

**AROUND THE SACRED CIRCLE:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT  
AND CULTURAL IDENTITY BY FOUR ABORIGINAL  
STUDENTS TAKING NATIVE STUDIES 20**

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**by**

**Two Colour Horse  
Juanita F. L. Tuharsky  
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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of four Aboriginal students in a Native Studies 20 class. The class was taught by an Aboriginal teacher who was knowledgeable in Aboriginal pedagogies and epistemology.

Education for Aboriginal people in Canada has been difficult. Many scholars believe that Canada's assimilative policy, intended to convert Aboriginal children to Eurocentric cultural beliefs and practices, has led to the development of both poor self-concepts and weak cultural identities. Many educational scholars believe that self-concept and cultural identity are essential to effective learning. As Saskatchewan's Aboriginal school population increases, Saskatchewan Education has developed Native Studies 10, 20 and 30. These curricula promote the development of positive self-concepts and cultural identities in Aboriginal students and others.

The purpose of the study is to describe any effects on self-concept and cultural identity experienced in Native Studies 20. Stories developed from interviews are the source of data for this study. The Aboriginal teacher was interviewed and his story was told. As a basis for understanding Aboriginal epistemology, an Elder was interviewed and his story is also told. These stories provide insight into Aboriginal pedagogical practices and into their use in the present day education of Aboriginal students and, possibly, of all students.

Four Aboriginal students, taking Native Studies 20 from the teacher, were interviewed and their stories are told. These stories reveal growth toward positive self-concept and strong cultural identity.

Implications for teaching and for the use of Aboriginal epistemologies in education are apparent in the stories.

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Megwetch all my relations.

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## Finding My Way

In order to understand my place in the research done in this study, you need to know something about me.

When I was a child, my mother taught us that a sense of family, community and culture are very important. I was raised in a downtown urban center where it was easy to be led astray. Yet, I grew up with pride for my culture and my family--both nuclear and extended. However, upon entering school, I felt it was uncool to be "Indian." I, like any other child, felt a great need to "belong" and to be "accepted." Fortunately, because of my colour, I could pretend to be Italian. I felt accepted, not realizing I had rejected my real identity. It was not until eighth grade that I truly realized I belonged to neither culture. I was not accepted in either the "Euro-Canadian" or the "Indian" community. For example, I was beaten up with weapons and physical force by my "own people." In the eleventh grade, a student in a report referred to all Indians as "drunks and sluts." I responded in anger: "Are you calling me a drunk or a slut?" From that day on I became aware that I was an "Indian" and proud of it. I realize how much strength, encouragement and education it has taken me to become who I am. It was my mother who would lead me on a spiritual and cultural path throughout my adolescent and early adult years.

My mother was a strong believer in her culture and education. Through rocks, a personal collection, she found her own strength, solitude and healing. Through her, I became aware of the Creator, the six directions (above, east, south, west, north, and

earth), traditions and prayer. She made me keenly aware of the need for education, as she so frequently stated, "Education is the key." My mother had guided me through the directions: east, south, west, and north. She had me participate and practice respect for family, tradition, education and Elders. She put me in touch with Aboriginal culture; she embedded in me the desire to search for "wisdom." She took me directly to the east; I felt a spiritual presence; I knew I belonged; I fully realized who I was. However, the missing components of "my circle" were the other two directions: the earth and the above. I only came to understand these two directions through my own adult education and through the wisdom of the Elders. As an Aboriginal educator, I was curious to see how Aboriginal students felt about learning about their own identities and cultures within the present school system. I hoped to understand more clearly how to teach, and help others to teach, Aboriginal students. This has led me to the question of this study: What are the experiences of an Aboriginal teacher and four Aboriginal students participating in the Native Studies 20 curriculum?

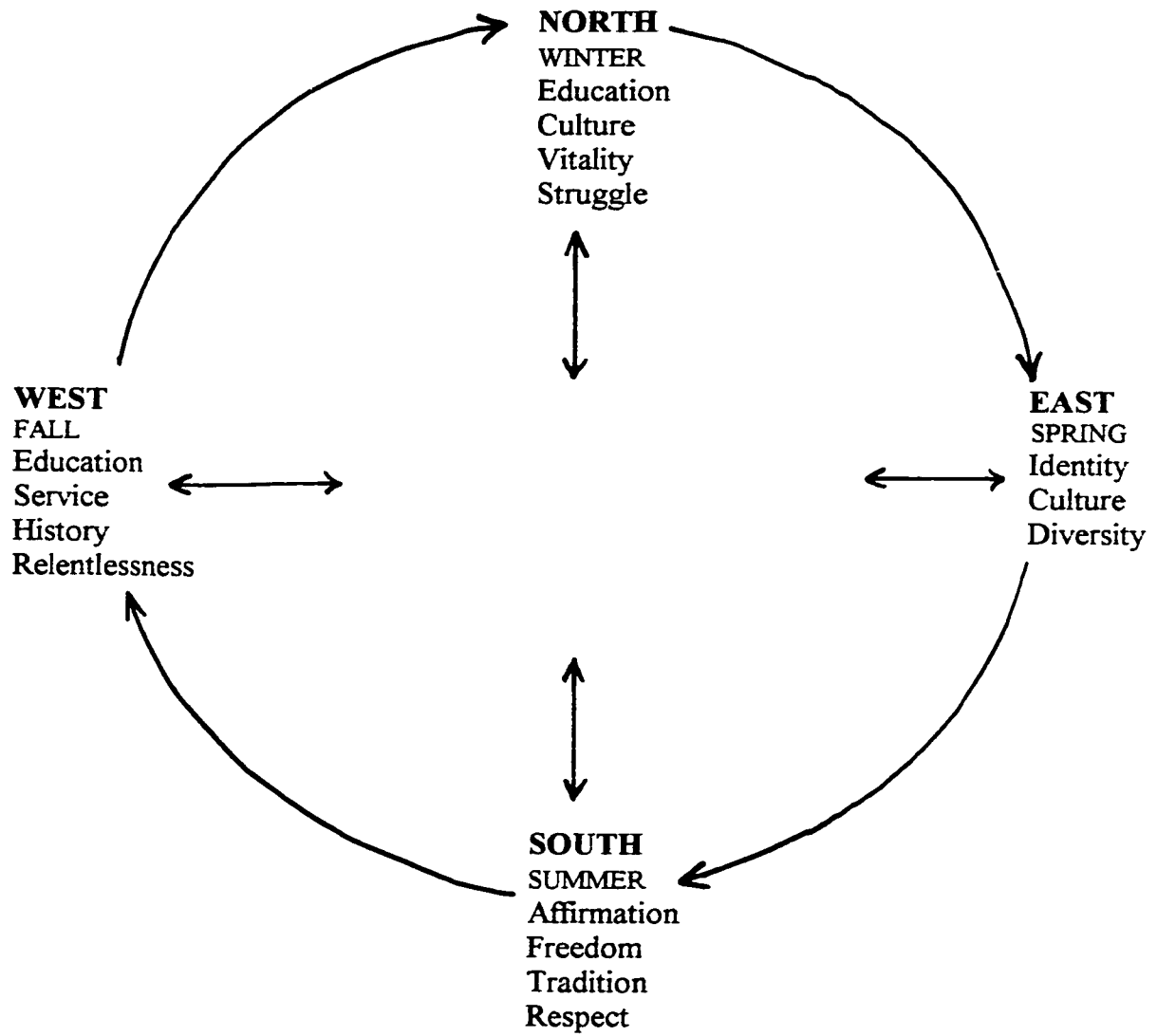
## Father Sky: As the Spirit Speaks

Many Aboriginal world views differ from major Eurocentric western world views.

The Aboriginal world views begin with the spirit world: Father Sky, Mother Earth, the plants, the animals and lastly humanity. This belief is taught through the Sacred Circle. I was raised by my mother who was grounded in her Aboriginal heritage. My research is founded in this set of beliefs. It is from my mother, the grandfathers and grandmothers that I take direction. They gave me the strength and the stability to pursue this research. The Sacred Circle encompasses six directions: Father Sky, the East, the South, the West, the North and Mother Earth. The six directions connect us to the "sacred centre." We use their holistic teaching to learn and to heal. As Graveline (1998) states in her book *Circle Works*: "Many Aboriginal people in the contemporary era are returning to the belief systems of our Ancestors to find solutions to the many and varied problems facing us today as individuals, as Community members, as Nations and as cohabitants of Mother Earth" (p. 12).

Traditionalists believe we "learn, grow and change" using our active being (Graveline, 1998, p. 191). So that the reader may actively learn about the Aboriginal knowledge, I will walk the reader through the six directions of the Circle to help the reader learn in the way the Elders teach. This study of the experiences of an Aboriginal teacher and four Aboriginal students who shared a journey through the Native Studies 20 curriculum is organized under the six directions (see Figure 1).

**SPIRIT**  
Spirituality  
Service  
Identity  
Affiliation  
Freedom



**EARTH**  
Place  
Affiliation  
Transformation

Figure 1.

SOURCE: Hampton, 1995, p. 17.

## Eastern Door: Glimpses of the Dawn

Curricula in Saskatchewan have been challenged to prepare students for a world where familiar geopolitical boundaries and economic assumptions are constantly changing. The changing dynamics of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population have created pressure to assess the effectiveness of instruction in school disciplines. There is an awareness that yesterday's educational methods and content may not meet the needs of today's Aboriginal students. Many Aboriginal children have dropped out of school. Many social problems of Aboriginal people are attributed to inappropriate education. There is a need to provide school experiences which incorporate Aboriginal content in curriculum. This content should strengthen Aboriginal cultural identity and self-concept. To address these needs, Saskatchewan Education began to provide direction by developing a document which outlined educational changes needed in Saskatchewan schools. This document was called *Directions* (1984). One option outlined in this document was to offer Native Studies in high schools.

The resultant Native Studies curricula have existed for approximately a decade and it seems timely to research and discover how students experience these curricula in the classroom. In the past, Canada's educational policies with regards to Aboriginal children were assimilative. These policies were implemented by segregating and educating Aboriginal children in residential schools. Here the practice was to minimize or destroy the self-concepts and cultural identities of these Aboriginal children. Over time, it became

apparent Canada's educational policies to assimilate Aboriginal children into the dominant society had failed. A new policy was introduced. Canada's federal government now wanted Aboriginal children to integrate into the dominant society's schools. This angered Aboriginal groups and their leaders. These people began to speak out and take action. Through their efforts over the past twenty-five years, Aboriginal educational programming and curricula have been developed—including Native Studies. I explored the relationship between the experience of Native Studies 20 and four Aboriginal student's development of self-concept and cultural identity. To do this, I used an Aboriginal perspective, the Sacred Circle. The Sacred Circle is how Aboriginal people look at life and learning. Through the six directions of the Sacred Circle, Aboriginal people teach their histories and cultures to the next generations (Calliou, 1995; Hampton, 1995). I begin this study with Father Sky. I travel through the five remaining directions: the east, the south, the west, the north, finishing with Mother Earth to illustrate how the Sacred Circle is used as a pedagogical device.

The Native Studies 20 curriculum attempts to promote positive self-concept and cultural identity in Saskatchewan Aboriginal students. This study explores its effect on four Aboriginal students' self-concept, after the experience of taking Native Studies 20 from an Aboriginal teacher who was knowledgeable as both an Eurocentric and Aboriginal educator. To see how education in Canada has come to include Native Studies

I will outline Aboriginal educational history in Canada.

### Assimilative Educational History and Cultural Identity

Segregation. In order to understand contemporary Aboriginal education, it is crucial to look at the past policies of the government and at how Aboriginal people were schooled in the past. Historically, Canada's educational systems have failed Aboriginal people. The *Indian Acts* of 1876 and 1880 gave control of education to the federal government. Canada's Aboriginal students attended residential schools run by the government and the church. Aboriginal students were forced to leave their families at a very early age. They were expected to live in residence full time and do daily chores. These students rarely returned home. As a result of this, children were isolated from their families and culture. The students' hair was cut. They were forced to dress in European clothing and to speak a foreign "tongue"--English (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Miller, 1996). Thus, they were taught to fear or forget the symbols and language of their own culture.

Integration. A century later, Canada's government stopped educating Aboriginal people in residential schools. In 1951, when *The Indian Act* was changed, all Aboriginal students were sent home. They were allowed to attend day schools near their reserves. Urban Aboriginal children attended school in the city. This significantly altered the way Aboriginal children were educated. Aboriginal children returned to their families and

communities. Parents and grandparents who experienced the residential school system had been deprived of their cultural background and their native "tongue." As a result, few knew how to educate and care for their children in traditional Aboriginal ways. Neither had they learned, in the repressive group world of the residential school, how to parent as Europeans do. The cultural identities of their children were confused, and their self-concepts weakened as a result (Barman et al., 1986). Some of the most significant changes in Aboriginal education came in the late 1960s. The federal government issued the "White Paper" in 1969 which stated Aboriginal education would no longer be a federal government responsibility. Aboriginal people would receive the same services, including education in the same institutions, as did mainstream Canadians.

