things. His ‘communion’ is his experience of the ideas within, concentric with reality without. Thus, to ‘know,’ to cognize, is experiential, direct knowing. (p. 28; drawing on Couture, 1991)

Brant Castellano (2000) also proposes that

Individuals and society can be transformed by identifying and reaffirming learning processes based on subjective experiences and introspection. . . those people who seek knowledge on the physical plane objectively find their answers through exploration of the outer space, solely on the corporal level. Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology. (p. 28; drawing on Ermine, 1995)

*Holistic* knowledge is perhaps the most misunderstood and misinterpreted form of Indigenous knowledge. Brant Castellano (2004) describes this as in addition to the above forms of knowledge. It comprises “openness to intuitive or spiritual insights” (p. 29).

### **Seven Principles of Indigenous Research Methodologies**

Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999) articulated the possibility of defining Indigenous research methodology, stating that the purpose would typically serve to “determine standards for authenticity of Indigenous research, and would enable a more effective critique of research dealing explicitly with Indigenous reality” (p. 31). Her understanding of these issues is a reflection of the context from which IRMs emerged. Weber-Pillwax raises the question of who should be participating in these developments, acknowledging that the idea could be threatening to existing forms of knowledge and knowledge creation. She makes the compelling point that, “while Indigenous scholars must be aware of such reactions, they will nonetheless experience themselves as the ‘active-centre’ in the process of any

Indigenous research which they choose to live through” (p. 31). Weber-Pillwax emphasizes the fact that Indigenous research methodology has always been central to Indigenous knowledge and is understood to be carried out by Indigenous people. She offers seven principles worth considering in an academic discussion: 1) the interconnectedness of all living things; 2) the impact of motives and intentions on the person and community; 3) the foundation of research as lived Indigenous experience; 4) the groundedness of theories in Indigenous epistemology; 5) the transformative nature of research; 6) the sacredness and responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity; and 7) the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes.

Recognizing that the scholarly discourse was in its initial stages, Weber-Pillwax (1999) was cautiously optimistic about the need for Indigenous scholars to lead such discourse, but concerned by the fact that their voices had not always been heard in any meaningful or lasting manner. She welcomed the interest of all scholars who have incorporated an “active respect for the principles of interactions with Indigenous peoples” (p. 36). While Weber-Pillwax does not claim to define Indigenous research methodology from any other perspective than her own, she states that her work is not fiction. Two beliefs underpin this topic. The first speaks for the need to develop standards that could attest to the authenticity of Indigenous research and would require acknowledging a specific outcome once the methodology had been applied and that research is measured and compared. Weber-Pillwax finds this an unlikely prospect, considering that there could be as many research methodologies as there are Indigenous people.

Furthermore, she does not believe that defining a single research methodology would benefit or improve scholarly work or its critique. However, since Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars are collaborating from distinctly different foundations, she was convinced that because it is already impacting research the question of Indigenous research methodology be addressed while acknowledging the need to “proceed with care” (p. 34).<sup>15</sup> For Weber-Pillwax (1999) political discussions need to be articulated and the sensitivity required needs to be established. She notes that cross-cultural dialogue often “has demonstrated our mutual reluctance and avoidance. . . ensuring that the question remains as an unvoiced subtext, influencing scholarly effort and discussions, often negatively” (p. 36), resulting in disappointment. Building a dialogue around the question of Indigenous research methodologies is worth the effort as it also contributes to what was quoted earlier as the “principles of interaction between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, researchers or not. This was not offered as a definition of Indigenous research methodology, but served as one starting point” (p. 36). Weber-Pillwax (1999) stated that discussion and the resulting decisions as to how individual research projects may be constructed could

impact upon and determine the type of personal experiences that are available to non-Indigenous researchers working in Indigenous

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<sup>15</sup> Weber-Pillwax (1999) articulated many sound reasons why she cautiously approaches this topic including, responsibility for her words, how they may be used, how this might impact communities, and the opposition and threat this poses to established authority in Indigenous research methodology.

communities. A non-Indigenous scholar who is willing to share the challenges of developing a model for an Indigenous research methodology will find the process excellent preparation for making informed and conscious decisions about doing any form of research in areas directly affecting Indigenous ways of being and knowing. The possibility of such an outcome, of course, is contingent upon the form and degree of involvement that Indigenous scholars will choose to have in the process. (p. 37)

Participating in the discussion of possible Indigenous research methodologies is political and brings to the forefront the need for research to be accountable ethically. Weber-Pillwax (1999) believes that such a movement would diminish “the tendency to excuse institutional injustice against Indigenous people as ‘unconscious irresponsibility’ . . . [making it] less socially and politically acceptable” (p. 38). These types of discussions contribute to improving research with Indigenous people. As the situation stands, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars face the daunting challenge of mastering two knowledge systems in any Indigenous related research.

Similar to Weber-Pillwax, Cardinal (2001) views the political merit in supporting these key discussions. He stresses that Indigenous foundations exist and questions how they can serve as platforms to enable Indigenous worldviews and perspectives to be brought forward and implemented. He states that Tuhiwai Smith provides a good place to develop a dialogue.



When she says that Indigenous methodology is community-oriented, she touches on a part of the definition of Indigenous research methods and research methodologies. . . .I think that as Indigenous or Aboriginal scholars, we need to dialogue: exactly what is it that we are talking about, how big is it, how dimensional is it? And as we continue this dialogue, we are not professing that there is only one way, but we are sharing our relationship to what we are seeing, feeling, or knowing. It is true that we have many different depths in our relationship to knowledge. These include our environment, our land, and our ancestors. This is a very, very important aspect. . . .As Shawn Wilson says “You need to develop a relationship with your research ideas.” Essentially, I am saying that Indigenous research methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations. They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships. (pp. 180-183)

### **Indigenous Research Paradigms**

Wilson (2001) calls for a move beyond Indigenous research perspectives to engaging with an Indigenous research paradigm, which he defines as being based on the foundational concept of relational knowledge.

Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the

animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. . . . You can extend this to say that ideas and concepts, like objects, are not as important as my relationship to an idea or concept. This language speaks from an epistemology that is totally foreign to the other research paradigms, an epistemology where relationships are more important than reality. (p. 177)

For Wilson (2001), an Indigenous methodology “means talking about relational accountability. . . you are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you” (p. 177). Wilson is asking himself, as a researcher, how to meet his obligations to the relationships in which he is engaged. Building knowledge must be carried out not as an abstract goal but as a process integral to meeting all the relationships forged through the research process. Wilson (2001) states “this becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to *all my relations*” (p. 177; italics added). Ermine (1995) also suggests that Indigenous knowledges are born of relational knowing, as do Battiste and Henderson (2000) and Kovach (2010).

Steinhauer (2002) also believes that non-Indigenous researchers could not carry out an Indigenous research methodology. She questions if people could understand Wilson’s explanation of relational accountability. She asks that if non-Indigenous people do participate, will the research “remain just as it was: research

conducted on Indigenous people?” (p. 73). She considers Weber-Pillwax’s emphasis on respect and questions if non-Indigenous researchers can fully comprehend the Indigenous understanding of respect. Quoting Cree Elders she writes showing respect, *kihceyihtowin*, is a basic law of life. Respect regulates how we treat mother earth, the plants, the animals, and our brothers and sisters of all races. Respect means you listen intently you show honor, consider the well-being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy” (p. 73).

### **Self-Determination, Decolonizing Indigenous and Non-Native Collaborations**

Brant Castellano (2000) stresses the challenge Indigenous people are faced with to move past the well-articulated critique of colonial institutions and deconstruction of oppressive ideologies into action in a manner that expresses Indigenous world-views and relations. For non-natives, the challenge “is to open up space for Indigenous initiative in schools and colleges, work sites, and organizations so that Indigenous ways of knowing can flourish and intellectual sharing can be practiced in a spirit of coexistence and mutual respect” (p. 23).

Because Indigenous knowledge has been under assault for generations

intergenerational transmission of ancient knowledge has been disrupted, and the damage has not been limited to the loss of what was once known: the process of knowledge creation – that is, the use of cultural resources to refine knowledge in the laboratory of daily living – has also been disrupted. (p. 25)

Today, as Indigenous people assert their rights in a more “hospitable social environment” (p. 25), they must consider how they wish to revise or modify their

traditions within contemporary research opportunities. Brant Castellano (2000), also points out that in Indigenous contexts, individual knowledge and experiences, even when inconsistent, may be accepted as valid. “You will not find arguments as to whose perception is more valid and therefore whose judgment should prevail. . . . people do not contest with one another to establish who is correct – who has the ‘truth’” (p. 26). The difference is understood between personal perceptions and wisdom that contains social validity and can therefore serve a community. “Knowledge is validated through collective analysis and consensus building” (p. 26).

Brant Castellano (2004), like many of her colleagues, believes that developing ethical codes of conduct for research with Indigenous communities or with external partnerships helps to “place the discussion of research ethics in the context of cultural world views and the struggle for self-determination as peoples and nations” (p. 98). Brant Castellano (2004) also writes that

The struggle is to live and thrive as peoples and nations maintaining and expressing distinctive world views and contributing uniquely to the Canadian federation. In the language of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, this is the pursuit, of self-determination. “Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. . . . Fundamental to the exercise of self-determination is the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real

and what is valuable.”<sup>16</sup> Just as colonial policies have denied Aboriginal Peoples access to their traditional lands, so also colonial definitions of truth and value have denied Aboriginal Peoples the tools to assert and implement their knowledge. Research under the control of outsiders to the Aboriginal community has been instrumental in rationalizing colonialist perceptions of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control. (p. 102)

Clements (2004), an adult educator in community development with Indigenous people’s movements, has found that the term self-determination when based on Freire’s writings reflects liberatory theory well. Clements defines self-determination

as the ability of people/s to name, create and control their own history. In this definition the ‘self’ of self-determination refers to groups of people. This implies a necessity to accept differences among groups and to design structures and methods of negotiating physical, social and cultural boundaries. (p. 65)

Hill (2000) concurs.

The first order of Indigenous self-determination is the task of revealing the Indigenous experience, long written out of official histories. Historically, Indigenous peoples have been dependent on non-natives to assist in

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<sup>16</sup> Here Brant Castellano is citing directly from the United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1994) E/CN.4/Sub.2/1994/2

developing the necessary dialogue to resist domination and exploitation.

The outcome has been a history of research by the dominant culture, within the dominant discourse. This discourse devalues Indigenous knowledge and is one strategy by which the West legitimizes its own knowledge. Indigenous peoples must have an intellectual space in which to develop their own frameworks and methodologies regarding intellectual self-determination. (p. 1)

Gilchrist (1997) argues that while it is impossible to find any single research methodology to suit all research, Indigenous people do share one common struggle, “to decolonize ourselves and our knowledge production. We need to change research methods to end objectification of Indigenous communities and to encourage action based knowledge that is useful to self-determination” (p. 80). Absolon and Willett (2004) write “that methodologies such as community-based research and participatory action research have provided a launch pad for the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies and community participation” (p. 11). They stress that it is also important for Indigenous researchers to accept responsibility in continuing to “develop methods embedded in our own frameworks” (p. 11). They also advocate the sharing of power with non-Indigenous researchers at all levels and advocate the need for Indigenous paradigms.

Aboriginal research must have contexts that acknowledge both our cultural and colonial history. Such variables as knowledge of history, culture and contemporary contexts affect process and research outcomes, in turn,

affect policy, programming, practice and societal perception. Renewal in Aboriginal research processes and methodology requires strength and pride in self, family, community, culture, nation, identity, economy, and governance. (p. 12)

## **The Need for PAR/PE in Non-Native and Indigenous Research**

### **Collaborations**

The development of PAR/PE out of the southern context of Freirian liberatory theory is significant for non-native and Indigenous research collaborations. PAR/PE provide the necessary space and the conscientização for non-Native researchers to reflect on their practice in order to increasingly work in inclusive ways that shift the leadership and power to Indigenous researchers both within the academy and in the field. Non-native scholars need to ask how they can participate in the production of knowledge at particular and/or vulnerable sites in ways that expand possibilities, especially in different contexts, depending on the role or voice of authority accorded to them. Indigenous scholars and researchers have found that academic institutionalization and hegemonic hierarchies of research continue to colonize our practice. They are positioned in a context that places them outside of themselves, as opposed to in relationship with their work and all it engages. Understanding how dominant structures diminish one's ability to maneuver is key to decolonizing one's imposition. PAR/PE provide practical starting points to opening up spaces for Indigenous research protocols to be established and to furthering the decolonizing objective of PAR/PE implemented by Indigenous and non-native researchers in collaborative research projects.

Dissolving hegemonic practices that simultaneously give space to Indigenous perspectives in service of their resistant struggle to achieve disciplinary recognition (Lather, 2006) becomes vital, as this will enable theory to move into action; otherwise, the learning will remain partial and unimplemented. This dissolution could also provide opportunities for non-native researchers to learn more about Indigenous methodologies and knowledges for the creation of more space. Recognition and understanding of Indigenous epistemologies can only further our ability to collaborate in meaningful ways, as well as provide more inclusive educational experiences. PAR/PE has evolved from a liberatory theoretical standpoint into a praxis that ethically implements methodological Indigenous protocols, supports Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous rights to the control of construction and meaning within all their research relationships.



## **CHAPTER 4: Witnessing/Listening and Decolonizing Collaborative Partnerships between Indigenous Researchers and Non-Natives**

### **Chief Reggie Mark Reflects on the Impact of Residential Schools on the Cree**

*At the age of six I was sent off to residential school. Little did I know that this would be a long journey of disconnection, away from family and community. I spent nine years in residential school, in Moose Factory and Sault Ste. Marie. High School, and College were spent in foster homes, also far away from home.*

*The system was rigid with rules and punishment.*

*We only reconnected with family during the short summers. The first news we were told was about the births and deaths of family and friends. Daily family life was quick and short, before you knew it we were back at school. the impacts were enormous, no love, no family, no daily family life, but always longing for it.*

*We quickly bonded to create lifelong friendships. These friendships were with children from many different Cree communities. They provided some of the support we missed from our families.*

*The lifelong friendships made at the time resulted in simple unity, which was needed because life had imposed a system that was uncommon to us.*

*The fight for Cree Rights became possible because we were united and due to strong, courageous leaders was won.*

*The Cree leadership fought a long battle that improved the quality*

*of life today and for our future.*

*Our children, and their children, will always be proud and will walk with dignity.*

**Chief Rodney Mark (Reggie Mark's Son) Reflects on the Impact of Residential Schools on the Cree**

*Residential school had a devastating impact on our community that will last forever, both negative and positive. It disconnected families, it shamed our Cree identity, and robbed us of our self-reliance. These, I believe, are the three main issues inflicted on our community, which we are still recovering from. The best outcome of residential school is the ability to read, write, and speak English. My father's generation was able to fight for Cree rights because of their literacy.*

*When my son turned 8 years old, I realized that he was the same age my father was when he was taken to residential school. I could not imagine my son on his bed alone and frightened needing someone to tell him "I love you", to simply hear a voice of encouragement. Every child born is awesome. Every child needs love and affection; this is a human need.*

*When looking at my son, I saw my Father. I was humbled by this realization. I grew more compassionate and understanding of my father's generation. They all missed the love and affection of parents, as well as moments and memories with their families.*

*I recall when my Father and my uncles spoke about returning from residential school for the summer. The first thing they were told was of the births and deaths in the community. Sometimes it would be a parent, grandparent, sister, brother, uncle or auntie.*

*I am deeply proud and forever grateful to that generation.  
Resilience is their legacy.*

The opening of this chapter features a commentary by Former Chief Reggie Mark followed by his son and current Chief Rodney Mark from the Cree Nation of Wemindji. Creating space for Indigenous voices is part of the ongoing decolonizing challenge all settler Canadians need to think through. I have had the opportunity to hear Chief Reggie Mark speak in his community to both local Crees and visitors about the impact of Indian Residential Schools on his own life, the lives of his family members, and its impact on the Cree way of life. Chief Reggie Mark spoke openly and honestly about pain, loss, and the positive outcomes of his experiences. I believe that part of Cree resiliency is found in the value they place on sourcing whatever may be found of benefit, from even the most dire of life's experiences, to serve their families and community. Cree worldviews and Indigenous courage continue to define the expression of Cree leadership and these values.

This chapter calls for a shift from merely assuming the proper attitude towards action on the part of all settler Canadians towards Indigenous peoples. Before non-natives can truly decolonize research methodologies in working

collaboratively with Indigenous peoples, settler Canadians must assume some measure of responsibility towards reconciliation and healing the legacies of residential school syndrome. By witnessing, in myriad informal and formal ways, the truths of residential school, we can contribute towards building a more authentic trust in our Indigenous collaborations.

Part of my own response in this dissertation features a visual narrative discussion drawing on Indigenous art and art work with related Indigenous themes to support an apology offered by myself to the WTSG after having participated together as witness/listeners to issues and testimony concerning Indian residential schools. Complex are the cultural, social, historical and political contexts surrounding this action, and here I explore the questions raised in connection with it. In particular, I identify how introducing the work of contemporary Indigenous artists, who are bicultural, or have chosen to work from a modernist perspective, can serve to: i) raise powerful issues that are difficult to introduce from multiple points of view; and ii) create the space and support for important conversations to take place between non-native and traditional Indigenous artists. I look at some of the questions raised, as well as consider the opportunities they point to for improving art education and the decolonization of pedagogical practice.

### **The Harper Apology**

June 11, 2008, is a key date in the history of Canada for all Indigenous and settler Canadians. This date marks the day that the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, offered an official apology for the atrocities committed against

Aboriginal people through residential schooling.<sup>17</sup> I have decided to include the full text in the body of my dissertation due to its hard won content and the apology's ongoing significance:

***Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools***

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history. For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed,

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<sup>17</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada provides a link to the official apology offered by the Government of Canada here:

<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=9>

This website also provides links to official apologies made by the Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, and United Churches in Canada, as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Apologies are available in text or on video. Initial apologies that were found wanting by Indigenous communities are also analyzed here.

some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child". Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country. One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home. The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities. The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities

today. It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada. The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system. To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from

suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry. The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.



### **‘Witnessing’, the Apology and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation**

On June 11, 2008, I found myself working in the Cree Nation of Wemindji. It was the best possible place for me to watch the position taken. Being a non-native in an Indigenous community highlighted the projected attitude of the Canadian Government towards Indigenous peoples of this land for the genocidal policies that governed the Indian residential school system (IRS).<sup>18</sup>

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was established to support Indigenous healing processes resulting from the legacies of sexual, physical, mental, spiritual and cultural abuse of those who went through the residential school system. The impetus for this grew from First Nations leader Phil Fontaine’s 1990 account of his own IRS experience, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) of 1991-1996, which called for a public inquiry<sup>19</sup>, and the growing number of class action suits emerging by the early 2000s

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<sup>18</sup> Ravi de Costa (2009) offers insight into the nature of apology and some critique regarding the official Harper Apology. He points out that the apology may have “preceded any substantive achievements of the TRC. . . there is a strong sense that we as a nation have apologized without knowing, or even having had the chance to hear what the truth is to which we must become reconciled” (p. 4). It is noted that Canadian liabilities and any further obligations end with the timeline of this agreement.

<sup>19</sup> For full details see the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and/or the Truth and Reconciliation, see <http://www.ahf.ca> and [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)

(Akhtar, 2010; de Costa, 2009; Nagy & Karur Sehdev, 2012).<sup>20</sup> In 2003 the government set up the alternative dispute resolution system to manage all the claims. The Assembly of First Nations heavily criticized this system. By 2006 the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was reached. This agreement led to the Common Experience Payment paid to all former students and an Individual Assessment Process for compensation for sexual and physical abuse. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)<sup>21</sup> was established to acknowledge the IRS system and its impacts and consequences. The TRC also provides culturally appropriate and safe places for survivors to tell their stories and for official witnessing thereof. It honours the survivors and their families. The

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<sup>20</sup> For a through explanation of how the IRS perpetuated genocide see Akhtar (2010). This paper reports on the limitations of the TRC, which lacks investigative or punitive powers and has no right to compel witnesses. The establishment of the International Human Rights Tribunal into Genocide in Canada (IHRTGC) and its mandate are provided. Evidence that there were thousands of preventable deaths in these schools and hospitals has been documented and justice is being pursued. Investigation into other forms of Indigenous assimilation under the guise of childhood welfare that perpetuates the insidious nature of colonial processes and continues to undermine Indigenous families is discussed. Indigenous people will not let the lack of punitive power of the TRC rest, reconciliation is not a given or an equivalent outcome of the witness apology processes.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 4 for a TRC Canadian institutional map of the IRS system.

TRC was mandated to promote truth and reconciliation on both the national level and at a local, community level. It serves to educate the public about IRS and has created a national research centre.<sup>22</sup>

After the truth telling and witnessing, after redress and financial compensation, will reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and non-native Canadians emerge? What is needed for this process to effect a real change in the Canadian consciousness? What lies at the heart of residential schools was colonization. The TRC, and education generally, have begun to examine colonization through that lens in order to draw this period to a conclusion (Nagy & Karur Sehdev, 2012).

### **Being with the Cree and Listening to the Apology Together**

When I watched the Harper Apology I was in the community as a research assistant with Cree program staff and my doctoral research supervisor. We were conducting a participatory evaluation of COOL (Challenge Our Own Limits), a Cree inspired after-school program. Conscious that this was a momentous event, we took the afternoon off and invited our colleagues to remain with us, at the transit house, to view the apology on television.

The Apology was experienced in different ways. One of our Cree colleagues had participated on a youth church panel, advising the Canadian Government about what youth would like to hear in the apology. His thoughts were with his ailing Grandfather throughout the broadcast. The other young woman in our group was relieved to have a break from data analysis. She had her

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 5 for a condensed time-line of events regarding IRS.

two toddlers with her; supervising them was a more realistic task while we watched the apology. Life carried on, precariously, for those who were now too elderly to appreciate the broadcast and in joyful exploration by those too young to be troubled as yet by its meaning. Today, when I watch a video clip of the apology, I am still deeply moved. Collectively, our emotions, from engaged to distracted, were strongly evident as we listened to the Canadian government offer a long-overdue apology to the many people whose lives were harmed.

Dr. George Blacksmith is an example of a person whose courage is exemplified in his dissertation and in his response to the Apology. With heartfelt courage, Blacksmith (2010) analyses his response to parts of the apology and seamlessly includes paths available for Crees to take action to build and improve Cree education for Cree children and their future. I encourage all who can read these truths, and who feel called to bear witness, even in the privacy of individual reading space, to read *The Intergenerational Legacy of the Indian Residential School System on the Cree Communities of Mistissini, Oujebougama and Waswanipi: An Investigative Research on the Experiences of Three Generations of the James Bay Cree of Northern Quebec*. While his dissertation ends with his experience of the Apology, this in no way signals an end to this work together. It is in the courage and hope that resonates through voices of determination, such as Dr. Blacksmith's, that we as settler Canadians are offered a new opportunity to co-create a better future together.

As witness/listeners, the WTSG heard testimonies offered from a nine community-wide radio broadcast. This event did not proceed in a ceremonial or

formal manner as described by Regan (2010). We listened to testimonies offered within the process of answering questions and providing information about the financial and legal ordeals, which began long before the official apology was offered. These broadcasts initiated many family members into the process of bearing witness for the first time, where the younger generation heard the unspoken spoken, and where the stories, pain, questions, and confusion were shared with anyone who cared to tune in to the broadcasts. Cree consciousness and non-native consciousness alike were exposed. Stories require a listener and a response. We listened together within the intimacy of our group. After bearing witness, in the company of generations of impacted people throughout all the communities, not responding would have felt like dishonouring the courage of those who spoke their truth; it would have added up at best to complicity.

### **A White Woman's Claim-Staking in a Settler Call to Action**

Paulette Regan, who wrote *Unsettling the Settler Within* (2010), reinvests the term settler Canadian with a new mission. She defines settler from “within Canada’s multicultural context, Western European philosophy, political systems, law, and values, (which) still define dominant Canadian culture” (p. 240). The term settler, as Regan uses it, refers to “not only Euro-Canadians whose ancestors came to Canada during the colonial period but also to more recent immigrants from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are part of contemporary settler society” (p. 240).

Regan (2010) asks non-native settlers, who have heard of the gifts of testimony offered by Indigenous peoples,

How will we, as settlers, receive these gifts? What gifts will we ourselves bring to truth telling and reconciliation? Each of us must answer fundamental questions. Do we choose to remain colonial perpetrators – benign peacemakers – bearing the token gift of false reconciliation? Or will we bear gifts offered with humility, respect, and a genuine willingness to experience our own unsettling so that we might learn the profound teachings that this history holds for all of us? Will we view a truth-telling and reconciliation process simply as a way to put the past, and our guilt, behind us quickly? Or will we recognize the possibility of opening transformative pathways on a journey that starts within ourselves – a journey of critical reflection upon profoundly disturbing residential school stories? (p. 17)

Regan issues (2010) “A Settler Call to Action” that I have also felt the need for and acted upon in the past. I resume this call with the writing of this chapter. Regan summons us to this call through the authority of her experience as a Director of Research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, as an official non-Indigenous host of an apology feast, and as an official witness with ongoing commitments. Regan (2010) explains that the act of truth-telling and witnessing extends beyond the ceremony, as her responsibilities to recall and honour the gifts offered by those who testified are met in part by authoring her text. “Indigenous people have broken their silence in order to name the violence that has been directed at them, and in doing so they call us, as settlers, to account. . .bearing witness is an ethical undertaking” (p. 18).

Unsettling the Settler Within is a call to action for non-Indigenous Canadians who do not see a need to take part in a truth-telling and reconciliation process. It makes a compelling argument for why they should care about history of the IRS (Indian Residential School) system and actively participate in dismantling its ongoing legacy. For scholars, policy makers, and negotiation practices and the concomitant erasure of the history of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking from the Canadian consciousness. For educators, conflict/peace studies scholar-practitioners and historians, it links theory and practice to explore the pedagogical potential truth-telling and reconciliation processes. For those who would be Indigenous allies in the fight for justice and peace, it demonstrates how examining myth and history enriches our thinking about, and participation in, the decolonization project. (Regan, 2010, p. 17)

Dr. Alfred Taiaiake, in the foreword to the same text, writes that Paulette Regan “offers up the history and living legacy of colonial violence that characterizes the Indian residential school system. . . . She rejects a self-congratulatory version of Canadian history and challenges the benevolent peacemaker myth that forms the basis of settler identity” (p. ix). Taiaiake (2010) goes on to highlight two key themes in Regan’s text.

Non-Natives must struggle to confront their colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance as part of a massive truth telling about Canada’s past and present relationship with the original inhabitants

of this land. . . .The author argues that words of apology and reconciliation are not enough to make the significant social and political change that is so sorely needed. Words must be accompanied by concrete action at all levels of Canadian society. If such actions are to be transformative, they cannot be predicated on good intentions but must be rooted instead in a fundamental recognition of the human dignity and right to freedom of self-determining Indigenous peoples. . . . the words and ideas (Regan) offers us. . . have revolutionary and liberatory potential. They point the way toward something completely new in the five-hundred year history of interactions between Indigenous people and settlers in this land: white people staking claim to justice and the generation of a relationship of honesty and mutual respect. (pp. x-xi)

Within this chapter I have been moved by Regan to heed her call, and extend a call of my own. I do think that the people who pick up Regan's book already do care, but it may very well put some backbone into those of us who recognize these needs but have yet to carve the space and time to respond. But most importantly, it gives me hope that when we, who may not need to be converted, take concrete action, it will impact others who have not understood its necessity. As I struggle to decolonize my relationships with traditional Cree artists, in this case, through the common vehicle of visual and Indigenous art, I hope to inspire others to examine their own narrative threads for ways in which they too can enrich and add to the process of genuine reconciliation. Morris (2002) writes about "thinking with one's own story" and how under certain



conditions “it is extremely difficult to author our own lives from within. It is difficult to find a narrative thread that sustains the integrity of self” (p. 5). While this does present challenges, additional courage is also required to weave in the narrative threads of others. Exploring how metaphorically reflecting on key narrative threads structures and integrates an inquiry, facilitating both my understanding of who I am, how I participate and contribute to our group, and how the WTSG responds to me, serves the common good in our work.

### **Becoming Whole: Apology as a Necessary Component of Reconciliation and Healing**

Regan, in her capacity as an official witness, writes about the nature of apology and witness. She views apology as one part of settler truth-telling needed to accompany reconciliation. Acknowledging an injustice may take many forms depending on the context and expertise of the people speaking and the people listening. Different Indigenous communities do have their own protocols complete with traditional formal rites and ceremonies that must be respected when offering and accepting an apology.

Regan (2010) refers to four forms an acknowledgement of injustice may take. First is self-knowledge, the second is moral witness, the third form of acknowledgement is “whistle blowing, wherein the person reveals an ‘open secret’” and the fourth level is “living outside the lie” (p. 177). At this point a witness expresses what he or she deem to be the truth according to their conscience. Regan (2010) describes it as the “discovery that it is possible to live inside the truth, to find a repressed alternative to the inauthentic. . . . People

become committed, driven, unable to return to their old lives or shut their eyes again” (p. 177). This process of coming to consciousness, is experienced by individual perpetrators or bystanders and may also impact the historical consciousness of societies as a whole if people are willing to struggle with the truth about traumatic events.

### **Unsettling the ‘Settler Within’: A Personal Response**

Regan’s seminal text provided me with an in-depth lens from which to understand two previous apologies I made for the impacts of residential school on Cree people and colonization itself. The first apology I offered was in 1997 to the eight women to whom I taught the Educators in Native Childcare Services attestation.<sup>23</sup> The second apology that I will describe in detail also took place in the CNW and was offered to the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005. I outline them here, because listening, acknowledging and responding to the stories was for me, an integral part of bringing personal meaning into decolonizing our research projects and working relationships.

I had many questions as I thought through how I could offer an apology and what it could mean. What were my non-native research collaborator and partner responsibilities? What are the social, political, ethical implications for me, with regard to my role in the group, and what might be an anticipated outcome of the process? How could I bridge my needs to respond with respect, responsibility,

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<sup>23</sup> A description of this apology is featured in the text which analyses a photographic collage titled “Hiawatha” featured in my Master’s thesis (Stocek,1998).

and reverence? Should I risk our vulnerability (their shyness and privacy, my insecurity) because I was driven to decolonize my position? If how I listened could transform our relationships, then was it possible that the way I responded could reinscribe the patterns of colonialism and do more harm? Could an apology contribute in some small way to the context of restitution in a more humane manner than the legal accounting of the impacts of atrocious experiences? How to sort through my own implication in colonization and the privileges and benefits afforded me at the expense of others? These were the questions at the heart of ‘unsettling the settler within’ my experience.

I decided to offer my apology, not specifically for the testimonies I had heard exchanged, because I was not privileged to understanding all the testimony and conversations held in Cree. The risk of possibly going wrong and making a mistake was unthinkable. I apologised for the broader experiences of colonization, not the actual residential school accounts I had heard. These speakers were not present although we all were aware WTSG members had their own stories. My intentions and the context from which this apology was offered were abundantly clear. I felt that this was the most respectful path I could take. I would offer an apology demonstrating that *I had listened*, in silence alongside each of the members present, not through an inactive silence, but from *an engaged silence*, in powerful ways that could contribute to our understanding and relationships. To do so, I decided to draw on rich experiences and perspectives expressed from our daily experiences. I chose to do this with the support of a Cree poem, Indigenous artwork and artwork with related themes. Posting the images by request on the

workshop wall afterwards, where we all could individually contemplate how they spoke to us from the depths of this new space, enriched the active and dynamic forms from where the ongoing silence of our communications took place. In this shared space I staked my call to action.

### **Witness/Listeners and Visual Narrative as Apology**

As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for restoration of their humanity they will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight, because of the purpose given to it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness, which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even when clothed in false generosity. (Freire, 2002 p. 45)

In October, 2005, I decided to present a visual narrative to offer an apology to the group for colonization. I had been considering it for some time. One member of the group was a Wemindji representative attending regional talks concerning the Federal negotiations addressing the intergenerational legacy of Canada's IRS system. Several meetings over two different fieldwork trips had been aired live over the community radio, which we listened to avidly in the workshop, imagining what it was like for our colleague in attendance. Regan

(2010) considers the “possibilities of apology and testimonial exchange that is experiential, subjective, and emotionally engaged, thus enabling settlers to bear ethical witness and learn to listen differently – with a decolonizing ear” (p. 15). Some of the radio broadcasts were in English, parts in French, and much of it in Cree, but there was no mistaking the tone of highly emotionally charged discussions. Even if the language was at times beyond my understanding, the tone was not.

Nagy and Karur Sehdev (2010) discuss the difficulty the TRC has when collecting testimonies surrounding the “politics of translation when the English language has been strategically employed to displace and disempower Aboriginal languages. And about the power of telling and listening to stories in the face of profound cultural, linguistic, and experiential difference” (p. 71). I felt after listening for two days that Cree speakers who spoke in English were prepared to do so. They had specific stories to tell, points to make, and questions prepared. It was a political decision to have their presentations heard and understood by the broader audience, especially by the legal representatives in attendance to answer questions. Those Cree speakers who spoke in Cree were speaking to their own communities, to their family. Many speakers had difficulty getting through their contribution, speaking painful truths in the language of oppression was not imaginable.

Thinking about what to say and how to present my thoughts so that I did not rely on spoken language alone required that I carefully evaluate the ethics of the situation. Could I draw from the resources at hand or should I wait,

postponing for a future field trip? I wanted to honour our experiences and my values even as they were shifting. I did not want to compromise my knowledge or my imagination, nor succumb to fears the process engaged. These feelings felt contrary, but risk is always engaged when seeking alternative means to re-right or re-story injustice. Should I introduce Indigenous art only? Could I draw from a wider selection of artists, one that reflected diverse backgrounds, or should I privilege space to those who have been historically silenced? How could I communicate my message through images? Could I construct a visual narrative or story, a multi-layered message that would remain open to each participant's truth that would be open to each participant's willingness to enter and centre the stories from within their own truth? Would my Cree colleagues be willing to take this journey with me? What meanings could it hold for them?

I wanted to shed my polite demeanour, my stance of respectful listening, to venture out opening the borders of my relationships where truth circles at a safe respectful distance but also in an increasingly irredeemable silence. This distance had been adding up to mean more than simply keeping an arms-length. Imagine an arms-length being measured by units or guises of respectful silence, polite denial, avoidance, and distancing. The time had come to breach these spaces, to embark on a constructive dialogue, a *visual narrative telling*. I planned these narrative stories, not to foreclose on any new conversations, but to present one means to offer my deeply felt sorrow for past wrongs, to offer my respect for who my Cree colleagues were, and to make a real contribution to building a more truthful and respectful future.

I carefully planned my apology to acknowledge the sharing we experienced listening to the broadcasts. I did not occupy the role of an official witness, but I wanted to demonstrate my respect for having shared this witness/listening experience with my Cree colleagues. To turn away at the end of the day without making any comment would be to deny complicity – or worse yet, to respond with empathy but without any significant action would have been a passive response, one that did not reflect the integrity of our hands-on active work together.

Regan (2010) cautions that compassionate gestures in the past have “reinscribed colonial relations in ways that ultimately reinforced rather than reconstructed the legitimacy of the benevolent colonizer” (p. 47). Far from a simple compassionate gesture, I have aspired to open up new possibilities in my own work with Cree people, illustrating, in a concrete manner, the shifts in my consciousness and the corresponding shifts in the decolonization and liberation of my interactions with Indigenous peoples. It was my attempt to re-establish a balance between us, and even to raise the bar, once it had been re-established, between the tensions of shared witnessing/ listening, between the tensions of truth-telling and respect. If we are to own being engaged in a decolonizing phase of our collective histories all our actions must support Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous rights: once this phase has begun to run its course we must be increasingly open to Indigenous people’s critique of how we can further expand these spaces. In a cautionary note, Regan (2010) explains that benevolent gestures have

recur(red) throughout the histories of imperialism and colonialism, including forms of humanitarianism and ‘benign imperialism,’ providing ground(s) for policies of modernization and development, assimilation and integration, charity and aid. . . . these motivations are foundational to the colonial enterprise in legitimating European’s presence and presumed superiority. (p. 47; drawing on de Costa, 2009)<sup>24</sup>

Two key factors continuously motivated my decision. First, I had been a teacher in the community since 1997. In the past, I taught early childhood education. I witnessed first-hand how colonizing education continues to be manifested. The group knew me as a teacher and took a very long time adjusting to my new role as a participant researcher. When our research really began to flourish and the group understood how my participation could contribute, my presence lost its novelty. I started to feel more accepted as one of the group. This acceptance was the second factor. I did not want to take this position for granted but aspired to build and enrich these precious relationships.

Since that time I have grown to understand how the idea of restitution and financial compensation cannot begin to address the loss Indigenous people have suffered. While I do not suffer from guilt any longer, I do feel the type of sorrow

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<sup>24</sup> Chief Mark and I have written about how we experienced this form of benevolent colonialism when we collaborated to help establish the CNW’s first childcare services. This experience led to the list “How to Approach Collaborations”, which is featured in the title of this dissertation and in Chapter Five.



that emerges from a deeply felt place where integrity and honour are threatened. The following excerpt from my field notes describes the deep emotions I experienced trying to reconcile these conflicting social spaces and identities.

I question how as a Canadian I can accept my identity when so much is unspoken and unknown about the impacts of our colonizing heritage. I also feel a deep abiding love for the community, the group I am working with, their joys, strengths, and humour. Colonization is part of Canadian heritage and our legacy, one I feel necessitates more than an official apology in the form of a governmental declaration and a financial equation. I wonder if, once as a nation we can accept what was lost, perhaps our identity will grow as doors are opened acknowledging the Aboriginal roots that have nourished our heritage and contributed to our culture since our beginning here. (Field notes, Oct. 2005)

After much thought, I realized I should put my energy into deciding what I could offer. I began to combine my thoughts of IRS and the basketry project we were working on. A number of multi-layered stories through the selection of images and themes surrounding trees, bark, and roots were the inspiration I had at hand to work with. Indigenous interactions with the environment, like many Cree relationships with the natural world, bring together people, animals, and plants in symbiotic relationships. These relationships grow from respect, mutual survival, spirituality, and cultural expression and are key sites of Indigenous knowledge and learning. For Plains Cree, the Buffalo's return has become a metaphor and reinvigorated site for learning and education (Hubbard, 2009; Stonechild, 2006). I

drew on the theme of trees and the value of trees in Cree worldviews in a similar vein as the metaphor of the buffalo, albeit for this single occasion. Could Trees be a site of metaphor, communication, and exchange? Could Trees be the WTSG's Buffalo? By drawing on stories of trees and the value trees hold for my Cree colleagues, I hoped to evoke sites of learning which would renew our relationships in light of the truths we had heard as witness/listeners.

We read in the poem "Trees" (see Figure 4.1 below), which I shared with the group. Wood has sheltered, transported, and kept people warm, supporting the life of families and community in the bush. All of these relationships are connected with the forest, trees, and wood, albeit in different ways. Wood and Cree relationships to trees and the forest have been a source of physical and cultural, traditional, and spiritual sustenance.

Drawing on the symbol of trees and their roots was also practical in nature as a means to initiate this conversation. We had been working to develop our skills making Spruce bark baskets, a project featured in an upcoming chapter. We were in the midst of beginning a creative endeavour to recover traditional Cree skills interrupted and lost while a generation was away at IRS. The workshop smelt of pine resin and sap, the rich scent seeped from the bark and wood chips, our hands and pores were stained with natural dyes and permeated with the scent. I opened our discussion by first reading a poem by Margaret Sam-Cromarty (1992) entitled "Trees". This elicited some individual stories and conversations of bush camp, grandparents, and concepts of nature.

## **TREES**

I often think of trees  
along the shores of lakes.  
My grandfather used poles  
to make a teepee.

My grandfather made a toboggan  
out of trees.  
It was smooth and fine,  
the toboggan he made by hand.

I travelled on sturdy snowshoes  
made from trees –  
on the snowy slopes  
stood the hardy pines.

I drank from wooden bowls  
so clean and nice,  
had light wooden snow shovels  
made from trees without a price.

I often think of trees  
so special to me.

On cold winter nights  
I make a warm fire from a tree.  
  
I was born a tree.  
My Mother said I came  
from a tree stump in the woods.  
  
I was once a beautiful tree.

**Figure 4.1: “Trees” by Margaret Sam-Cromarty**

This particular piece also held deep meaning and relevance for me, as I knew Margaret from having spent time with her in Chisasibi and Fort George. I also organized a public reading celebrating the launching of this book in Montreal. I wanted to read something I had some experience of, even if the content of the poetry was not related to my own cultural heritage. The poem was very well received. Everyone wanted copies and one went up on the wall.

The next part of our visual narrative studied an article in *The Nation*, a Cree magazine, which appeared in a December 2002, issue. It featured the work of Reinhard Reitzenstein. Reitzenstein is a contemporary sculptor whose work often relates to the nature-culture dialogue. Featured in this article were several well-known images of works completed outdoors featuring trees. Three examples in particular stood out as resonating with all of us who were participating in the

group. In this segment, John K. Grande (2002) was describing the artwork and interviewing Reitzenstein.<sup>25</sup>

1) In the 1970's he excavated the entire root system of an ancient ironwood tree on family land near Ottawa. . . . the roots he uncovered had grown around obstacles, boulders and stones. The immensity and majesty of the tree, this ancient mythical symbol found in writings of many ancient religions, was impressive. More interestingly, after the earth was infilled, the tree flowered better than it had in years due to aeration of the soil. . .

2) a sculpture in 1992 titled Replanting T-his-tree, Reitzenstein (was) the only non-Native invited to participate (at the Woodland Cultural Centre) which was an honour.

JG: American Natives say that trees are their books and the forest their library. With Replanting T-his-tree, you have actually taken pieces of 19th century colonial history books and spliced them to a living tree.

RR: I actually pushed them through the tree in the hope that as the tree traces its wounds, it begins to reabsorb the entire contents of the books-the books themselves, the tree itself, a white spruce was used as a pulp tree.

JG: In 1987 at Topsoil Island near Sault Ste. Marie. . .

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<sup>25</sup> Reinhard Reitzenstein: Earth in Context is an article that has since been published in *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (Grande, 2004).

3) you upended eight 50-foot-tall-trees, planting them upside down in the ground. . . . in a 60-foot-diameter circle configuration.

RR: The circle is a universal form. This piece, called NO Title, referred to the titling of land. I worked in collaboration with Dan Pine, an 88-year-old medicine chief from the local reserve there, to create a site where the appropriation of land, the ownership of place could be discussed. By inverting the trees and placing their tops in the ground I tried to address the inversion of priorities, of what desire has been, to establish balance. (pp. 14-15)

The group responded well, they were animated, enjoying the work. They responded with amazement and appreciated the irony and the strength of the statements made. They spoke in solidarity with Reitzenstein's sympathy for nature and trees. They related *Replanting T-his -tree* to one of contemporary Indigenous artist Nadia Myre's works where, with the participation of a group of Indigenous artists, they beaded over each page of a copy of the entire *Indian Act* (also the title of the artwork, 2000-2003). Another of Myre's artworks, *History in Two Parts* (2000) generated good discussions between us about decolonization and colonial pressure. In this work Myre constructed a canoe from both aluminium and birch bark, using traditional and contemporary techniques she has created a visual metaphor for the dualities or challenges in her life.



**Figure 4.2: “Spine” by Rodrigues-Labreche**

In the last segment of our discussions I showed an original mock-up of an eight-foot black and white photo collage by Maureen Rodrigues-Labreche, a Montreal photographer. The image, in Figure 4.2 above, is titled *Spine* (1994). Most of the top half of the image depicts the trunk of a pine tree cropped up close so the branches extend off the borders of the unframed work. The bottom half depicts a pine-wooded shoreline with seamless reflections of the trees in the water. To the viewer it is not immediately apparent that this is a shoreline. Rodrigues-Labreche has rotated the lower image vertically and cut it to size so what was seemingly a horizontal shoreline becomes a vertical extension of the

trunk above. She exhibited this piece with powerful and moving effect, in a series of works researching issues relating to adoption.

I offered my apology through a discussion of what the Rodrigues-Labreche image represented to me at that moment. I spoke about how the tree was ‘reflected’ in the water, and if you looked to the bottom of the image your view was abruptly cut off. It appeared to be a rootless tree (endless shore line disrupted and turned on end). Our immediate conclusion is that the base of the trunk and its roots must be hidden beneath the water. I speculated that perhaps colonizers arriving in this land viewed the forests, the land, and its people as undeveloped territory with no roots, no heritage, only seeing what they wanted to see: a reflection of themselves and their ambitions, a rootless territory free for the taking and re-making. I directly apologized for colonization in general and specifically for how colonization has impacted them and the experiences of their families. Metaphorically, morally, I acknowledged their cultural heritage and roots, I attempted through our discussion, as Reitzenstein literally did, to trace the wounds and begin the long, slow process of reabsorbing the contents of colonial history in order that an authentic truth could take root.

### **Multiple Sites and Roles of Apology**

Murphy (2011) examines the role of apology. Official apologies, in contrast to my own informal apology, are made for past injustices. They are “offered by official representatives of a state (or some state agency) for past actions committed by a state or under state sanction” (p. 149). Murphy has identified a core set of questions that officials should ask themselves when



planning an apology. Proposing the definitive list of criteria to author a perfect apology is unrealistic. He rather suggests “who is to offer the apology; what substantial issues should the apology address; where is the apology to be offered; when is the apology to be offered; and how is the ceremony surrounding the apology to be configured” (p. 50) as criteria that must be thought through carefully. Further, apologies must recognize the injustices done, express remorse and an acceptance of responsibility, and vow to ensure the unjust acts never reoccur. Sincerity is here crucial, since “it is especially important that apologies be offered without verbal equivocation, qualifications, or excuses, and without an air of reluctance” (p. 50). Recipients of the apology must indeed be sure that the apology is not being extended to simply pacify victims, while at the same time balancing political needs do not alienate opponents to redress. Including survivors and youth impacted by the injustice in crafting the apology is also important when one considers the gains towards reconciliation. The officials who make the apology must be approved by victims and of sufficient importance to lend credibility to the process.

Murphy (2011) strongly maintains that truth telling must also extend to both the micro-and macro levels of injustice.

Apologies that overlook key micro-level injustices are morally compromised because they fail to accord the recognition and respect that is due to the victims of those injustices. . . .Apologies that fail to engage with macro-level injustice are also extremely morally problematic, because in many cases, unjust actions at the micro-level were both

legitimated and perpetrated by an unjust system or policy environment. (p. 55)

The younger members of the WTSG took some time to respond once our discussion had wound down, as they were reflecting carefully on what had transpired, perhaps waiting for their Elders to respond first. The older members of the group were very moved and appreciated what I meant almost before I had finished speaking. They all got up and stood in a line to shake my hand. Regan (2010) reminds us “as Indigenous peoples *restore* their own sense of human dignity as self-determining groups, settlers must *recognize* and *respect* that inherent dignity, thereby restoring their own” (p. 177; italics in original). Darder (2002) cites Peter McLaren, who states “of course, Freire acknowledged that decolonization was a project that knows no endpoint, no final closure. It is a life time struggle that requires insight, honesty, compassion, and a willingness to brush one’s personal history against the grain of ‘naïve consciousness’ or commonsense understanding” (p. 252).

I had not offered an official apology, nor had I been an official witness. My efforts grew from the fact that I am a teacher, and as such, I have become aware that IRS legacies are not from some long ago dark past, but are real living bodies, that inhabit parts of each day of every Cree colleague I work with. I thus offered an apology in solidarity for my chosen profession, not as an official on its behalf and in recognition that colonization continues to structure Indigenous experiences of formal education. Decolonization of formal education experiences will necessitate reciprocal action from all parties. I decided that the best way to

honour the courage we as witness/listeners had seen was to respond with compassion, to voice my commitment to equality, to express sorrow for the pain and suffering of my Cree colleagues and their families, and for the broader context that legitimated and perpetuated these injustices. I wanted to make clear that even as I listened silently I stood by my convictions and would work to see that these injustices were not erased or forgotten and would not be repeated. While official apologies are acts of moral leadership, I believe that as a citizen I too could assume a role in moral leadership. The discussion I led was a direct response to our time spent as witness/listeners. What it lacked in authority and ceremonial force it made up for in visual narrative threads or metaphors that were grounded in our current work and designed specifically for those present.

My own humble act of remembering, acknowledging, and apologizing involved deconstructing contemporary art images to create a space where my Cree interlocutors and I could offer our insights into historical wrongs. I did not focus on residential school itself, or even my colleagues' residential school experiences, or the intergenerational legacies experienced by the younger members of our group. These stories were very fresh in our experience. They were told over a series of broadcasts and understood in profound ways that I will never fully comprehend. My apology was rather extended through themes and means that related to our ongoing research and education and the learning processes that we were currently engaged in, in order to decolonize and bring a new order into our relationships as co-researchers/learners and collaborators. My apology was offered to respectfully acknowledge the experience of witnessing/listening we had

shared and to bring that experience directly and immediately into play from the active edge of our work together. If I could hope to offer an ethical response in the face of the courage and strength that had been expressed, I felt it had to come from our own shared work space, in keeping with our own working objectives, as a lived experience.

Dénommé-Welch (2008) writes that “we live in a society that offers little or no stable infrastructure that reflects our cultural and community needs and does not support our collective vision of what happiness and success mean” (p. 59). He goes on to articulate that in exploring pedagogy through narrative and storytelling.

I do not perpetuate mythologies, an artist is capable of occupying space as an in-betweenener, living among world views, cultures, and spaces. This is a space where I feel I must incessantly revisit notions of ethics and truth-seeking. If seeking truth is a possible ideology, then it could be argued that it should come with the responsibility to act respectfully, or at least be prepared to accept the consequences of one’s artistic actions. (p. 59)

Since I extended this apology, I have been asking myself whether, as a non-native in a Cree community, I was aspiring to be the type of in-betweenener Dénommé-Welch refers to? Offering an apology does in fact come with responsibility and the need to act respectfully.

Sharing meaningful stories through the arts can be an effective tool for discovering our best attempt at versions of the truth. These stories can promote self-reflection and “compassionate resistance and ethics in a space where resistance has historically been silenced” (Dénommé-Welch, 2008, p. 63).

I can state that through the process of in-depth reflection into the multiple layers of meanings and metaphors that the works of art I discussed with my Cree counterparts, considerable movement was achieved towards humanizing our relationships. I think a new level of respect was mutually exchanged which has served to enable our working relationships and interpersonal communication. Darder (2002) stresses that Freire repeatedly “insisted that dialogue only takes place to the extent teachers have the capacity to teach with humility and have faith in the students. Faith in their power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human” (p. 104). Here as a co-researcher I was clearly also a student alongside my fellow witness/listeners.

I appreciate that the Indigenous people of our country, in the most profound manner, understand what colonization means. However, Cree and Inuit people have repeatedly asked me, with sincerity, to explain to them the meaning of the term colonization. This is a request I have experienced in the past as emotionally charged. Recently I have found that I am able to participate in these all-important dialogues in-depth and more freely having had the experience of fostering this new space with the WTSG. In Freirian terms:

To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it. . . dialogue is the encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of the others. . . . The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Freire, 2002, p. 88-89)

When Freire (2002) writes about the leadership group, he argues that it is often comprised of men and women who themselves have come from the social strata of the colonizers or dominators. “At a certain point in their existential experience. . . these leaders renounce the class to which they belong. . . in an act of true solidarity. Whether or not this adherence results from a scientific analysis of reality, it represents an act of love and true commitment” (p. 163). I believe that my apology marked not only those whose ‘humanity had been stolen’ but also my own as an outside researcher “representing” the historic and ongoing dominating forces of the colonizing population. This act served in a different way to humanize my own position within the group, permitting me to move from the peripheral borders of the space I initially occupied, in a little closer. This opening up represents an act of generosity on the part of the group who cope with the dual task of struggling with their own decolonization and that of liberating me from mine.

In this chapter I presented one account of how dialogical links between colonial history and identity, Indigenous expression and art, can construct visual narratives that support witness/listening between Indigenous colleagues and their non-native partner. In addition I will present an Indigenous example of how practice of art and art education can confront traumatic historical events (framed in either a pedagogical research context or an educational setting) contributing to the truth-telling required to recognize an honest place for Indigenous peoples in our collective histories.

## **Indigenous Artists Featured in Aboriginal Healing Foundation Documents**

Settler Canadians, by a strange conflicting combination of self-absorption and romantic empathy, have managed to justify or disregard draconian processes of assimilation and genocide, yet admire representations of the Indians it was saving by portraying them both in the visual and literary arts. Francis (1992) writes that after destroying many aspects of Indigenous culture, “white society now turned around and admired its own recreations of what it had destroyed” (p. 36). Evidence of this is documented in the success of the visual arts exhibitions and publications often printed in numerous languages many times over. Vanishing Indians were by no means the exclusive property of settler Canadians, although it is worth noting that the majority of images we do have, according to Francis, were funded by government agencies or entrepreneurs whose success grew from exploitation and appropriation of land and resources.

The way by which Indigenous knowledges and artistic expressions are shared with the outside world are often “restricted, guided, mediated and/or translated by those who have the power to define what is worth knowing and what is not” (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008, p. 7). Whose perspectives have we offered in our educational settings? Of the Indigenous art shown, what images and themes are portrayed? Do we glorify traditional arts and crafts or modernism? Have we included Indigenous perspectives on colonial history, art, and education?

Dénomme-Welch (2008) points out that Indigenous artists whose work raise questions of an ethical and pedagogical nature are often considered by two sets of standards.

(a) standards set by mainstream social, artistic, and academic communities with expectations that Indigenous-themed art should be accessible and pleasant to the tastes of a broader society and consumer; and (b) standards established by their own guidelines, and if not theirs, then by their own community who may not want them to use or exploit various cultural signifiers (e.g., clan symbols, teachings). (p. 60)

Can we heed the call put forth by the very artwork Indigenous people are creating, to follow the directions Indigenous people are articulating and include issues relevant to both reserve and urban populations in our educational programs?

I was drawn to study the artwork included in several texts available on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) website because these are good examples of artwork that should be used to continue the decolonization of our pedagogical practices. They are a small but select number of artworks created by Indigenous peoples depicting themes of utmost significance to them concerning IRS.

One image, North American Indian Prison Camp, by George Littlechild, illustrates the cover of a document and the others preface two additional key documents. A Healing Journey Final Report Summary Points (AHF, 2006) features the artwork on the cover page of the document. (Reproductive rights for this image were not available. You may view a digital image of the work here: <http://www.ahf.ca/publications/research-series>).

The “From Truth to Reconciliation Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools” (2008) document has three pieces of artwork, one each by



Christi Belcourt, Alex Janvier, and Abraham Anghik Ruben. Not all are included here for lack of reproductive rights.



**Figure 4.3: “Resilience of the Flower Beadwork People”, Christi Belcourt, (1999) Acrylic on canvas**

We have survived through incredible odds. We very easily could have been absorbed into the mainstream society. The pressures were there from all sides. No matter. We are here. Despite direct assimilation attempts. Despite the residential school systems. Despite the strong influences of the Church in Métis communities to ignore and deny our Aboriginal heritage and our Aboriginal spirituality. We are still able to say we are proud to be Métis. We are resilient as a weed. As beautiful as a wildflower. We have much to celebrate and be proud of. (Christi Belcourt, [www.belcourt.net](http://www.belcourt.net).

Image reproduced with permission from the artist)

Reproductive rights for the image of Alex Janvier’s “Blood Tears” (acrylic on linen) were not available. You may view a digital image of the work here: <http://www.ahf.ca/publications/research-series>. Painted on the artist’s 66th

birthday, Blood Tears is both a statement of Mr. Janvier's sense of loss and a celebration of his resilience, made all the more powerful with the inclusion of a lengthy inscription painted in his own hand on the rear of the canvas. The inscription details a series of losses attributed to the ten years he spent at the Blue Quills Indian Residential School: loss of childhood, language, culture, customs, parents, grandparents, and traditional beliefs. He was taken off the land he loved and severely punished for speaking his language, Denesu'liné. Being a little boy did not matter and "many, many died of broken bodies" and "broken spirit." The entire inscription is reproduced within.

Reproductive rights for Abraham Anghik Ruben's "Wrestling with my demons" (2001) (Brazilian soapstone) were also not available, however, a digital image of the work can be seen here: <http://www.ahf.ca/publications/research-series>. The artist made the following statement about the sculpture:

This sculpture is a personal interpretation of my life. It is a mirror of my past, a signpost for the present, a reminder of yet unresolved issues and day-to-day struggles. Past struggles include twenty years of alcoholism and my recovery, and years in the residential school system. These demons still make themselves known, but as time goes by, they have become faint echoes and whispers. ([www.inuastudio.com](http://www.inuastudio.com))

*Response, Responsibility, and Renewal Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey* (2009), also shows three artworks alongside each other with the artist statements to follow. The artists featured in this document include Jim Logan,

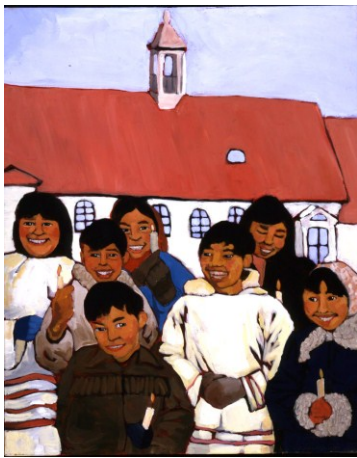
Heather Igloliorte, and Carl Beam. I have included the descriptions provided of each artwork and the images of their artwork here.



**Figure 4.4: “Not the Message but the Messengers”, Jim Logan (1993),**

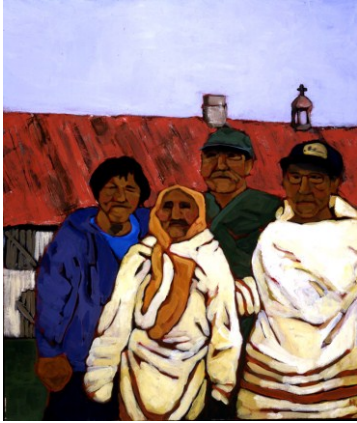
**Acrylic on canvas**

Shortly after my series on residential school abuse, entitled *A Requiem for Our Children*, which had a prolonged effect on me as most of that work was derived from interviews I did with former students, I painted this as a sort of conclusion, a closure for me of sorts. This painting is not so much against the teachings of Christ, but more about those who delivered his message, where the departure of goodness and holiness commences. There were people in charge of children where abuses under the guise of Christianity took place. It is one of the world’s most tragic events, yet very little is documented in Canadian history. This painting is part of such documentation that needs to continue. (Jim Logan – image reproduced with permission from artist)



**Figure 4.5: “1959 The Hebron Relocation”, Heather Igloliorte (2002), Oil on canvas**

The 1959 relocation of 60 Hebron families by church and government had devastating consequences for these people who were moved to more southern communities in Labrador. The reunion in 1999 began the healing process for many of these families and provided some closure to this painful part of Labrador Inuit history. Such forcible relocations are sadly recurrent, but as these paintings depict, they are not without hope of reconciliation. The artist is grateful for the permission of Hannie Hettasch for the use of her family’s photo, Bob Mesher of Makivik Corporation, and the subjects in the photograph. (Heather Igloliorte)



**Figure 4.6: “1959 The Hebron Reunion”, Heather Igloliorte (2002), Oil on canvas**

The Hebron Relocation is part of a diptych. The accompanying artwork seen in Figure 4.6 is titled The Hebron Reunion, which depicts a group of elders who returned to the site during a reconciliatory event exactly 50 years later. Both images are reproduced with permission of the artist.

The description accompanying the image of “Burying the Ruler”, found on the AHF website, follows.



**Figure 4.7: “Burying the Ruler,” Carl Beam (1991), Photo emulsion and mixed media on handmade paper**

The central image in this work is from a photograph that Carl, in the desert of Northern New Mexico, had taken shortly before the New Millennium.

This image also appears in the Burying the Ruler Video. When asked about the meaning of the image, Carl had replied, “There are all kinds of Rulers in life. . . some of them I have to bury on a daily basis.” (Anne Beam)

This image is one of a series and is slightly different from the AHF image and was reproduced with the permission of the Canada Council Art Bank <http://www.artbank.ca/en/Home.aspx> and permission from the estate.

### **Indigenous Artists and Representations of their Own Community Concerns**

With these few examples of contemporary Indigenous art, we see how Indigenous artists are creating their own directions, focusing on issues relevant to their communities, be they urban or reserve locations, to express and foster shared interactions that support the lives of peoples in interconnected communities. These artists have presented alternatives to colonial discourses on Indigenous experience. The heterogeneity and complexity of the art is evident. As a viewer, I take their distinct positions and lived experiences as points of entry in understanding the themes they offer regarding relocation, reconciliation, IRS and their ongoing legacies. The AHF provides clear guidance by including texts accompanying each image so that messages will be clearly understood by anyone reading these papers. These artworks demand appreciation and appropriate treatment as they invoke the complexity of Indigenous experience.

Together the artworks tell a number of stories, weaving messages from different sites of struggle, resistance, coping mechanisms, and hope. Homogenizing and ‘othering’ by the mainstream art world and viewer become impossible. The challenges Indigenous artists face are immense, but these same challenges are increasingly motivating a dynamic number of artists to sustain their traditional art practices, to continue to challenge dominant and homogenizing ideologies, and to make their struggles known using whatever form of art, or theory of art, that suits their need to communicate.

If I pull the narrative threads from each of the images depicted, I can draw story lines much like I did in the apology I offered, which I believe is in part their function here. Littlechild depicts a young boy and girl outside a building; stars decorate the children, the building, and the space itself, as if everything has been washed with the same promise, a promise not of Indigenous making and one that would belie anything remotely acceptable from an educational institution today. The title “North American Indian Prison Camp” decries the true nature and experience of these institutions.