Aboriginal educational initiatives. Aboriginal people had not been included in the policy making (Bouvier, 1989). In the White Paper, First Nations and Metis leaders objected to being excluded from the process of making policy about their own children's education. "Indians across Canada reclaimed their right to direct the education of their children. Indian identity would be thus reinforced while Indian children were prepared to live in modern society" (Bouvier, 1989, p. 78). This was a huge step in the history of Indian control of their own education. This Paper was the beginning of the development of Aboriginal educational programs and of the use of Aboriginal content within these programs. As one result, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College was incorporated



in 1976. As a federated college, it has its own governing body from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and is under the academic umbrella of the University of Regina. Teacher education programs in Aboriginal post-secondary institutions were funded by the federal government. The Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) were also developed at this time. The goal of these programs was to develop an Aboriginal teacher force. This was the beginning of a new perspective in Aboriginal education. Aboriginal teachers began to work to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children--especially in the development of positive self-concept and cultural identity (Battiste & Barman, 1995). It was soon realized by the staff and students of these organizations that the development and use of Aboriginal knowledge was key to the success of these programs (Cooper, 1999).

Attempts to adopt a similar philosophy in some of the high schools in Saskatchewan have occurred. Joe Duoquette High School, Saskatoon, and Scott Collegiate, Regina, are two examples. The Joe Duoquette school houses close to 150 Aboriginal students and its curriculum and philosophy are based on the teachings of the Sacred Circle. They have teachers, Elders and counsellors on hand all the time to guide and direct students' self-concepts and cultural identities. Their every day operations are based on traditional Aboriginal ways. These reinforce a cultural identity grounded in

Aboriginal knowledge (Regnier, 1995).

Scott Collegiate in Regina also has a high Aboriginal population--approximately 75%. Its philosophy is to try to meet these students' needs both academically and culturally. Alternative teaching methods are used to accommodate academic needs. There are cultural events and community people are invited. Their philosophy is not grounded in the Sacred Circle, but does offer an alternative to other, more Eurocentric schools in Regina. It is through high school alternatives like this that Aboriginal ways resurface. They help reinforce the belief there are valuable knowledge bases besides those grounded in Europe (Regina Public School Division No. 4 of Saskatchewan, 1990).

#### Historical Overview of Saskatchewan's Curricular Reforms (1980-1999)

In 1980, the Saskatchewan Minister of Education held a mini-conference to discuss provincial curriculum needs. The Honourable Douglas McArthur asked "What should our young people learn in school and how should we organize the educational program in order to help [children] learn?" (Saskatchewan Education, 1981, p. 65). Conference participants concluded that significant changes were required. Participants agreed to address the issue of providing "optimal educational opportunities for every individual which takes [sic] into account a pluralistic society, jurisdictional parameters, human and material resources and which anticipate society's probable future characteristics" (Saskatchewan Education, 1981, p. 66).

As a result of this conference, an advisory committee for Curriculum and Instructional Review was formed to address the issues arising from the conference. The committee was comprised of people from Saskatchewan's two universities, the Department of Education, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the Saskatchewan School Trustee's Association, directors and superintendents of school boards, and parents. Their mandate was to provide a new direction for Saskatchewan's educational system focusing on public involvement, the commissioning of studies, and the committee's unique decision-making format (Saskatchewan Education, 1984). The advisory committee invited the public to participate in compiling a list of issues and concerns. They examined curriculum content, instruction, school environment, resource center services, support services, inservice education and leadership.

The advisory committee discovered that existing curricula lacked accurate Canadian and Saskatchewan content, particularly in Aboriginal issues. Racism and prejudice were found in existing resource materials (Saskatchewan Education, 1984). Sixteen recommendations were made. Of the sixteen, one recommendation dealt directly with Aboriginal issues. This recommendation urged "that the Minister initiate the formulation of policies and procedures to ensure that the unique needs of Northern and Indian/Native students are met" (Saskatchewan Education, 1984, p. 8).

As a result of this committee's recommendation, specific goals were identified.

New courses were needed in Native Studies and Native languages. These courses would be electives at the secondary school level. The Department of Education maintained a Native Curriculum Review Committee as well as an Aboriginal representative on the Program Policy Committee to ensure that these goals included emphasis on the development of cultural identity and positive self-concept (Saskatchewan Education, 1984, 1985).

### The Development of Native Studies Curricula

In 1982, by order of the Minister, the Native Curriculum Review Committee was established. Part of their mandate was to develop curricula relevant to Aboriginal issues in the Social Sciences. Textbooks were scrutinized for prejudicial content which was both offensive and demoralizing to Aboriginal people (Saskatchewan Education, 1984).

After a needs assessment by the Native Curriculum Review Committee, goals and a philosophy were developed for Native Studies 10, 20, 30. This led to the development of new Native Studies curricula in 1985 and 1986. The central aim of these curricula was "to develop in the student a personal and cultural awareness and understanding, and to promote the development of positive attitudes in all students towards Indian and Metis peoples" (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 2).

Native Studies 20. Native Studies 20 was developed in 1986. It was to be piloted in 1987, but this did not occur. Sites were re-established for this process in the 1990-91

school year. Implementation for Native Studies 20 occurred in September of 1991 with revisions in 1995. The course has an optional introductory unit and three other units which focus on Aboriginal world issues. The Native Studies 20 curriculum fulfills the grade 11 or 12 Social Sciences credit requirement for high school students. The specific time allotment for each unit is to be determined by the teacher and students involved.

Native Studies 20 has nine goals and of those nine, three are directed at self-concept and cultural identity.

The three goals are:

Native Studies should help individuals clarify their cultural identities and function effectively within their communities.

Native Studies should facilitate in Indian and Metis students the development of a positive self-identity through the acquisition of a knowledge of their history and culture.

Native Studies should enable **all** students to better appreciate the contributions made by Aboriginal peoples to the development of Canada, and contemporary Canadian society (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 2).

Native Studies 20 is a resource-based, holistic curriculum. This means that issues and concepts are considered to be interconnected, and suggestions have been made to integrate these issues and concepts in other subject areas. The teacher is to teach Native Studies 20 holistically, integrating various subject areas and topics. The teacher is expected to use a variety of materials. Methods such as case studies are recommended. Issues in legislation are explored. Principles and concepts emerging from the Aboriginal knowledge base are taught. The students are taught how to look at issues both locally and

globally while developing strategies to bring about change. The main purpose is to have students learn to "**think globally and act locally**" (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 44)

In 1991-92, Native Studies 10 and 20 were officially accepted as credit courses and began to be offered throughout the province. This was a major breakthrough for both the Aboriginal communities and the province. Native Studies 30 became an officially accredited class in 1997. At the time of this study, Native Studies 10 and 20 were optional courses. Actual availability of these courses is dependent upon scheduling. Qualifications of instructors are varied. Few have extensive backgrounds and/or experience with Native Studies. Many have very little experience or none at all. They are assigned the class because they are presently teaching Social Science classes or have been told to teach Native Studies.

Although Native Studies has become a high school optional credit, many questions remain about the delivery and accreditation of these courses (Dewar, 1999). The 1993 Administrator's Report from Saskatchewan Education agreed there were many areas of concern. First, a prerequisite of Native Studies 10 is not needed prior to taking Native Studies 20 or 30. Then, there are concerns about teachers' familiarity with Native Studies curricula. Teachers did not require provincial accreditation for Native Studies 30, for example, until 1997. Any teacher, especially in a Social Studies or History department, could be assigned to teach Native Studies. Third, there are concerns that valid and

accurate resources (print material and resource people) are used. Maintaining Aboriginal perspectives in Native Studies courses is crucial. The final concern is related to teacher enthusiasm and student progress. Teachers' attitudes affect student progress, therefore, the teacher's enthusiasm for teaching Native Studies is central to students' success. Therefore, it is important that those teaching Native Studies know what they are doing (Borich & Tombari, 1995; Farrell-Racette & Racette, 1993).

When teachers have limited knowledge of, or experience with Aboriginal epistemologies, pedagogies and Aboriginal curricular content, they have problems understanding and conceptualizing the purpose of Native Studies. As a result, students are not provided with accurate information. They are not given positive role models. Problems arise with the Aboriginal student's development of self-concept and Aboriginal cultural identity. Non-Aboriginal students also do not develop an accurate grasp of Aboriginal knowledge and the place of Aboriginal people in Canadian history. The lack of understanding and valuing of Aboriginal beliefs, values and knowledge, is at the heart of the problems experienced by Aboriginal people in Canadian schools and society (Dewar, 1999).

This study describes a journey in Native Studies as experienced by four Aboriginal students and an Aboriginal teacher. Each section in this thesis is one of the Sacred Circle's six directions. The journey begins with the recollection of the five participants'

experiences in Native Studies 20. Here in the east, we begin to understand the beginnings of a new curriculum. In the south, we see how past history affected Aboriginal education. In the west, we look at data collection and analysis. In the north, actual accounts are heard from all five participants. An Elder's voice reflects on Aboriginal culture. At the end of this thesis, we return to understand Mother Earth.

The participants' experiences seem likely to help us to understand a small piece of a large educational issue, the failure of schools to educate Aboriginal children. We need this understanding as we plan for Native Studies programs. So, the question I ask in this thesis is: What is the experience of an Aboriginal teacher and four Aboriginal students with the Native Studies 20 curriculum? In Northern Door: Heavenly Voices, stories about these experiences are told.

There are three guiding questions:

- 1) Can any effect, on the students' identity and self-concepts of their experiences in Native Studies 20, be discerned in their stories?
- 2) What is the relationship between their experience with Native Studies 20 and the teachings of a respected Aboriginal Elder about Aboriginal education?
- 3) Do the Aboriginal students describe any effect which can be attributed to the use of Aboriginal knowledge in Native Studies 20?



### Assumptions

I assumed that the Aboriginal students in this study would provide honest opinions and an accurate report of their experiences with the Native Studies 20 curriculum and their experiences with their teacher. I also assumed the teacher would give an accurate report of what he had done in his Native Studies 20 course.

### Definition of Terms

**Aboriginal:** includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada (Government of Canada, Oct. 1999, p. 66).

**Culture:** Kahn (1991) defines culture as broadly as "the environment in which things grow . . . . A person's environment determines much of what she is able or not able to do, to feel, to think" (as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 20).

"Culture is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world view shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion" (Nieto, 1992, p. 111).

**Identity:** "belonging to a cultural group" (Nieto, 1992, p. 230). "We are like one big family with 'all our relations.' Nothing we do, we do by ourselves; together we form a circle" (Graveline, 1998, p. 56).

**Native Studies:** ". . . to provide students with the opportunity to replace old ideas with

new ones" (Farrell-Racette and Racette, 1993, p. 9).

". . . a vehicle for negotiating a new and more positive relationship between the school and the Indian and Metis community."

". . . courses to develop personal and cultural awareness and understanding.

The development of positive attitudes in all students towards Indian and Metis peoples is another course goal" (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1992, pp. 38-39).

"The primary aim of Native Studies 10, 20, and 30, is to develop in a student a personal and cultural awareness and understanding, and to promote the development of positive attitudes in all students towards Indian and Metis peoples. The student will learn to recognize biased and racist information" (Saskatchewan Education, 1992, p. 2).

Self-Concept: "A person must first know him- or herself and his or her family line, tribal nation and responsibilities to all relations if he or she is to function within an Aboriginal identity" (Graveline, 1998, p. 57).

Self-Definition: Indian and Metis people believe that it is the people themselves who should define who they are. Being something is how you feel about yourself. It is something that is inside of you. This feeling does not always agree with the law or what other people say you are. It is generally accepted that people of Indian

and/or Metis ancestry have the right to define who they are, themselves

(Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1992, p. 2).

Aboriginal values, beliefs and knowledge have been ignored by Canadian educators until recently. This has had an adverse effect on many Aboriginal learners' cultural identity and self-concept. This study explores the experience of a teacher and students with one of the initiatives developed by Saskatchewan Education to counteract these effects: the Native Studies courses.