Igloliorte depicts a scene full of innocent and happy young people who were soon to be relocated, separated from place, from the land that supported their language and all their relations, which “had devastating consequences” that reunions have only just begun to address. The church looms in the background completely filling the space, thrusting the children forward. The second image in what is actually a diptych was provided by the artist and is called The Hebron Reunion. (It is the only image that is not from the AHF documents). The Hebron

Series consist of a set of 12 paintings that derive their content from historical photographs published in Carol Brice-Bennett's (2000) text, *Reconciling with Memories*. The portraits were all taken at Hebron and Okak, just days before the relocation was announced. The artist has painstakingly rendered each image in full colour, and then slowly obscured them over time using thin washes of paint, which eventually made many details invisible, leaving only traces or shadows from the original photographs.

Logan depicts an individual site of struggle and survival where a single child stands between traditional homeland and the ominous dark presence of an institutional building. The child's psyche is struggling to cope with opposing messages from two completely different environments and the impact of abuse delivered, as Logan states, "under the guise of counselling". Two figure heads, one of a nun the other of a priest, float above whispering in her ear in a "Chagall" like but very menacing manner. It is this push/pull of other voices overwriting another's very being that asks where is the voice of the child, what will she say and who will hear her.

In the above three works, the viewer has travelled with the children from their homelands to the residential schools and we see the threat of cultural genocide take root. We are witness to a reunion some fifty years later, a reconciliation event, where the former Hebron residents have aged and the church has lost its prominence. The desire to re-write and re-right these stories grows stronger when viewing the work of Janvier. Janvier's painting "Blood Tears" reveals the next part of the struggle, what to do with the legacy of pain and the



loss of childhood, family, language, culture, and identity. While these “tears” recount the pain, they also celebrate his resilience. Carl Beam’s work is also very telling and direct. In a photo he is featured burying the “Burying the Ruler Video.” He states that “there are all kinds of Rulers in life. . . some of them I have to bury on a daily basis.” Here the ongoing battle to overcome the methods and pain of loss, and to reclaim a heritage stolen is depicted.

In a similar vein, from a totally different form of expression, Ruben has sculpted a piece that depicts his demons crouched on his head, strangling him in their death grip. He speaks about the unresolved daily struggles, which given time become fainter. However, it is evident that colonization and the effects of residential schooling are still being felt today. The notion that colonization is insidious and legitimates outside voices is prevalent, as the demons (be they voices in one’s head, residual scars, or the legacies of reoccurring domination) will not let go of their stranglehold on the figure(s) being throttled. Surely as we can see here, Ruben is not alone in his battles.

As depicted we see that to recover is to find a means to deal with suffering and loss, to carry on and to work hard each day. In the final work by Belcourt, hope is depicted as the promise at the end of most Indigenous stories. Grounded in rich and diverse traditional symbols of nature, which are hierarchical but lyrical, flowering plants in full bloom. Symmetrically illustrated, healthy and strong, full of green leaves and sturdy roots, there is power in healing. How Belcourt takes ownership of the process of referencing traditional art forms and themes is an example of resistance to domination and honours the knowledge, beauty, and

resilience of those who came before. Belcourt writes “We have survived through incredible odds. . . . We are resilient as a weed. As beautiful as a wildflower. We have much to celebrate and be proud of.”

### **Art and the Healing Power of Stories**

There is a healing power to story, whether written or depicted visually. In sharing stories, or showing artwork, creative energy is released and relationships are celebrated. Stories can be of creation, restoring balance or offer help in finding resolutions through the imagination used to depict and understand them. Iseke-Barnes and Estrada (2008, drawing on Viznor 1991, 1994) write

through stories communities and listeners to stories can gain understandings necessary for survival including ideas of continuance, interconnection, humour, as well as guides in finding balance and freedom. . . . [These artists] demonstrate the powers of art to sustain and to heal, to engage in imaginative liberation and to recover from a colonial history and its current forms. (p. 6)

The artists, selected to be featured in these publications, can be read collectively in the vein of identity politics: they have taken control of their work, selecting how to deliver their messages, maintaining cultural connections while forging new artistic paths. Having made artistic decisions right for them, they do draw on the artistic heritage of the Western world, yet they have refused to be subjected to the artistic rules and principles of others, who often want Indigenous work to look Indian, or feature traditional themes and materials. This kind of freedom is grounded solidly in connections to tradition and place for which these

seven artists have struggled. As Jim Logan stated, Indian residential schools were “one of the world’s most tragic events, yet very little is documented in Canadian history. This painting is part of such documentation that needs to continue”, as are all these artworks.

Art brings awareness to the viewer, raising questions of the history that preceded these struggles and continues to contribute to them today. Through the work of these artists and their location within the legacy of Indian residential schooling, the viewer is drawn in, and by the direct knowledge gained from these viewing experiences, the viewer engages with history in ways unique to those communicated through visual art.

The question for the non-native viewer is, what will you do with this knowledge? Here art expression is both political and educational, as it is in service of a community of peoples whose voices have been deliberately punished, silenced, and abused. Here art is also a healing practice. The politics of knowledge production is about how power relations set up who gets to have a say, who will hear the message, how it will be portrayed and understood.

In Canadian/Indigenous history this has meant that the messages Indigenous people would have us hear have often been mediated through colonizing mythologies that have served to preserve the Canadian ideal of peace-keeper and benevolent protector/teacher. When Indigenous people draw on diverse forms of cultural production, they are demonstrating their intelligence, ingenuity, and creativity to master diverse forms of communication. These artists are righting back (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). They are assuming the power to

determine the language of their work, and in what context their work will be understood, so that the message remains a strong and undiluted one.

Acknowledging changes in our understanding of colonial history, the diverse perspectives and ways of knowing that are fundamental to Indigenous art (Battiste, 2000; Brant Castellano, 1989) can be achieved by respectfully creating space for traditional and anti-colonial art that is not as yet mainstream. This would be a service, correcting historical wrongs and Canadian myths by introducing Indigenous voice and articulations of history. Indigenous artists are providing all the material and signposts necessary for that end.

Dénommé-Welch (2008) wonders if introducing difficult knowledge into pedagogy is perpetuating trauma? He asks at what point can “art be a ‘safer’ entry point for dialogue to happen and a method to explore difficult and contentious topics?” (p. 61). Is it safe to think that notions of safety will always be present when exploring these topics? Dénommé-Welch (2008), when considering decolonization, asks:

How can the academic and/or artist decolonize how we do research? If we are truly acting in the best interests of ethics, can we fully live up to this responsibility in the academic space? I have trouble believing that the solution can be based solely in a theory of decolonizing, because the term decolonizing, like postcolonial, suggests there may be an opposite to colonization or a way of undoing colonization. But is there really? Is there a way to decolonize while nurturing an “ethic of caring?” (Piquemel,

2006). So far, most of those doing the imagining have been inheritors of the benefits of colonization. (p. 68)

I believe that the gestures, and the apology I have offered, grew from caring about my colleagues, their experiences, and our context. I end this chapter with how art education can contribute to the decolonizing work we still have to accomplish.

### **Challenging Colonial Practices in Art Education and Becoming an Indigenous Ally**

Art education practitioners are challenged with the need to help in the battle to disarm myths that continue to re-surface in popular and consumer culture, where stereo-typical images of all things ‘Indian’ continue to be presented in a manner that misinforms the public (Francis, 1992; McMaster, 1989; Phillips, 1998; Phillips & Steiner, 1999; Trump, 2001). In the field of art education we are well placed to meet these challenges. Contemporary artwork can combat homogenised content; contemporary Indigenous artists are depicting their struggles for recognition and respect. Indigenous people are commonly objectified and mythologized through popular culture, and as a result of a consumer-driven society. Education can achieve more to correcting this situation. Indigenous artwork is rich with the complexities inherent in depicting historical truths, relations in the artist’s life, and of the people represented. Understanding these challenges, and the neglect thereof, which historically failed to acknowledge that location, the significance of place, and knowledge base, from which all Indigenous art originates regardless of its form, offers plenty of places to redress

historical wrongs and gaps in education. The truth about Indian residential schools and colonization is a powerful place to start. Teaching about Indigenous culture without a long-term plan to include the realities of colonial history and how Indigenous peoples have been impacted is no longer acceptable. While it is important to celebrate and teach about the richness of Indigenous knowledges and cultures, the realities of colonization and residential schooling for Indigenous peoples need to be better understood and redressed from within our institutions, schools, and pedagogical practice. Indigenous visual artists are providing good places to begin negotiating these areas of importance in colonial history.

## CHAPTER 5: Collaboration and Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values

### Paradise in Motion

Born to be in motion  
like the wind, like the river;  
Hope's eyes, the messenger above that shines,  
that feeds our souls - all around.  
A paradise in motion.

The values of respect and relationship connect us all  
...and to all of nature's beauty.  
Shadows of the past pound in our hearts.  
Eyes closed, gently embraced by nature's hand,  
our dreams set in motion bring harmony.

The echoes of yesterday are here,  
the silence of the present is you,  
whispers from the future are calling.  
A poet of hope, a lightening of perfection - it is you  
embrace the raindrops of life's challenges.

Precious it is, important it is.  
Life is meant to be in motion,  
ideas are meant to be seen,  
dreams are meant to be followed,  
spirits are meant to live.  
*And you are meant to be here with joy, with love, with freedom.*  
Our presence here is SHORT, dancing in nature's paradise.  
We shall fall, we will rise, needless we move on.

I'll wait for you here forever.  
Our home, our Land, our garden of paradise.  
Enjoy the ride as paakumshumwaa gracefully carries you on her back.  
You are a paradise in motion.  
Indeed, "*Life is an Expedition.*"

Chief Rodney Mark

**Figure 5.1: "Paradise in Motion" by Chief Rodney Mark**

## **From “How Could It Be Done Differently?” to “How To Approach Collaborations”**

In my capacity as a researcher and colleague it has been my privilege to be offered information in many forms. I open this chapter featuring a poem that Chief Mark wrote about travelling by canoe down the river Paakumshumwaa (where the water spills out), a historic route, which reveals the depths of themes discussed here and their significance to Mark. The metaphorical content contained in this poem echo in poetic form the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram discussed in depth later in the chapter (see Figure 5.2).

Wemindji is taking control of its collaborative relationships with all non-Native partners. Indigenous communities working within marginalizing systems require new respectful relationships. While under pressure from the encroaching instrumentalisation or economisation of social and cultural life (Finger & Asún, 2001) by the surrounding culture to balance long-term economic development, cultural resource enhancement and protection of lands, Wemindji community residents are defining what constitutes meaningful collaborations, specifically, the ways they can best maintain the traditional skills of local artists. Wemindji demonstrates its approach to negotiating new forms of alliances by drawing on the two fundamental Cree values of respect and relationship. These core values will be presented later in this chapter as I describe our collaboration to illustrate the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram (Figure 5.2). To begin this chapter I will discuss the *How to approach collaboration* guidelines.



According to Chief Mark, “we want to be in a position to control these projects as much as possible through collaborative processes with outside expertise. Outside expertise is valued when it means sharing specialized knowledge that contributes to. . . our self-determination and to our aspirations.”<sup>26</sup>

This chapter does not include our prior work experiences which prompted the generation of the guidelines *How to approach collaborations*. These experiences were reported in detail in a prior paper (Stocek & Mark, 2010). However, I do offer an account of how Chief Mark and I have put the collaboration guidelines into practice to improve collaboration and communication. The upcoming discussion of the evolution and design of the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram, which illustrates Indigenous knowledges as a form of reciprocal processes of learning and pedagogy serving Indigenous agendas, is one such example.

Both collaborative activities, the *How to approach collaborations* guidelines and the depiction of the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram*, are examples that demonstrate how successful forms of learning, work, and research are not contained within the parameters of specific projects. These projects have been implemented in diverse areas of work carried out by the WTSG and Mark’s work with the community as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Field notes: verified by Chief Mark July 2007 when we reviewed my field notes together.

<sup>27</sup> The Wemindi Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram is featured in a forthcoming chapter co-authored by Mark, Brown, Forrest and Stocek.

I begin by introducing the *How to approach collaborations* guidelines. The chapter ends with the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram*. Both exemplify shifts in research paradigms that open new paths to opportunities that Indigenous leaders and scholars are calling for.

During a phone conversation with Chief Mark related to prior work establishing the CNW's first childcare services, I had asked him, "If we were to work together again on a new project what would you recommend, how can we work together differently?" I challenged Mark to send me 10 points or tips to improve our collaborative work. Mark responded with a list of 12 points, which have since become a guiding source informing subsequent projects, including the development of a protected area, a mining project, and the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group. These guidelines underscore ongoing themes raised through collaborative processes that engage self-determination and the ways in which colonization remains a force to be challenged. Significantly, they reflect enduring Cree values of communication and relationship, the bicultural skills of Cree leadership, and how Indigenous peoples engage in local forms of PAR (see Mulrennan, Mark, & Scott, 2012; Stocck & Mark, 2010).

*How to approach collaborations* was originally titled *How could it be done differently?* We changed the title when the list was first published (Stocck & Mark, 2009) to emphasize the positive intentions these guidelines represent. We felt the first title was negative or passive and that the guidelines required not a critique but instead a call to action. We wanted the title to reflect our aspirations for the future, to be more proactive in its decolonizing efforts, shifting old

paradigms of the culture of dependency to focus on agency and self-determination. While the original title reflects more accurately our frustration with adult education, development projects, and the processes of institutionalization in Indigenous communities, the new title reflects a proactive as opposed to a reactive stance.

### **How to Approach Collaborations?**

The guidelines described below are the ones Chief Mark and I use to develop our collaborative projects. By returning to this set of guidelines throughout our collaborative processes, we are able to remain grounded in our intent, purpose and actions.

1. Work using a collaborative team concept approach. Identify values, vision, and specific objectives. How is this project meaningful to the community and the individuals involved? Both parties need to develop a sense of ownership.
2. Decide together the rules of engagement. What are the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities? Once the agenda is set the main principles supporting the work should not change. The expectations of each party need to be clarified in order to best deliver the project in a process that engages all.
3. Decide what to do if things are not going as planned, especially if they are evolving too fast or too slow for one partner.
4. Demonstrate respect for key individuals involved at the local level who are committed to many projects. Limited human resources are a reality in small communities; very often you are working with individuals who are responsible for many files.

5. Plan a schedule or action plan together, specifically what needs to be accomplished with target dates. Going with ‘the flow’ of the community is hard to do.
6. Plan how to integrate fiscal relationships into the partnerships. Often the funding source limits the project to a strict schedule. There should be some understanding by both parties regarding these impacts. Funding sources rarely consider local capacity building and can be detrimental and threatening to both the project and the work being carried out.
7. Define passive roles, advisory roles, and leading roles. Who ultimately has the authority to make decisions? Financial reasons should not be used to create pressure when decisions are jointly made. Disregard for local values, human resources, and capacity building fosters a lack of accountability and a breakdown in local ownership. Often the threat of losing a project, or missing out on a potential funding opportunity forces the community to agree to decisions they are not ready for. Decisions should not be made before all partners understand the implications and feel ready or capable of beginning a new development.
8. Consider seriously when starting and ending a project if you are creating the need for a perpetual advisory role. This is a crucial factor. How will the project develop local capacity and how will the partnership conclude?
9. Set the agenda for independence and local ownership as an end result. Local ownership builds capacity and increases the chances to achieve ongoing development and the quality of the project or services being offered. Real

ownership may lead key local people to long-term interest and commitment, remaining with the project or services.

10. Plan activities and allow time for getting to know people you are working with as well as the people they are serving. This is vital to the work at hand.

Establish a mutual, meaningful relationship.

11. Collaborate and work to build confidence within the community and with the people involved. How can this be built into the process?

12. Ask yourself if you are not involved in this project will it succeed and if the answer is no, then you should seriously evaluate how to ensure the success of the project when you are no longer involved.<sup>28</sup>

Prior experience with community development and Indigenous adult education led to Mark's articulation of how non-native and Indigenous people working in partnership can better collaborate.

### **Self-determination and taking time to collaborate.**

The elaboration of the above twelve points exemplifies the need for collaborative projects to construct their working relationships to reflect the objectives of local forms of PAR and Indigenous epistemology. Mark's deep comprehension and ability to pinpoint the difficulties Cree communities experience directing the development of their own institutions and policy underscore the importance of working in partnership with local authorities. A

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<sup>28</sup> *How Could It Be Done Differently?* was originally written and emailed from Mark to Stocck on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004. It has been revised in minor ways for publication but remains true to its original intent and format.

willingness to work with many people is evident, as Mark repeatedly places emphasis on collaborative approaches and the need for all partners to have a clear sense of ownership. How people negotiate their work must be transparent. Consideration for the needs of all partners and their manner of carrying out objectives should be culturally appropriate. Fiscal relationships should not dictate sensitive cultural projects where cultural values and ethics must take priority. Building local capacity – *obtaining the education, training, and skills development one wants* – is central to ownership, autonomy, and the ongoing success of projects. These must be considered throughout the process.<sup>29</sup> In Mark's vision, the pace of the project is controlled so people involved are informed and active throughout the entire process as their roles are clearly defined and understood. Researchers would do well to re-view their own work from this lens if decolonizing research collaborations are to exemplify true shifts in power, respecting local Indigenous agendas and active learning.

Brant Castellano (2004), for example, believes that developing ethical codes of conduct for research with Aboriginal communities or with external partnerships helps to “place the discussion of research ethics in the context of cultural worldviews and the struggle for self-determination as peoples and nations” (p. 98). She goes on to note that:

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<sup>29</sup> Field notes drawn from an interview (March, 2005) conducted evaluating the authors' progress implementing the 12 points, *How Could It Be Done Differently?* and from an audio recording Mark made on the same subject (June, 2005).

The struggle is to live and thrive as peoples and nations maintaining and expressing distinctive worldviews and contributing uniquely to the Canadian federation. . . Just as colonial policies have denied Aboriginal Peoples access to their traditional lands, so also colonial definitions of truth and value have denied Aboriginal Peoples the tools to assert and implement their knowledge. Research under the control of outsiders to the Aboriginal community has been instrumental in rationalizing colonialist perceptions of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control. (p. 107)

Mark reflects Brant Castellano's perspective when he commented that:

As a result of these types of experiences, when the opportunity for local accountability is taken away, so too is the people's sense of responsibility. We. . .[have often felt] that we could walk away at any point. Being involved opens the door for the opportunity to be empowered. If you take away local responsibility and accountability, you shut the door on empowerment. As an end result, how we value the quality of life and work depends on our self-determination.<sup>30</sup>

As Kovach (2010) suggests, Indigenous research methodologies should broadly reflect an epistemology that reverberates with many Nation's beliefs; Indigenous methods, however, are defined locally. So too are the above guidelines. While we believe it would be worthwhile to consider these guidelines

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<sup>30</sup> Field notes: Phone conversation, July 11, 2007 from Mark to Stocck reviewing the *How Can It Be Done Differently?* guideline.

in all collaborations, it does not replace the need to go through the process of determining a locally based set of guidelines when beginning a new working relationship. This list may well serve as one point of departure when negotiating new initiatives.

A word of caution is appropriate here. Building trust takes time. An Elder, when speaking during a consultation with Chief Mark, commented that

the first time we went on our expedition [a canoe trip], it was called a *plan*. As we all know, when the Whiteman wants to do something *there is always a plan*. The next step was called the regional plan; we completed them both and that was the only mandate we had. (Elder's meeting, Deputy Chief Mark's audio recordings, translated by Francis Visitor, 04-04-03)

It is clear that developing a project and project participation requires time for different forms of collaboration to be expressed. The basic presentation of a set of objectives with guidelines or protocols that one has to quickly absorb in order to have the time to comment on is insufficient. These forms of discussions often launch new projects. It is difficult to discern in advance the time required, and the amount of trust that must be built, in order for diverse people to come together to express themselves and be understood. Revisiting these forms of discussion throughout a project may help to overcome these difficulties.

As the guidelines state time to collaborate is important. Often once a researcher has obtained permission for a research project, following protocol, they proceed to make new contacts as necessary. However, I have been sorry to see



that the initial conversations are not repeated or renewed with new contacts. Opportunities for researchers to decolonize their position, for the community to learn, ask questions, offer suggestions or assume a leadership role and encourage self-determination are lost.

### **Assessing collaborations.**

Successfully implementing the *How to Approach Collaborations* guidelines with the WTSG has not always unfolded in ways I would hope for. Conscientization does not emerge as an equally held or evenly distributed facility. How this related to specific objectives is illustrated in the actions taken by the WTSG discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. Reaching a point where objectives were achieved, altered, or dropped was challenging and time consuming, much more time consuming than any of us were ever able to anticipate. In Chapter Six the WTSG objectives for tanning moose hide have evolved and are ongoing. Many of the spruce bark basketry objectives described in Chapter Seven were achieved, while a key objective pertaining to making the best use of the entire tree remains a challenge.

Our research was inspired by the commonly held translation of the term Wemindji into paint hills. We became interested in what paint was made or used from local resources. This led us to the Canadian Museum of Civilization to examine examples of Cree Hunters' coats as part of a research grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. While we saw some beautifully painted and embroidered coats, how the paint (a red ochre recipe from 'Paint Hills') was made

remains an objective to be pursued. A research update on the moose hide work and spruce bark basketry is provided in Appendix 13.

Key members of the group agreed on our roles, although several people left the project or their jobs changed, thus interrupting and at times bringing the project to a complete halt. The WTSG artist's commitment has been consistent. Collaboration with other community members from diverse entities does change more frequently. Collaboration emerges from individual interest in the partnership, therefore depth of commitment and level of participation varies depending on how different people understand or appreciate how their role emerges from their work. Funding, often patched together, has always presented issues and time constraints.

The WTSG identified and made all its decisions collectively. This process did falter but in the end, perhaps due in part to stubbornness I shared with the WTSG, we established shared trust supporting the leadership of all necessary for me to become an integral and functioning member of the group. Establishing leadership roles and trust took time and a few successes; before leadership was shared, it had to be both offered and proven.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms**

Indigenous peoples share many common approaches in how they conduct their day-to-day lives within mainstream Canada. However, individual communities do demonstrate local ways and means determining community development. These guidelines are based on particular histories informed by how Cree people have lived in relation to the land, fostering the development of

distinct cultural worldviews. In the next section an example of this community's particular set of beliefs and values is offered. The community is working to bring this knowledge to the forefront of their education and development practices and as such it is vital for collaborators to make a greater effort to understand to the best of our ability.

Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2009) argue that Indigenous knowledge originates from the collective genius of humanity of Indigenous peoples that exists in the context of learning and knowing from places where they have lived, hunted, explored, migrated, farmed, raised families, built communities, and survived for centuries ... The best approach to learning and understanding IK is in the dynamic linguistic foundations of Indigenous frameworks and paradigms. (p. 5)

Thompson (2008), a member of the Tahltan Nation writes in her search for an Indigenous paradigm that she needed to carry out her work from a place that supported and recognized her. Indigenous scholars state how important it is to move beyond researching from an Indigenous perspective tagged onto Western methodologies, such as PAR, or community action research, critical or feminist methodologies that "parallel our journey" (p. 27) to researching from broader relations expressed in Indigenous paradigms. Working from Indigenous worldviews requires more than respecting protocols and ethics. Thompson describes moving from a Western academic perspective to Indigenous teachings as she became more engrossed in understanding the world through her Elder's

eyes. As I have made clear, those methodologies are the starting points non-native colleagues on a quest to meet Indigenous research partners should *begin* from. Once we have established the means to collaborate with all partners we need to remain open to ways beyond our mindset. We are very fortunate today in the revolution and renewal of Indigenous thought and the willingness of Indigenous peoples to risk added colonial pressure by sharing their views with us.

### **Māori conscientization, renaissance, and resistance.**

Smith (1997, 2000) emphasizes how the Māori experience is important for all Indigenous peoples due to its dual strategies of decolonizing education and maintaining the resurgence in the struggle for self-determination by local people for their ancestors, elders, children, families and future. Smith encourages all Indigenous peoples to work from their community's particular set of beliefs and values, to articulate their paradigms. Battiste (2004) writes that the Māori revolution did not arise without deeply felt mobilisation of freewill. Success at establishing Māori language and culture used as the language of instruction in their schools, and the legislation that instituted Māori as the second official language in New Zealand in 1980, is still exceptional. Battiste (2004) writes, "the Māori struggle was formed when they politicized all new parents to a Māori conscientization, a critical consciousness of the politics of their identity and their place and their personal role in making change in their country and among their people" (p. 63). Smith (1997, 2000) has also expanded Freirian conscientization through his theories of decolonization based on his work with emerging Māori language nests (Kaupapa Māori ) for pre-school children. He found that in order

to maintain critical consciousness, both collective resistance and a reflexive praxis were crucial to sustaining meaningful change.

Kovach (2010, p. 87) cites an interview with Graham Smith concerning emerging Indigenous paradigms. Smith argues passionately for an ontology and epistemology that is firmly grounded in knowing that originates from each unique cultural context and history. He has been encouraging Indigenous Canadians to develop Indigenous theorizing located in their own landscapes. Indigenous knowledge is not so much about a return to the past as it is about staking a claim in determining Indigenous people's future, a future based on their origins, spirituality, and worldviews. IK has inspired a decolonization of knowledge hierarchies as it asserts its location in language and place, spirituality, and relationality.

**Cree heritage continues to co-construct contemporary culture.**

I believe that Chief Mark's research described here meets the call extended above by Smith. The research process that resulted in the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram described here illustrates how Cree heritage and the values it exemplifies continue to contribute to the formation of Cree culture. When Chief Mark was Deputy Chief he began to research what leadership meant and how Elders practiced it; the stories he was told stemmed from a time before the CNW existed, when Crees who lived along the James Bay Coast practiced a nomadic lifestyle, obtaining a living from their relationship to the land and *all living things*. These local stories contain foundational Cree views that were co-

constructed with the environment they inhabited and are represented today by Cree people through the stories they tell and the choices they make.

Today's landscape and lifestyle have, however, drastically changed. Indigenous people face environmental challenges to applying their ethics and values as they wrestle with issues that arise alongside new opportunities. Historically, the application of these values proved difficult. Cree beliefs and sacred stories originating from pre-contact heritage continue to inform and construct contemporary expressions of Cree knowledge and culture. The inspiration, mentoring, teaching and knowledge that comprise Indigenous heritage, supports present day community decisions. For instance, Cree beliefs traditionally "recognize the balance of nature and how people fit into this spiritual and physical world. Their traditional worldviews of nature and spirituality reveal their deep respect for maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature" (Gnarowski, 2002, p. 11). Indigenous people may not have always practiced conservation per se, but their cultural and spiritual heritage has historically understood the quality of their survival to be integral to the well-being of all life. While some may view the Indigenous values expressed here as 'romantic', these values are rigorous when thought through and applied to current issues and do very quickly highlight critical environmental and cultural tensions that the community and its Chief and Council are addressing.

Chief Mark and the Council wanted to draw on the cultural heritage of the community and its Elders to develop a new vision statement for the community, including principles to govern the Cree Nation of Wemindji Administration. The

project became known as “Revitalizing and Strengthening Our Traditional Philosophies and Principles Towards Building Strong Governance, Administration and Accountability Systems”.<sup>31</sup> The purpose was to develop a transparent process for local government that originated from Cree knowledge within the community to guide the Council and its administration. The intention was to ensure quality services for the entire community. To be successful the process had to fully involve the community’s members. To this end focus groups were identified including youth, men, women, trappers, Cree teachers, as well as former leaders from within the community, and most important, the Elders. Two questions framed the workshops: “What do you want to see twenty-five years from now?” and the second one we considered was “What is good Government?”. Many issues were discussed to inform the Governance project however, Mark felt that something key was missing and decided to hold four additional Elders sessions.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Please see the website <http://www.wemindji.ca> for a description of these principles.

<sup>32</sup> With gratitude we acknowledge the participation of the following Elders from the Cree nation of Wemindji: Winnie Asquabaneskum, Daisy Atsynia Sr., Daisy Atsynia Jr., Florrie Atsynia, Raymond Atsynia, Rupert Atsynia, Sally Atsynia, Richard Blackned, Alfred Georgekish, Beuhlah Georgekish, Clifford Georgekish, Emily Georgekish, Johnnish Georgekish, Johnny T. Georgekish, Mary R. Georgekish, Roderick Georgekish, Simeon Georgekish, Sophie Georgekish, Billy Gilpin, Ellen Gilpin, Sarah Gilpin, Emily Hughboy, Harry Hughboy, John

Specifically, Elders were asked to describe what leaders were like and how a leader was identified in the past. It became apparent that a list of qualities that could be credited to one person would not be forthcoming. Instead the Elders shared stories and events in keeping with Cree views of shared leadership, which elicited actions demonstrating leadership abilities as each situation required from the people involved.<sup>33</sup>

Elders discussed what leadership traditionally meant and how one exemplified these imperative qualities of leadership. Mark identified a consistent set of values revealed within the events and stories that were specifically discussed with the Elders in their last meeting; they have become known as *The Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*. Respect and relationship are the main principles identified as integral to all the stories told.<sup>34</sup> Here the fit between local and

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Matches, Angus Mayappo Sr., Isabel Mayappo, Margret Mistacheesick, Annie Shashaweskum Sr., Annie Shashaweskum Jr., Clifford Shashaweskum, Elizabeth Shashaweskum Sr., James Shashaweskum, Lloyd Shashaweskum, Minnie Shashaweskum, Harry Stewart, Charlie Tomatuk, Nellie Tomatuk, Frank Visitor.

<sup>33</sup> Chief Mark told four stories for the 2007 keynote delivered by Stocck and Mark at the 12th Annual International Wanapitei Aboriginal History and Politics Colloquium: Sharing the resources? Examining, exploring, and discussing the changing dynamics of Aboriginal use practices- past, present, and future.

<sup>34</sup> Examples of the challenges implicit in Cree leadership were evident in the following stories told by Chief Mark: A Dream From Lake Sakami, Supply Trip to Old Factory Post, Leadership Qualities, A Dog Incident.



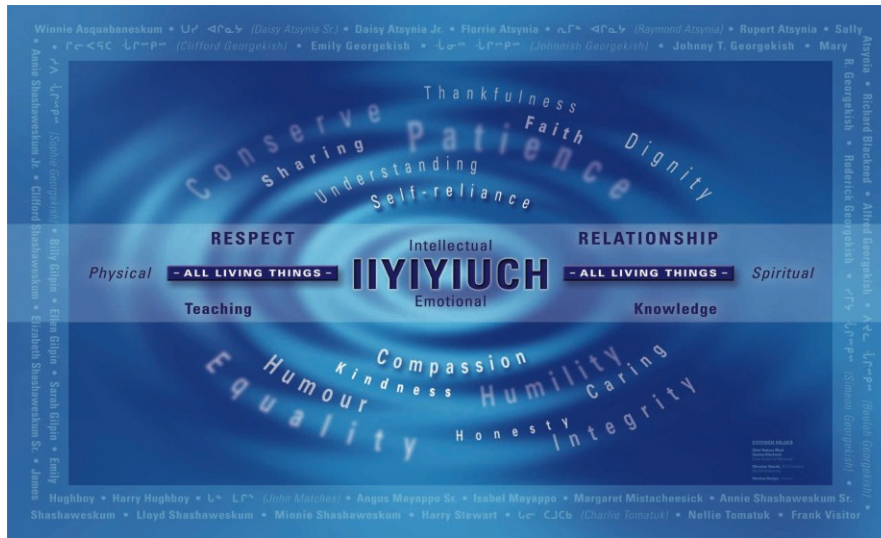
organic forms of PAR as IRM and epistemology are integral to the process. One cannot separate a discussion of values, and IRM.

**Wemindji Iiyiyiuch core values.**

Mark recognized the significance of the knowledge the Elders were sharing and he understands these core values as the principles required to guide the Chief and Council and the CNW administration. The content of the original project “*Revitalizing and Strengthening Our Traditional Philosophies and Principles Towards Building Strong Governance, Administration and Accountability Systems*” may be adapted under different leadership. However, the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* are understood as an overall guiding set of principles that over time have endured. I visually conceptualized a diagram of these values and how they operate, as described by Mark (see Figure 5.2 below).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The conceptualization of this diagram evolved through many stages. The diagram printed here is the latest version that includes a border of participating Elders’ signatures in both Cree syllabics and/or the English alphabet. Cree syllabics have also evolved; Elders spell their names reflecting the syllabics in use at the time. Help with the graphic work was donated by Stuckey-Design. Translation was carried out by Francis Visitor.



Iiyiyiuch in the local Cree dialect means people of the land. In the Cree Nation of Wemindji Iiyiyiuch is commonly used to refer to the Cree people themselves. In earlier versions of the diagram the spelling Eeyouch was used; the meaning is the same and is still in common use in Wemindji and the Cree region. In this diagram the use of the word Eeyouch or Iiyiyiuch both specifically locates these Cree people geographically and at the same time illustrates how the values identified from the stories told by community Elders are local and land-based in origin.<sup>36</sup> Iiyiyiuch in Cree resonates with the land-based origins of the word Indigenous.

Cardinal (2001) has written about the roots of the word *Indigenous*:

<sup>36</sup> An earlier version of this diagram that uses the spelling Eeyouch and which includes the description of the diagram's meaning was published in Stoeck and Mark (2009).

In Latin it means “born of the land” or “springs from the land,” which is a context. We can take that to mean “born of its context.” Born of that environment. When you create something from an Indigenous perspective, therefore, you create it from that environment, from the land in which it sits. Indigenous peoples with their traditions and customs are shaped by the environment, by land. They have spiritual, emotional, and physical relationship to that land. It speaks to them; it gives them their responsibility for stewardship; and it sets out a relationship. (p. 180)

Mark’s poem (Figure 5.1) illustrates the connections and significance of one’s relationship to the land expressed by Cardinal above and reflected in the stories told which elicited the values articulated in the Iiyiyiuch diagram. Mark explained that these values recognize and honour Cree ancestors. The values represented were identified because they have sustained Cree people serving to help them endure the hardships they encountered. The values respect and relationship form *The Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*. Respect and relationship connect our physical and spiritual being. Intellectual and emotional aspects of being are also integral to the connection between the physical and spiritual self. They are needed to achieve equilibrium in life represented by the horizontal band. According to Mark, the horizontal band depicts this balance representing how the core values combine to work together. These are the values that were derived from Cree heritage and concepts of leadership, as told through stories and events by Wemindji’s Elders.

Mark has emphasized that in our day-to-day lives we need to work to try to achieve and maintain a healthy balance between our physical and spiritual being. This is manifested by establishing a healthy sense of self, balancing both our intellectual and emotional lives exhibited through our interconnectedness and active engagement in respectful relationships. Mark understands that teaching and knowledge are gained through this process. We must be taught these values. As our lives become a reflection of this, by the way we live on a day-to-day basis, we become in turn mentors or teachers. Teaching and knowledge are engaged through reciprocal and recurring social relationships, as are respect and relationship. Once the rapport between these values/relations becomes a living manifestation in our life, our intellectual and emotional states are balanced, and our physical and spiritual well-being is achieved. At that moment the ability to think clearly and express wisdom is manifested.

Our intellectual and emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being is demonstrated through the expression and combination of many values. According to Wemindji's Elders, these values are key to Cree culture. They include kindness, humility, humour, honesty, ability to conserve, thankfulness, compassion, sharing, caring, dignity, integrity, faith, understanding, patience, equality, and self-reliance. Mark states these values are all interconnected and interdependent. When a value is not active, the balance at our core shifts; in an infinite, never-ending variety of ways, these values all work hand-in-hand. Life is understood as challenging; how we respond to the events in our life provides ample opportunity to achieve this balance.

Maintaining this balance is not only a reflection of our relationship with our internal self but, just as important, it is a reflection of our relationship to our environment, to everything outside of us. Therefore, our values are depicted as rippling through the waters of environment. The interactive exchange between humankind's values, our impact on the environment and all living things, as well as how the environment has an impact of its own, in turn shaping values, is represented. From this perspective the distinction between inner and outer borders of being is deceptive. If we are balanced and have achieved interconnectedness, these divisions become immaterial. The animals and everything the environment contains are imbued with life, humanized with feeling. Our relationship to the environment, to the animals, or to other people is a reflection of who we are.

Equally important is the relationship the environment, the animals, and other people have with us; it is both a reflection of who we are and how the environment is. The balance (also represented by the horizontal band) we achieve within ourselves is a reflection of how our values manifest in our life and how the environment, manifesting in an infinite variety, relates and interacts with our lives. The band is transparent in order to illustrate the shifting and reciprocal exchange between human kind and the environment, both of which are represented by the expression *all living things*. This phrase pierces the band where the people are represented, depicting this profound interactive exchange. The pervasive strength of the environment to support life and its vulnerable fragility co-exist simultaneously.

Mark's research on Wemindji Elders and his description of the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values relates to many aspects of Indigenous knowledge. For example, Mark's research describes one's relationship to the environment, as well as the environment's relationship to the individual, as a central part of one's experience. Couture (2000) approaches this when he describes the relationship between inner and outer reality:

Reality is experienced by entering deeply into the inner being of the mind, and not by attempting to break through the outer world to a beyond. This positions the native person in 'communion' with the living reality of things. His 'communion' is his experience of the ideas within, concentric with reality without. Thus, to 'know,' to cognize, is experiential, direct knowing. (p. 28)

Mark has described the communion Couture refers to when he points out the profound depth of the Cree spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual relationship to life's events and the environment. He takes it one step further, describing this relationship from an environmental position or perspective. Couture's communion is equally expressed by all living things. Scott (2006) has written specifically how Cree people understand that humans and animals share a common condition of personhood in the world. In the case Scott offers he refers to the significance of the bear to Cree life and the Cree to bear life.

#### **A local Cree paradigm.**

This diagram is an example of a set of values that can be drawn on to inform interactions and decision making. It is a good example which nicely

illustrates Wilson's definition of relational knowledge. Wilson (2001) states that an Indigenous paradigm is based on the foundational concept of relational knowledge. He defines a paradigm as a "label for a set of beliefs that go together that guide my actions. . . a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions" (p. 175).

Like Wilson, Mark and Wemindji's Elders have articulated their concern for fulfilling relationships, relationships that permeate one's existence, interconnected with the environment. Being accountable to all one's relations means maintaining a balance by living one's values and, therefore by extension, expressing wisdom. Indigenous scholars have written that Indigenous research, like one's life, should be reflective of one's values. Mark is advocating that on behalf of the community, governance, leadership, and local development should also be guided by and reflect these values, maintaining balance in all decisions and in all their relations. Therefore, to think through and work from the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values Diagram is to work from a local Cree paradigm. These guidelines have served in different ways to guide the WTSG, the after school program, Challenge Our Own Limits (COOL), the reading program COOL Reading for Real Change, the mining negotiations in Wemindji, and the development of protected areas<sup>37</sup>. It is Mark's hope that these values will continue

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<sup>37</sup> Visit <http://www.wemindjiprotectedarea.org/> website for information about the Wemindji Protected Area Project: Environment Development and Sustainability in Eastern James Bay.

to serve to guide all projects and entities within the community, including those of persons and organizational entities other than the Council.

### **Design Collaborations**

In the following section I review how the design of the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram illustrates many of the aspects suggested in the guidelines for collaboration. I will also demonstrate how the process of discussing the design directed its evolution and served to help Chief Mark think through and clarify his explanation, in English, of the concepts embedded within Cree worldviews. Design discussions brought to light the significance of the relationships between Cree values in key ways that I would not have understood if I had not had the opportunity to go through this creative endeavour.

#### **How the *How to Approach Collaborations* informs a design process.**

In designing the diagram, the *How to Approach Collaborations* guidelines were particularly useful as they asked us to consider how we (referring here to Chief Mark and myself) would work together, what role each of us would play, and why we thought the effort worthwhile.

Chief Mark very much appreciated the first diagram and considered the work done sufficient. But, as I began to explain why I had made certain choices and their placement, the value of listening, explaining, and exchanging ideas became increasingly significant, and we agreed that taking longer to work through the process, developing a series of diagrams, until we had exhausted all possibilities, would enrich the final design. The diagram went through seven



distinct versions that illustrate this dialogue and in total took several years to be developed and validated.

While Chief Mark was surprised by the number of re-designs, I was surprised by the length of time it took to validate the end product. As the diagram grew increasingly complex and multi-layered, I elicited the help of a friend and graphic designer, Pam Stuckey. Her contribution was significant, enabling our discussions to be reflected in the layers and painterly effects of the diagram. The diagram was first printed as a poster and distributed to all the local entities for comment. Next it was presented to each Elder or family member who had an Elder that participated in the process at a general assembly. Sadly a number of Elders have passed away since the first consultations.

#### **Values validation as part of a PAR process.**

The results were repeatedly opened for questioning, comments, or suggestions. It was officially presented once again the following summer at the community's Old Factory gathering on the coast of James Bay, where the river spills (*Paakumshumwaashitkw*). I found myself under a large *shaapuhtuwan* (canvas and pole structure with plywood floor and a generator) presenting the details of the diagram with Chief Mark and the Deputy Chief who translated for me. The diagram was projected by power point and the whole discussion was broadcast back in Wemindji for those at home.

Each time the diagram was presented it was well received. However, Chief Mark knew that people required time to consider it, mull it over, talk amongst themselves, and that they would offer additional comments at a later date. Final

decisions in Indigenous communities are often not as final as non-natives understand them to be. An example of the type of questions or comments Chief Mark had—and there were very few beyond expressions of pleasure—is “Where is bravery?” Chief Mark replied after being steeped in the Elder’s stories and his analysis of them, “It is a result of self-reliance and humility, knowledge and faith.”

The final product, by community consensus, was deemed successful. It has been printed as a poster, as sets of gift cards, and each desk in the CNW administration building boasts a *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* mouse pad. In the future if anyone wants to refine the diagram for more specific purposes, or add to it, it can be easily adjusted in its digital format.

### **Design conversations as visual research.**

Throughout the process ongoing discussion about the diagram’s visual construction elicited increasingly in-depth conversations as to the actual meaning of *Iiyiyiuch* values. The visual research process we engaged in, in order to complete the diagram, fostered a greater understanding and exchange between participants. It demonstrates not only how the process furthered an in-depth understanding and exchange as to the meaning of the values, but also how the values function together, how one speaks about them, and the significance of the roles they represent in traditional and contemporary lifeways. We were developing the diagram in conjunction with several projects Chief Mark and I were working on; how the diagram related to both of our work for the CNW was

enriching. This process was integral to the diagram's development, to its presentation, and to the validation process engaged by the community.

Prior to being invited to collaborate on the design of the diagram, I watched Chief Mark struggle with the design himself. He took to drawing in coloured markers on a big plate glass window at the back of his office. Over a two-year period I watched the diagram go through various forms ranging from a teepee, flock of geese, wheel, tree line, and a set of balance scales. These coloured marks represented attempts to come up with a symbol, or map, to diagram the relationships inherent in Wemindji's values. The drawings tended to take centre stage with the text circling or overlaying the designs. Little relationship between design element and text, except proximity, was apparent. Chief Mark's frustration led to his request for me to try my hand at it.

### **Seven design conversations.**

What follows are digital images of the diagram in process. I want to take readers through this process in order to illustrate how art-making as research can be used to elicit valuable information, to make connections, and to evaluate what and how we were thinking; art-making fosters good conversation.

When writing about what makes a good researcher/community artist, Barndt (2008) raises the importance of listening, deep listening, and active listening; she is referring to researchers who "go beyond the kind of self-expression often associated with art to expressions that are collective and community-driven" (p. 360). She describes this type of listening as "listening-centered rather than vision-oriented art, which can only come into its own through

dialogue, as open conversation, in which one listens to and includes other voices” (p. 83; drawing on Gablik, 1995). Here the research methodology, the aspirations I called for in Chapter Two where theories of liberatory/PAR are understood through core Indigenous epistemology, and not vice versa, takes shape through the diagrams/design process.

Theories developing around a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004) also help to shed light on the process Chief Mark and I engaged in and specifically point to where I started from. A/r/tography is an artistic research process that places emphasis, amongst other things, on the in-between spaces

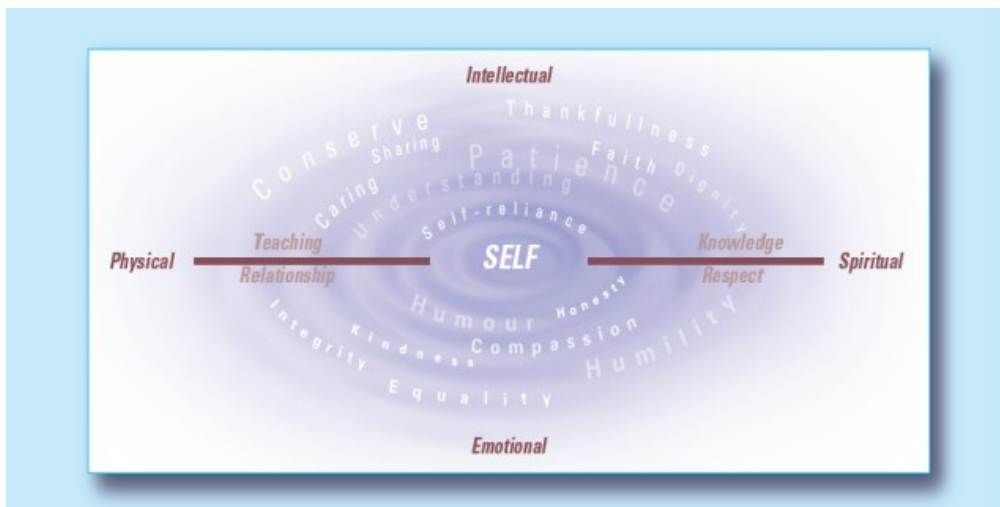
where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time. . .[and create] the circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry laden processes. (Carter, Beare, Belliveau, & Irwin, 2011, p. 18)

Carter et al. (2011) offer an intriguing ecological metaphor of rhizomes to illustrate the aforementioned relationality.

Rhizomes metaphorically relate to a network of connected identities, ideas and concepts. Rhizomes are horizontal stems of plants that grow longer roots underground and send out shoots for new plants to grow above ground. The roots grow in all directions, with one point connecting to any other point. Like a mesh of lines or a road map, there are no beginnings or middles, merely in-between connections. In this sense if one visualizes a series of strong roots connecting the artist’s work to that of the writer, teacher and researcher the spaces in between these seemingly separate

identities disappear. Instead each identity is strengthened by another allowing for new directions/approaches/ideas to emerge-unrealizable when one chooses to “plant” themselves in a particular epistemology/subject/way of thinking or being. (p. 19)

The analogy of working from in-between spaces and the relationality inherent in the rhizome metaphor, a metaphor embedded in an ecological epistemology, illuminates the complexity of the mix of places and experiences from which the design of the diagram emerged; this metaphor is exemplified by rippling water.



**Figure 5.3: Draft values diagram 1**

We decided to use the metaphor of rippling water; it illustrates a line from Chief Mark’s poem opening this chapter “embraces the raindrops of life’s challenges.” It is a powerful element from nature and easily understood by all. As a symbol it expresses relationality. The actual layout of the text and the brown bar reflects Chief Mark’s physical gestures when describing the content. He

continually uses his hands, spreading them out to both sides in wide sweeping gestures, to express the careful balance engaged in living your life well. Therefore, you can see the brown bar depicted over a water drop or waves. The values are spread out within the environment (blue water), receding and coming to the fore as needed, each connected integrally to the rest. When one or two are in action, the entire balance is put into motion. Humanity is represented by the word self; each individual must live their life in balance interconnected with the environment. We thought that the brown bar around which everything was centred was too strong, overriding the environment.



**Figure 5.4: Draft values diagram 2**

In Figure 5.4 the water has been expanded right off the borders of the page; the environment contains human life. We did not want to depict human life as overtly hovering over the environment. However, the most significant change here really illustrates how pervasive the colonizing western agendas of education

are. Chief Mark's first comment related to the words teaching and knowledge. I had placed them above the bar reading left to right, a position of power in diagram 1. Chief Mark explained that respect and relationship were the core values, and they should be given the most prominent position. As an educator I had unconsciously placed the word teaching in this space. Mark states that if one lives a balanced life, keeping in mind all these values, then you will gain knowledge and your life will serve to mentor others. Teaching and mentoring mean the same in Cree. Mentoring teaches others when you model actions as a result of knowledge gained through living a balanced life respectfully.



**Figure 5.5: Draft values diagram 3**

In Figure 5.5 we continue to increase the position of the environment. The brown is replaced by a darker shade of blue, connecting the text with the water. The blue bar now has the text *all living things* written on it. This text is bolder and set off in white; it both connects with the values that recede behind as they are suspended within the watery environment and moves forward toward the viewer.

The phrase *all living things* disrupts the human hierarchy which had occupied the band's position; now this space, like all places are shared environments. At Chief Mark's request, the words respect and relationship are also made bolder and have been drawn close to the core: respect and relationship are the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch core values.



**Figure 5.6: Draft values diagram 4**

In Figure 5.6, we experimented with toning the white down, compacting the space. A pale blue band is featured horizontally. This band gathers the text and places emphasis on the interconnected balance that comes into play with each action, each decision made. The word self is now a cut out, once again trying to underscore the integral relationship humans have with *all living things*, with the environment. The colour has been intensified; we see them through the band, they support the band, and the band feels the constant undulating movement of a living environment. *All living things* exist in a series of rhythms.





**Figure 5.7: Draft values diagram 5**

Here in Figure 5.7, the phrase *All Living Things* has been set off in white, once again it takes the most forward position and is visually connected back to the values. For me the most important change occurs here: the word self has been replaced by EEYOUCH. Eeyouch means Cree and refers to *people of the land*.

The word Eeyouch connects this diagram to the same land where the stories originated and that supported the livelihood of Cree ancestors and Elders and as such locates this diagram geographically. The word self, in today's contemporary Western context, is so imbued with individual development that one could easily accord it a more prominent, domineering position, where self-interests supersede all. People of the land places the human context in the plural. The translation and use of the pronoun 'of' situates an individual human being as one among his/her contemporaries, of whom all are embraced by the *all living things* band.

For me this diagram felt resolved; it communicates the Cree worldviews offered by the Chief Mark and his Elders. The pale blue bar is much more transparent. The effect of the brown bar as a balance beam that depicts dualities or binaries has been replaced by a rich interplay: the play of the water, the movement and action of the water rising and falling in waves and cycles connects everything through the rhythms of nature.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 5.8: Draft values diagram 6**

<sup>38</sup> Chief Mark and I discussed Scott's 2006 paper. We spoke about human relationships with the environment and the environments relationship with man, specifically Scott's example concerning Cree relationships to bears and a bear's relationship to man. Other than being on the land with Cree people myself to live a Cree experience, as opposed to living in the community, I began to understand Cree worldviews and feel able to depict them with a depth of understanding. Throughout this process I continually sought validation, discussing what each design decision meant to Cree people.

The diagram in Figure 5.8 illustrated the Greek alphabetical spelling pronouncing the word Eeyouch in the newly adopted regional Cree syllabics. Prior to this, each community used variations according to local pronunciation. This spelling depicts the form adopted regionally.

The final diagram (as illustrated in Figure 5.2) is framed by a border of the names of all the participating Elders in Chief Mark's consultations. It was always our intention to include them once the design was determined. Their names are written in Cree syllabics as they signed their attendance participating in the consultations and reflect the syllabic forms they were taught. The names are also in English so children and grandchildren can all read them. The frame in no way contains the Elders or their context. The waves and rhythms move through the border as the environment embraces Elders and is in turn impacted by their presence.

### **Design afterthoughts.**

As I began to grasp what relational knowledges meant in Cree epistemology, my decolonizing experiences as a PAR artist/researcher expanded and were enriched. Throughout the design process, as I explained my design decisions, I listened, pointing out small design adjustments and elicited more and more refined details concerning the meanings Chief Mark wanted expressed. These conversations highlighted my understanding of the interconnectedness of both the visual elements and their power to express relationships contained within the diagram, as well as my misconceptions, or where my understanding fell short of what the actual research was offering. These discussions also served to enrich

Chief Mark's understanding of how an art dialogue can serve an Indigenous agenda.

Chief Mark, by necessity, had to explain the significance of Cree values to me. The design decisions map his ongoing struggle and patience in repeating himself, explaining what he meant and wanted represented, as well as my struggle to unlearn and relearn. When I was able to challenge my assumptions, I recognized a corresponding decolonizing shift in my consciousness take place accompanied by a pervasive feeling of joy. Moments such as the ones experienced through the design conversations were often hard won and are cherished.

Indigenous forms of relational knowledge raised by Wilson (2001, 2003) differ from relationality raised in the discussion of a/r/tography (below), despite the ecological metaphor. This demonstrates where our two different worldviews and the diverse cultures they come from diverge, and for a design moment, merged. What Wemindji Elders, Chief Mark and Wilson are speaking about are interpersonal relationships and how those relationships with all creation go beyond individual knowledge to much broader forms of reciprocal relational knowledge. Baskin et al. (2008) write knowledge is relational engaging multiple forms of knowing and is "contextualised through relationships" (p. 91). Thompson (2008) would agree, stating that the critical components "are that it is relational and involve community" (p. 37). My own experience and education, as it is connected to a/r/tography and Gablik's understanding of relationality, is complex and may mirror those complex relations in nature but still remain within the realm of people/teaching/art even as a community activity. What a/r/tography

and Cree relationality share is the desire not to compartmentalize education. Education is a reciprocal interactive relationship, one that often grows from the in-between spaces. It is only through my contact with Cree people and Cree epistemology and worldviews, however, that I have begun to grasp the scope and significance of the reciprocity between environment, cosmos, and Cree people of the land.

### **Collaboration and Core Value Conclusions**

The leadership questions Mark asked Cree Elders elicited the stories which were analysed to derive the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values. Therefore, there could be no better place to support self-determination, decolonizing practices, and research with a more inclusive pedagogical research agenda. Brant Castellano has reminded us that research controlled by others has colonizing, patronizing repercussions. The design of the diagram is one example of how this can be countered through collaborative projects.

The *How to Approach Collaborations* guidelines provides ample sources of places or points of entry to guide Indigenous and non-native collaborations. Indeed more needs to be done to write about these experiences in documenting decolonizing experiences or relationships. Respect and relationship do echo the twelve points put forth by Chief Mark, although the latter stemmed as well from prior colonizing experiences. They provide one example of Mark's bicultural success. The values of respect and relationship that stem from *the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* guide us to think through our decisions, not motivated from negative bicultural experiences, but from Cree epistemology. They require non-

native collaborators to work harder to understand worldviews, not simply from a different mindset but from the land where they originate, offered by *all living things*.

In the same manner that the chapter began with Mark's poem, *Paradise in Motion*, it is fitting to conclude with a stanza from it. It is clear that respect and relationship, as guiding values, have powerful implications as put forth in the poem and in the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*.

The silence of the present is you,

whispers from the future are calling.

A poet of hope, a lightening of perfection – it is you

Embrace the raindrops of life's challenges.

In the words of Thomas King (2003), an Indigenous author and academic, take Chief Mark's story. "It's yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story —*You've heard it now*" (p. 25; italics in original).

## CHAPTER 6: The Path of a Moose Hide



**Figure 6.1: Embroidery on moose hide and images from The Path of a Moose Hide consultation.**

### **Traditional Cree Skills and Modern Collaborative Projects**

This chapter addresses the formation of the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group (WTSG). I start this discussion by considering the traditional roles of Cree women and their work context. The WTSG women were hired because they were appreciated and recognized by their community for their practice of Cree skills at home. In an earlier time, these women's skills contributed to the mixed economy

of their families and extended community. Now, their skills are practised in a formal work setting.

*The Path of a Moose Hide* consultation is the research project discussed in this chapter. It exemplifies how PAR projects can provide support for decolonizing research. The availability of handcrafted smoke-tanned moose hide is essential to the continuation of the WTSG's artistic practice and to the practice of artists working from home. There is much concern that if the practice of tanning hide diminishes the land-based values that are embodied within will also recede. If the group had simply decided to rely on commercially tanned hide the erosion of Cree local practices would further the colonization of a significant cultural asset and the values that sustain it. PAR methodology guided me in my role as research colleague, ally, and as a non-native collaborator. The *Elements of Development* model featured in this chapter is an analytical tool that guided discussion with invited local experts and anchored the research in Indigenous worldviews.

I conclude with how the group's decision-making process and work they choose to do stems from and contributes to a holistic system of knowledge production that, when collectively practised, blur the lines between work as production, consumption, and leisure.

Today both the evolving workplace and the sale of art beyond the local community elicit issues that require new decisions and leadership to meet the challenges posed for the practice of traditional skills and values. Consequently, Cree cultural assets and the role they are accorded by the group and its mandate



were analysed through the community consultation titled *The Path of a Moose Hide*. The entire group participated in each phase of the research. Respected Elders and a variety of experts were consulted at each step due to the importance and interest for all Cree people concerning the use of moose hide. The research findings were then analysed using an Indigenous economic model titled *The Elements of Development* (Salway Black, 1994).

### **Traditional Skills, Employment and the Work Context**

At the onset, employment and the practice of traditional skills were the two main factors that influenced the direction of the WTSG as a community-based project.<sup>39</sup> The growing sense that cultural revival is a worthy pursuit, in and of itself, has affected the maintenance and day-to-day operation of the group. Community support and funds from sales, combined with frugal operation, have allowed the group to develop their mandate from production and sales to include research, resistance, and revitalization.

Chief Mark stated the WTSG grew in part from the request to “do something for those women” that, as Mark put it, “built on existing skills.”<sup>40</sup> Russell (1998) notes that the acknowledgment of people’s existing strengths as a focus for renewal is indicative of a shift in the ways development is understood: previous understandings of ‘progress’ out of ‘underdevelopment’ are being replaced by community-based leadership.

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<sup>39</sup> Understanding for the framework and articulation of issues that developed as the WTSG evolved grew from Matthew Krystal (2000).

The WTSG began in 2001 as a job creation initiative and as a modest exploration into small business opportunities. The CNW administration's main concern set the criteria: they wanted to organize something for people who were at home, connected with traditional life and marginalized in a variety of ways from the community's evolving work contexts. The stated objective was to utilize "traditional human resource skills in order to create traditional handicrafts to be marketed within Canada".<sup>41</sup> These skills had to already exist within the community and be of sufficient proficiency to warrant immediate employment, thereby requiring no job training for those individuals who were out of work. Examples of some of the skills the group initially excelled in were making moccasins, mittens and gloves, camouflage coats, bags, beadwork, canvass for teepees, lunch bags, utensil holders, baby quilts, walking-out ceremony wooden toys, gun gear, and snowshoe weaving. The form of construction, the amount of decoration, and the selection of material depends on whether the object is for use in traditional bush camps or within the community.<sup>42</sup>

The group was originally funded by proceeds from Cree investment and business initiatives. There was an official standard job posting, with an application and interview process, run by a selection committee. Twenty-three applications, all from women, were received for the original five positions proposed. The plans were reconfigured in an attempt to accommodate the level of interest demonstrated, serving to hire several more artists. The women ranged in

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<sup>41</sup> Objective noted in the Cree Nation of Wemindji Council Resolution 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Fieldwork observations, summer 2003.

age from their twenties to sixty-five. For the majority of these women this opportunity represented their first consistent employment, a significant achievement in a community with a population, in 2001, of just over 1000, where 60% are under 35 years of age, and with unemployment rates that reach as high as 30 %.<sup>43</sup>

The incorporation as a not-for-profit association represented a key moment in the group's development. Early ideas of developing a sustainable business were dropped by the group. Success in revitalizing Cree art and researching traditional skills was understood by the collective as an important and worthy mandate. The participants were paid an hourly wage; income from the sale of their work contributed to the group's functioning but has not financially supported the group. Nevertheless, the group's continued presence, despite adverse challenges such as unstable funding and long-term accommodation, is testimony to the community's recognition of the value WTSG serves within community life.

Demonstrating the importance the group places on making positive social contributions to their community, the WTSG has also experimented with employment projects, summer youth work projects, and strategies that embrace youth at risk. The group initially provided a site for a number of short-term renewable employment projects sponsored by Cree Human Resource Development. These projects offered an excellent opportunity for the WTSG artists to mentor and teach, as well as provided good work experience for a number of employees. They also brought in significant sources of cash income to

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<sup>43</sup> Cited from Mark's "Investing in Traditional Skills" power point presentation.

participants, even if this income could not be calculated as a direct source of profit for the group itself.

The group has also experimented with selling their art in the community and at locations outside, always studying the kinds of articles that are of interest within and outside the community. Understanding what motivates consumer interest and what motivates the group's own choice of what it should make has generated tension and conflicting cross currents among group members. These tensions are articulated in detail in Chapter Seven in relation the group's spruce bark basketry.

### **Formal and Informal Learning of Traditional Cree Women's Roles**

Clarkson, Morisette, and Regallet (1997) state that traditionally, Cree "women performed the role of teachers and transmitters of values and were the socializers of children. The children themselves were teachers to the younger siblings and relatives as well as performing tasks around the camp" (p. 47). Ellen Smallboy was a Cree woman born in the 1850's. Regina Flannery met her in Moose Factory in 1933 and recorded her life history. Flannery (1995) writes about Ellen Smallboy's earliest memories that offer us insight into how children acquired proficient levels of skills at a young age. Ellen Smallboy was able to set snares without her mother's supervision by the time she was five or six. A lot of her skills were practiced though play as she tried to imitate what she saw her mother or other adults doing. For example, "she used a piece from an old fish net to catch small fish which she then cooked over her fire in front of the little *mîkiwâm* she had put up using three sticks as the foundation. . . .Later she was

trained by her mother to make fish nets, to sew moccasins, and perform other tasks” (p. 14).