In the next section, Southern Door: Shedding Light, in order to develop a theoretical framework for my study, I will further describe and discuss a variety of research and legislation to show first how the education of Aboriginal people has contributed to the problems of self-concept and cultural identity which many researchers and educators identify in today's schools. Second, I will outline a variety of theories about the development of self-concept and cultural identity in children. Third, I will outline the history of attempts by Saskatchewan Education to begin to address issues relating to the education of Aboriginal children and to the development of a more accurate and equitable education for all Saskatchewan children. I will begin with a discussion of traditional Aboriginal education and of traditional and modern views of the Sacred Circle.

## Southern Door: Shedding Light

No question, no issue, no problem comes free of its past. I begin with Traditional Aboriginal education, the role of Elders and the Sacred Circle prior to European contact. This helps us to understand how learners' self-concepts and cultural identities were formed. It also forms the interpretive framework of this study. Education changed after direct European contact. For 130 years Indian Affairs policy controlled Aboriginal education. Theories of identity, relationships and of self-fulfilling prophecy will be explored to see how they may help us understand the experience of the Native Studies teacher and the four Aboriginal learners.

### Traditional Aboriginal Education.

Prior to European contact, Aboriginal communities had their own educational systems. Elders kept their nation's culture alive and taught it to their people. The people sought advice and knowledge from the Elders (Archibald, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Graveline, 1998; Little Bear, 1994).

The Elders use the Sacred Circle to teach the people about the Creator. These "old ones" have always taught the people about spiritual, physical and emotional growth (Archibald, 1995, p. 289). Some of the Sacred Circle's teachings are the four directions, the life cycle, and the four seasons. These were the curricula of the Elders (Banks, 1991; Calliou, 1995; Graveline, 1998; Hampton, 1989 & 1995; Regnier, 1995). These teachings were passed on orally. Ceremonies taught children and young adults cultural values and

beliefs (Ermine, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996). These experiences provided the learner with a deeper understanding of their world. Readiness to learn was determined by the person, by the parents and by the Elders (Ermine, 1995; Hampton, 1989, 1995; Little Bear, 1994).

Education is a lifelong, continuous, process requiring stable and consistent support. First Nations people of every age group require appropriate formal and informal opportunities for learning and for teaching. The education provided must be holistic. Education processes and institutions must address the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development of the participants (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 445).

### Elders

Elders are the "most respected teachers" (Archibald, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Little Bear, 1994). They have made "countless journeys into the inner space" to receive knowledge for future generations (Ermine, 1995). They are the "guardians of culture" and the "keepers of tradition" (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 525). Inner and outer worlds are connected by the Elders who have made journeys into the spirit world and shared this information with their people (Ermine, 1995). It is through them that the survival of culture is ensured (Archibald, 1995; Banks, 1991; Calliou, 1995). It is important to know that "each nation also has its own body of knowledge, . . . belief systems, ways of thinking and behaving" (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 526). In traditional Aboriginal communities, Elders prepared the next generation for specialized roles. They helped individuals discover that each one of them has their

own Sacred Circle within themselves. It is through the Sacred Circle we find ourselves and our place within our community and culture.

### Sacred Circle

It is believed by traditional Aboriginal people that everyone has his or her own Sacred Circle (Archibald, Friesen, Smith & Sterling, 1993; Government of Canada, 1996), and knowledge of their Sacred Circle is drawn out of the student through the teachings of the Elders (Banks, 1991; Calliou, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Regnier, 1995). The Sacred Circle is a communication tool and a teaching tool that we see in the physical world through circular formations made of rock and stone (Banks, 1991; Ermine, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996). Hampton (1989, 1995) further explains how the six directions are not a model, but rather "a pattern or an organizing principle" (p. 27). The Sacred Circle is used by many Aboriginal communities, such as the plains people--Blackfoot, Cree and Dakota (Calliou, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996). The interpretations and uses of the Sacred Circle vary from nation to nation. In essence, the Sacred Circle is a way of connecting with the spirit world and the Creator. It is used in a holistic way. Nothing is dissected. The individual parts are considered to be intertwined (Banks, 1991; Calliou, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996).

Hampton (1989, 1995) explains the spirit dimension and earth dimensions within the realm of Sacred Circle's teachings. Spirit is described as education beginning with

prayer in the center of the world, looking toward the sky, and respecting the spiritual relationships that exist between all things. Earth is our home. Hampton (1989, 1995) explains our bodies come from the earth and return to the earth. The earth is a stable background against which changes occur. It sustains us and comforts us by showing the importance of having a sense of place. The earth is always there. This relationship is intensely personal. The Sacred Circle is used as a way to think about our existence in the universe. It is the "silent teacher" of the reality of things (Banks, 1991). It provides connectedness, balance and harmony in the process of learning throughout one's life (Ermine, 1995; Regnier, 1995). The Sacred Circle is a very simple, yet complex concept to grasp. When the Europeans came bringing their own values and beliefs, the Sacred Circle and its teachings became a target for government policy (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Hampton, 1995).

### Assimilative Aboriginal Education

*British North America Act (1867) and its role in Aboriginal education.* The *British North America Act* in 1867 specifically addressed issues involving Aboriginal people. They were considered incapable of directing their own lives. In controlling Aboriginal people, the Canadians were following a very long European tradition of seeing the other, those whose culture was very different, as either children or savages or both (Miles, 1989). They became the responsibility of the Federal government under sections

91(24) and 132 of the *British North America Act*, and as such were recognized as children of the Crown (Henderson, 1995). Their educational systems were not recognized. The Canadian government made provisions to educate the "Indian." Education became a part of treaty negotiations (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Novak, 1984). Aboriginal education was separate and distinct from educating immigrants. This ensured that the cultures of Aboriginal persons would not be seen as valid or worthwhile. Generations of Aboriginal children were thus deprived of pride in, and often also of any knowledge of, their own history. The resulting loss of confidence and strong self-concept is well documented (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Miller, 1996).

In 1868, a year after Confederation, when Indian lands were sold, money raised from the sales was contributed to the schools frequented by Aboriginal children. Aboriginal education was funded by the sale of Aboriginal lands; a clear treaty violation (Henderson, 1995; Miller, 1996; Novak, 1984; Smith, 1975).

In the *Indian Act* of 1876, existing laws regarding education were continued in sections 11 and 63(6). The treaties stated Aboriginal people had a right to education. However, there was no federal legislation on the establishment of schools, the employment of teachers, the development of curricula, or on any other educational matters. As well, any Indian, under this *Act*, who had a profession or university degree



could be disenfranchised. They lost their status and identity as "Indian." The *Indian Act* was amended in 1880. Amendments stated that the chief or band council had the right to decide the religious denomination of the teacher: Catholic or Protestant. Traditional Aboriginal spirituality was not even considered. The only other item Aboriginal nations had some control over was the construction and repair of the school houses (Henderson, 1995; Miller, 1996; Smith, 1975). School houses seldom existed since most Aboriginal children were sent away to residential schools at this time.

Integrative Aboriginal Education: Assimilation with a New Face

Indian Act, 1951. The *Indian Act* was amended again in 1951, adding a new section on education. The federal government could now enter into agreements with the provinces or territories for the purpose of educating Canada's Aboriginal people. Religious organizations could be involved in the support and maintenance of Aboriginal children attending their schools (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996; Smith, 1975). The *Act* legislated that Aboriginal children attend school, beginning at age six and remain in school until the age of sixteen. They could attend up to the age of eighteen, but no longer. The Minister was responsible for operating and sustaining schools for Indian children. The government would provide and make regulations with respect to standards for education and teaching (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996; Smith, 1975). This version of the *Indian Act* continued the historic assumption that all aspects of Aboriginal

peoples' schooling, and especially the curricula, must be controlled by the Eurocentric government of Canada. Traditional cultural knowledge and pedagogy continued to be denied. Elders were forced to keep them alive in secret. Aboriginal cultures and identity survived through the perseverance of Elders and their teachings (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996).

Concerns were continually expressed by Aboriginal parents about attendance, drop-out rates and absenteeism. Many Aboriginal people were not convinced that the "White man's" education was any better than their traditional ways. Their major concerns were about the loss of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginal cultures (Saskatchewan Education, 1981; 1984b; 1993).

#### Aboriginal Leaders Begin to Assert a Voice in Aboriginal Education

The Hawthorne Report and the White Paper. In 1967, the Hawthorne Report was issued. This report focused on the conditions of Canada's Aboriginal people. In it, education was defined as "integration." Integration would better serve the Aboriginal population. In the past, Aboriginal people had not completely changed or adopted European ways in spite of "assimilative" policies. Although government language changed in this report, it still promoted assimilation. Two years later, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs issued the "White Paper." This paper released the Federal Government from its responsibility for Aboriginal education, which now would become

the responsibility of territorial governments. This paper received much attention from Aboriginal people who were infuriated by the government's intentions to offload Aboriginal education. This violated treaty rights and *Indian Act* policy (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Bouvier, 1989; Kirkness & Bowman, 1992). Reaction to the White Paper resulted in Aboriginal groups issuing their own document. This paper stated that Aboriginal people were capable of controlling Indian education. They would base education on their own cultures and world views. The National Brotherhood of Indians (NBI) issued Indian Control of Indian Education in 1968. Approximately five years later, in 1973, the federal government adopted this paper as policy including acceptance of parental responsibility and local control of education (Barman et al., 1986; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Bouvier, 1989; Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 1992). The road to the return of Aboriginal culture and identity to the education of Aboriginal children had begun.

Section 35, Canadian Constitution (1982). The *Canadian Constitution* became legislation in 1982. Section 35 defined Aboriginal peoples as being Indian, Inuit and Metis (the latter included for the first time). Their inherent rights were recognized. An understanding and sensitivity towards Aboriginal people began to grow. Aboriginal people had been given an "official" identity and recognized as a unique and separate group. Opportunities for Aboriginal education, however, remained limited (Battiste &

Barman, 1995; Bouvier, 1989; Henderson, 1995).

There continued to be misunderstandings and fears on both sides. The general public still believed that Aboriginal people should assimilate into the dominant culture which controlled social, economic and political institutions. Furthermore, as Aboriginal people became urbanized, they sometimes moved further away from their traditional culture and identity (Center Sky's interview, 1996). The general belief was that minority groups need to acquire the dominant culture's traits if they are to advance socially and economically (Larocque, 1991; Satzewich & Wotherspoon, 1993). Culture and identity were often sacrificed.

A study completed in 1988, Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future. A Declaration of First Nations' Jurisdiction over Education reported Aboriginal communities still had limited input in the delivery of education to their people. The federal government had not allowed Aboriginal communities and their leaders the right to redefine Indian education, only the right to administer it (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Bouvier, 1989).

#### The Consequences of these Policies in Aboriginal Education

Residential schools/industrial. In 1884, the *Indian Act* provided for a separate school system for Aboriginal children on reserves. Law required these children to attend school from age six to age fifteen (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996; Novak,

1984; Smith, 1975). Children were sent far away to be "educated," parental contact was discouraged. Missionaries believed Aboriginal children must learn about the "White man's" religion, together with reading and writing. Aboriginal males were expected to train in the areas of wagon-making, blacksmithing, and carpentry while Aboriginal females were expected to train in the areas of general housekeeping, sewing, spinning and knitting. Agriculture was the school's main focus and the school's main purpose was to have the "Indian" educated out of these Aboriginal students (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996; Smith, 1975). Aboriginal people were clearly to be a labour force and were considered "second class" citizens.

Racism flourished at the residential and industrial schools. Aboriginal children were forced to change. They were trained to hate their own flesh and blood (Barman et al, 1986). Miller (1996) writes about a Saulteaux woman who recalled her days at St. Philip's residential school. This woman's experience left her with a very negative attitude towards her parents, siblings, and community. She was taught to believe the teachings at home were "ugly" and devil worshipping (p. 205).

At the turn of the century, and well into the 1940s, the goals of Aboriginal education remained the same--to convert and assimilate the Aboriginal children, to change their culture and identity. The curricula of residential and day schools followed provincial standards and special emphasis was put on "language, reading, domestic science, manual

training and agriculture" (Miller, 1996, p. 155). In the 1950s, Indian Affairs tried to have Native content included in the school system. Success was minimal and Aboriginal children were still deprived of their heritage (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996).

In spite of residential school practices, Aboriginal people did not abandon their cultures. So educational policy took a new direction. The new government policy was "integration." After World War II, Aboriginal people had the right to travel freely, to drink alcohol and to vote. It was hoped these freedoms would help integrate Aboriginal people into mainstream society. It was intended to provide them and their children with equal access to other opportunities (Barman et al., 1986; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Kirkness & Bowman, 1992). It did not.