Many of the WTSG women were taught their craft skills in formal school learning environments. One participant described learning how to sew using commercially produced fabrics and hides. She did not learn to work with locally handcrafted hide, or how to embroider, until she joined the WTSG group. The value attributed to their educational experiences differs greatly. Older women who learned skills at residential schools in either Moosonee or Chisasibi describe learning to sew with cotton or canvas ‘only’ or using commercially prepared hide to make small decorative items. Women who learned skills in community schools did learn how to knit and bead, skills that are still popular today.

Learning how to work with hide was accomplished by watching their mothers, grandmothers and aunts. One participant described her initiative and drive to learn:

by watching people. . .mostly my Mother. . .She wouldn’t teach me [referring to moccasins]. . . .You know what I did? . . .I took her moccasin apart and sewed it back together again. . . .She didn’t do it this style [pointing to a dress slipper decorated for a child’s walking out ceremony] she did the style I am making with the big ones. . . .she made it plain. . . .the style was totally different. . . .she didn’t do the cross stitch [which this participant is currently using to gather the vamp to the sole with a mix of

decorative coloured embroidery thread]. . . These was working moccasins [not] dress moccasins.<sup>44</sup>

Cree skills learned informally from observation are characterized quite differently as being much more simple in form and less dressy. One participant explained, I “learnt a little bit from my Mom. My Mom made plain mitts, moccasins, for working and wearing in the bush...I started embroidery and beadwork from teachers in the community, local Cree women”.<sup>45</sup> Participants spoke more highly of skills learnt through formal education once school or training programs were available in the community. In community schools, local Cree women were hired as teachers and a greater variety of commercial and locally produced materials were used; participants often contrasted this with their residential school experiences. Some of these women were hired through Manpower, a federally funded employment program.<sup>46</sup> The participants spoke of how these courses were “very important for the community”; they learned among other skills, how to tan hide, work with fur, and make practical, warm items that could also be decorated for dress wear. As one participant noted:

You have to know how to use the hide, using it the right way so it doesn’t stretch, follow the line of the head [she is tracing in the air with her fingers, outlining the contours of a hide and pointing to the place where

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<sup>44</sup> Fieldwork observations: participant no. 1, summer 2003

<sup>45</sup> Fieldwork observations: participant no. 3, summer 2003

<sup>46</sup> See Elberg, N. et al. (1972) to understand the significance of Canada Manpower courses in a community the size of Wemindji in the 1970s.

the head or neck of the hide would be indicating the top] or the fingers [of the gloves] will stretch if you use it sideways. [She then holds up a pair of gloves and indicating with her fingers how long the fingers of the gloves will stretch, as opposed to stretching that occurs when the hide is used width wise]. They will stretch in length not width. . . When we went to school we didn't have that, we weren't taught that in Chisasibi, or Wemindji. It's a good thing it is an improvement that it's taught in school today. <sup>47</sup>

Opportunities to observe, practice, and learn traditional skills, together with opportunities to mentor and teach traditional skills, are continuing to change rapidly. Increased time is spent at school, work, and in the pursuit of today's popular activities. The WTSG, within their mandate, work to fill in the gaps created when the traditional transmission of knowledge and skills is interrupted by the changing context of how education is organised and provided in the community.

### **Transitioning Traditional Skills from a Mixed Economy to Formal Work**

Blythe and McGuire (1996) conducted a study in Moosonee and Moose Factory, Cree communities across the bay from Wemindji, which shed light on Cree women's choices when deciding to move away from the mixed economy to fulltime employment and settlement life. *Mixed economy* is defined by the authors of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) (1996) as follows:

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<sup>47</sup> Fieldwork observations: participant no. 3, summer 2003

In the mixed economy, households combine cash from a variety of sources [wages, social transfers, arts and crafts production] with income from the land, shifting their efforts from one sector to another as conditions dictate...The mixed economy is the dominant economic form of most Aboriginal communities, and it is by far the most stable. The stability of the mixed economy is evident in its persistence since the earliest days of the fur trade. The central reason for this stability was its flexibility and adaptability, allowing producers to take advantage of a variety of economic opportunities. (p. 381) <sup>48</sup>

Community transactions often do not involve the exchange of cash but are of significant monetary value; for example, goods such as fresh meat and fish would require a significant amount of cash if one had to replace these items by purchasing 'equivalent' ones (Salisbury, 1989; Scott, 1992; Tanner, 1979). Often these products and services are not easy to replace; they contribute to what makes a Cree lifestyle distinct.

The role of the economy when distinct from the community and family acts as a replacement for those structures (Ross & Usher, 1986). It is important for Cree women, when considering their stake in community and making decisions about the kinds of work they will pursue, to understand this. Maintaining the

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<sup>48</sup> See Elberg, Salisbury, and Visitor (1976) for a description of Wemindji (Paint Hills) and the organization of its various entities and services that formed the mixed economy. See La Rustic (1968) for a description of Cree people entering the work force.



mixed economy, supported by such structures as the Income Security Program for hunters and trappers, has ensured that the mixed economy permits diverse forms of economic practice based on family, tradition, community, and cultural heritage that have grown not from the industrial model of economic efficiency but from a Cree subsistence model of sustainability (Scott 1982, 1984, 1987, 1992a).

Blythe and McGuire (1996) review how minimal options for employment, gender, ethnicity, and education function as constraints that both limit the choices available and shape the ethical decisions faced by Cree women while balancing paid work with the non-financial needs of their families.<sup>49</sup> Relevant here is the concept of “stake in family and community which give (the authors) a framework for investigating the shifting perceptions of family responsibility in relation to community cohesion” (p. 132). The choices the CNW women face are reflected in the way they articulate family and community relationships:

Both the family and the community are recognized as sets of affiliations that people make with one another. The family need not be a “domestic” unit; indeed, family. . . might extend throughout the community as a network of bonds that have real economic and political consequences.

Among the Cree. . . it is the women who are responsible for creating meaningful ties; they are meaningful because they represent an investment in community through family and support family through community. And women must now do this within the constraints of their jobs, so it is the

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of the challenges Aboriginal women face in Quebec see the Status of Women Canada report by Carol Levesque (2001).

women and their families who must decide where the boundary between family and community will be. In the bush, family and community overlapped considerably in terms of work. (Blythe & McGuire, 1996, p. 147)

Core members of the WTSG have chosen to work full time, but they do have the opportunity, due to the nature of their work, to reconsider traditional community affiliations and the purposes these affiliations from within their daily workplace. Although the culture of contemporary work settings and education continue to colonize Indigenous institutions by emphasizing the separation of work and the division of labour into increasingly specialised tasks, the manner in which the WTSG organizes their work resists this process. This rigidity of work roles is something the group does not want to mirror; instead, they would like to use their diverse skills to support varied needs that extend beyond the immediate work place to broader aspects of community life.

The WTSG recognizes the specialized but localized nature of their artwork. A formal globalized economy does promote growth through specialization, but it is characterized by large segments of the industrial economy that have developed international divisions in labour with centralized production and long-distance trade. What used to be made locally is likely made in Taiwan. Rare is the job description that calls for knowledge and skills that contribute to one's ability to sustain a living from the land. Conventional views of modernization and development rigidly divide lives between economic and social lines, between work and leisure. "Modernization' also means new social

relationships, new property relations and new ways of organizing work” (Ross & Usher, 1986, p. 29).

### **Transmission of skills in the WTSG workshop.**

The WTSG work setting highlights the talents of individuals who are acknowledged as experts in certain areas of exceptional and specialized skill in ways skilled artists have typically not been recognized when working from home. The group is very aware of this and consciously reminds the CNW and buyers that they share these skills with their peers working from home. Among themselves, each member of the WTSG is recognized for a particular skill or technique, be it beading, flower design and colour selection, pattern making, sewing perfect seams for a pair of gloves, record keeping, experimenting with new or period methods of construction, teaching or communication skills. Individuals are motivated to learn skills demonstrated by others. While the location and context has changed, the methods of mentoring and teaching, and the dedication to learning, reflect Cree heritage. Considerable effort is expended to learn techniques from each other. A strong sense of community is reflected in crediting design choices and the high standards they set for the quality of their work.

Learners are expected to observe carefully and work hard; expertise is accrued over time and with experience. As such, several levels of skill are exercised, depending on whether a learner is working from a personal strength or developing a new skill. The women in the group take time to teach each other and

value their time spent teaching students, employees on work experience projects, and members of the community during workshops offered for that purpose.

The decision to sell the group's art, to produce enough work to supply both the community's needs and several outlets outside of the CNW has engaged the artists in new questions concerning the financial and broader community economic development implications of their work. The issues that have emerged have focussed the energy of the group and prompted the emergence of its current, ongoing research agenda. These are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

### **The Elements of Development Model and the Path of the Moose Hide**

Wuttunee (2004) cites the First Nations Development Institute's (FNDI)<sup>50</sup> definition of Indigenous economics as the "science of dealing with production, distribution, and consumption of wealth in a naturally holistic, reciprocal manner that respects humankind, fellow species, and eco-balance of life" (p. 3). Like Indigenous scholars who are calling for a paradigm shift in Indigenous research,

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<sup>50</sup> I would like to thank the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI), Virginia, U.S.A. an offshoot of AIM, the American Indian Movement, and Marry Phillips who encouraged me to pursue participatory research. She informed me that grants were becoming more available and mailed me a copy of Sherry Salway Black's (1994) *Redefining Success in Community Development: A New Approach for Determining and Measuring the Impact of Development*, which has had a defining impact on how we approached PAR and developed *The Path of a Moose Hide* consultation project.

so too are Indigenous entrepreneurs, community development organizations, and business people. Wuttunee suggests that the FNDI's definition moves beyond the doctrines of market driven capitalism common to neo-liberal globalisation. They are calling for a "shift of perspective in the heart. It requires a connection to spirit that goes beyond the scientific analysis of numbers of jobs created and revenues generated" (p. 3). This western mindset uses indicators for success that do not account for cultural assets and broader objectives integral to Wemindji values. I agree with Wuttunee and find the WTSG research initiatives (both *The Path of a Moose Hide* described here and the Spruce bark basket project featured in Chapter Seven) to be exemplary projects. Although small, they have larger implications for the kind of development model proposed by the FNDI. Like Wuttunee (2004) we in the group see it as a

[m]ove instead towards an economic development approach that includes these costs but also attempts to quantify all costs of development decisions on environment, people, communities, and future generations. Profit is important as a measure of success, but it is not the only measure.

"Reasonable" profit that honours the limits of the planet's resources must replace the idea of "maximum" profit. (p. 7)

**Connecting Freirian-influenced PAR with Wemindji community core values.**

Drawing on *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* as a set of principles guiding development of new projects also requires this shift in perspective. If implemented, a remarkable new economic reality cannot help but emerge

(Wuttunee, 2004). The *Elements of Development* model has helped to maintain a desired balance as expressed in the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* diagram.

Projects that have emerged from conducting this analysis exhibit a more comprehensive understanding of how to uphold traditional values in changing work contexts, reducing decolonizing decisions that may have otherwise been taken within the group's daily practice without a clear understanding of impacts. In this manner the combination of the use of the diagram and model serve our PAR objectives in Freirian terms.

Wuttunee (2004, 2007) and Newhouse (2000) describe how when Indigenous values and worldviews are taken into consideration they can affect economic development. Sherry Salway Black (1994), in *The Elements of Development*, has proposed a very comprehensive model and guide, which I have selected as a foundational document for my research and thinking because it aligns itself with Indigenous worldviews and PAR in practical ways. FNDI encourages Indigenous communities to evaluate their own economic projects on their own terms. The model can be adjusted to suit individual and community beliefs, demographics, and cultural assets. This focused participants on evaluating CNW areas of strength and weaknesses in achieving the holistic balance that the model proposes. Most importantly it places these decisions in the hands of local Indigenous people. It helps people to identify the impact of their projects through a collaborative process. Of key interest in this case are the issues and needs that arose throughout the process, generating projects that seek solutions to problems – problems locally defined and solutions drawing upon the community's

capabilities and strengths. Maintaining the balance suggested by the model depends on the emphasis each group places on their values, what shifts are acceptable, and what trade-offs demand too high a sacrifice. The *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* provides guidelines crucial in this decision making process. Analyses and decisions are made case by case.

This circular model builds from the centre outwards. It begins with a focus on the individual, the project, the community, and the nation. Salway Black's (1994) model is divided into four equal sections; each section features an additional three reference points. If you want to evaluate and analyze a new project in-depth, holistically, from an Indigenous perspective Salway Black, and Wuttunee propose you consider how it functions as a reflection of the 16 elements.

The four main points of axis, reflecting economic development factors, are Control of Assets, Spirituality, Kinship, and Personal Efficacy. Contained within the model are twelve additional elements: environmental balance; hope and future orientation; choice/vision; cultural integrity; social respect; political and civic participation; vibrant initiative; responsibility and consequences; health and safety; productivity skills; income; trade and exchange. For an in-depth description of the elements, Salway Black (1994) and Wuttunee (2004) offer thorough descriptions of each and possible indicators of success for each quadrant.

The following examples offer additional insight as to how our understanding of the work conducted by the group reflects some of the elements

and values expressed in the model. Through their day-to-day activities and decisions, the WTSG demonstrate commitment to the interactions that keep them connected to their community in numerous ways, which embrace kinship, social respect, and cultural integrity. These values are demonstrated through actions such as women's pride in being able to tell a buyer where and by whom a hide was tanned, as well as how it was prepared, by the thickness, texture, colour and smell. Individual orders completed are kept until the person has the money to pick up the item, despite interest shown by others. The women will wait for a hide to be brought to town or they may call other neighbouring communities for a locally tanned hide instead of ordering commercially prepared hide. The women will reorganize current work in order to wait for a new hide to arrive from people working and living in the bush.

Another example illustrates *productivity skills, kinship, and cultural integrity*. The artists can explain the different seams and cuts used to sew a moccasin or a slipper, attributing it to one or another of the Cree communities that popularized it. When sewing footwear there is much debate over issues such as the origins of the James Bay or Wemindji seam, that gathers a third piece of hide between the edges of the seams to ensure that there will be no gaps, despite stretching and wear, adding to its strength and whether to credit Mistissini or Waswanipi for the gather used to attach the vamp (around the toe) to the sole of the footwear. They can also recount who taught them their skills and, if the teacher was local, how that person was taught. The work itself, the materials selected and techniques favoured all confer value on both the practice and the



product. Clearly one of the characteristics of the group is not only the opportunity to choose what is produced but, more importantly, how the item is produced and the relationships that are maintained throughout the process.

### **PAR and the Elements of Development.**

Here I share information discussing what *The Elements of Development* revealed in supporting WTSG as a PAR project, respecting Indigenous research protocols and most importantly the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*. The process was collaborative and served to help implement Mark's guidelines *How to Approach Collaborations* in strategies we implemented aimed at improving our work. It reviewed the group's vision and set objectives towards its achievement. The agenda called on a variety of local people and regional organizations to help contribute to the project. Working with the model served to guide the group through a decision-making process, which clarified the scope and importance of their work for the group, the community, and regarding Cree cultural issues currently impacting all Cree communities in Quebec. It also illustrates how, as an in-depth process, it engaged Indigenous and non-native people in collaborative conversations expanding many themes in a positive and, in this community, unprecedented manner. It proved to be the catalyst needed to take the WTSG in new directions that revealed their abilities, identified which required skills were missing, and encouraged initiative to formulate new goals. These goals were written into a grant request that was awarded by the *Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association* (CNACA). The group then shared their progress and concerns at CNACA's regional general assembly. The assembly was held in Wemindji, due in

part to the group's research initiatives. They shared their process, concerns, and plans with their colleagues, obtaining feedback from the other Cree communities. Some interesting points involved the differences between commercialism and exploitation, safe-guarding the interests of artists, updating prices charged for products, and maintaining quality in production.

### **The Path of a Moose Hide and the implications for self-determination.**

As a group, we collaborated with the Director of Wemindji's Tawich Development Corporation, a CNW community economic development (CED) organization. The Director worked with us to plan a process that maximized the model's impact. CED corporations engage processes of capacity assessment and community economic development that seek greater levels of self-reliance when they work together so that "communities can initiate and generate their own solutions to common economic problems and thereby build long-term community capacity and foster the integration of economic, social and environmental objectives" (Markey et al., 2001, pp. 43-44). The Director suggested that the group learn how to use the model by focusing on one moose hide project and invited local Cree experts from different specialized areas to participate in the consultation. In order to facilitate the presentation Francis Visitor translated the model into Cree (see Appendix 6 for the translation). As a group we then developed a list of questions to initiate discussions with members who shared their knowledge in each area of the moose hide path (see Appendix 7 for the Path of a Moose Hide questions). Once the discussions began, the majority of questions on our prepared list emerged naturally from the flow of conversation.

Members of the WTSG knew from their prior research that the cost of purchasing hand crafted smoke tanned moose hide was creating a deficit and outside purchasing meant they lost control over the quality of hide. Yet the labour and time engaged in tanning hide themselves did not offer any financial relief, although they could control the level of quality required by their artistic standards. Further, the time and labour engaged in embroidery is clearly an artistic choice based on the group's high standards of quality but does not improve the financial picture. It is the most cost prohibitive factor in sewing moose hide items. How to understand the economic impacts and come up with possible solutions was not evident (see Appendix 8 for budget and pricing of an embroidered slipper).

The research reiterated that the group was not interested in saving time through piecemeal work or dividing the labour up according to who can carry out which step the fastest when sewing a slipper: a common suggestion proffered to curtail labour costs. The WTSG artists take pride in completing a project from start to finish, including understanding where the materials came from and how they are created. They are currently exploring how to tan moose hide at the workshop. The cost of hides continues to go up and has almost doubled since this consultation took place. While the group does not want to curtail the time engaged in embroidering or beading moose hide, the artists see the necessity for the group to take up tanning hide themselves in order to revitalize and secure this knowledge and investigate if tanning hide can reduce labour costs, waste, as well as provide a valuable service to the community.

Every time a pair of hand crafted, smoke tanned, beaver fur trimmed, embroidered slippers are sold the consumer pays \$165.00 and the CNW contributes \$360.00. Prior to our work analyzing the prices, the group commonly sold their work for the same prices CNW women sell their work for from their homes. Average sized women's slippers were sold for approximately \$125.00. At times the group drastically undersold their work, especially work made from sealskin or other furs that are not readily available. The importance of addressing the pricing of their work was raised and confirmed through an analysis of income, responsibility, and consequences. As the research progressed our findings helped the group identify how they could address the issues raised, where they were willing to put their efforts, and where they thought they might be able to generate solutions. I made small posters of several items to help the group explain their prices to customers, especially those customers who insisted on bargaining.

As a group we later conducted a price analysis of over seventy-five different items the artists produce. At times the group was astounded and even shocked at how the figures added up. It was decided to ensure that all prices in the future would cover material costs, a modest overhead and wholesale percentage, which has been factored into a new price list. The cost of labour would raise the prices so far beyond consumer expectations that the group had to acknowledge this was not a viable goal, especially if they wanted to ensure traditional moose hide items would be accessible to the community. The WTSG does aspire to create for-profit projects to offset financial losses associated with moose hide

work and to build some entrepreneurial skills. The spruce bark basket project featured in the next chapter represents the group's first attempt.

The *Path of a Moose Hide* invited knowledgeable representatives in hunting, tanning, producing crafts, and marketing products to participate in a discussion that followed the moose hide within its habitat, from its seasonal movements to the moment the moose was hunted, tanned, sewn into a product, and sold. All the local experts shared their knowledge, describing each step the work demanded. "Kinship, acknowledges the system of giving, sharing, and reciprocity. . . . By acknowledging and building on the kinship system, a strategy builds on local strengths" (Wuttunee, 2004, p. 22; quoting Salway Black). These distinct Cree skills vary from community to community. They are significant as they recognize a pool of cultural assets that "salutes empowerment through ownership and control, enabling wealth creation" (Wuttunee, 2004, p. 23). Cree cultural assets value heritage and traditions, skills, hunting rights, kinship, Cree institutions such as the Cree Trappers Association, and CNACA, access to funds and credit, and natural and human resources.

The consultation was spread out over two weeks, spending a day or two on each step in the path. The conversation was carried out in Cree, recorded and translated. The Director simultaneously chaired the consultations and translated discussion highlights in English on a flipchart. We were amazed at the wealth of information we had acquired. The group then posted all its notes on a wall and after colour coding *The Elements of Development*, they sorted through the

information and considered its implications. Some of the guest experts returned to participate in the analyses, further enriching the process.

Detailing *The Path of the Moose Hide* project helped the group communicate the research results and new initiatives to the Cree Trappers Association, which supports the project, and the Cree Regional Authority; after having reviewed the environmental impact of a proposed pilot project, it has been approved. The artists were not all aware of key hunting processes, seasonal factors and environmental balance. Capitalist economics are not based on nature's seasons and cycles, which are living systems of renewal. Economics are increasingly based on cycles of consumption. Here Cree spirituality may also reflect one's contribution to Cree life, teaching, mentoring language, and traditional skills, creating a respectful forum for Cree beliefs, practices, and values, which in turn serve to balance local economics.

The group determined that approximately only twelve people in the community were physically able and experienced enough to carry out the traditional process. The group also realized that many homes with freezers contained raw hides because people living in the community did not have the time required to spend with those who could carry out the tanning process. As people's freezers become full, an increasing number of moose hides are not being used. While traditional forms of learning through observation and practice on the land continue, for most the time required to become sufficient practitioners of these cultural skills is no longer possible. Today the majority of people live in the village of Wemindji itself. WTSG acknowledges that school and work

increasingly structure the community's time; therefore, WTSG is striving to adapt and provide alternatives. By carrying out their daily work in the workshop, the living practice of cultural traditions can continue, fostering a sense of well being by providing important opportunities for observation and learning in the daily life of the community.

### **The Path of a Moose Hide Analysis and Decisions Made**

The analysis was completed, drawing on the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* to guide the process and decisions taken. For example, there were plenty of issues to weigh when considering if the group should buy commercial moose hide or buy moose hide from other Cree communities or tan its own moose hide and, if there was a need, offer this service to the CNW. Having the diagram present as a tool or guide to point to served to focus discussion or summarize points put forth. The WTSG has recognized an urgent need to revitalize and research its local moose hide tanning processes. It realised that equally important is the need to develop the means to support this work and acknowledges the need to teach youth, to pass on their skills, as well as realizing the rich cultural heritage that fostered these skills. Consequently the group wants to integrate five youth into the project. They wish to extend their community presence to include the tanning of hide. Purchasing tanned hides from other communities does not foster an environment that supports the local transmission of these cultural skills.

The moose hide once tanned, using Cree processes, is so soft and supple that the artists can embroider intricate designs, maintaining high artistic standards. A special benefit from the process was the decision the group made to translate

one example of a local tanning process, with its specific practices and tips, into Cree for the school's Cree cultural education program (see Appendix 9 for an English/ Cree example of one family's tanning process). The group hopes to collect other families tips and, together with their own, articulate a Wemindji tanning process. Some tools, names, and processes could not be explained adequately in English. Maintaining the language helps to maintain knowledge specific to highly specialized local skills.

Within the group itself one member volunteered information about specialized skills using a hand-operated fleshing machine. She had learnt the techniques of how to use this machine when Wemindji once operated a silver fox farm. She found that when this machine was properly used, the quality of this labour intensive step, which many Elders have been finding increasingly beyond their abilities, could be maintained. The group also wants to study the impact on both the quality of the product and the experience enjoying tanning hide itself when integrating some labour saving steps into the traditional process. The WTSG wants to see if they can reduce waste and the cost of purchasing moose hide by tanning hides themselves and offering this service to the community. Self-confidence and personal efficacy celebrate individual achievements and honour accomplishments "when they benefit the extended family and the community" (Wuttunee, 2004, p. 22).



### **Moose hide tanning project objectives.**

Listed below are the objectives identified from *The Path of a Moose Hide* consultation after analyzing the results using *The Elements of Development* model.

1. To construct and maintain a *mitutisaanaachinikimikw*, a traditional lodge from bent poles to use as a site to carry out traditional tanning processes.
2. To learn how to make the traditional tools required in the tanning process.
3. To traditionally tan moose hide for the group and the community.
4. To foster the practice of specialized Cree skills and language describing Cree ways and means of tanning hide between Elders and Youth.
5. To carry out necessary repairs and to clean up the old canoe factory, providing a location to support the contemporary steps in the tanning process.
6. To integrate the use of the industrial support machine, a Quebec Lite Flesher, to alleviate the labour intense processes engaged in tanning hide; to evaluate how the integration of the machine impacts the quality of the work and the enjoyment of the process; to determine if the implementation of this process can reduce the cost of purchasing hide from other communities.
7. To offer the group's services, using traditional processes and/or the Flesher machine, to the community to alleviate aspects of the labour engaged by those individuals who do not have the time or physical ability to process their hides.

8. To assess if reducing the labour engaged in tanning hide reduces overhead costs when the group purchases hide from other communities; to develop a service for Cree communities which provides a source of revenue for the group.<sup>51</sup>

### **WTSG Sales Calls**

In this next section I relate events that occurred making an initial series of sales calls with Chief Mark. He wanted to understand firsthand what was involved in selling WTSG artwork. These experiences served to forecast some of the issues that I would later experience making additional sales calls with the WTSG. Selling WTSG artwork beyond the community presents opportunities to remind broader audiences about their existence and to further educate those interested.

#### **WTSG sales calls in Old Montreal.**

Our first stop was at a beautifully displayed ‘Indian’ artefact/souvenir store in Old Montreal. The owner recognized the quality of the items for sale. While he looked over the items, he began to tell us how slow business was. People were not interested in purchasing fur or paying for quality items when cheaper items were so readily available. He asked where the objects had come from. When he heard the art came from James Bay, he began to tell us about the places he had visited. He and the Chief had a long discussion. The owner bought a large percentage of the artwork we brought, including moose hide beaded and embroidered work. All the children’s hand crafted clothing was sold. The owner informed us that he bought the items, not for sale, but for display purposes to

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<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 13 for a summary of recent research results.

bring shoppers into the store and encourage them to browse. He did not negotiate the prices.

Later I returned to the store with the WTSG on a trip funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. We had booked a sales call; this experience differed greatly from the first. The shopkeeper greatly admired all the work. Our prices had risen and the artists were prepared to explain how they determined each price, noting that the labour was not included. We were advised that we should save items of this quality for home or to be given as gifts to Elders. Work bought and sold, despite the quality displays, had to be made much more quickly and in far less detail. We should come back with work of lesser quality; those items sold better. He would be pleased to see us again and made a request. Could the group make arrowheads? They did not have to be made of flint, any stone would do. Arrowheads always sold well to foreign tourists. The group was disappointed, but very pleased with the friendly, open, and honest manner through which the conversation was held. They thought about the arrowheads for a few moments, smiling. Upon return to the community no one attempted to make any arrowheads.

When the group visited a high-end Indigenous art store in Ottawa they were advised to “not change a single aspect of their work”. While the owner attempted to negotiate, the group maintained their prices. The women sold all the artwork they had to offer, for the first time, at the newly raised prices. This was a tremendous personal moment for each woman and validated the work the WTSG had begun.

### **WTSG sales call to Ten Thousand Villages.**

On that first day making ‘cold’ sales calls, Chief Mark and I also approached the fair trade certified *Ten Thousand Villages* store. We appreciated the artwork that the organization supports from developing communities around the world. The store operates with socially ethical purchasing guidelines. They offer a 50% advance as working capital for artisans, paying in full once the order is shipped. They monitor working conditions and run according to well-defined principles of fair trade. However, these principles do not work in favour of Indigenous people from industrial countries where the cost of living is so much higher than in developing countries. An Indigenous rattle made in Kenya, purchased at a fair trade price and taking into consideration fair wages, will sell for under \$10.00. Due to the high cost of living in North America and the criteria of equal pay and fair wages, a Canadian Indigenous rattle bought under the same guidelines will cost the consumer \$75.00. To date, Canadian Indigenous arts and crafts from groups who meet most of the other criteria pertaining to marginalized work forces (except that they are located in an industrialized country) are unfortunately not represented in these stores.

### **WTSG sales call to the McCord Museum boutique.**

Our final visit that first day was to the McCord Museum Boutique. We were invited to show the manager the items we had brought with us. Some items she quickly told us to pack away, as she had plenty of local Indigenous suppliers. She looked at a few samples of children’s clothing and lamented that we had just sold all the main items earlier that day. Children’s clothing is the best seller. She

selected a number of items and requested information concerning how to stay in touch.

Over successive visits the manager looked at a real hunter's goose decoy and pointed to the quality of decorative examples, which made the sale of a working carved wooden decoy unlikely. She carefully considered a small hand carved shovel, used at Cree camps. She enjoyed the story of how the carver must search for a tree with a root base below the earth's surface wide enough for the shaft and bowl of the shovel, as the shovel is carved from one solid piece of wood to ensure its strength. However, she concluded people would not know what to do with it and that it was not an item easily displayed.

An interesting incident occurred over some beaded items. There were some moccasins and jewellery that featured clichéd stereotypical 'Indian' faces with braids that swung freely. The manager became quite agitated, especially when some customers approached the counter where they were laid out, insisting that we put them away. The irony was that while the world has invented countless 'Indian' images and appropriated many Indigenous ones; Indigenous people appropriating a western 'Indian' image to decorate their work was deemed in poor taste. The graphic symbol of a stereotypical 'Pocahontas' style 'Indian' woman was not acceptable.

A lasting relationship has been established with the McCord Museum and Boutique, one that due to its authority actually serves to validate the group. Sales of its work are only one aspect of this relationship. The Boutique tries to stock specialty items that relate to current exhibits. For example, one summer an exhibit

that featured tools resulted in the sale of knives and scrapers made by several CNW men. Since that first visit, the McCord Museum Boutique has hosted the group. The manager made a presentation to demystify sales calls and the benefit of online catalogues for buyers.

The McCord Museum has also opened its collection to the group, who were interested in viewing quill work on hide, tufting, and painted hunting coats, as well as examples of patterns for embroidery and bead work. An Indigenous educator working at the museum also offered the group a moose hair-tufting workshop. The group provided the moose hair (the longest hair located on the back of the neck, which is hard to come by as it is only saved if asked for in advance). Although this is not a Cree tradition, the group wanted to learn this decorative skill as it maximized their use of the materials the animal had to offer. The group excelled at this technique. They picked up the steps and process, enjoying experimenting and re-inventing it immediately. It is evident that they are very familiar with this material if not the actual technique.

### **Understanding Some of the Ironies Engaged by the ‘Indian’ Image**

The incident that revolved around the ‘Indian’ beaded facial images raises questions articulated by Bataille (2001, pp. 4-5; see also Alfred, 1999; Clifton, 1990; Francis, 1992; King, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). What images have been created and how do they persist? Who controls these representations? What do these images mean for Indigenous people and how are Indigenous populations using them?

Phillips' (1998) articulation of Pratt's notions of autoethnographic expression may help to illustrate how non-native viewers understand Indigenous arts and crafts.<sup>52</sup> Autoethnographic expressions are those in which "colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms," involving "partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (p. 17), a definition that perfectly fits the production of northeastern souvenir arts along with its ingenuity and agency.<sup>53</sup>

The WTSG members like to set trends themselves in terms of decoration and patterns and enjoys developing new decorative designs for the moccasins and moose-hide mitts they produce. They are actively engaged in adaptation not for the non-native population but for themselves. Some of the unique requests made of the group have provided challenges and tested the group's ability. For example, moose-hide mitts have been embroidered with the new local fire department's and the Montreal Canadians' hockey logos. In these cases knowledge is pooled and sometimes reinvented for local enjoyment.

The notion that there is somehow one correct image of the 'Indian' and the objects Indigenous people choose to produce has been contested; however, it is persistent. More work needs to be done by art educators to foster understanding and to combat and correct persistent misrepresentation of Indigenous people.

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<sup>52</sup> For an in depth and humorous analysis of authenticity and tradition related to forms of autoethnographic expression see Pakes (1987).

<sup>53</sup> See Myers (1987) for an example of early moccasins manufactured specifically for sale to non-native populations.

More to the point is the recognition of what is being produced and why it is a worthwhile endeavor for both the maker and/or the owner. Perhaps this is insulting because historically, Indigenous ingenuity and foresight have motivated entrepreneurs to capitalize on opportunities when circumstances have provided an opening. The intersection of non-native and Indigenous world values shapes processes the maker may or may not choose to engage with.

The production of traditional Cree art was an integrated aspect of Indigenous culture; as such, it reflects the nature and character of social relations of production, directed by and benefiting artists, families, and all those who valued the variety of purposes the object served. Decline in the use of these items and the currency of artistic skills, as art works, objects, and tools are increasingly replaced by new inventions and materials, signifies the penetration of dominant cultures, and colonization itself, within Indigenous communities.

McIssac (2000) acknowledges that “elders’ emphasis on cultural practice and traditional knowledge is not simply about economic relations; it is also about resisting cultural domination and colonial history” (p. 97). For CNW shoppers buying traditional articles of winter clothing and wearing them, even those with ‘Indian’ facial motifs, has become an act of cultural distinction, identity, solidarity, and in the context of ever encroaching fashion trends from dominant cultures, an act of resistance.

### **Heritage Continues to Contribute to Living Traditions**

The WTSG continues to create art from traditional materials prepared in time honoured ways. They are demonstrating the value they place in their



heritage, which contributes to their living traditions. Examples such as the moose-hide moccasins have come to represent much more than simple cultural artifacts.

According to McIssac (2000):

They imply a series of relations: to the land, to the community, and to production. For example: traditional winter clothing involves hunting on the land and knowledge of the land. These in turn imply a sense of protection of the land based on use according to need, and the social relations of hunting. Furthermore, preparing skins and sewing winter cloths is the domain of women in terms of their traditional knowledge and roles. The final product, the winter clothing, holds important cultural value in this context. The concern for passing traditional knowledge to future generations perhaps implies a vision of social relations based on principles that challenge the dominant Canadian culture. (p. 96)

When Cree people continue to make and use traditional objects, adapted or otherwise, they are demonstrating the value they place in their heritage, which contributes to their living traditions. Cree traditions are not static; they are products of agency, which in the present are reformed by each new generation. When Indigenous people re-appropriate stereotypical images of the Indian, they are reclaiming political jurisdiction over how they choose to be represented.

**Blurring the lines between work as production, consumption, and leisure.**

Demystifying cultural and economic processes, by understanding them through local Cree perspectives, served to raise critical consciousness, motivate

solutions to problems identified, and establish a more socially just and equitable decision-making process, which drew on cultural beliefs, local values, strengths, and abilities. Placing the development of a culturally sensitive project in local hands promotes a people-centered approach. This encouraged the possibility, through contemporary projects, for many more shared learning opportunities and enriched reproduction of knowledge based on cultural heritage. These efforts served to decolonize non-native collaborations, helping Cree people to reflect upon the circumstances of colonization.

Different workplace settings make different demands and have different expectations regarding communication and collaboration. The women do recognize the need to develop new skills required by the changing work context, such as computer skills, second language phone skills, networking and presentation skills, and teaching and demonstration skills that accommodate school expectations. Chapman, McCaskill, and Newhouse (1991) recognize the flexibility Indigenous people must exercise “to be able to switch back and forth with ease, as well as being able to translate two cultures to each other” (p. 347) to meet bicultural demands in the workplace.

Beyond the daily tasks, exercising traditional values such as leadership, mentoring, and teaching are all impacted by the different motivations and initiatives expressed in different community bush, family, and work contexts. When the work context risks becoming a site for colonizing forms of organization that the group does not wish to adopt, such as piece work or setting time limits for specific projects, the WTSG resists these changes by continuing to conduct their

work in a flexible manner. They are struggling to maintain the flexibility and adaptability that have traditionally characterised Cree relations and the mixed economy.

*The Path of a Moose Hide* consultation process guided by local experts and the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* fostered a sense of ownership and self-reliance. This is demonstrated by the objectives the group adopted: to keep the prices for their artwork locally accessible; to practice traditional tanning processes on site and to offer these services to the CNW; to practice and maintain specialized Cree language that identifies local procedures key to tanning hide; and to explore some labour saving tools. The holistic, balanced approach advocated in *The Elements of Development* fostered the emergence of research objectives suited to PAR and demonstrated the importance of implementing Indigenous research protocols. This consultation project responds to the shifts in research, economic, and local paradigms Indigenous leaders, scholars, and many other academics are calling for. Local skills valued by the group contribute to a holistic system of knowledge and production that, when collectively practiced, blur the borders of the workplace itself and the lines between work as production, consumption, and leisure.

## CHAPTER 7: PAR and Kischikwaahaanuwit (Bark Baskets)



**Figure 7.1: Steps in spruce bark basket-making, crooked knife, boutique display, and Elders consultation**



**Figure 7.2: Spruce bark baskets: Rectangle, round, oval, stacked, and plugged**

### **Kischikwaahaanuwit (Bark baskets)**

In this chapter, I write about the WTSG's revitalization of a local Cree spruce bark basket-making practice. This research exemplifies how Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies can direct a project (Cowan, 2005). Barndt (2011) describes PAR research as truly attempting to be “engaged in a process of decolonization: of education, of research, of art, and of community” (p. 7). As Barndt suggests, “examining any one of these practices or standards inevitably implicates the others; that is, in attempting to decolonize them, we are reclaiming their inseparability” (p. 7). The connections that Barndt so eloquently describes between education, research, art and community are recurring themes that have helped me make meaning of my collaborative experiences in Wemindji. In this chapter I will conclude by describing how non-native partners can support Indigenous colleagues in creating a holistic workshop space for a diversity of capacity building in accordance with Indigenous traditions, values, and worldviews.

Interviews with Cree Elders during this research resulted in rich data coupled with images of the artwork the group created to highlight how my Cree colleagues engaged in the process of self-reflection and research that Freire called *sistematización* (Freire, 2002). In doing so, they theorized their own experiences as artists and researchers, expanded their own artistic practice and contributed to the development of the WTSG as an institution guiding their mandate. Multiple points of view in the historical conceptualization of the production of Indigenous

objects are discussed in order to clearly frame how the WTSG understands their work and how this informs workplace decisions.

### **Reclaiming a traditional skill.**

In March, 2005, while looking through the text *Central Cree and Ojibway Crafts Household Accessories: Bark*, one of the artists was particularly intrigued by an example of a basket made from pine bark and spruce root in La Sarre, Quebec. She informed us that her Auntie had one just like it in a closet that she later brought to show us. We were all excited to see and handle the basket; no one had any experience making them. Some members recalled seeing their families use them when they came home from residential school in the summer. This was a project that united us; we agreed to research and learn how to make them.

We began by consulting several key Elders. We developed themes with related questions about personal experiences making baskets and about the trees, roots, and bark (see Appendix 10 for the basket questions). Elders were invited to the workshop; tea and travel cake were served. The group decided who would speak with which Elders and small groups met in a quiet back room. These interviews were recorded and the Cree discussions were translated and transcribed into English by local Cree language expert, Francis Visitor. The translations helped me to keep abreast of the basket knowledge that was being gathered.

### **Elders Sharing Knowledge with the WTSG**

While the Elders were too frail to demonstrate basket-making, the group recovered enough information concerning these skills to begin experimenting

themselves. One Elder recalled that she had made plenty of baskets and offered the following advice:

First, you use a tree, a tree that's standing. It's done in the summer, okay?

You peel the bark from the tree using a stick. . . you take off all the bark.

Before the bark dries, you make the basket. However you want to make the basket. . . you can also make a lid, using the same method. You use them for your things, to put your things in. You use your baskets any way. People used them for fish. I saw people a long time ago use them for fish. A long time ago when people made jam they used the baskets.

Yes, you can make it into any size, even a big one. You can even make one this size [specifying size using arms]. You make one this size, different ones in small sizes too. Yes, you can use it for a long time when you take care of it. You use it for a long time because of how it's made. You use tree roots. You know that, right? You use tree roots to stitch the basket. . .you also use willows around the rim. . .then stitch it up.

Yes, they [the baskets were] left behind. Yes, [sometimes] they would take the baskets with them. People used them as luggage. . . they were used as luggage for your things.

A discussion of which trees yielded the best bark, how to collect bark and use roots followed.

During the summer, in the month of July. You can even pick the bark in June, July, August, you can make them. Any kind of tree. . . white spruce tree (mi-ni-h-ii-kw) and black spruce tree (ii-yaa-h-ti-kw). Not balsam fir

(ii-yaa-shi-h-t), there's too much sap. You only use the two. You choose ones (trees) without knots but it's impossible to find one without knot. Some people plug the holes made by the knots. Some people. . . You know where the knots are? A tree bark with knots sometimes doesn't have holes in it, so when there's a hole, you plug the hole with something, using a small stick. You use a stick, a dry stick. [A tool to remove the bark]. . . A dry stick. . . a round stick, a long stick. You flatten one end of the stick on both sides. On both sides [describes the flattened end using hand gestures] the stick, using the stick; you try not to puncture the bark. Yes, yes, yes, you soak it [the bark]. You soak it until it's finished, then you let it dry. Also, you try not, after it's dry, you try not to bang it around too much. Pieces of bark will fall off. You dig them [the roots] out of the ground, top layer. You can see how they're twined. You pull them out, however long you want them to be. You do not allow them to dry. You only use the moist roots; they work good when stitching the baskets. You soak them in water. No, you cannot use dried roots. They will break if you use dry roots. They won't break if you keep them moist. You cut them in half; they're cut in half. You cut the roots in half, okay? You make two strands from one root. You don't use the whole root itself. . . [This Elder is referring to splitting the roots lengthwise].

She then went on to conclude:

That's how you do it. You use a willow around the rim, stitching it with a tree root. You puncture the bark this way. You stitch it all the way



around. You do the same thing with a lid. [Using a paper towel the Elder demonstrates how the bark is folded]. Yes, just there. You put them together. You stitch here to hold its shape. I never did this. . . put a handle, you place the handles here, on both ends, to grab from. . . it goes here, a willow.

When asking if children would like to learn how to make a basket this Elder responded:

Yes, it would be good for children. S/he really wants to try it [does not specify if male or female]. . .when I saw my mother making one; I really wanted to try it. Some children would want to try it too if they saw how they're made, other children just don't bother.

Another Elder described how she learned to make baskets by observation:

I only watched the baskets being made. That's how I know. . . that's how I knew to make it. No one told me, "here is how you make it". I only watched someone make it. There was someone a long time ago in Wemindji who I watched [make baskets]. That's when I tried making one. That's when I tried on my own. I made one finally.

During an interview with a different Elder, information describing how to remove the bark was shared.

A tree, a standing tree. You measure. . .you measure the length, using an ax. This way and this way. [This Elder continues with a pencil, gesturing]. Um-hmm. When you cut it here, along this line. You split it open [using the ax], you do it twice. You split it open. You chop down a piece of

wood, making it look like a wedge, using a tree, making it nice. This is what you use to take out the bark. The bark comes off going around, it comes off.

When discussing how to sew the folded spruce bark together, the Elder suggests:

That's when you use the root. It looks very nice if you use a nice root, when you even out the stitches without leaving them far apart. That's how you make it. It's not hard to make. It's very easy to make when the bark is good, when it's not broken. Sometimes, though it gets broken. You make it as quick as possible.

The same Elder also describes how baskets were used offering contextual information.

It was used to hold fish and dried fish too. Long ago, they used to store them at their camps. . . they would store fish under the ground for a long time. The fish were still good. . . . you put this one on, tying around it. Nothing spoils when you do it this way; it stays good for a long time. When people used to go out in the summer, if they didn't get their belongings for a while, their fish would not be spoiled if they kept them in these baskets. They always did this before they had things, before there were stores. They were good for so many things. They were used to hold fish whenever they checked their nets. The bloody water does not seep onto the canoe. They were used for everything. . . for keeping berries in the fall. Dried food, even goose, dried goose meat. It would be very good. . . it never went bad. Even if you didn't see it for a long time, it still didn't

spoil. That's how it was used, but whenever it dried up [spruce basket], you had to be very careful with it. It would be very fragile once it dried, when it was completely dry. When this was used. . .we call this a lid, we use it for the top. It closes completely. That's probably why the food never spoiled. Dried fish, dried goose and dried meat were kept in these. This one must be a knot in the bark. You don't put those on. . . . If there's a knot. . .they say a person smells it first, you smell it. They probably suspect a bug, makes the food spoil. You only use one that doesn't have knots at all. When you use it for fish, when you empty it after checking the nets. . .after taking out the fish, you wash it right away. You hung it up outside; you made sure it dried right away. That's why it lasted so long. But if you used it for dried goods, you didn't use it for raw fish. You used different ones for fish. . . . It had many good uses. . .just like today, white man makes many things for good uses; the basket had the same useful purpose. I've never even seen these kinds of baskets being used this long. . .but that one could keep dried food for long periods. When you used them for berry baskets, when you ate them in the wintertime, when you froze them.

### **Gathering Materials**

Next the WTSG went to collect bark and roots for the first time. They fashioned from a straight branch a tool with one end flattened to help remove bark without bruising the tender underside of the bark. Armed with axes and knives,

we drove out to a wooded area next to a camp. The group decided to collect bark here, while the trees would later be used for roasting sticks and firewood.

This was an exhilarating adventure. The women selected the trees, marked out the sections of bark within reach using an axe and proceeded to pry and lever the bark off. The process issued a loud hissing sound as the tree let go of the bark. Depending on the width and height of the tree, one or two women worked together to pull the bark, backing slowly around the tree. Once removed, the bark was cleaned with moss to remove the wet sap. The smells and sounds were intoxicating. The thrill experienced as we gathered the bark, putting into practice the advice offered by Elders, yet unseen until that day, was memorable.

We returned to the workshop at noon to soak the bark in plastic bins until we were ready to use it. That afternoon the women drove to a different location, a sandy spot, where the same trees grew much farther apart. Here you could see roots as they often surfaced. Looking for the finer ends, the women tugged on them, pulling them until they came to an end. They continued pulling the roots until they judged them too thick to use, cutting them and coiling them to use sewing the baskets. They were careful not to pull more than a few from each tree. These roots were also left to soak until we were ready to use them.

### **Spruce Bark Basket Construction**

The first baskets made were a tremendous source of satisfaction. As we began, the workshop was filled with nervous tension and anticipation. There were murmurs, whispered comments and questions, punctuated with reassuring comments such as “we’re just making testers.” These artists were well known for

their highly valued skills. This work, however, asked them to try their hand at skills not personally witnessed; as a group they looked to each other, but no one was able to demonstrate how to proceed. They had to feel their way together. I was thrilled to see the work begin to take shape. The women cut bark into rectangles, making the most of the width of the bark. They flattened the bark out onto cardboard taped down to protect the work surface and scraped the thicker sections of bark, taking it down a layer or two. This revealed a surprising range of colours and textures patterned into the bark. The ends were scraped down to the thinnest thickness possible where the women planned to make cuts and fold the bark. Several times bark split or tore as the women learned how thinly the bark could be reduced. The women used their own crooked knives, Cree tools that are used by drawing the blade towards your body. You hold the knife, knuckles down. By the end of the week we all sported blisters. We wore thin gloves, but these were to protect our hands from the sap; they did not offer protection from rubbing against the rough bark.

The roots had been scraped and split the day before and were soaking, waiting to be sewn to hold the folds together forming the sides and shaping the basket. Holding the willow branch while sewing the pine roots required dexterity and a familiarity with the material. Often the bark split or roots broke. Developing skills without the benefit of first watching practiced artists required additional material, but this cost was deemed well worth the final results.

By the end of the day the first baskets were made. They were tied with waxed cotton, braced with branches, and weighed down inside with rocks to

support the shape as it dried, minimizing warping. Over the next few weeks many different sized baskets were made and the women tried to sew the baskets using only two knots.

As word spread around the community, many people dropped by to see the work in progress; often at break time the workshop was filled with visitors and people were lined up, pressed against the storefront window watching. It was very encouraging. People were so pleased to see skills few could remember and most had never seen being brought back to life. Much to our appreciation, when the multi-purpose centre was built, a mural was painted of an outdoor landscape featuring baskets in the foreground. This was validating; the group recognized that their work had been beautifully acknowledged.

### **Spruce Bark Basket Initial Sales**

The group decided that they would sell some of the baskets, keeping a selection for teaching and demonstrating. They calculated a fee for non-reusable supplies, labour, and overhead; the bark incurred no cost after labour and gas. Baskets prices averaged \$100. Once they had dried sufficiently, I took a selection to the McCord Museum in Montreal and the Canadian Guild of Crafts to sell. Both organizations were very supportive and purchased the baskets “to test” the market. As the McCord informed me, it was a risk because the baskets really should have been cured for a longer period of time. At the McCord’s request, labels were made from workshop pictures describing the materials and the artists. The Guild did not even have to display the baskets. They called their list of collectors and quickly sold them. The few largest sized baskets sold for several

hundred dollars. Some of these were sold on consignment, the shops offering to divide the profits 50% with the group. Our experiment was a success.

The group was able to sell all the baskets. Over the next few seasons we discovered more about the market we were entering. These baskets had a natural aesthetic with a raw, rough quality, while other grass or birch bark baskets are much more refined with coloured patterns and designs, lids, and handles. Our research to date had enabled us to develop the skills we recovered as Elders had practiced them. The group's drive to excel led them to begin to consider how they could develop this art form from the land-based use it once served to meet contemporary standards. These baskets were no longer being buried with dried food, or used to hold the day's catch. They were used as practical, decorative items on display in people's homes. Cree people enjoy the quality, knowing these revitalized skills supported their Elder's life on the land. The baskets were strong, sturdy storage containers that had served to transport and store their Elder's food supplies. Using and displaying them serves as a symbol of Cree cultural vitality. Just as the artists were refining their moose hide work, they began to elaborate their basketry with new criteria in mind for use in new settings.

On a personal note, I love the natural beauty of the material and the forms the bark takes as it is manipulated in partnership with the hands working it. I enjoy being able to discern the way it is made and to see evidence of an artist's gestures made heavy or light. One WTSG artist commented, "Even if it doesn't seem to look too nice, the white people still like them". Montreal gift shoppers have diverse aesthetic criteria in mind.

### **Challenging colonizing conceptualizations of Indigenous craft.**

Erik Trump (2001) and McMaster (1989) articulate how Indigenous craft was conceptualized in the context of conflicting social political agendas at the turn of the last century. Colonizing populations viewed Indigenous craft variously; as a craft of technical excellence and beauty; as drudgery and product of poverty; as an expression of gender equality; as a job creation project contributing to industrialization; as a civilizing process integrating Indigenous populations into the industrial movement and economy; and as a valid or authentic source of Indigenous education, serving assimilation. Indigenous craft has been framed by multiple and duelling identities serving different functions, depending on who is doing the valuing and for what purpose. In the early twentieth century craft items were generally attributed value not from Indigenous perspectives but based on constructed colonizing perspectives. Trump (2001) cites numerous reasons advocated by women's reformer groups to buy crafts from the Indian art trade, including assertions that include the fact that they may originate from an 'untouched' region, make use of a rare plant for the dyes, and feature designs that have been handed down for generations, the meaning and practice of which were quickly disappearing or already lost. The authenticity and rarity all served to add perceived value to the objects. Reformers, however, collected crafts because it empowered the women and their organizations that had pledged to serve the Indigenous population.

Irwin and Farrell (1996) have suggested that "perhaps the single greatest change since white settlement has been the commodification of visual expression



in Indigenous communities: that is, ‘art’ for the tourist trade in addition to or instead of ‘art’ as an active agent of the cultural fabric of the community” (p. 60).<sup>54</sup> Phillips (1998) categorizes two groups of art produced by Indigenous people as commodities. She distinguishes between objects with utilitarian purpose and those objects made as art commodities for the tourist trade or souvenir market. The question of authenticity and tradition arises when we consider the souvenir market. Some types of objects produced for the market were replicas, models, and miniatures of artifacts that were produced specifically for trade or for sale. Others fell into the and/or category and could have been used by Indigenous people or traded. Crafted objects were sold or traded to supplement family incomes. Although the income earned was very meagre, “its importance should not be minimized, for often these earnings provided food for the families of the artists” (Ettawageshik, 1999, p. 22). A small amount of cash could go a long way to supporting the subsistence domestic economy.

With modernization innovations in crafts that had earlier been appreciated as evidence of progress came to be rejected as evidence of contamination by colonizing populations. Fearing the disappearance of ‘authentic’ objects, interest was regenerated in their preservation and collection; rarity increased commercial value. ‘Salvage expeditions’ negatively assessed any signs of change. The modernization paradigm, which hailed change as progressive for Westerners, labeled it as menacing in relation to Indigenous people. Authenticity grew as an ideological tool, shifting its boundaries to include unique individual or spiritual

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<sup>54</sup> For a broad history of this process see Phillips (1998).

art, distancing them from the mass-produced commodities of the working class. The construction of 'authentic tradition' imposed on Indigenous peoples of North America was disempowering because they were descriptions of an imaginary past lifestyle that no Indigenous person could attain.<sup>55</sup>

The WTSG's artistic basketry practice grew from past community use and is currently evolving due to community interest; in times gone by practical purposes were paramount. Perhaps due to its relative isolation as a Northern community or to the local mixed economy that was not dependent on the art trade, Cree culture as expressed through the objects they make, has evolved from community consensus, to meet community needs. A souvenir/tourist trade has not invaded the CNW. Their experiences meeting with shop managers in Montreal and Ottawa selling artwork brought the group into direct contact with several of the dueling identity perspectives outlined above. Some of the conflicting messages received by the group in this context included: (i) that they are authentic representatives of Indian culture; (ii) that they needed to improve the aesthetic quality of their work; (iii) that they should save the best work for home, producing cheaper items that have more appeal to the tourist trade; (iv) that they should not to change a single aspect of their work; (v) that they should adapt to consumer demand.

Despite the many contradictory messages from outsiders about their work, the WTSG has chosen itself to blend practical purpose and artistic expression, and

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<sup>55</sup> This discussion is formulated based on Marvin Cohodas' (1999) discussion of the modernization paradigm and its authentic boundary.

values their social and political agenda, which they view as being associated with revitalizing Cree heritage. Traditional skills that embody values and worldviews, which serve in a reciprocal way to maintain their living practice, are accorded great respect. It is in this respect that Cree people themselves must determine how colonizing forces should be mediated and/or resisted.

### **Basket Research Continues to Evolve in the Community**

The WTSG was awarded a Canada Council for the Arts (Aboriginal Art Forms) grant in 2006. These funds provided the group with the means to travel to Eastmain and Chisasibi (two other Northern Cree communities) to speak with Elders, sharing what they had learned about basket-making to date, confirming and adding to information gathered. These two Cree communities, to the North and South of Wemindji, share the same geographical characteristics and support similar cultural practices. One Elder in Chisasibi commented that she had used cloth to cover the baskets and that she had made handles but not lids. She also informed the group that she used to freeze the roots for later use and roll up bark in sphagnum moss to keep it moist until she was ready to use it. An Elder from Eastmain had more to offer concerning lids for the baskets. This Elder had seen a lid used “for the ones they used for dried fish and dried goose heads and wings. . .the lids were detached. They just placed the lids on opening of the baskets”. Another Elder volunteered that the “bark was used for coverings around the bottom of a teepee. They would use the bark of bigger trees for this purpose, before the material for covering such as tarps. I saw my Dad use the bark to cover things that he stored things in a cache, before tarps and they did not get wet”.

Francis Visitor, the translator, also offered this story told to her by her father about a teepee covering made entirely from bark.

This was the only one he ever saw. When they wanted to use it, they would unfold it by heating it up. Once they decided, where they would build the teepee, they would make a big fire and here is where they would heat it up and it was a long and tedious job unfolding and folding it. He said, they would heat it and unfold and they did this heating and unfolding until the whole thing was unfolded. It was the same thing when they wanted to fold it after use, it was heat and fold, heat and fold until the whole thing was folded. It took a long time to prepare it for use but it kept the wind out and kept the teepee warm. They used it until it fell apart.

Cree words that emerged from these conversations were translated, documenting key materials and tools. Interesting information, such as the names and qualities of bushes yielding branches that could be stripped to make good string, and terms for seasons and weather that describe when the bark loosens from the tree, were also recorded. The conversations that began with revival of a traditional basket skill expanded to reinforce other forms of Cree cultural skills, and became focused on the preservation of Indigenous knowing and vocabulary.

The grant also supported the group's trip to Montreal and Ottawa. At the Native Friendship Centre in Montreal, we took a birch bark basket-making course with Atikamekw artist Édmond Dubé. This workshop was a great success. Not only did the group quickly learn new skills, they expanded their knowledge of working with spruce roots used in both birch and spruce basket making. The

WTSG learned how to prepare and separate the roots, dry and store them, and how to use a variety of different stitches.

Once back in the community they adapted and used their newfound knowledge of working with roots. They can now double the roots when constructing the rim of their baskets. This technique helps to prevent warping in the drying process, which increases the range of both size and shape of baskets they can make. The baskets are much more refined and have increased appeal for a wider public. Also learned was the construction of lids and handles that the group has been experimenting with. They decided, however, that these techniques were more suitable to birch than spruce. Observing demonstrations by a recognized artist of Edmond's caliber expanded on their understanding of the oral instruction that they had put into practice to date.

Curiosity and the natural desire to experiment in order to perfect one's mastery of materials are instincts shared among artists. The group continues to develop and refine their basketry techniques. The group can patch knotholes, form stacking and oval baskets, and make trays. They have also extended the season by freezing, defrosting, and heating the bark when necessary, as well as drying and soaking the roots. They can now control the production of 'laundry' size baskets as big as the largest piece of bark collected down to tiny one-inch 'jewel' sized baskets. The group held a tea party/demonstration of their new-found skills, working with spruce bark for the Elders of the CNW, sharing and validating what was learned as well as discussing the adaptations and improvements to their repertoire of skills and techniques.

Comments from the WTSG's fieldwork journals reveal the interest and importance of the birch bark workshop to them.

I am very inspired. I loved [the] designs. I would like to transfer, adapt some designs into beadwork. I learned about heating the bark, beginning and ending how to sew with roots without knots. How to trim the basket's rim. . . . We learned how to put two layers [of bark] for the lid, not one. [This prevents warping]. Edmond and Lucy [Mrs. Dubé] are models for their tradition. . . . Yesterday afternoon we put designs on our baskets. First we wet our baskets with sponge then we scratch designs. First I thought it was going to be hard. . . but once I started it was easy and it was very exciting and fun.

Other artists commented on important skills adapted for spruce bark use.

I learned how to fix a split, how to make knots. . . I learned the different kinds of stitches, how to heat the bark to fold it to make the shape/form, working on all my stitching without making any knots. . . the different kind of tools [traditional and contemporary]. . . the different kind of roots you can use different techniques of sewing.

Another artist's comment sums up the group's experience:

It's good to learn from other Native cultures. We can learn some techniques and some skills some materials are new, others are the same but we still learn new things. . . . It's exciting to learn new techniques because it's my first time with birch bark basket making. I'm expanding on my skills.

On this fieldtrip the WTSG also studied baskets at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. A tremendous number of baskets, collected from across the country, were made available for the group's study. The group also discovered baskets made by Elders from their community and neighbouring communities. These were photographed and shown to family members when they conducted interviews. They validated that the Cree knowledge they gathered had been passed down intact. In addition they learned how to patch a basket after seeing an example. During their community interviews one Elder spoke of "handles." We were not able to find one in the museum's collections. The group has concluded that this was an example of an individual's artistic adaptation to the standard form. Also lids were not formally constructed in spruce; a flat sheet of bark was simply tied or weighed down over the top of a cache of buried dried food. Elders consulted in Chisasibi and Eastmain confirmed these findings. Cree people who live in areas where more birch grow constructed birch bark baskets with lids or traded for them. Several elders referred to highly valued bear grease being stored in birch containers with tight lids.

One surprising benefit from the grant writing process was the pride and esteem the women took in having their biographies written. We decided to write biographies as opposed to curriculum vitae for the grant application. These biographies are regularly updated (see Appendix 12 for an example of a WTSG artist's biography). Their esteem also grew because they were able to take a course with a world-renown basket-making artist, who positively valued their skills. The WTSG joined a wider circle of people beyond their Cree nation who

are actively practicing traditional Indigenous art forms. Skills that had begun to erode locally or that were sometimes taken for granted were reinforced and valued. Their knowledge contributed to others' expert knowledge, inspiring their teachers and museum officials, making this research/workshop process a reciprocal one.

### **Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association Supports Artistic Research and Practice**

The Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association (CNACA) funded a pilot study conducted in the summer of 2007. The funds were awarded to the WTSG after presenting their research at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual assembly held in the CNW. The group presented *The Path of a Moose Hide* research and their work to date making baskets. The objectives of this project were twofold: the group wanted to establish a spruce bark basket-making project that was both environmentally and financially sustainable.

Results from the summer's PAR project demonstrated that the WTSG could make far more baskets than expected. The group discovered that their basket-making expertise could be a fundraising project for the group. Within a three-month period five artists worked with the three students to produce 323 baskets. These baskets were sorted according to size and quality and priced. The prices ranged from \$20.00 to an exceptionally large basket priced at \$500.00. A 49% profit before the cost of sales was calculated. Typical sales expenses were not incurred, as not all baskets were shipped; people travelling south for other purposes delivered them and I produced the sales information. Price tags that



named the group and location in which the baskets were made were designed. Biographies of the artist for the higher end baskets were provided. The greater majority of baskets were sold within the community, to other Cree communities, and to outlets with which we had prior relationships. The bulk of the remaining baskets sold at the Bonaventure Craft Exposition held each year in Montreal prior to Christmas holidays. A handful of baskets were kept back to offer locally for sale and to use teaching and demonstrating (see Appendix 11 for a sales invitation printed for the Bonaventure Craft sale).