As Aboriginal children began to attend the dominant society's schools, it was apparent there were cultural and linguistic differences. However, these schools continued to teach Aboriginal children as they did all children. Aboriginal parents still were outside the system. School curricula contained exclusively mainstream educational ideals and knowledge. Evidence of failure to educate Aboriginal children became more apparent. Absenteeism, high drop-out rates, abnormal age/grade discrepancies and disproportionate failure rates for these Aboriginal students were prime indicators of this failure. The negative self-concepts of many Aboriginal children continued to be reinforced. Statistics showed "only one-third of Indian people were beyond grade 3, compared with over 60

percent of the children in provincial public schools across Canada" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 13). Regarding self-concept development, there was evidence Aboriginal children felt untrustworthy, inferior, incapable and immoral (compared to their peers). These children were brainwashed into believing "Indian" was synonymous with sub-human, savages, and idiots (Barman et al., 1986, 1987; Miller, 1996).

The forgotten people: non-status Indians and Metis. Historically, Aboriginal education was not open to all Aboriginal children. Many non-status Indians (Aboriginals) and Metis received little or no education. Education for these children varied from region to region and from province to province. These children were allowed to attend residential schools if space was available. This practice was not consistent. Essentially, non-status Indian and Metis (Aboriginal) children were the "forgotten people." Neither the federal government nor provincial government accepted responsibility for educating these children (Miller, 1996; Saskatchewan Education, 1996). A 1938 report stated "approximately 3500 Native children of Saskatchewan" were largely unschooled (Saskatchewan Education, 1996). Lack of school facilities was cited as the reason. However, in 1944, the Piercy Report was completed. Piercy found nineteen residential or day schools were in operation in northern Saskatchewan. He noted eighteen settlements up north had no schools. Almost half of the Aboriginal children who lived there and were of school age, did not attend school. Aboriginal communities give the following reasons:

lack of schools, lack of teachers for the school, distance and no water. Only a small number of Aboriginal parents reported they did not want their children to attend school (Piercy, 1944a & 1944b; Saskatchewan Education, 1996). The effects of these policies and events on the development of self-concept and cultural identity among these Aboriginal learners were profoundly negative (Campbell, 1973; Culletin, 1984).

### The Development of Self-Concept

According to McCarthy and Schmeck (1988), self-concept is affected by environment, self-evaluation and interaction with others. Self-concept development begins at a young age and can be either negative or positive. For example, if a child fails to learn to read then he or she may label himself or herself as "unworthy" or "incompetent." Tags like these threaten and change an individual's self-concept, thus affecting the quality of learning (Farrell-Racette & Racette, 1993). As reported in 1975, 93% of Aboriginal children did not complete grade 12, and in 1980 the cumulative drop-out rate for Aboriginal children was 91% (Pelletier, 1993; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1992). The effects of this on Aboriginal children's view of themselves are profound and obvious. Textbooks, pupil-teacher relationships, and self-fulfilling prophecies all affect the development of self-concept and cultural identity.

Textbooks and other pedagogical materials. Throughout Canadian history materials used to teach lacked accurate Aboriginal content. Larocque (1991) argues that



literature continues to contain "degrading and dehumanizing materials on Indian peoples" (p. 74). She goes on to state that "Indians have been called every name under the sun and their histories in effect have been falsified" (p. 74). Rudolph Kalin (1981) agrees with Larocque. Kalin (1981) stated that a study completed by McDiarmid and Pratt in 1971, showed that textbooks perpetuated prejudice through pictorial stereotypes and biased treatment of ethnicity (Kalin, 1984, p. 116). When children are exposed to biased materials, their attitudes towards others are affected. Aboriginal people were characterized as "savage, hostile, and warlike. While they may be skillful and friendly, they also commit murder and massacre" (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1974, p. 18). This kind of writing still remains. In the novel, *Copper Sunrise*, (1972), an Ontario teacher/author, Bryan Buchan, writes:

But that is not the worst of it. Only last week, my friends, these heathen savages, these barbarous murdering wretches, had the gall and effrontery to slaughter, in cold blood, a subject of the King, a fisherman who resided peacefully in your neighbouring village of Port Martinson (p. 80).

Literature like this continues to perpetuate identity problems for Aboriginal children.

When these passages go unquestioned, the effects on self-concept development are far reaching.

Pupil/teacher relationships. Larocque (1991) says Aboriginal people and children face forms of prejudice or violence everyday, whether it is in school, in business or in the justice system. This has had an impact. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians reported

that in the 1969-70 school year, 33% of Aboriginal grade two students were one to two years older than their non-Aboriginal peers and 17% were three or more years older (Pelletier, 1993; Saskatchewan Education, 1984a; Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 1992). By the time Aboriginal children reached grade four, they were two or more years older. The number of Aboriginal students in grade eight working below their age was 95% (Pelletier, 1993, p. 32). This data shows how Saskatchewan's school systems have failed to educate Aboriginal children. It also indicates how devastated their self-concepts must have been.

Cashmore and Troyna (1990) describe the tactic of "blaming the victim" for their oppression rather than society (p. 134). To maintain power, mechanisms like blaming, stereotyping and backlashing are used by those who have power (Larocque, 1991). Nieto (1992) documented how teachers use negative beliefs about parents and homes as reasons for an Aboriginal child's failure or underachievement. Educators have been known to explain a child's failure to learn by making statements like "children in our school who don't learn either are brain-damaged or don't have a father in their home" (p. 28). The children so labelled are often of minority or poverty backgrounds.

Low expectations. Farrell-Racette and Racette (1993) documented how students describe school as a difficult place. Phrases like "teachers did not care, and they did not understand" affect students' feelings of self-worth (p. 7). Blaming oneself for being

inadequate is apparent as children internalize what they have experienced. So, when Aboriginal students, who have had these experiences, are criticized for poor behaviour, their response may be "What do you expect, I'm just an Indian" (Farrell-Racette & Racette, 1993; Larocque, 1991).

Self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecy is the confirmation of a person's expectations. It means students perform the way in which their teachers expect them to. Performance is based on subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, messages about a student's worth, intelligence, and capability (Nieto, 1992, p. 29). The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (F.S.I.) reported that over 50% of the grade two Indian students had failed at least once; and 93% of Indian students in grade 12 had dropped out (Saskatchewan Education, 1984b, p. 9). These indicators imply major problems exist in educating Aboriginal children. One must question the teacher/pupil relationship that allows such massive failure and the effects it has had on the child's development of self-concept (Saskatchewan Education, 1984a; Saskatchewan Education, 1993). As a teacher I see some, but far too little, change in this area.

In this literature review, I have shown how Aboriginal identity and culture have suffered from domination by Eurocentric policies, values and knowledge. I have also shown how, prior to European contact, Aboriginal people taught their own children and instilled pride through the Elders and the Sacred Circle.

Now that 130 years have passed, Aboriginal education is finally being released from domination by the federal government and the *Indian Act*. We have yet to understand what effect this may have on Aboriginal children's self-concepts and identities. This study is a description of one teacher's use of this new freedom to implement holistic methods and knowledge. Native Studies 20 supports the use of traditional Aboriginal pedagogy and epistemology. It also describes the students' responses to learning in this new environment. They are seen to develop stronger self-concept and new pride in their identities.

The next section, Western Door: Insightful Light, describes how the participants of the study were selected, the research methodology I used, and the ways in which the data were interpreted.

## Western Door: Insightful Light

This section describes the research participants, the use of narrative for the purpose of data collection, how the data were processed, analyzed and interpreted.

### The Research Participants

For this study, six people were interviewed. They included a recognized Aboriginal Elder, an Aboriginal teacher, and four Aboriginal students. An Aboriginal teacher who had been teaching at the high school level for three years agreed to participate. The Elder, who is formally appointed and recognized by his community, came from a reserve in Southern Saskatchewan. He was interviewed as a source of knowledge. He did not participate in the Native Studies 20 class.

The four students were from a core area high school in a major Saskatchewan city. There were three females ranging from the ages of sixteen to nineteen and one male aged sixteen. All had taken Native Studies 20 together during the winter semester of 1996 with the same teacher. I contacted these students after gaining permission from the school board.

Attempts were made to contact all seventeen students enrolled in the Native Studies 20 class by telephone. Several of the numbers were no longer in use. Direct contact was made with only six of the seventeen students--four females and two males. Each student was given information about the study and asked if he or she was Aboriginal. All were told that my research was about Native Studies 20 and the curriculum's specific

goals. Each student was asked if he or she would volunteer and be interviewed about their experiences in Native Studies 20. Each person was given the option to leave the study at any time.

I attempted to maintain a balance in gender even though the following criteria for selection of students were used: they must be of Aboriginal ancestry, have completed Native Studies 20, and be willing to participate. Balance is the central principle of the Sacred Circle. In all, six persons, three female students and one male student, volunteered to take part. A male Aboriginal teacher and a male Elder complete the balance.

All six participants were of Aboriginal ancestry, either Indian or Metis. The decision to include an Elder in the study is grounded in Aboriginal epistemology. As Ermine (1995) contends, "the Old Ones knew the intricate and tedious task of fusing the energy that emits from the place of prayer within" (p. 109). "Prayer," he continues, "becomes power and by its very nature becomes another instrument in Aboriginal ways of knowing" (p. 109). Interviewing the Elder provided further insight into the possible changes needed to help Aboriginal students develop a positive self-concept and sense of cultural identity. He provided knowledge needed for analysis and interpretation which only an Elder possesses. My analysis sought to discover growth in self-concept and cultural identity when studying a Native Studies course grounded in Aboriginal pedagogy and epistemology.

### Data Collection

Story telling is part of the oral tradition among Aboriginal people in many nations. It is an important mode of communication. Story telling allows the participants to reflect upon their past experiences and illustrate, through their stories, the forces that have shaped their lives. Using story telling as a data collection tool also provided opportunities for me to gain insights into participants' feelings and interpretations of the Native Studies 20 course.

According to Nesper and Barylske (1991),

Oral narratives are culturally specific representational technologies for moving past and distant events (usually ones in which the speaker can claim to have participated) into the context of the story telling. There are ways for the speaker to "craft a self" from the cacophony of experience, to control (by creating) one's own life (p. 809).

The students participated with me in a dialogue which crafted our own stories.

There are sometimes questions about "cultural 'authenticity'" because in the past knowledge was always passed on the oral way. It is only now that the "written word" is being used and recognized as a tool for stories of oral cultures to continue. It is through these that knowledge and sacred practices among the generations young and old are learned (Graveline, 1998). Many Aboriginal scholars are convinced that speech reveals truth and has a special place in research (Ermine, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Graveline, 1998; Regnier, 1995).

Each participant's audiotaped interview ran approximately 60 minutes. The initial

questions were general and open-ended; further probing was tailored to the individual participant according to the feedback he or she provided to the general questions. This procedure was followed until all the interview questions were addressed. Open-ended questions were used to guide each interview. Immediately after each interview I wrote field notes which contained observations of body language, personal information about the participants and about anything else I thought would be helpful to me.

The Native Studies 20 curriculum was examined prior to the interviews. This was to ensure the appropriate use of language was used while interviewing the participants.

Patton (1980) warns that:

Interviews are a limited source of data because participants and staff can only report their perceptions of and perspectives on what has happened. Those perspectives and perceptions are subject to distortion due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics and simple lack of awareness. Interview data can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time the interview takes place (p. 157).

With Patton's warning in mind, I kept field notes for each participant. These field notes made the interview data more reliable. They provided additional information about each participant not covered in the interview.

In using story telling as my main data collection tool, I had to be aware of a number of potential problems, the largest one being "trustworthiness" (Patton, 1980). I had to establish a mutual understanding with each student. It was possible that each interviewee's story would not reflect his or her true voice. Participants may have said



what they thought I wanted to hear. I was also concerned about my position as a teacher, even though I was not their teacher. Would the participant react to me as an authority figure? How the participant perceived our relationship in the research would be important (McLean, Danzig, McGraw, Aleman & Reese, 1994; Patton, 1980; Van Manen, 1992).

I practised "active listening," using both my eyes and my ears. This allowed me the opportunity to monitor the interviewing process of each participant. I determined when to redirect the flow of the interview or when to ask for clarification. Throughout the interview, I had to be extremely careful not to allow my voice to become the dominant one. This was accomplished through the careful and brief wording of questions and active listening. Patton (1980) cautions that "the clarity of interview questions will depend on understanding what language participants use among themselves in talking about program activities and other aspects of program life" (p. 225).

Other concerns revolved around authenticity and validity. How authentic was the story for both the teller and the reader? How valid was my interpretation? This relates to trustworthiness and to the relationship I had established with each of the participants (McLean et. al., 1994). Audiotaping ensured that the interviews were recorded verbatim. These tapes provided me with an accurate account of each interview. Field notes of casual conversations before and after each interview allowed me to obtain more data from participants, and allowed them an opportunity to better understand me. These

conversations were an opportunity to converse freely with each person about topics and personal information indirectly related to the research. They enriched our dialogues and built our relationships.

At the end of each interview the data were transcribed. Because the data could provide highly personal views and be contradictory, I decided from the outset they would have to be reviewed for possible clarification. I met again with each participant to review and to revise his or her interview. Story telling is the traditional way to pass on knowledge and it connects us closely to Aboriginal cultures. I felt obligated to follow the traditional ways, not only to show respect for the Elders and the community, but also for the Aboriginal participants. My goal was to record as accurately as possible the voice of each participant, so after each story was completed a second meeting was held. Each review and revision session lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

Upon completion of this portion of the study, the data were examined for themes using the processes of open coding, finding the themes; axial coding, refining the themes; and selective coding, finding the stories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My analysis sought influences on self-concept and cultural identity.

#### Verifying Data Analysis and Interpretation

I used the grounded theory method that was originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967); and later expanded on by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin

(1990). The grounded theory method is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon. The research findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers, or a group of loosely related themes. Through this methodology, concepts and the relationships among them are generated.

Coding. Each interview was transcribed and examined verbatim. Then each individual interview was read over again. This part of the process allowed me the opportunity to conceptualize each participant's main ideas. A line by line (open coded) analysis of what was said was completed for each interview. As the analysis progressed, I noted data that were significant in analysis notes. All of the interviews were done this way. I continued to examine the material to see what codes and categories were emerging. As time passed, I was able to reflect on what I had done with the interviews.

After open coding, I listed the words I had compiled from the conversations. Each word was written on a sticky note and placed on chart paper. These sticky notes were sorted into themes. Once these categories were complete, I was able to determine how they related to each other in flow charts. I examined and re-examined each category to see that the codes fit appropriately for each emerging theme. Each theme was recorded with all of the codes. This completed an axial coding process.

Finding the stories. I reviewed the data and re-examined the process I had gone through. I began to craft the stories. Each story was written to reveal the participant's experience as clearly and validly as possible. If the stories were valid, the participants would recognize themselves. These stories will be told in the sections, Northern Door: Heavenly Voices and Mother Earth: Grounding in the Earth.

### Setting

Each student participant was given the option of being interviewed in my home or at an Aboriginal educational institution. Three student participants chose to be interviewed in my home; the fourth chose the institution. The teacher was given three choices--a restaurant, his home, or mine. The teacher chose to be interviewed in his home. The Elder was given two choices--his home on the reserve or my home. The Elder chose his home.

I let the participants pick the location for the interview because it allowed each person the opportunity to have some input into the decision making about the research process. For the students, it was an opportunity to show them they were important. It also helped make them more comfortable with the process. Allowing participants to choose the location helped set the stage and tone for the interviews. The teacher and the Elder both lived out of town. Instead of incurring travel costs for them, I drove out to their homes. The time spent driving gave me an opportunity to prepare for the interview

on the way out and to reflect on what had taken place on the way back.

### Interviews

All participant names are pseudonyms. I assigned them according to the personality and characteristics I saw in each participant. Animals represent values in many traditional stories of the Sacred Circle. I adopted this practice to honor these teachings. For example, Sparrow is Sparrow because she reminded me of one (see Figure 2). The first interview was with (*Sparrow*). At the time, it seemed that I had done all the speaking. Many of her responses were "I don't know." This made it difficult to transcribe and read her interview. Even the open-ended questions I had prepared did not seem to help. I found I had to ask other questions in order for her to feel comfortable enough to answer. At the end of the interview, she explained that she was a very shy person. She felt the interview went well. I said yes. In reviewing the tape, I found I had more data than I had originally thought.

The second interview involved (*Hawk*). It was difficult to tell how (*Hawk*) was feeling about her interview. She appeared to be very determined. She was not about to let anyone take advantage of her. In the beginning, she was reluctant to volunteer information. But as the interview progressed, she provided more. During the interview there were times when she replied "I don't know" or "you know." When the interview was transcribed, it was difficult to understand. Once I removed those phrases, however,

**SPIRIT**  
Spirituality  
Service  
Identity  
Foundation  
*CENTER SKY*

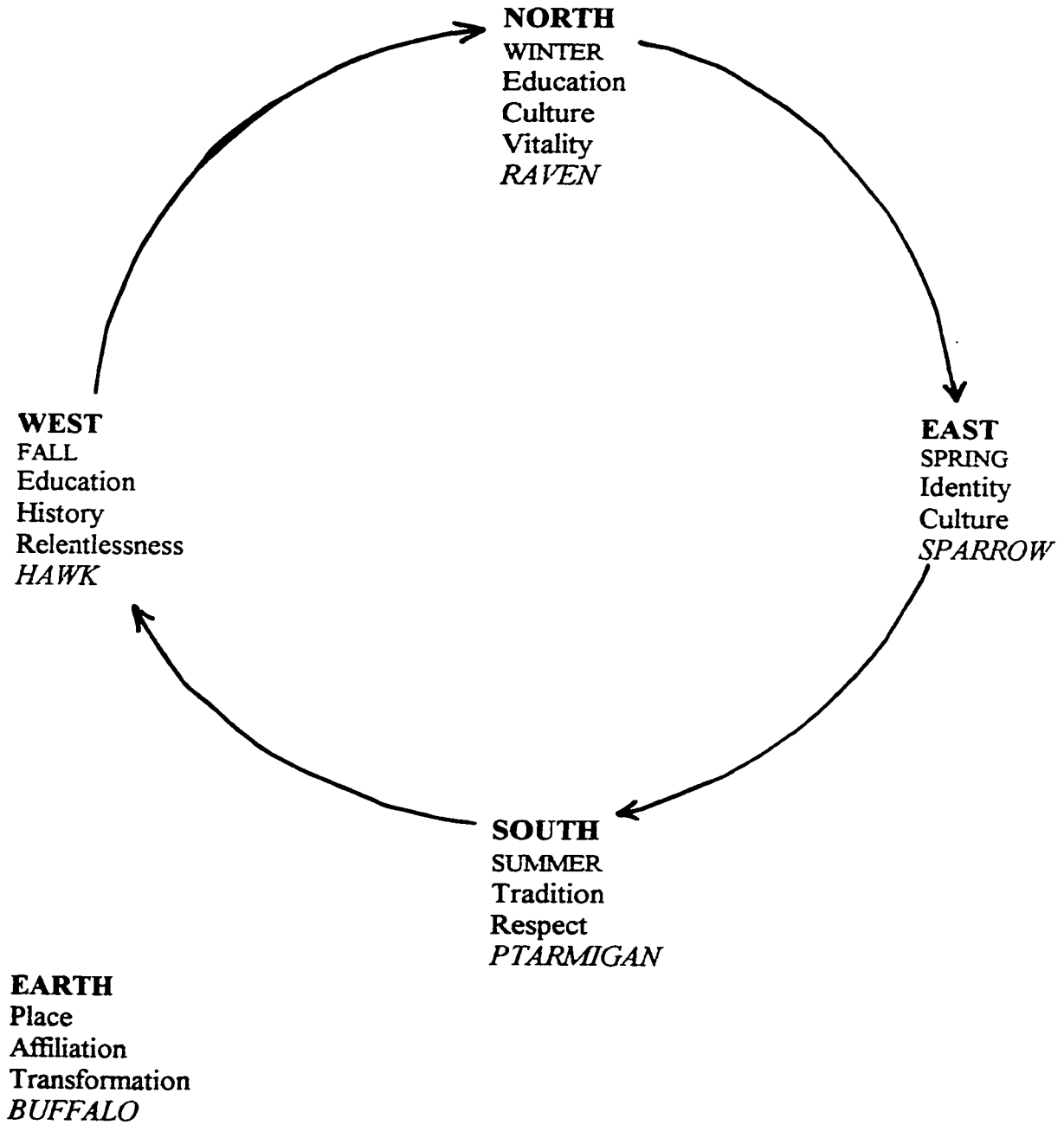


Figure 2.

How I saw each participant as each one related to the Sacred Circle.

information made more sense.

The third interview involved (*Ptarmigan*). His interview went rather well. This may have been due to the fact that by that time I had already completed two interviews and knew what to expect. I had a better idea of how to approach any level in the conversation. (*Ptarmigan*) was eager to help, and provided a lot of information. Furthermore, he said he was quite comfortable with the process.

The final student interviewed was (*Raven*). Despite the fact that the interview took place in an institutional setting, she was the most relaxed. In this interview I said very little, simply asking the questions. After we had introduced ourselves, the conversation flowed. (*Raven*) volunteered an abundance of information, as if she was talking to a friend or family member.

The fifth interview took place at the home of the teacher (*Buffalo*). Prior to it, we had already had several informal conversations about my study. When I asked the interview questions, he seemed to speak freely. As rapport had previously been established, the interview flowed quickly.

The interview with the Elder (*Center Sky*) was the easiest, and yet at the same time the hardest. This interview followed traditional Aboriginal teaching and story telling protocols. First, the Elder took the questions from me and silently read them over. Then he began talking, while I sat there, listening and drinking coffee. The stories he told were

many. I found him very interesting to listen to, but was unsure I had received all the information I was looking for. There were times too when I felt that the questions did not ask for the right kinds of information. This was the first time that I had formally interviewed an Elder. When I left his home, I was not sure I had understood everything he had said. It was not until I had transcribed and read the material that I realized I had much more information than I had originally thought. I was now left with the problem of which parts to use. Upon further examination of the material, I decided to use the information that best characterized and outlined the Elder in relation to the other participants.

Northern Door: Heavenly Voices tells the stories of the Elder, the teacher and the four students. It is hoped that the reader becomes actively involved in the stories, making his or her own interpretations. In Mother Earth: Grounding in the Earth, I discuss my interpretations of these stories.



## Northern Door: Heavenly Voices

With your eyes open you have to go somewhere. Yet a culture is never reducible to what meets the eye, you can't get to ethnographic reality by just looking. A culture is like a black hole, those compacted stars whose intense gravitational forces don't let their own light particles escape. You can never know it's there by simply squinting your eyes and staring very hard at it. If it is real at all, you can know it only by inference and conjecture (Shweder, 1986, p. 38, as cited in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 153).

In respect to the Sacred Circle, I have placed each participant according to the place on the Circle where their characteristics and learning tasks fit. For example, Raven is in the North because she displayed intellectual vitality and a search for wisdom. Center Sky's story comes first. The Elder's are the foundation of knowledge and learning.

### Center Sky

Now today when I think back, to the old people - especially what [my grandfather] used to tell me: 'In time to come, a whole lot of our white brothers are going to come to you.' Today I see that. (Interview, August 1996).

This story is taken from the interview with a recognized Elder from a south Saskatchewan reserve. Center Sky was educated in both the western and the Aboriginal worlds. He is involved in numerous cultural activities and works with both Aboriginal and Canadian organizations in such areas as justice and education. He is a firm believer in knowing and practicing his culture and speaking his native tongue at all times. However, during the interview, Center Sky spoke to me in English.