Developing an environmentally sustainable practice has proven more elusive. Every time bark is collected, the family whose traditional hunting territory is impacted grants permission. The WTSG is not worried that basket making would exceed the capacity of Wemindji forests to reproduce at a faster rate than trees are taken for their bark. They do consider the use of other living things for their own purposes and do not want to waste any part of the tree that could be used. That was why they used trees near camps so the wood could be harvested for other uses, such as firewood or roasting sticks. However, the group wants to collect bark from spruce trees that are being clear-cut for development. The collection of spruce bark is a seasonal activity. Clear cutting often takes place in the winter when the ground is frozen and heavy machinery is used. Trees would have to be marked as harvestable; construction companies would have to be willing to allocate areas they could leave standing for the group to harvest in July. Bark must be gathered from living trees when the sap is running. Coordinating construction schedules and local harvesting is an ongoing challenge. The group

has been successful harvesting bark from trees that were taken down to make room for new housing in the community. To date this has not provided sufficient quantities of bark. Several construction companies operate out of the CNW and carry out projects across the geographical region. Goodwill needs to be established and the importance this project represents credited for this collaboration to take root.

### **WTSG and its Educational and Service-Oriented Mandate**

While moose hide and basketry work accrued sufficient monetary value to endure in a mixed economy, the cultural goals that embrace education and the maintenance of Cree skills are increasingly valued over short-run profits. Time spent working is not calculated, measured out, or divided by work place objectives. The women engage time spent working in a manner that respects all their cultural assets and community relations. Community and tradition, economic organization, and the function of family, friends, and kinship, go beyond notions that all workplace relationships are commercial relationships.

The WTSG has developed a strong sense of ownership through determining the mission and mandate of this new organization. This is due in part to its growing sense of accomplishment, from the realization that as traditional artists they can address economic concerns that reflect contemporary fiscal issues and respect their cultural heritage at the forefront and as the foundation of their work. The recognition the WTSG has received from a variety of Cree media sources reporting on their work and the financial support and grants it has been awarded to research issues of concern have served to build the group's esteem and

confidence. Financial independence remains an unresolved issue. The group's research into developing a fundraising project to support pursuing the practice of more costly moose hide work, in addition to offering the community a fleshing or tanning service, demonstrates their will to evaluate and understand the competing tensions that have emerged as Cree traditional skills move from bush and home life into a new work place structure, and as they increasingly choose to engage with the surrounding colonizing culture.

WTSG has recognized that it has a new educational and service-oriented mission that the community has increasingly begun to appreciate. Recognition has encouraged the group to continue to courageously address problems relating to their work, sharing their relevance with artists from all the Cree communities. This has brought positive attention to the community as a whole and to those Cree traditional artists who continue to persevere, working from their homes to produce both innovative and traditionally rich artwork, fostering in turn the community's appreciation for the work the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group is carrying out.

## CHAPTER 8: Conclusions



**Figure 8.1: Collage of images (i) presenting the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values at Old Factory Island, (ii) a mural featuring spruce bark baskets in the foreground, (iii) workshops from the Path of a Moose Hide Consultation, (iv) identifying the WTSG objectives, and (v) artists' images on the workshop walls.**

This thesis has two primary research questions:

- (i) How can collaborations between Indigenous and non-native research partners be improved?

- (ii) How does the changing social context in which the community finds itself affect the customary artistic practices of a group of women involved in the Wemindji Traditional Skills Group, and how their work is valued?

Specific objectives this thesis has addressed are detailed below. Next I consider how the challenges and obstacles I encountered during my research shaped the outcomes. The contributions of contemporary Indigenous artists to decolonizing conversations and our pedagogies are discussed. Examples of decolonizing moments are also reviewed. I summarize the findings of this thesis regarding the research questions described above.<sup>56</sup>

In order to honour time well spent working with my colleagues in the Cree Nation of Wemindji, I have strived to accomplish the following goals:

- i. Trace how participatory action research constructed from the basic tenets of Freirian liberatory theory, evolving from a southern perspective, developed a sharper lens through the consciousness of participatory evaluation criteria when applied to research ethics, specifically those ethics Indigenous scholars called for;
- ii. Express how Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research methodologies require respectful space within our academies and research collaborations. Point out how participatory theories with special care and specific political agendas can guide non-native collaborators to good places to start trying to understand the contribution and needs of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews. Inherent

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<sup>56</sup> For an update on the research progress relating to the Path of a Moose Hide consultation and the spruce bark basket projects, see Appendix 13.

- in this process is the need for all non-native colleagues to evaluate, understand, and implement how to decolonize their own day-to-day working relationships with Indigenous partners. In this thesis I begin to decolonize my own position;
- iii. Argue that decolonization must take place at an interpersonal level as well as at a macro level. It must begin with interpersonal relations and attitudes, and work towards correcting our national history and pedagogies, to be reflective of a holistic shift in consciousness redressing all spheres of life if Indigenous peoples are to truly be at home in the broader borders of our nation and with settler Canadians;
  - iv. Propose a call for settler Canadians to assume a measure of responsibility towards reconciliation meant to heal the legacies of residential school. These acts may assume a wide array of informal forms of listening, re-educating oneself concerning Indigenous peoples and Canadian history, as well as the truths Indigenous peoples are asking that we acknowledge and accordingly add to our pedagogical practices;
  - v. Present specific examples, from ongoing projects, of how the above goals identified tensions, provided recommendations as they emerged from learning how to improve collaborations, participating in acts of listening concerning Indian residential schooling, embracing different epistemologies and local values, confronting a range of socio-economic factors at odds with one another, and reclaiming, reinvesting, and reinventing forms of traditional Cree art and the values and practices that support it. Locally handcrafted smoke tanned moose hide and spruce bark basketry are two projects spotlighted.

## **Research Limitations and Collaborative Issues Encountered**

The two main challenges conducting research in the CNW were my limited knowledge of the Cree language and the time needed to comprehensively conduct the work. Not speaking Cree continues to constrain my ability to understand, listen, and participate in reciprocal dialogues. I am forever grateful for the patience of my Cree colleagues, many who strained to speak to me in English and to those who generously divided their energies to translate for me. Compounding the issue of language is the issue of time. Without command of the language, the time required to work well together expands significantly.

The intent of this study was to develop a deep understanding of how non-native people, who define their work in arts and education, can work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples without reproducing the colonial relations that constitute broader power structures of Indigenous/non-native relationships in Canada. In this context, providing leadership was a shared responsibility. I did assume an active role, rarely taking on leadership without being asked to do so. Sometimes this created confusion; many people persisted with the assumption that I would lead. This was often the case in the presence of other non-native visitors. I was able to function as a supportive group member once trust was established and my colleagues felt comfortable directing work while I supported it. These types of interactions led to mutual recognition of basic principles supporting practices of self-determination that are critical to decolonizing relations, specifically for artists who are in the midst of creating workplaces that are truly their own.

When conducting PAR, much energy is spent getting off to a good start. Time is required to work out how to delimit the parameters of a proposed study that both meets the academic standards of the university and responds to the practical needs and goals of the community that one is collaborating with. Funding presents an ongoing puzzle. It is a challenge to obtain sufficient sources of revenue to carry out research without stops and starts. The support of the CNW contributed greatly to the smooth operation of the WTSG and to our research.

It did take two years for the group and me to establish what would evolve into core PAR aims/objectives, which expanded and developed the WTSG's mandate serving the artists, their community, and the broader Cree population. These research initiatives are, of course, ongoing. For the WTSG's research to be self-determining and in the control of the group itself, a lot of time and energy went into mini-objectives or projects that did serve to lead us to the work featured in this dissertation. These initial research projects helped me understand the dynamics of the group. One research initiative, a community survey, generated information concerning how the group could serve the community but was conducted at the request of the economic development officer, not as an outgrowth of the group's own initiatives. Taking two years to establish objectives that would lead the group to define their mission, a vision each artist could get behind and contribute to ensured ownership and a deeply felt sense of purpose.



## **How We Improved Collaborations between Indigenous and Non-Native Research Partners in the Context of WTSG**

### **Theoretical foundations improve collaborations.**

In this thesis I mapped out the development of PAR as it emerged from Freirian liberatory theory with a southern perspective. Prior experience using participatory evaluation in the CNW had sharpened my focus on the ethics of research and furthered my ability to account for the gaps between my understandings as a non-native researcher and those of my Cree colleagues. The experience I obtained as a research assistant for COOL, or Challenge Our Own Limits, a CNW afterschool program that underwent six years of PE in its development phase (Jordan, Stoczek, Mark, & Matches, 2009), augmented a reciprocal conceptual learning process. My research with the WTSG ran concurrently with COOL. Local Indigenous sites, as Kapoor and Jordan (2009) state, “remain the soil of germination for indigenous. . . PAR engagements” (p. 3). In addition to evolving from within an Indigenous site, Weber-Pillwax (2009) credits PAR for the ability to deal with the “impacts of mainstream social institutions on the social and personal lives of Aboriginal persons and communities” (p. 45) as Indigenous peoples engage with the continuous colonizing encroachment (globalization) of mainstream institutions.

Kapoor and Jordan (2009) write, “some Aboriginal communities have managed to maintain and reproduce social relations and practices that effectively constitute organic forms of PAR that are specific to the indigenous cultures that generate them” (p. 9). When these practices begin to erode under the continued

pressures of capitalist processes of institutionalization and colonizing forms of education—as noted previously through the ongoing struggles of the WTSG to revitalize the local practices of smoke tanned moose hide and spruce bark basket-making—local paradigms can and do continue to provide real guidance for Cree cultural decision-making that supports Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies in the face of rapid change.

Indigenous scholars (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Battiste, 2000; Kovach, 2010; Newhouse, 2000; Salway Black, 1994; Smith, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999, 2001; Wilson, 2001, 2003; Wuttunee, 2004) have provided many analytical tools to re-focus and rebalance relations from Indigenous perspectives. This work is foundational. When Indigenous people choose to collaborate with non-natives, it is because it supports practical achievements in self-determination that shift power away from settler allies and melt residual forms of patronization that surface in both formal and informal forms of Western education at all levels. In my experience easing the expectations that in part came from having been an adult educator in the community was often difficult. The diverse perceptions the WTSG had of teachers, combined with their own prior experiences of education in general were particularly difficult to overcome. There was an expectation that I would be in charge, that I would have a predetermined set of objectives, that I would have a different and/or better answer, and that I had expectations that we had to ‘pass’ something. Being a PAR researcher engaged very different methods and educational agendas that overcame these expectations when we began to achieve locally determined needs.

While in recent years Indigenous theories and paradigms are assuming greater attention within the academy, it is still the case that in the core disciplines of the traditional social sciences academics are largely unaware of the contributions this work is making to both theory and methodology. This probably explains why theories of colonization, post-colonization, anti-colonization, and a multitude of other social, political, and critical theories are still being used to conceptualize state policies concerning Indigenous people without drawing on existing Indigenous paradigms. While I am not Indigenous and my understanding of Indigenous relations is nascent, I became aware of the insidious potential of the role of ‘educator’ to perpetuate colonizing relations if the process of collaboration does not make every effort to understand people and their history. Simpson (2011) has issued a call encouraging all Indigenous Peoples

to delve into their own culture’s stories, philosophies, theories and concepts to align themselves with the processes and forces of regeneration, revitalization, remembering, and visioning. It is a call for Indigenous Peoples to live these teachings and stories in the diversity of their contemporary lives. (p. 148)

Conducting *The Path of a Moose Hide* community consultation, revitalizing spruce bark basket-making, and articulating the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* paradigm are thus all examples of Cree people projecting their cultural heritage and traditions into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These initiatives can be viewed as both a form of resistance to the globalizing tendencies of contemporary capitalism and a statement of cultural revitalization.

### **Bicultural achievements bridge collaborations.**

The bicultural achievements of many Indigenous peoples are a testament to their ability to negotiate and contribute to mainstream Canada. The *How to Approach Collaborations* guidelines is one example of how local Cree leaders are maintaining and reclaiming power over projects that impact their territory. As Chief Mark clearly stated, “we want to be in a position to control these projects with outside expertise. Outside expertise is valued when it means sharing specialized knowledge that contributes to. . .our self-determination and our aspirations” (Stocek & Mark, 2010, p. 1). Indigenous peoples have shouldered much of the responsibility for bridging “jagged world views” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84). Simpson (2011) argues that building relationships with supporters is a key strategy in the Indigenous movement for change. She cautions that these relationships can be problematic; “too often they are wrought with cross-cultural misunderstandings, poor communication, stereotypes, and racism. Too often we have forged these relationships without taking the proper time to clearly discuss our different roles and responsibilities” (p. xiii). My own participation in this research required both a new and deeper understanding of how education continues to colonize PAR and the need to be vigilant in recognizing, resisting, and diminishing it. Non-native colleagues must assume more of the burden in re-balancing these relations.

### **Ongoing discussions serve to direct and validate collaborations.**

Receiving Indigenous funds from Indigenous organizations (to support the WTSG), verifying our research progress with the WTSG Board of Directors, the

Chief and the CNW, hosting community consultations, presenting at local general assemblies and gatherings, listening to Elders and reporting back our progress, validated and supported the work of my Cree colleagues. Further validation relating to theoretical positions that were more a concern for me as a student than for my Cree colleagues, motivated me to discuss our work with Indigenous scholars, colleagues, and students. Disseminating our ongoing work at national and international conferences, and receiving positive attention from local families, Elders, and the Cree media, all helped to verify and confirm that directions taken and decisions made were in fact constructive to local Cree agendas at multiple points in the evolution of our research.

#### **‘Witness’/Listening and Owning our History in Collaborative Spaces**

As a direct result of sharing the experiences (mine and those of the WTSG present that summer) as witness/listeners to local and regional Cree stories of Indian residential schooling and extending an informal apology to my Cree colleagues for colonization and the harmful ongoing legacies of residential schooling, I feel there is plenty of work to be done by all settler Canadians to identify and extend gestures that contribute to the process of reconciling our relationships with Indigenous peoples. It is essential that these gestures are relevant and meaningful to recipients and that they originate from appropriate areas of interest, as well as embody an integrity that hopefully contributes to establishing new alliances.

While I agree with Simpson (2011), who can’t see any “evidence whatsoever that there exists a political will on the part of the state to do anything

other than neutralize Indigenous resistance, so as not to impinge upon the convenience of settle-Canadians” (p. 24), I will add there is much that concerned settler Canadians can do. The only way the state will work to improve relations with Indigenous people is if Canadians make it everyone’s concern. It is clear that there is much work to do and that it needs to take place both at the macro and micro levels.

There are many challenges, as Simpson (2011) acknowledges, for Indigenous peoples in reclaiming “Indigenous contexts (knowledges, interpretations, values, ethics, processes) for our political cultures” (p. 17). The irony of being a settler Canadian from an institutional system that has grown out of ideologies that supported IRS, while conducting PAR research with educational, self-determining, and empowering aspirations, at key moments felt more than hypocritical; remaining silent felt like complicity.

With the hope of improving Indigenous and non-native collaborations, expressing my regret let my Cree colleagues know that I was aware, listening, and appreciative of their tremendous efforts in the face of historic injustices and that I was sorry for their individual experiences, for those of their families, and the community. All settler Canadians as defined by Regan (2010) would do well to prepare the ground to promote a shift in our consciousness. This shift must accompany the current Indigenous resurgence in order for *all* Canadians to participate in the re-building of lasting reciprocal relationships that honour and respect Indigenous contributions of diversity and their legacies that are in fact part of our collective national identity.

**Indigenous artwork speaks to those who are willing to see.**

Within the field of art education some progress has been made to prepare First Nations and Inuit pedagogical materials. Presenting these materials is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I would like to acknowledge the early work of Zuk and Bergland (1999), who gathered visual material providing art reproductions, contextual information, and suggestions for pedagogical activities from Indigenous perspectives. But, as Chalmers (2002) eloquently states, art education must move beyond multicultural education to be “used to make a difference. The unjustness of injustice needs to increasingly permeate our work”(p. 293). Deciding to present the work of contemporary Indigenous artists to the WTSG provided us with the means and vocabulary to begin discussions related to the injustice of historic and ongoing colonial pressures experienced by the group, specifically themes related to decolonization and Indian residential schooling. Indigenous organizations are beginning to produce pedagogical materials that are issue-based (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). There are rich possibilities to develop and extend this pedagogical work drawing on the art of contemporary Indigenous artists.

Presenting the work of contemporary Indigenous artist Nadia Myre (2004) to the WTSG enabled me to open initial discussions relating to colonization in a safe and respectful manner. Of particular interest was *History in Two Parts* (2000) and *Indian Act* (2000-2003). This process contributed to consciousness-raising and the development of shared analytical abilities. In turn our understanding of how issues of representation, social economies, and the importance of valuing

Cree cultural assets became prominent in our deliberations regarding how to support Cree culture and economy. These processes demonstrated to me that as a group we could share decolonizing conversations (see McGregor, 2012). Often, when discussing themes relating to the group's identity, financial circumstances, and the quality of their artwork, the artists would point to the images of Myre's work posted on the workshop walls. Pointing to these images had become a form of verbal shorthand indicating when cultural expectations clashed. When the freedom to draw on these critiques spread to frame situations that arose in our fieldwork, within the community and beyond its borders, I knew that the momentum we had achieved was serving the work of the WTSG in becoming self-determined.

In Chapter Four, I took the opportunity to briefly present contemporary Indigenous artists whose work draws on themes of relocation and Indian residential schools to illustrate Aboriginal Healing Foundation research documents. These inspirational and challenging artworks are: "Burying the Ruler" (Beam, 1991); "Resilience of the Beadwork People" (Belcourt, 1999); "The Hebron Relocation" and "The Hebron Reunion" (Igloliorte, 2002); "Blood Tears" (Janvier, 2001); "North American Indian Prison Camp" (Littlechild, date unknown); "Not the Message but the Messages" (Logan, 1993); and "Wrestling With my Demons" (Ruben, 2001). There are many Indigenous artists with content relating to a wide range of issues that offer dynamic places to begin integrating Indigenous content and perspectives in our educational practices.



Within our educational settings there are ample opportunities and pedagogical materials for Canadians to begin presenting a balanced account of Indigenous history. The Legacy of Hope Foundation provides a variety of accessible pedagogical resources including books, DVDs, and exhibition materials. The Threads of Hope: The Living Healing Quilt Project is an excellent example of artwork by Canadian communities responding to Indian residential schooling. These projects reveal that the historical subjugation and oppression of Indigenous peoples needs to be better understood and acknowledged in our pedagogical practices. Then perhaps those of us who will work with Indigenous peoples will do so in a climate of openness, as opposed to the layers of mystery and ignorance that currently distance Canadians from even knowing who Indigenous peoples are.

### **Exploring Decolonizing Moments through PAR**

Very few educators will be as fortunate as I have been to live and work in an Indigenous community. How can I translate what I have learned and experienced into something concrete to offer? Throughout this dissertation I mentioned moments where I felt the power of our research as a decolonizing influence. “Indigenous epistemologies are action-oriented. They are about living life every day according to certain values” (Kovach, 2010, p. 62). While systemic change needs to happen at the macro level of all our governing institutions, I believe that the personal is political and that interpersonal exchanges must happen as a precursor to systemic change. Change that adds up and counts in the daily lives of Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians needs to happen through telling

incidents and one-to-one experiences. These moments highlight how colonial pressures continue to challenge Cree epistemology, or the “self-in-relation” (Kovach, 2010, p. 55), and record examples of true change in process for both my Cree colleagues and myself.

Personally, one of these decolonizing moments included imagining an epistemology that accords nature, the environment, and all living things with the same interchangeability and mutuality of roles expressed by dialogical methods and praxis. Imagine a broader cross section of western thought that could think through and centre what it would mean to consider cultural synthesis as a praxis, as *environmental synthesis*. Another series of decolonizing moments occurred when I worked on the design for the Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values diagram, which led to a more in-depth understanding of local epistemology featured in the paradigm. For a description of several more decolonizing moments see Appendix 14.

These concrete experiences, like many others, have served to deepen my perceptions of the value inherent in understanding our work through Cree epistemology, the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*, knowledge, and PAR processes that reinvigorate cultural revitalization. My experiences working with Indigenous analytical tools and practices highlighted key moments in my understanding of the processes of decolonization that emerged when Cree epistemology, practices, and values collide with those I represented as a non-native researcher. Being able and willing to identify with the complexity of these

clashes, and to step-back in order to re-center Cree epistemology, helped relieve colonial pressures.

### **The WTSG's Artistic Practices Continue Cree Values in the Contemporary Workplace**

The second question that ran throughout this dissertation was how changes in the social/work context impact the artistic practice of the WTSG and how this practice is valued. What became evident in our research was the desire of the artists, the CNW administration, and the community to ensure the relative stability, integrity, and reproduction of Cree values. The group's willingness to draw on *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*, and their interest in pursuing every opportunity to think through the moose hide work featured in *The Path of a Moose Hide* consultation (because it served to highlight key cultural assets in the analysis), demonstrates this. Decisions made to support the financial deficits moose hide work now incurs and to explore how to provide moose hide tanning services to the community illustrate that the community does in fact understand that the artwork being produced serves active processes which embody Cree values. That is, although the context where the artwork is being practiced and the values it carries has moved from bush and home life into a workshop setting, the meaning of the work and the values it represents are nevertheless alive and well. Another example is how their concern for environmental issues surfaced over not wasting any part of the tree when collecting bark to construct a number of baskets that would serve as a fundraiser; the group wants their evolving artwork to continue to serve land-based values of the Cree.

As a workplace, the WTSG workshop blends family, economic, and community relations that foster a particular kind of space Cree values need to flourish. This demonstrates the group's willingness and ability to monitor the changes their artistic practice is undergoing, resisting further processes of colonization. In order for Cree values to continue to flourish and support living traditions, the WTSG and their non-native colleagues, including myself, have been vigilant in the struggle to resist colonization at both the community and regional levels of Cree engagement. While the contemporary setting highlights new challenges Cree artists face, the will to think through and act from Cree values is evident. As Grand Chief Ted Moses noted in a speech he gave to the Wemindji Economic Development Conference (2004), being Cree implies

Taking very seriously the values, the beliefs and the philosophy that evolved and developed out of the traditional Cree way of life and the incorporation of those values in everything we do today and in the future. I would like to suggest to you that we, as Cree people, are defined by our values and beliefs and by what our ancestors have learned from the traditional Cree way of life and passed them on to us. Our way of life has never been a static one, fixed forever in time to be exactly the same thing. There have always been changes — and we have continuously adapted ourselves to make beneficial changes for our people. What *has* endured is our values.

What needs to change is how settler Canadians and nations value the heritage and traditions that Cree and other Indigenous peoples have to share. It is

my hope that the shared learning we accomplished together was sufficient in balancing individual and the community's aspirations, meeting everyone's needs. Generosity, listening, and caring were the mediating values that made it so.

### **Summary**

I aspired, in this thesis, to share the knowledge my Cree colleagues have shared with me. I am grateful for the Indigenous academic voices and literature that have helped me to accomplish this. I am hopeful that the work my Cree colleagues and I have done together will broaden conversations about Indigenous inquiry. I am dedicated to and thankful for their scholarship. I aspire to be a member of the growing community of non-Indigenous academic allies.

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## Appendix 1: Certificate of University Approved Ethics

<b>MCGILL UNIVERSITY</b> <b>FACULTY OF EDUCATION</b>			
<b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR          FUNDED AND NON FUNDED RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMANS</b>			
<p>The Faculty of Education Ethics Review Board consists of 6 faculty members appointed by the Faculty of Education, an appointed member from the community, and the Chair of the Ethics Review Board.</p>			
<p>The undersigned considered the application for certification of the ethical acceptability of the project entitled:  <u>Is the medium that the Cree crafts people attach to the making of</u>  <u>as proposed by: traditional objects changing through their involvement with</u>  <u>"Jivists in Traditional Skills"</u></p>			
Applicant's Name <u>Christine Steele</u>	Supervisor's Name <u>(Co) Dr. Steven Jordan</u>		
Applicant's Signature/Date <u>Christine Steele Nov 9/04</u>	Supervisor's Signature <u>[Signature]</u>		
Degree / Program / Course <u>PhD/DISE</u>	Granting Agency _____		
Grant Title (s) _____			
The application is considered to be:			
A Full Review _____	An Expedited Review _____		
A Renewal for an Approved Project <u>X</u>	A Departmental Level Review _____		
Signature of Chair / Designate _____			
<p>The review committee considers the research procedures and practices as explained by the applicant in this application, to be acceptable on ethical grounds.</p>			
1. Prof. René Turcotte Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education	4. Prof. Joan Russell Department of Integrated Studies in Education		
Signature / date _____	Signature / date _____		
2. Prof. Ron Morris Department of Integrated Studies in Education	5. Prof. Doreen Starke-Meyerring Department of Integrated Studies in Education		
Signature / date _____	Signature / date _____		
3. Prof. Ron Stringer Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology	6. Prof. Ada Sinacore Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology		
Signature / date _____	Signature / date _____		
7. Member of the Community			
Signature / date _____			
<p>Office of the Associate Dean (Research &amp; Graduate Students)          Faculty of Education, Room 230          Tel: (514) 398-7039 Fax: (514) 398-1527</p>			
<u>Mary Hargrave Nov 10, 2004</u> Signature / Date Chair of the Ethics Review Board			
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;"> <b>Office Use Only</b>  <b>REB #:</b> <u>354-1003</u>          (Updated September 2003)       </td> <td style="width: 70%;"> <b>APPROVAL PERIOD:</b> <u>Nov 11/04</u> to <u>Nov 11/05</u> </td> </tr> </table>		<b>Office Use Only</b> <b>REB #:</b> <u>354-1003</u> (Updated September 2003)	<b>APPROVAL PERIOD:</b> <u>Nov 11/04</u> to <u>Nov 11/05</u>
<b>Office Use Only</b> <b>REB #:</b> <u>354-1003</u> (Updated September 2003)	<b>APPROVAL PERIOD:</b> <u>Nov 11/04</u> to <u>Nov 11/05</u>		

## Appendix 2: Council Resolution - Cree Nation of Wemindji

### COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Chronological No. - Numéro consécutif  
2003 - 095

Subject - Sujet

GRANTING PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH



16 Beaver Road, P.O. Box 60  
WEMINDJI  
James Bay, Quebec J0M 1L0

**PROPOSED BY:**

Danny Tomatuk

**SECONDED BY:**

Chief Reggie Mark

**ACTION:**

Carried unanimously

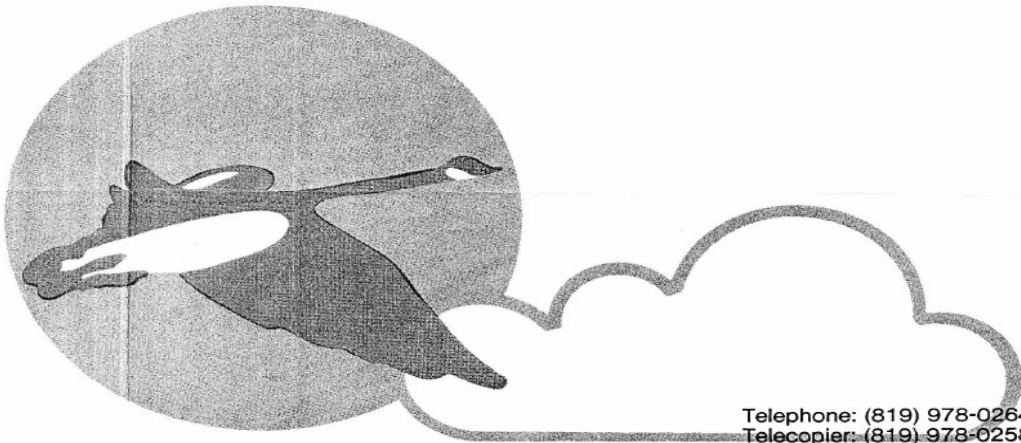
**WHEREAS** the Council of the Cree Nation of Wemindji have reviewed the request submitted by Ms. Christine Stocek, McGill University PhD Student in Culture and Values in Education, to pursue a research project with the "Investing Traditional Skills Ladies".

**RESOLVED:**

**THAT** the Council of the Cree Nation of Wemindji hereby approve the request from Ms. Christine Stocek, McGill University PhD Student to undertake research with the "Investing Traditional Skills Ladies".

**CERTIFIED COPY** of a Resolution adopted on  
April 29, 2003

Karen Mistacheesick,  
Corporate Secretary



Telephone: (819) 978-0264  
Telecopier: (819) 978-0258

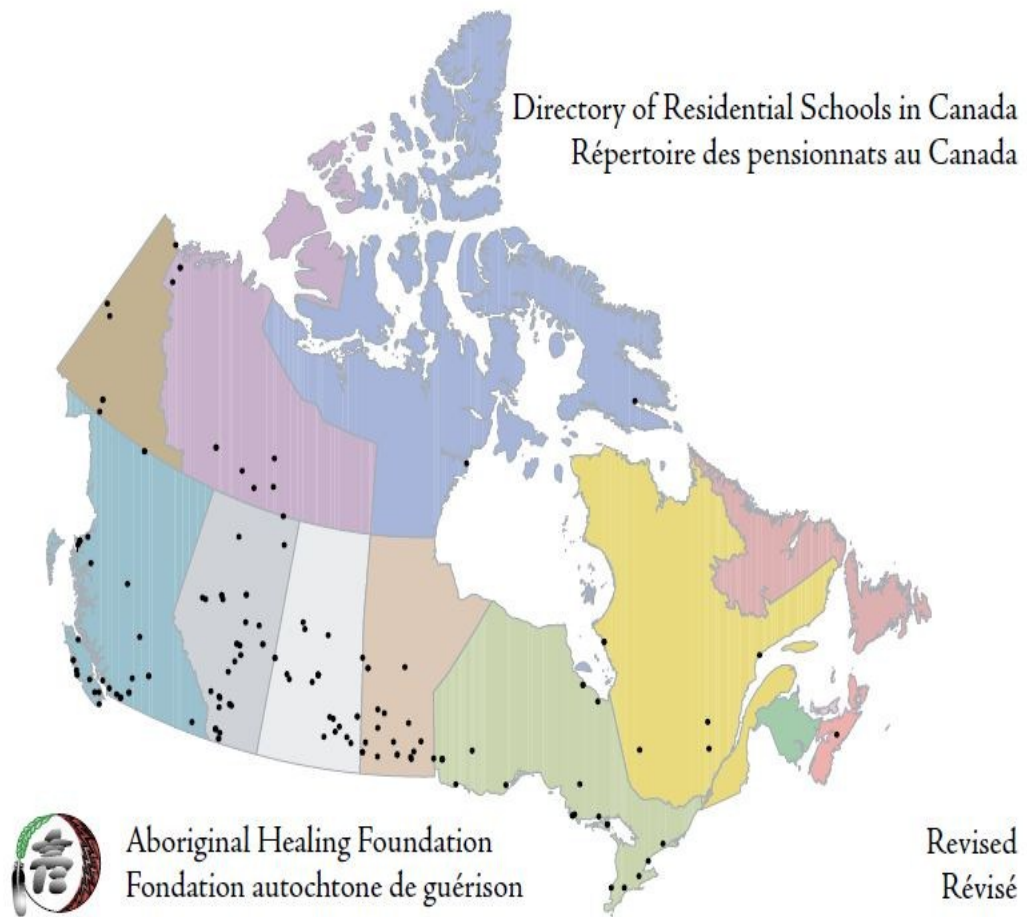
### **Appendix 3: Hall's PAR Definition**

Hall (1993, p. xiv) presented the following definitions of PAR from some of its leading proponents:

- Participatory research attempts to present people as researchers themselves in pursuit of answers to the questions of their daily struggle and survival (see Tandon, 1988, p. 7).
- Participatory research is a way for researchers and oppressed people to join in solidarity to take collective action, both short and long term, for radical social change. Locally determined and controlled action is a planned consequence of inquiry (see Maguire, 1987, p. 29).
- The final aims of this combination of liberating knowledge and political power within a continuous process of life and work are (1) to enable the oppressed groups and classes to acquire sufficient creative and transforming leverage as expressed in specific projects, acts and struggles; and 2) to produce and develop socio-political thought processes with which popular bases can identify (see Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 4).
- Participatory research attempts to break down the distinction between the researchers and the researched, the subjects and objects of knowledge production by participation of the people-for-themselves in the process of gaining and creating knowledge. In the process, research is seen not only as a process of creating knowledge, but simultaneously as education and development of consciousness and of mobilization for action (see Gaventa, 1988, p. 19).

- An immediate objective. . . is to return to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing through their own verification systems, as fully scientific, and the right to use this knowledge, but not be dictated by it-as a guide in their own action (see Rahman, 1993, p. 15).

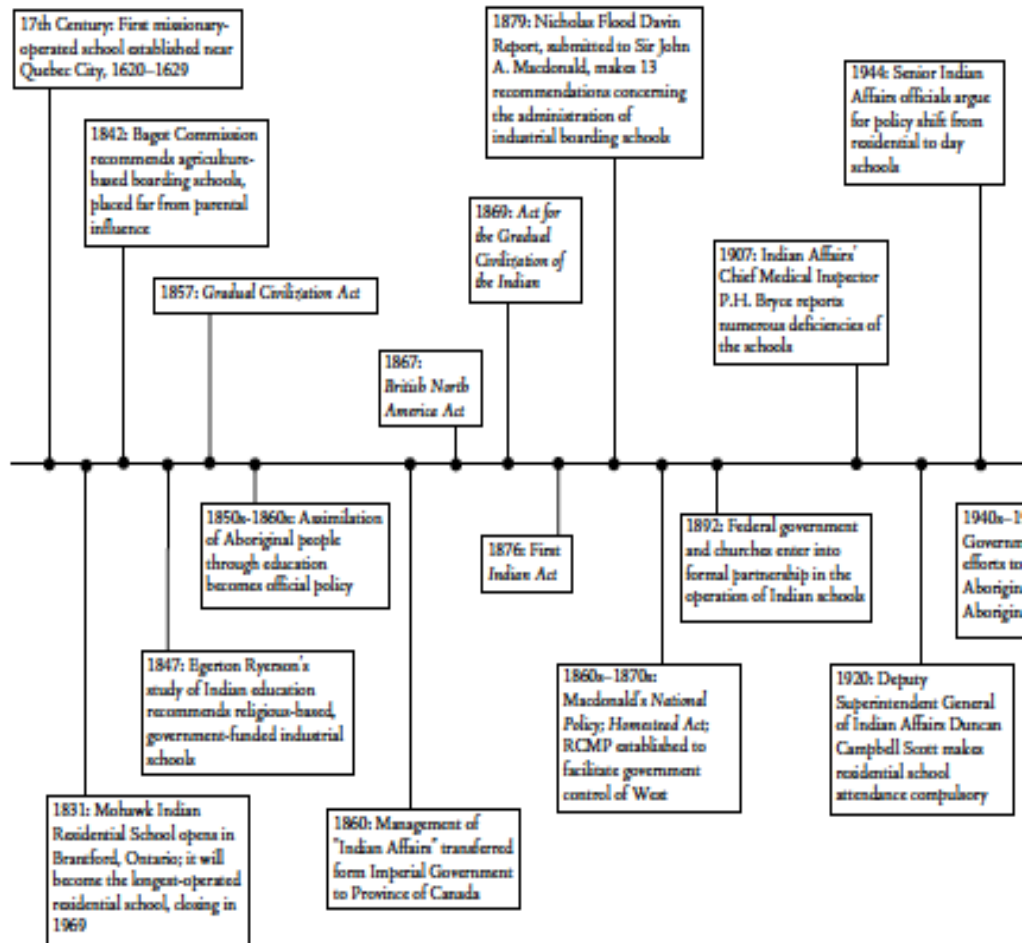
#### Appendix 4: Residential School Directory Map



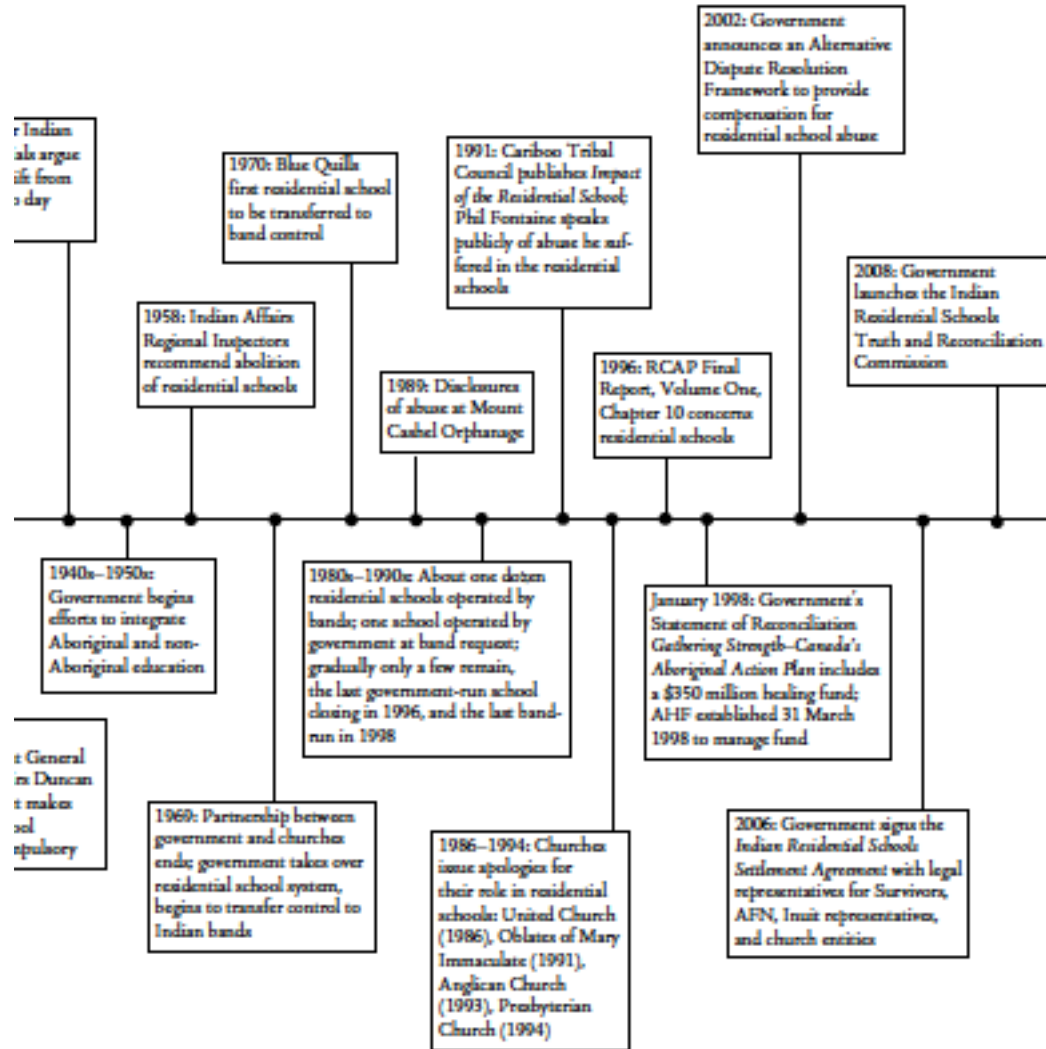
(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2013a)

## Appendix 5: Condensed Timeline of Events

### Condensed Timeline 1600s to 1940s



## Condensed Timeline, continued: 1940s to 2008



(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2013)



## 305

Created by Frances Visitor, Education Consultant, Cree Curriculum Department, Cree School Board  
for Investing in Traditional Skills Abchahkw Development Corporation





## **Appendix 7: The Path of a Moose Hide**

### **The Path of a Moose Hide Community Consultation Questions**

Four sessions were planned with different interested Elders or parties who were invited to attend all or one of the sessions. They were held at the WTSG workshop and the sports complex on May 31, June 1 and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005. The four sessions were on:

- 1) Hunting
- 2) Processing/tanning
- 3) Craft production-sales
- 4) The Elements of Development analysis

### **Question Guide:**

#### **1) Hunting:**

- Why are we hunting moose?
- Where do we go hunting?
- When do we go hunting?
- What resources are required?
- Who is in the hunting party?
- When the moose is killed what is done?
- How much work is involved before processing-or giving it away?
- How long should the moose hide be left unprocessed?
- What is happening with the moose hides, why aren't they being processed?

- Are there other questions or topics to offer?

## **2) Processing/Tanning:**

- Describe the process?
- Why do you do it that way? What is the benefit for the end product?
- What time of year is best to do it?
- How long after the moose hide has been killed do you wait for the best time to process the hide?
- What resources or tools are needed?
- Which processes make the hide better and/or suppler?

## **3) Products:**

- Choose a product to talk about.
- Describe the process to make it.
- What materials are involved?
- How much time does it take?
- Which part of the moose hide do you prefer to use?
- Can this product be broken down into different parts in order to ask different people to make the different parts? Instead of one person making a product from beginning to end can you think of the product as a series of steps that different people could carry out?

## **Cost and Pricing:**

- Break down the parts of the product by piece.
- How much time is involved in making each piece?
- What materials are involved?

- Are there one or two members who prefer this part of the process or who are good at it?
- If you shared in the making of a single product would it be faster and of better quality?

**Orders:**

- How are the orders taken?
- When ordering do customers ask for a particular person?
- When ordering do customers ask for a particular deadline?

**Sales:**

- Who is buying it?
- Where has it been sold? Locally, to other Cree communities or externally?
- When you make this product at home who would it be given to?
- Do you sometimes offer the product in exchange for other services or favors people have done for you?
- Do you trade or exchange services?
- What is the average price range the object sells for in the community, out of a household?

What is the lowest to highest cost?

- What do you think of WTSG selling for external sale only?
- How might WTSG balance using/accessing the community resources such as hides?
- What other services can WTSG offer the community as a craft group in exchange for the donation of hides?

- What can WTSG do to help Wemindji keep its traditional skills a living and vital part of Cree culture, Cree life?

#### **4) The Elements of Development**

- Explain the 4 Elements located at the 4 axis points.
- Explain the three elements within each section.
- Look at the past three discussions, read out or review the information and decide where this information fits into the model.
- Are there any forms of information that does not fit anywhere or would be best under its own category?
- Are there any Elements that do not respond to this project's description?  
Would other WTSG activities offer information for this item?  
Is it best to remove this item or is this an area to develop?
- Is there information that could not be placed or does not fit very well under an Element?
- Should a new Element be considered?

Discuss why this information is important and how it can be used.

## Appendix 8: Embroidered Slipper Budget

INVESTING IN TRADITIONAL SKILLS CRAFT BUDGET	
<b>DATE:</b> November 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2005	
<b>NAME OF ITEM:</b> Hand Crafted Moose Hide, Embroidered Slippers	
<b>SIZE:</b> 8 Woman's average or medium size	
MATERIAL USED	MATERIAL COST
Moose Hide	\$70.00
Fleece	\$3.75
Beaver fur	\$43.33
Commercial sinew	overhead
Needles for leather	overhead
Thread & embroidery floss	overhead
TOTAL MATERIAL COST: \$117.08	
TIME REQUIRED: (32hrs. x 9.90/hr. = \$316.80 Not included in buyer's price, subsidized by the CNW)	
10% OVERHEAD: (considered basic cost)	\$128.79
25% PROFIT (WHOLESALE): (considered as the asking price)	\$160.98
40% PROFIT (RETAIL):	\$180.36
PRICE CHARGED:	\$165.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain sewing: 5 hours x \$9.90 salary = \$49.50</li> <li>• Embroidery: 25 hours x \$9.90 salary = \$247.00</li> <li>• Fur/trim: 2 hours x \$9.90 salary = \$19.80</li> <li>• Full price if the buyer had to cover the labour involved = \$481.80</li> <li>• The WTSG covers basic overhead costs, but does not charge labour. The group's funding from the CNW pays the artists' salaries. For every pair of average moose hide, fur trimmed, embroidered, slippers sold the consumer pays \$165.00 while the CNW contributes \$316.80.</li> </ul>	



## Appendix 9: One Cree Family's Tanning Process - The Path of a Moose Hide Consultation

(Translation from Cree into English by Francis Visitor)

Question # 2: Time & Tools<sup>57</sup>

This work represents the processes of one family shared at the consultation.

1. Rinse the hide to remove all blood, rinse until water runs clear (or it will be stiff and may be stained).
2. Soak again after *uudimski* is removed. If not done well the hide will be stiff and discoloured.
3. Soak again after *uubiwii* is removed.
4. Soak after hair is removed.
5. *Amaathawginuud* (scraping) dirt and soiled parts scraping *uudimskii* side (flesh side).

In step five you can suspend the hide horizontally above the ground. It is tied to approximately 40 posts tightly. You can put a light beneath it to judge the consistency ensuring it is evenly scrapped. You can cut a small section to see if it is scrapped evenly = compare it with other pieces from other parts/sections. The posts are often stuck in the snow. To get to the middle you take the sticks down and roll it up to reach middle parts /sections hard to work on. You can also stretch it vertically on a large

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<sup>57</sup> The Cree terms need to be verified and updated according to newly adopted regional syllabics.

frame. You can soak it and wring it out, hang to semi dry while scrapping it.

- Locally made tools = *maathiigan*, *shaagawhiigin*

- Dense smoother side/ texture = *uubiwii*/ fur side

- Open rougher/texture = *uudimskii* / flesh side

- From the neck to hip the hide must be scrapped consistently, different parts of the hide are thicker.

- Often second scrapping required to remove *uudimskii* (flesh/meat side).

6. *Amaathawginuud* (scrapping) on the *uubiwii* (hair side) - less scrapping required on this side.

7. Hang to semi dry then soak it and begin to wring it out.

8. Soak it in moose brain, soap (Ivory bar, June/Sunlight),<sup>58</sup> oatmeal grease mixture. Can soak for two nights.

#### **Moose brain mix:**

Whole brain is used

Dissolve whole bar of Ivory soap

½ container of oatmeal

½ pound of lard (or goose grease/ She wouldn't use this)

water

(more water for soaking, less water when spreading thicker consistency - see step 11)

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<sup>58</sup> Suggestion from WTSG member, 2007.

If another moose brain is available, they will add it to thicken it, but it is not necessary.

9. Hang over stick

[Added a point here in November by WTSG member which alters some of the June numerical sequencing]

10. *Abaaguuchid* - hung outside in the cold to dry/freeze = makes it more supple.

11. Prepare soaking brain fluid/mix again – apply to both sides by hand - it is a thicker mix all over. Fold into a clean container, so it does not get stained. Fold it as you apply then put into a container to soak. Applied to both sides quite different from soaking stage.

12. As the brain mix dries *yuuschipdaagind* hang to stretch for suppleness, hung as high as possible, mix dries on both sides, hang for one week by a warm stove/fire so the brain mix/ soaks and spreads and is absorbed into the hide = *uusuginanuu*

NOTE: Participant's Mother used these processes during summer tanning.

Step 12 can be done by warm water dip and rinse or warmed in the sun - warmth helps mix go through both sides/ hide. Participant did not see her Mother do this but was told so by her Father.

13. Soak in very soapy water (ivory), warm the hide and wring it out. You wring it out by twisting it and squeezing it all over, may be repeated as necessary until the hide is supple and soft enough-  
*shaapwachibihaaginu*- wrung out one fistful at a time for the whole hide,

the fluid must be absorbed through the hide/pushed through the hide for it to be supple.

14. [WTSG member added in November: Soak in warm water after step 12]

Wring and stretch to dry/ hitting with flattened stick, or shovel - flat side= no marks. Dry completely – wring it out or stretch it and hit it to finish drying it and soften it.

NOTE: If the hide is not supple enough – steps 12-14 will be repeated.

15. Hang to dry again (heat) half a day according to individual

*aashiibidaaginuud* when it is dry.

16. *Chuupshithawginuu* fold ends to sew together, fold over and sew along top

and down the side and a little along the bottom on either side. A cloth is sewn around the bottom to drape/enclose space between hide and hot pot.

17. Heat rocks and place in enamel container with *gisgischaatuhk* – dead tree,

rotten powdery bark, also used for baby powder. For smoking use

tamarack/spruce/willow and tamarack, evergreen. This powder is added to hot rocks. Only done on non-windy days. Flip it around to do both sides, reverse it. Gives it a nice smell of smoke and *gisgischaatuhk*.

18. Participant: Undo the sewing, apply *gisgischaatuhk* again and fold and

store. [WTSG member has not done this, but it would be done if the hide is not evenly coloured]

19. Hang on clothesline with clothespins on a windy day.

20. Take down and fold ready for use.

*Gaachayaan*- Hide hung to dry, dry hard parchment, is harder to process- hide is stiffer unless all blood is removed.

## **Appendix 10: Basket Questions**

### **Basket Elder's Interview Questions:**

Brainstorming questions for Cree spruce bark basket interviews.

Answers to these questions may come from interviews or from experimentation.

### **Personal experiences making baskets:**

- Tell us how you made the basket?
- When was the last time you made a basket?
- What did you use the basket for?
- Who taught you how to make a basket?
- What different sizes have you made?
- In older times did people leave baskets at a camp before moving on?
- Did people carry the basket from one camp to the next?
- How long might a basket last? Did they last longer than one year?

### **Tree questions:**

- When is the best time to find a tree to make a basket?
- What kind of a tree should we look for?
- What should we look for in the tree?

### **Root questions:**

- How do we collect the roots?
- How do we dig the roots up?
- How many roots can we take from one tree?
- Is it okay if the roots dry out?

- Can we soak the roots later as needed?
- How do you split the roots?

**Stitches:**

- How do you stitch the basket?
- Folds are sewn along the top edge securing both ends – are there stitches in the side folds?

**Bark:**

- What do we look for when choosing the bark?
- How do you take the bark off?
- What tools do you use to cut the bark?
- How do you soak the bark?
- How much time do you have before the bark is too dry to use?
- Can you re-soak the bark?
- How do we form the sides of the basket?

Additional questions brainstormed after first interviews. The WTSG wanted to obtain more contextual information.

**Contextual questions:**

- How does one dry jam?
- How are other foods prepared for storage in these baskets?
- What was stored in the baskets?
- How were the baskets buried, how long were they left for, where were the best places to leave baskets?
- How did the food stay preserved?

- Was a lid separate or was it an extended flap or was it folded over?
- How were handles made?
- How big were the baskets? Can you show us with your hands?
- Can you describe who you saw using the baskets, where and how they were used?



Appendix 11: Basket Invitation

**AA Wikipiwaayhtaaknuwich kiyaañ aa wii chiṃkannaakuhtaaknuwich iyyiyu iḡtuwin**  
**Investing in Traditional Skills**

**Panier traditionnel Cri en écorce d'épinette.**  
Fabriqué par des artistes traditionnels de Cris de Wemindji,  
Baie-James, Québec

**Traditionally Handcrafted Spruce Bark Baskets**  
Made by Traditional Cree Artists from Wemindji,  
James Bay, Québec



**AA Wikipiwaayhtaaknuwich kiyaañ aa wii chiṃkannaakuhtaaknuwich iyyiyu**

**Investir dans les compétences traditionnelles** est un groupe d'artistes traditionnels cris de la Nation Cris de Wemindji, située sur la côte de la Baie James dans le nord du Québec. Le groupe cherche à retrouver et à préserver les compétences traditionnelles cris afin que les traditions cris puissent se perpétuer de façon viable dans la société d'aujourd'hui tout en reflétant les valeurs sur lesquelles elles sont fondées. En étroite collaboration avec les aînés, le groupe a repéré suffisamment de compétences pour poursuivre cette forme d'art. Pour la première fois depuis très longtemps, l'écorce et les racines sont cueillies pour fabriquer des paniers dans la communauté à partir d'arbres ayant été choisis à des fins d'exploitation.

Les Cris ont fait usage traditionnel de l'épinette pendant des millénaires. Bien avant que les contenants de plastique fabriqués en série soient disponibles dans le nord, ces paniers en écorce d'épinette pleins, cousus avec des racines d'épinette, étaient utilisés pour cuisiner le poisson, les baies ainsi que pour l'emballage. Ce produit artisanal provient d'un riche héritage de compétences dont les Cris avaient besoin pour tenter les outils nécessaires pour vivre confortablement dans un pays rigoureux. Tout comme l'on fait leurs parents, bûcherons dans les compétences traditionnelles choisies soigneusement le matériel parfait pour accomplir la tâche. Fabriqués à la main dans la communauté, ces paniers en écorce d'épinette pleins sont confectionnés à partir de matériaux locaux entièrement naturels. Les recettes très de la vente de ces paniers sont investies dans la recherche sur diversifiés formes d'art effectuée par le groupe.



**Investing in Traditional Skills** is a group of Traditional Artists from the Cree Nation of Wemindji, on the coast of James Bay in Northern Québec. The group is concerned with regaining and practicing traditional Cree skills, so that these traditions maintain a living presence in today's contemporary society, yet reflect the values from which they flourished. Working closely with Elders, the group has recovered enough skills to carry on this significant art form. For the first time in years, these traditions are being continued in the community.



The Cree have made use of the spruce tree for millennia. Long before mass produced plastic containers were available, in the North, these folded spruce bark baskets, sewn with spruce roots, were used to collect fish and berries, and for storage. This craft grew from the rich heritage of skills the Cree people needed to create the tools necessary to prosper in a harsh land.

Like their parents before them, Cree artists of today select just the right materials for the task at hand. These folded spruce bark baskets are authentically handcrafted in the community from 100% natural and local materials. All bark and roots are collected from trees that have been designated to be cleared for development. Proceeds from the sale of these baskets serve to fund research into a variety of Cree art forms carried out by the group.

**Les prix des paniers sont entre \$20 et \$500.**

**Mini panier - \$20**

(3.5" longueur x 2.5" largeur x 1.5" hauteur)

**Moyen panier - \$100**

(10" longueur x 8" largeur x 5" hauteur)

**Extra large - \$500**

(26" longueur x 19" largeur x 7.5" hauteur)

Les grandeurs peuvent varier quelque peu. Disponibles en saison.

**Baskets range la price from \$20 - \$500.**

**Mini Basket - \$20**

(3.5" length x 2.5" width x 1.5" height)

**Average Basket - \$100**

(10" length x 8" width x 5" height)

**Extra Large Basket - \$500**

(26" length x 19" width x 7.5" height)

Sizes vary. Seasonally available.



**Pour plus d'information contactez:**  
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# Artist's Name

## Traditional Cree Artist

As a full time practicing traditional aboriginal artist, Xxxxx is a former member of the Wemindji Traditional Skills Association.

- Xxxxx, learnt beadwork and embroidery from Daisy Gunner in school in Moose Factory. She learnt how to work with hide by watching Elders and her mother. She enjoys telling the story of how she snuck her mother's moccasin and took it apart in order to learn how to sew it back together! The functional ways of working with hide that she learnt in the bush were quite different from the more decorative forms she sells in town today.
- Xxxxx, won first prize for her beaded moose hide moccasins at the Malagami exhibition. She has also donated baby moccasins for a charity auction raising funds for the Native Women's Association.
- Xxxxx, is recognized and enjoys making duffle parkas with different embroidered designs. She also enjoys making slippers, moccasins, and mukluks. Annie has sold her work to many families in Chisasibi, Eastmain, Waskaganish and Wemindji. She also sells her crafts to the Cree School Board, the Cree Health Board, and the McCord Museum. In Montreal her work sells out very quickly in Mohawk communities.
- Xxxxx, is recently retired. She helped to carry out local and regional research into Cree basketry, moose hide tanning and ornamentation in aboriginal visual and traditional art forms funded by the Capacity Building Program for Aboriginal Arts Organizations for the Canada Council for the Arts.
- The Wemindji Traditional Skills Association wishes to thank the Canada Council for the Arts, the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal, the McCord Museum, the Canadian Guild of Crafts, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization for their collaboration supporting this research as well as the local Cree Trappers Association and the Cree Nation of Wemindji Administration.

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## **Appendix 13: Research Update**

### **The Path of a Moose Hide Consultation: Project Update**

The CNW has built traditional structures, a *shaapuhtuwan* (a structure that can hold up to 3 hearths) and a traditional style lodge to deflesh the hides on the grounds of the workshop. This lodge has electricity to accommodate two flesher machines. Tanning hides traditionally takes place over several seasons. The group hopes now they have settled into new facilities that accommodate work across seasons that they will complete the entire process of tanning hide on the WTSG site. Fostering specialized language is carefully highlighted each time activities are demonstrated and workshops are offered. This is key to maintaining tanning processes as well identifying locally made tools. The WTSG visited a flesher machine dealer in Gatineau. They participated in a workshop to see what this process offers. After deciding that it was worth investing in, the group purchased two. These have been installed and an expert has been to Wemindji to offer in-depth workshops. Additional workshops are planned with other experts for the fall and spring of 2012 and 2013. Adjustments to the support structures have been designed and worktables are being built to accommodate how the group plans to incorporate the use of these tools in their ongoing study. More time is required to develop the expertise the group needs to feel comfortable incorporating these new techniques into their practice. They have very high standards to meet as is evident by the community's traditional tanning skills. Assessing the merits of incorporating new tanning processes or strictly maintaining traditional ones are ongoing and dependent on accomplishing the above objectives.

## **Spruce Bark Basket-Making and Fair Trade: Project Update**

Recently a new fair trade art store has opened off the Island of Montreal. This store understands the barriers to Indigenous peoples and has begun to offer periodic fair trade Canadian Indigenous exhibits. The WTSG hopes to participate in one of these events. A grant for this endeavour has been submitted to fund demonstrations and a spruce bark basket exhibit.

Last year when I returned to the community we carried out a new price analysis for the baskets. I observed that two of the senior artists were now routinely making baskets in a third of the time. This has allowed the group to make the prices more accessible and has reminded us that these skills continue to evolve. It was exciting to note that the range of artistic expression and the quality of the baskets continues to improve. Recently the group has begun to experiment with food safe stains and paint finishes to treat the interior or the roots of the baskets. Several artists are exploring wood burning, transferring their embroidery, pattern and drawing skills to basketwork. The group has demonstrated its will to develop the utilitarian and decorative aspects of these skills according to how the community wants to use them in their homes. The initial results have proven rewarding.

The Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Programs has provided partial funding for the WTSG to carry out this research.

## **Appendix 14: Individual Decolonizing Moments**

- With the help of CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) Aboriginal Services and Robert de Chancenotte, the WTSG and I analyzed every aspect of their artwork in order to price each piece. The group did not want to undersell their family and friends. They kept the prices slightly higher than the price range of items that were sold in the community. However, if the prices went up too high, they risked creating a false impression that the WTSG work was ‘better’ than the work of their peers. Underselling their neighbour proved not to be the issue. At the same time this practice was challenged when we were deciding how to price their artwork sold beyond the CNW. The extent to which the group was under-pricing their work came as a great shock; they had no idea how paid hourly labour would add up. The group had always wanted to make a profit thinking that would be an avenue to success. In order to make a profit they would have to raise the prices significantly. The actual monetary value of labour and the social and cultural values of exchange in a mixed economy are still at odds with one another. For example in times past when a woman exchanged warm waterproof footwear with a hunter for fresh meat or with a traveler for oranges, there was the perception and satisfaction of a fair trade. How does hourly paid labour in the workplace determine prices and equate with forms of exchange that grew from a local mixed economy?
- I had the opportunity to try my hand at de-fleshing a moose hide. I worked outside with my Cree colleagues one bright winter’s day, removing fur from one side of the hide and flesh from the other. I tried a variety of tools ranging

from a metal bar to the shinbone of a bear. I was so excited and proud to be permitted to join in. I have been a vegetarian since I was a teenager. However, participating in a form of this age-old tradition, working with the fur, flesh, and skin of an animal that was hunted by my colleague's husband on his family hunting territory, connected me to these people, the animal, and the land in ways that moved me profoundly. As an artist I appreciated that Cree people understand the value of material locally gathered and prepared. "I contend that the body can be recognized as extending out into the land from whence materials are gathered" (MacEachren, 2006, p. 221). As a vegetarian, to my amazement I accepted this activity without any qualms. My main concern was to do a good job, one worthy of the animal that had given its life maintaining the balance of nature and also worthy of the effort that had gone into the hunting, skinning, and butchering of the moose.

- Taking the spruce-bark basketry course with the WTSG and Edmond Dubé, I carefully observed his teaching techniques. The group was picking up the skills at an amazing speed. As a pre-service art education lecturer at Concordia University, these teaching techniques astounded me. I have been teaching students for years to plan demonstrations, break down techniques into carefully thought-through instructions and tips, as well as to identify the potential areas where students may require extra hands-on support. I had known that our teacher was a gifted artist. What I didn't know was how different observing his actual teaching process would be from my own. Mr. Dubé seldom spoke (there were some language constraints); he often worked on his lap, below the surface

of the table where we could see little, using his body as leverage. He worked swift and sure, each step in the process joining the next in an orchestration of time-honoured skills, and the WTSG, to the best of their ability, followed suit.

- At the start of 2<sup>nd</sup> annual assembly of the Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association held in Wemindji, the group was too shy to make their presentations. Before we began they repeatedly asked me to speak for them, in English, to this largely Cree speaking forum. It was not ideal. As a non-native, I perceived I had too much to say and used too many words to make a point, although the translator took time and care to do a good job. The themes we were presenting raised interesting questions; people from other communities wanted to share their experiences. More and more I began to turn to members of the WTSG to respond. This alleviated both the language issues and my frustration of speaking for people in their presence. The women joined in the conversations and overcame their hesitancy to speak in public. *They shared* their knowledge and concerns with their *peers* in a natural manner; their fears of assuming the role of an *expert* through this formal structure melted away. Over the next two days the group's drive to explore the questions in their research process was validated; they grew in esteem and determination.