*I was taught by my grandfather and father over the years and during that time I learned many things. For example, from the old people, I have been taught that the Cree originated from the bush and they travelled to the Prairies. And when you look at the*

*Bush Cree today, their actions and movements and everything are still the same as us.*

*In order to understand who I am today, you need to understand some of my past.*

*I'll tell you a story. One time my father and I were out in the bush. We found some eggs, bush chicken eggs—twelve of them. We were out cutting pickets at the time. "Dad," I said, "Look what I found. Some bush chicken eggs." Dad said we would have them for dinner and he would cook them. We had nothing, not even a pot. But we did have a big fire. My dad took those ashes and started pushing them with a stick. Then he shoved those eggs all in a line and covered them with those ashes. In five to ten minutes, those eggs were cooked.*

*Then in 1934, there was the time when I was expected to be in school when I learned how to catch a coyote with my uncle. I was always being taught along the way, even as I got older, by people like my grandfather, dad and uncle. We were in the bush over here and my uncle was with me. We had a little axe, a little hatchet. We had seen a coyote track, but we had no trap. My uncle said "We are going to catch that coyote," and I said to him "But we have no snare wire." He said we were going to make a trap, an Indian trap. I learned lots that day, by golly. I had to cut so many branches. We formed a little house. It was pretty neat how we made that trap. My uncle then told me that it would take a little time before the coyote came back, but he would come back again. Maybe in a week or two he would return on this trail again and when he did, that coyote*

*would smell something real nice. A little while later, the coyote returned. He stuck his head in the trap first, and then in he went. The first thing you know, a big log about five or six feet long came down. Bang! We had got him. That's how it was done. There were lots of interesting things to learn. For example, in the past, the old people used to say "No, I can't say that I know more than you. No, we're all level. There's only one that knows more than us and that is our Creator." That's what I heard them say. Now today, I still maintain that attitude.*

*When I was in school, our Native ways were never recognized. No, not in my school. I was never allowed to speak my Native tongue. If I did, then the muns would try to kill you with rulers or broom handles or mop handles—whatever they could get their hands on. They were taught to do that: to try and abolish our Native ways. There was not even one line of study in the Native way for them to teach us. They just tried to abolish our ways, and this was done all over. Why did they do that? Who was behind them? This was wrong. Today I still hear a lot of old men and ladies talking about the same thing. Even though this occurred, I would have to say there were a lot of things I learned the Native way that I didn't learn at school. The same applied over here on the reserve. I didn't see the things taught in school being taught back at the homeland.*

*And as my grandfather said to me, our Native ways with their ways, we are all level. We are all equal. We should try to understand each other. That is why I feel*

*sorry for these Catholic nuns and people today. I believe that we are equal and have something to contribute.*

*Another belief I learned and teach today is that a person should know their culture and their identity, and speak their native tongue. It is a priority. It gives you that brotherly feeling. I was taught it is a way of promoting yourself all the time. As the old people say, "Be proud of who you are and don't overrate yourself above anyone." It is important to remember we are all equal.*

*For example, when you enter a Chinese restaurant all you hear is them speaking their language, talking their native way. I believe that you should not put your language aside. You should use your Cree tongue. We urge you. We push you to use it. It is important that you practise that role at all times.*

*When I was young, I went to Elders because they had knowledge and experience. A presentation [of tobacco] was made to ask them to teach me. Then I was able to pass it on to somebody else. That was how I was taught. Today, that is the same way I do it. I was taught not to keep the information inside. It was meant to be passed on and shared. I was told that this is a good way of doing things.*

*My grandfather taught me many things. One day I was holding a yellow pencil and my grandfather took it from me. He said, "Grandchild, someday this is what you will be using. Not that axe and not that fork. You will have different ways of surviving. You*

*have to understand that."*

*So, that's why I talk quite a bit about unity and about the four colours of people from all over the world. I teach about sitting together in the circle and that brotherly feeling. I believe the only way that we can get along in this world is by helping one another, and by understanding one another. This is where we are today. That's why I think it is a priority to have a Native instructor or Native resource person to talk to students and others. This way they can expand their minds about Aboriginal culture.*

*In the city, especially nowadays, there are a lot of young men and women who only go so far in their studies. A lot of these young people are unsure of themselves. They feel they do not have anyone behind them to help them along the way so they drop out. I see lots of young men aged fifteen, sixteen, who drop out because they do not have that interest or support. And in order to build that interest, students need to ask an Aboriginal person to come into their school. This way, they will want to learn more about Native Studies. I think this is a good way to start. But to have a White person go in there and start talking and reading from a book--no...o...o. That is no good. There is a lot of that happening today. I have heard of a lot of these White teachers talking about Native issues. What would they understand? What would they know? You have got to get right to the very heart of a person for them to be taught. As stated before, the only way we can fit in together is to help one another and try to understand one another. We*

*are to try to understand the person, even if he is a stranger. The time has come.*

### Buffalo

Buffalo is called Buffalo because he was grounded in the Earth of Aboriginal knowledge. This story is taken from the interview of a teacher who is a Saskatchewan Metis. He has been teaching for seventeen years and has two degrees—one in physical education and another in Native Studies. He was raised in a rural area and became very interested in Native Studies in an elective class when he took his physical education degree. He pursued this interest. This is his story.

*After taking the Native Studies elective class, I knew I wanted to further develop my interest in the area of Native Studies, so I began to take classes at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. At the time, there were only six classes available. Now there are at least a hundred. That is how I got started. Then as I became more interested in the area, I began talking to Elders. This is where I learned the most. Books were okay, but I learned more from speaking to the Elders and going to sweats [sweat lodges] and ceremonies. There I learned a lot, and I found the more I learned, the more I did not understand. It was never ending. It felt the more I knew, the less I knew.*

*For example, when I was working in the re-entry program [a program for high risk students] I got a chance to go to a ceremony. It was one where you get ready for the Sun Dance Ceremony. I was involved with a group of people, and the pipe was used. I*

*knew what to do during the pipe ceremony, but when it came to going down the hill to the place where all the ceremonies were to be held, I was unsure of myself. One of the men began to walk backwards, so I did the same. A guy tapped me and said, "No! No! No!" I soon discovered that person was one of the clowns, and they were supposed to do everything backwards. So, like I said before, this is where I learned the most—from watching and asking lots of questions. That was one embarrassing moment, yet it was funny too.*

*Over the years, I have also had the opportunity to see kids experience their first sweat, and I have seen them come out of there with pride on their faces. That is really nice to see, especially for the kids who do not know that much about themselves as a person, let alone for the Indian or Metis person. Talking to the Elders, the kids discover who they are. It is moments like this that you can't capture in books.*

*Presently, I am teaching Native Studies at the high school level, and I have come across a number of barriers. Whether people like it or not, we live in a multicultural society, and we have got to know each other. Unfortunately, our history has been left out of the school curriculum. We are unique. Europeans can go back to Europe for their language and culture. As Aboriginal people, where do we go? I mean the buck stops here. Let's face it. We live in a society that is fairly racist. The only way we are going to change these attitudes is to have people understand treaty rights and learn the history;*

*not from the Europeans' point of view, but from ours.*

*From what I have seen, there is a lot of reluctance on the part of a teacher to teach Native Studies. Many times, teachers are asked to teach Native Studies, but they have no background in it. Many of them are of European descent. They want to do a good job, but they are unsure of where to go. A lot of people that are reluctant about Native Studies have said, "Why are we taking this? If we are going to have Native Studies, why don't we have German Studies?" It is the old boys' club, and that attitude has to change because there is a reflection on new teachers coming into the system. They sort of admire these guys because they have been there forever and ever. I would like to see those people who have to push Native Studies, do it in a positive way rather than say, "Oh, do we have to do this?" I guess the bottom line is that I would like to see more Aboriginal people teaching Native Studies. I have a lot at stake here because when I teach it, it is really important to me. It is part of my identity. I would like to see more Aboriginals, just for the role modelling.*

*I think human resources (Elders) are really important. It is not my place to talk about spirituality. The spiritual element is an important aspect of Aboriginal culture. There has to be some mechanism in place to bring in Elders. That is going to cost money. Unfortunately, I don't think the people in charge of funding really understand. One of the problems is that you hate to see an Elder come in and not give him an*



*honorarium. We do not always have the money in place. I like to use Elders, and positive role models from the community. Unfortunately, we lost Gordon Wasteste. He came in all the time. But, he died. The more people you bring in from the community, the more insight your kids can get into the community itself. We were to have a traditional counsellor at our school, but that never happened. So, we just try to get people. I tell the kids that if they have somebody that they think would come in and talk, they should feel free to bring him in. I think word of mouth is best. Then the kids feel real comfortable that you are sincere, that you will take time for them. You know, it is their classroom.*

*Native Studies is a valid and respected discipline. People have to understand we are a young discipline. The general public has to learn about treaty rights, and what is going on, because there are so many negatives in the media. Native Studies classes are really important. These classes can help try to change the negative stereotypes everywhere. I think it is a hard sell though, because first of all, we have to convince the boards that we work for, that Native Studies is valid. My feeling is they are going through the motions. The bottom line is that it is up to us, the teachers, to do the best possible job to get the students stimulated, so they will take classes in the future. They are the future parents, so I know we are starting in the right place.*

*In my classroom, I have the desks in a circle. All teachers have their own*

*structures. Mine is designed this way because it encourages the students to talk, and I believe it stands for equality. I run my room fairly "loosey goosey." It is a relaxing atmosphere, so the kids can explore. I allow the students to wear hats, and eat in the classroom. If a student has a spill, then he is expected to clean it up. The students are also allowed to call me by my first name. I feel that the students respect that. In my class, the students are allowed to be themselves, and who would not like that? If an Elder comes in, the students know to take their hats off. I believe when kids are having fun, then they forget themselves, and they are willing to learn. It is a comfortable room because the students have painted murals of Aboriginal scenery. People who have come into the room have said "It's a nice room." The kids do all of the artwork and I put it up. It is their room. I am running out of room for the drawings, so I am going to have to use the ceiling soon. The drawings are impressive. There is some pretty fine artwork in there.*

*My class is the first period of the day. When the class starts, I might have three students. Around 9 a.m., I might be up to twelve students. The students tend to come in late, so instead of waiting, I would give them a short assignment. Because many of my students do not like a lot of reading, I would bring in newspaper articles. The students would read them, and then we would discuss them. Once more students arrived, then I would get into the "meat and potatoes" of the course for the day.*

*One of my goals is to make the students feel good about themselves, especially if they are Aboriginal, because of all those negative stereotypes out there. One of the things I tell my kids about life in general is that ninety percent of your energy should be spent on solutions and ten percent on problems. However, it seems to be the other way around. I want my students to have some good problem solving skills. I am interested in giving them some problem situations, and having them write up in some kind of format how they are going to deal with the problem, what the problem is, what is behind the problem and some solutions. I get the students to write papers and do art. They have a choice. I also like the kids to work in groups on their papers, but I tell them to be careful who their partner is because some of them miss a lot. I give oral exams, so I can see what the student has to say, rather than what they memorize. I expect kids to be there, so I give a mark for participation to encourage this. There is also a certain amount of work I expect from each one, and if the student finishes early, then I give them a bonus mark.*

*I do not like to fail kids. It is pretty hard to fail in my class, but the student is expected to do the work. Sometimes when I return to school, I hope to have some kids that have worked over the summer. But they won't, so I will give them a month to hand in the assignments they owe. At the end of the semester, some will still receive an incomplete. They still have to do the work though, so I give them a transcript of what they owe, and the due dates. I usually get about five students who have not finished by*

*the end of the semester. I give those ones incompletes, and they are expected to finish over the holidays or soon after. I try to sit down with the students who have incompletes when they come back, and discuss their assignments. There is always a danger that a student will not return, but that student will not have made it anywhere else.*

*I like the idea that all the teachers at this high school have the choice of giving incompletes to the students even though they did not finish the class. It works out quite well. I feel that all students should have that opportunity. The kids are willing to realize that they have made a few mistakes, and they learn from them. Why should the student have to repeat the whole class?*

#### Sparrow from the East

This student was nineteen at the time of the interview. She is an Aboriginal from Manitoba. Most of her upbringing is urban.

*I took Native Studies in grade ten. It helped me to understand what Native Studies 20 was going to be like. When I was picking my classes, I noticed that class, so I decided to take it. It sounded interesting.*

*In my grade ten Native Studies class, the teacher expected you to have everything done on time. If you did not have it done, then he docked you marks. He never really talked to us like my Native Studies 20 teacher did. This teacher had us sit there and work. He used handouts from a book he had. The articles were about Aboriginal people,*

*marriage and hunting. It was not stuff that I knew really.*

*Our classroom for Native Studies 20 was in a big circle. I liked that because we were not sitting there looking straight up at the board. You could look around and talk to everybody. It made it easier to have a conversation, and the teacher sat or stood right in the middle. We all talked. It was a friendlier atmosphere than in a regular classroom.*

*In Native Studies 20, at the beginning of our class, the teacher made us all say our names. We all said something we felt after we said our names. It helped us to get to know everybody's name and everything. I am shy, but after a couple of days in that class, being able to sit there and watch everybody, it became easier for me to talk. I did not really know anyone from before, so sitting in the circle helped me talk to the other students, even though I barely knew anyone. Before, I could not have done that because I am a shy person, really shy.*

*We had lots of discussions. Whenever anybody brought something up about any subject, we sat there and discussed it. We got to put in our say, what we felt about a subject. Almost everyday, someone brought something up and we talked. I guess it kept us from doing our work. For example, this one female student started talking about something right in the middle of class when the teacher was talking. She said, "Oh I had a dream" and then from there on we all stopped and listened. The teacher even stopped the class while she told us about her dream. Then when she finished, the teacher went*

*back to teaching. Then somebody else started talking and that is how the class proceeded. It was a big conversation. Everybody got to add their own comments.*

*The teacher was a real fun guy.*

*The teacher expected us to learn from what he was teaching us. After every assignment, he wrote these little notes on what he thought of it. He made it personal. He really cared about how you were doing in your classes. He made us feel pretty good because he never failed anybody. He marked us mostly on what we knew and what we learned.*

*I liked the questions at the end of almost every assignment. He wanted your personal opinion on the article. I think that is what he really marked us on—your opinions. I liked those assignments best, because I got to put in my own say and how I felt about it. I read the article and wrote something under it. I remember on the end of one of mine, the teacher wrote this, "You are the future leader." I thought this was funny.*

*I liked the whole class—the whole idea of it, Native Studies, learning about my culture, and about all the other stuff. It was a good class and you learned from it, especially if you were there all the time. I do not remember many of the assignments, but I remember the teacher. Everybody liked the teacher. He was such a good teacher. He was different from all the rest. He was not uptight about anything. You could joke around with him. You could say anything to him, and he joked around back with you.*

*You could bug him, bug him all the time, and he did not get angry. He never got angry. If he did, he never showed it.*

*It was fun because the teacher was an interesting guy. He made it fun. We played games, silly little games. For example, we played one where you had to line up the desks in the middle of the room. You had to sit there with your hand like this and close your eyes. Then he started over here. He hit one of the hands, then that student hit another one and then we went all the way down the line. Whoever got to the end first, grabbed something on the desk. Whoever grabbed it first, got a point, and then we played the game over again. Everyone participated. The White students were right in there too.*

*We had to do a project. There were a lot of projects on health and education. We all worked in a group and he marked us on it. My topic was on health; some diseases like diabetes and bronchitis on the reserves. I found out there are quite a few people who have diabetes. Some of them do not even know they have it. There is diabetes in my family too. My aunties, my grandma and my mom have it. I worry about them a lot, and how they are doing because they live in Manitoba. We always try and go up there, especially when my grandma or auntie is in the hospital.*

*We did one assignment on role models like Tina Keeper and Theresa Stephenson. There was a big stack of names to choose from. For our assignment we picked three,*

*and then wrote on them. We also wrote one about ourselves, and how we considered ourselves to be role models. Tina Keeper did not even think she would be an actress. She just wanted to get her degree. Then her friend talked her into going to an audition. Suddenly, she got the part and was on **North of Sixty**. In the article, she said it would be best to stay in school and finish your education before you plan on doing what you want to do.*

*When I think about Indian and Metis people, they are not highly regarded. That is how I feel. I am not really sure. Sometimes they are treated equally, and then again sometimes they are not. People do not really listen to them. For example, when they were going to shut down our school, the school board did not worry about the community and how people felt. The school board decided that they were going to close the school down. Then a whole bunch of us from the school and community attended some meetings. I was angry about this school closure because I was attending this school. I really enjoyed our school.*

*I think that everybody, especially around the central area, should go to school. It would make me really happy to see them all going to school, instead of sitting around and doing nothing--doing whatever they do. I do not think we will ever see that though. I want to stay in school because I really want to make my parents happy. My brother graduated, and my sister started having kids when she was young. She was only sixteen.*



*Now she has her third child and she is only twenty-one. All she has is her grade ten.*

*That is why I am really trying to stay in school: trying to do something with myself, instead of ending up like my sister. She does not really do anything except stay home.*

*I thought I would like to be recognized for something. It came up in a conversation not even a month ago. We were all sitting around doing nothing. We were all talking, all of my friends. I said that I wanted to be recognized, like Tina Keeper, and they felt the same as I did.*

*Native Studies helps us recognize things that are going on around the world. We would not even know about it if we did not have this class. I think it helps students open their eyes.*

#### Ptarmigan from the South

This story is taken from the only male student I interviewed. His mother is Inuit from the Arctic and his father is German. He had the opportunity to take Native Studies since grade eight. This student met his mother's relatives for the first time in seven years. At the time of this interview, his grandfather and auntie were visiting from the Arctic.

*I was in grade eight when they offered a choice of classes, Social Studies or Native Studies at my school. [It was a school which emphasized Aboriginal ideas and had a majority of Aboriginal students.] I began taking Native Studies back then. I think it is very interesting because you learn about ancestors, what they did and how certain things*

*affected them, like the residential schools. We also learned what they did during a normal day's life and how the Indian people and White people fought--how those wars ended and how they were resolved. It is an interesting class because it gives you credit during high school.*

*Our Native Studies for this year was in the winter semester. It was the first period of the day, so everyone walked in late because they were tired. Then our teacher gave us an outline on what we were to do for that day and we completed the day's work. He also gave out handouts and other work to do. If we finished early, we were able to complete other work we needed to catch up on. Sometimes the teacher gave us a break. He let us go down to the gym or watch a movie.*

*In class the desks were set up in a half circle so the students were all treated equally. They could look every other student in the face. If you did not have an assignment done on time, he gave you an extra two days or so to get it finished. If he thought we had worked for the past couple of weeks, he let us have a day off. He also let people do artwork on the walls so the room did not have that classroom look. We got to talk in class. It was fun.*

*Because our class was first thing in the morning and only three boys were registered in the class, I felt out of place sometimes. There were numerous occasions when I was the only boy in the class besides the teacher. But I would have to say that, on*

*the whole, I liked the working environment. The class was fun because the teacher let us do things at our own pace. If we had a test on the same day in a different subject, he let us study. He gave us a lot of breaks, but you had to catch up on your homework. And when we asked our teacher for help, at first he joked around with us and said, "No, I can't help you," but then he came over and assisted. He was pretty informative.*

*The room was interesting. There was artwork all over. One drawing had a wolf and person in it. It was drawn in black and white. Another one was of an Olympic setting. There were people participating in track and field, playing volleyball, basketball and other sports. There was another picture of a buffalo and it showed how the Cree use every part of the animal for food, clothes and blankets. And the last picture I remember was of a playground. It had different cultured children playing together and this picture represented unity. That is what I remember.*

*The assignment that had the most impact on me was the course we completed on the residential schools and how badly it hurt the population. The students who went to the residential schools could not even speak their own language. They could not do any of the ceremonies. Basically, the White people were trying to assimilate the Native people, take away their culture and try to make them White. People today are still hurt by the effects of the residential schools.*

*Why did they have to have residential schools? Why couldn't the Native people,*

*the kids, stay with their families? Why did the White people take the Native children away from their families? We watched a film on the residential schools. In this film we got to see the impact the residential schools had on Native people. There were a lot of people who were angry or upset and sad about what had happened. I can remember we had quite a discussion.*

*Then there was an assignment about the baby boom, the Native baby boom. There was a course on how the Cree ancestors lived, what their days were like, their religions and family roles. There was another assignment on housing shortages on the reserves. And we learned about forests being cut down in the Queen Charlotte Islands and how the forests were also cut down in South America. They were cut down to make way for the dams and mines.*

*I remember learning about family as well. We were taught that if a child was born and the parents died, the child was then taken care of by the family or the clan that surrounded that child. We were given some information about spiritual ceremonies like the sweet grass ceremony and the sweat lodge.*

*We also went on a trip to Wanaskewin, but I could not go because I had to go to another high school for a conference. This conference was about identity. We helped the spokesperson with things he needed.*

*The conference's focus was on Native people and the racism and prejudice they*

*experience. We watched a film called For Angela. The film was about Angela and her mother taking a bus. Before the little girl and her mother got on the bus, three White students came up to the bus stop and started to joke around about Native people. In the film, the students sang, "One little, two little, three little Indians" and they made comments like "Do you smell something? Do you smell lysol or antifreeze?"*

*On the bus, the three White boys continued to taunt Angela and her mother by using cartoon voices, "Me wantum princess." The boys talked to Angela about her hair and braids. By the end of the film, one of the three boys threw money at Angela's mother and told her to go and buy a bottle of lysol on him. Then Angela and her mother returned home and Angela drew a picture of her family. She asked her mother which crayon should she use—light brown or dark brown. The mother pointed to the darker colour, but in the film, Angela said "I want the light colour because it is a nicer colour." She used the flesh tone instead. When Angela got ready for bed, she cut off her braids. She did not want to be an Indian anymore.*

*After the film was over, I felt angry because of the way some people treat others. I remember other students making comments. It was interesting to find out that others were not the racist type to laugh or state, "That is what I would have done." They were actually angry about what had happened in the film.*

*During the semester, our school hosted a conference on racism. We invited six*

*or seven other high schools. We had two or three speakers. One discussed art and the other was a storyteller. Some of the Student Representative Council (SRC) members introduced or explained what the conference was about. After the speakers in the morning, we had lunch at the community centre where we ate bannock and soup. In the afternoon the students attended a dreamcatcher workshop where we all learned to make one. It was fun. I met up with a lot of friends I had not seen in a long time from different schools and I talked to them.*

*My mother makes dreamcatchers for a living, so I whizzed through mine in a half hour or so. Then students were asking me if I could help them. They would say things like "I don't know how to do this." This made me feel good, because I knew I had a talent that others noticed. I could help them improve.*

*The dreamcatcher I made had purple leather around the ring with sinew and black beads. There were black and white feathers that hung from the middle. I gave mine to my mentor in the mentorship program at the end of the year.*

*Since taking Native Studies, I learned to control my anger and my temper. I now know there are a lot of people facing racism just like I have. I understand you cannot defeat racism by using force or anger. I learned this from watching the movies and by discussing the handouts that talked about different people facing racism and how they tried to use force to get rid of it. It did not work. For example, we watched a film called*

*Lakota Woman. The woman in this film attended a residential school, did drugs and alcohol, ended up in jail and was involved with a group called AIM (the American Indian Movement). This woman and the people from AIM went to Wounded Knee, where they protested and had a standoff. In the end it might have helped, but none of their problems were resolved at the standoff.*

*I remember this one time when my mother and I went shopping in the south end of town. People were looking funny at us. It was as if they were saying, "What are you doing here? You don't fit in." We received a lot of dirty looks from all those people. It made me feel angry. I wondered, "Why can't we shop here? We're people too! Why are we being treated differently?"*

*Once I was talking with my father's relatives from Ontario and we discussed how they used to use horse and buggy. Then we talked about my Native Studies class, what I had learned and how interesting it was to learn about our ancestors, our race, in school. This discussion made me feel good. I began to think, wouldn't it be nice to have an all Native school. A place where, if you were Native, you would feel in place. You would have people to talk to and you would not have to face as much racism or prejudice.*

*When I thought about my class, I felt it was preparing me for the future. It gave me skills to face racism and information as to what is available for Aboriginal people in the area of work. Our teacher was always telling us to become politicians so we could*

*take a stand for Native people. This class gave us hope. It helped me to realize that Natives are not at the very bottom. We can get somewhere. We can make a difference.*

### Hawk from the West

This female student was eighteen when she took Native Studies 20. Her class was in the winter semester. She was born in a small town in southern Saskatchewan and has lived in an urban, rural and reserve settings. She is a Lakota Indian. This is her story.

*I first heard about Native Studies from a high school teacher I had while attending a small town high school. At the time, I had no idea that Native Studies existed. It was not until this teacher told me about it. After hearing this information, I became interested in the class. I registered in the Native Studies 10 class. I never finished it.*

*I remember that class made me feel good about myself. I felt good because I was with all those other Indian kids. I was happy they had a class where we were all learning about Natives and what had happened. Then I moved into the city, and in grade eleven, I took Native Studies 20.*

*This was a neat class! Our teacher gave us handouts and he expected us to read them. Sometimes we watched films and had discussions. We were allowed to express our own opinions and speak freely. The teacher did not make me feel constricted or anything. I could say whatever I wanted and the teacher knew exactly what I meant.*



*I felt it was a good class because non-Indian students opened their eyes about Indians.*

*They did not see Indians the way they were stereotyped. I really liked this class. It made me happy to see my classmates trying to understand.*

*Our classroom was set in a circle. The desks were placed so the students could see everybody. No one was above anybody or below them, but beside one another. The teacher's desk was at the back of the room and there was lots of artwork on the walls. There was an eagle, a mural of a playground and a buffalo poster on one wall. This was a very comfortable room for me because the desks were not in rows. It was easier for me to learn.*

*I remember the beginning of this semester, I felt afraid I was going to offend the non-Native students, but by the middle of the class I discovered they knew as much as I did. By the end of the semester, you could see the non-Native students felt the same as the Indian kids. Their opinions on the issues were pretty much the same as ours.*

*I remember discussing boarding schools in class. I did not like them. I did not like the whole idea; the way they educated Indian children, how the children were taken there and taken away from their families. It was not right. I had many talks with my father about this. He was in school too, and they were discussing the same things at his school. We would talk about the boarding schools because he was in one. My dad and I agreed they were not a good thing. He was sent to one at the age of five and had to stay*

*until grade eleven.*

*My family and I also discussed the treaties. My father's views were totally different than mine. I was willing to understand both sides, he was not. I tried to convince him to see both sides, but he did not. I told him we could not just blame the White people. I told him we couldn't blame them and he said "No, they stole it." I tried to explain every story has two sides. There were the White people and the Indian people, and the White people got more than we did. They took the treaties the wrong way. The White people took our resources and everything. Then these people tried to go back on the treaties.*

*When we took the treaties in class and from the other discussions I have had, I felt, in my opinion, that the treaties gave the White people what they wanted and they did not really think about the Indians. These people conned the Indian people into signing them. Indians were conned out of their land, their culture and their pride. When I think about this I get angry, but that was a long time ago. Now it is different.*

*Indians are more educated today, so if a treaty was signed, the White people would have to explain to the Indians how it was going to work. Back then, the Indians did not know what was going on, they just signed them. But now, they would know if they were going to lose anything or if they were getting anything back.*

*The teacher had us do a lot of things in class. We worked on this one project.*

*You could pick either Native housing, education or employment. I picked employment.*

*When I researched it, I realized Indian people do not have the same choices, simply*

*because you are Native. For example, if I were applying for this job and there was a*

*White girl applying for the same job, she would get the job before me even though our*

*resumes might be the same and we both had experience. This would make me angry and*

*I would tell them what I thought of them choosing her over me. Then I would apply for*

*another job.*

*Another assignment we had to complete was on Native role models. My role*

*models were all sports related. I chose a hockey player, a runner and a police officer*

*from my grandmother's reserve. Oh yeah, I also had to pick myself too. When I read*

*about these people, I realized that we were all the same. We all had to struggle, but we*

*still continued to reach our goal anyway. For instance, the police officer had trouble*

*being accepted in the White community because he was Native. He also had trouble*

*being accepted on the reserve because he was a cop and even though he was an Indian, it*

*was assumed he would not act like one. Then there was the runner. She was female and*

*she had no real father figure in her life. Her mother and first husband were alcoholics*

*and yet, through all the turmoil she experienced, this woman kept running. As a result*

*of her determination, she made it to the Olympics. After completing this assignment I*

*realized that I would like to be like all of them. I would like to have the determination*

*they had. Sometimes I do not have any. I get frustrated with the way I am treated and I just want to give up, but these role models showed me that with determination you can get to wherever you want to go. This assignment made me feel proud because these people were all Indian, and they made it. I realized, that before, I thought I had nothing to say, or had done nothing that would be considered interesting. Then after this assignment, I realized I do have similarities. I realized what a struggle it was just to go to school. It was a daily struggle. For example, when I went to summer school I felt very uncomfortable. I felt people were looking at me, really staring at me and saying "Ho--ly, look it's an Indian." I was the only Indian there. I didn't like it when people stared at me. It made me feel really uncomfortable.*

*When I think about taking Native Studies 20, I realize I see things differently now. Before I was prejudiced. I did not really like White people very much, but after this class and learning both sides of the stories, I do not see them the same way. I understand what happened and you cannot blame just one person. Native Studies helped make me more mature concerning the way we are looked down upon sometimes. Before I took Native Studies I would get angry and retaliate. Now I know who I am and what I am. I do not care what they say to me. It does not really matter because they do not know. That is why they are saying it.*

*In Native Studies you were given more of a chance to express yourself—especially*

*if you were Native. It was easier to do. I think it is very important to take Native Studies because it is something everybody should have to learn about. You need to know who Indians are and the sacrifices they made. How can you go through life not knowing about that? It is ignorant not to know about a different type of person.*

*For example, our school held a conference for the Native Studies students from all of the high schools at our school. I did not attend the morning session, but I was there for the afternoon. We were making dreamcatchers. It was fun and all the students were interacting with each other. I remember feeling uncomfortable during this one time. I was making my dreamcatcher, and this little White girl sitting beside me said "I don't know how to do this." At that point, I looked at her and said, "Why would I know how to do this?" She did not answer because I am sure she realized that she had offended me. I then told her I bought mine and that I had never made one before. She was the only one who did not have enough sense not to say that, but everyone else was good. That day I met a lot of people. It was fun.*

*When I think about it, I have learned a lot, and I know that I am not going to let anyone walk all over me because I am Indian. If they have a problem with that, I will help them solve it. I am glad I am unique and different from everyone. However, there are times when I still get frustrated because I would like to see more Indians try to go to school.*

### Raven from the North

This student was sixteen when she took Native Studies 20. She was born in rural Saskatchewan and has been educated in an urban setting. She is of Indian descent.

*In grade nine, I was interested in taking something else besides Social Studies, so I asked our guidance counsellor if any other subjects were available. He indicated Native Studies was available. Before taking this class, I spoke to a friend of mine. My first impression about the class was it was going to be about what they ate and how they dressed, but I found out it was on today's issues. This sounded interesting so I enrolled in it.*

*Our teacher was not big on systems or rules. On the first day of class our teacher made us move the desks into a circle with a walkway. He taught from the inside. Our teacher did not want anyone to feel they were not as equal as the next person. I thought that this was cool because my other classes did not do that. It was his room. It was comfortable. We sat down and he reviewed the chapter. He sat there and talked to us. He helped us with problems and often those problems became class discussions. He was not afraid to let us discuss any issue.*

*Our classes began with us sitting down and our teacher began by saying "How was your night?" He went around the circle and we told him what we did that night and who we were with. Then the teacher yelled at us to get to work. It was funny.*

*Afterwards we reviewed and he handed out sheets with the work that had to be completed by each student. The rest of the period we were allowed to work on our assignments. He gave us work ahead of time. It was a class where you could work at your own pace. He did not teach every class. Sometimes students asked him questions and it turned into one big conversation. It was really good.*

*For example, one discussion was on the banishment of two boys to some islands in Vancouver. We discussed the topic for almost a week. Sometimes our teacher made up questions based on our talks. He gave us an assignment the next day. He asked things like, "Do you think the justice system should include banishment for everybody? What do you think? Is it right?" Then we had further discussions from that. Our teacher liked to talk. He thought it was better to talk sometimes because you got to hear different opinions. It was better to hear a whole lot of people talking, not just one person's views. My opinion on banishment was different. I did not think that banishment was right. They did not have it for African Americans or Caucasians, so why have it for First Nations people only? My feelings were it should be brought in for everyone, not just one race. Once it was brought in for everybody, then it would have a better effect. One of the other students disagreed. It was her opinion that it helped because if you looked at the prisons now, Aboriginal people filled the bulk of them. She felt it was a better way to rehabilitate them. As it turned out, the whole class participated in that discussion except for the*

*teacher. He made sure everyone got a chance to speak. He facilitated the discussion.*

*There was another time when we watched a film. It was about the residential schools. I could not watch it because it got me inside. It made me feel sad that our people had to go through that. The teacher was really good about it. I did not have to watch the film. Instead he gave me a book to read and sent me into another room. He never forces us to do anything we did not want to do. I remember in that film there was a lot of verbal abuse. For example, they said, "You're just a stupid little Indian." This really got to me because I had heard it before. I watched younger children go through abuse, both physical and sexual abuse before. It bothered me. I could not understand how anyone can go through it—let alone First Nations people. I could not handle it.*

*Our teacher also gave us other assignments. One of them was to either paint something on the wall or complete a written project. I painted because the teacher was free about it. There was lots up there—different styles of eagles and wolves. Beautiful artwork. Because our class was in the morning, the teacher brought his bagels in. He turned the radio on and we painted and chilled out. You could hear us chattering and laughing. It was so much fun. I got to help out my friend with the art. He drew a buffalo with a baby buffalo. On the back was the medicine wheel. Together we both painted that. I was lucky. I got to work with a real artist. He just loved doing it, so all I had to do was colour here and colour there. Ours was done freehand. It was awesome. After*



*the artwork was completed, the teacher had everyone explain their picture and the symbols. If someone did not know what it meant, then he told us.*

*Our class had a discussion on treaty rights. I learned what rights I have as a young Aboriginal woman and what different treaty rights there are. I remember studying them. I know what they are now, so when we are at a meeting on our home reserve, I know the significance of them. I am not as naive as I used to be. From what I understand, treaties were deals our great grandfathers made with the European settlers to come onto our land. The treaties said White people could live off the land as long as they took care of it. That is why our health and education are paid for. It is because our people from the past knew what they were talking about. They looked down the road for us.*

*Our teacher explained the creation stories from the different tribes to us. He used newspaper articles in class. He taught us information the grandfathers and grandmothers pass on. It made me feel I am not totally naive. I felt comfortable in class because I did know something about Native culture. Sometimes I talked to others about my class. My mom and I had these discussions. Sometimes we argued. For instance, my mom said, "How is that class going?" and then she went on about how beneficial it was to be able to take Native Studies all through high school and then in university. At first, I did not understand what she was saying. I thought "big deal!" But as the class*

*progressed, I began to understand. I realized this class taught me how to become more aware of the issues around us.*

*One time my mother and I had this conversation about language and how it is important for us to regain our culture. My mom told me it was a lost language. I started to argue and then I said, "But our teacher says we can find a class and learn it. Then we can teach it to others and so on." My mom just shook her head and walked away. She hated it when I argued and said "Well, the teacher says this, and the teacher says that."*

*I discussed Native Studies with my grandmother. Her opinions were the same as mine. Native Studies is a valuable asset. In her day, they did not have a class like that. They learned about Europeans and the government, but never about the First Nations people of Canada. She thought it is very important to learn about it now and to teach it to younger children as well.*

*At school, we have an Indian and Metis cultural workshop, and the Student Representative Counsel (SRC) planned it. I was on the SRC. I got to introduce and thank people this day. It was so good. We were so proud of it. We had approximately 500 students from different high schools. There were so many of them. They thought what we had planned was so awesome. In the morning, we had different powwow dancers. They performed some demos in fancy and jingle dancing. We also had a children's group dance. There were speakers too. Wes Fineday and Sherry*

*Farrell-Racette attended. In the afternoon, we made dreamcatchers and attended different workshops on cultural awareness. We were integrated with all of the students. Everyone mingled. We were all mixed up, so we got to hear different opinions from other students on topics like the treaties. It was so awesome.*

*I remember this one guy saying, "Treaty what?" and we were like "Yup!" Then there was a girl and she said, "Isn't that where we give money to children in different countries?" I thought "Holy! I can't believe people just don't know about this!" She thought it was about world vision. I just said "Nope!"*

*It was fun. We all said "Hello," and got to know each other. We were not sure how the other high school students saw us. Actually, we were afraid that they thought we were a raunchy school where there was a lot of fighting. We were sure many of the schools would decline and make up excuses like "No, we can't make it because we have a field trip or something." But they all came and they gave us a chance. Now we do not have a bad reputation. People have been in the school; they have seen it and now they know it is okay here. It was not as bad as we thought it would be. We were very proud of this day.*

*Our teacher was so cool. He was always so friendly. He did not demand that we sit down and just work. He was always asking us how things were going and he offered his advice. You always felt like someone was listening to you. This teacher did not treat*

*his work like a job either; like he was there just for the money. He made each and every student that walked through that door feel like they had a friend and that they were important. He was funny too. He teased us all the time. He was awesome. For example, our teacher asked us how our weekend went. Then he teased us by saying "Excuse me ladies. I hate to impose here" or "In ten years I will see you in KMart or Zellers working." It was so funny.*

*There are times when I run into non-Native people and they say "We let you guys exist within our society." I used to think this might be true until I took Native Studies 20 class with my teacher. I told him about my problem I had in the mall. My teacher just pointed to this one poster and he said "Write this down." It said, "We are people with rights guaranteed to us by promises and treaties." From that day forward I told people this. I never had another problem with that again. I realized it was a frame of mind—we are not here because they said we could be.*

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To honor the Aboriginal tradition of story telling, the European traditional analysis of these stories is placed in a separate section. This honors both traditions. Northern Door: Heavenly Voices is analysis and interpretation in story form to honour Aboriginal ways. Mother Earth: Grounding in the Earth is analysis and interpretation of the stories in a Eurocentric form. An epilogue is included. It is my story: Riding Two Horses. It is

included because I, too, am journeying around the Sacred Circle as a graduate student and beginning researcher.

## Mother Earth: Grounding in the Earth

In "Grounding in the Earth" I will analyze the data and show how it relates to the four questions asked in this study. The participants' stories were examined to identify what experience the four Aboriginal students and Aboriginal teacher had with the Native Studies 20 curriculum. Some growth and transformation was apparent in all four students. The student participants experienced changes in their view of themselves and in their cultural identities. This will be discussed in further detail. I will use the Elder's teachings as one basis for interpreting the participants' Native Studies 20 experiences. Furthermore, I will describe the effects on the learners that might be attributed to the use of Aboriginal knowledge in Native Studies 20. Throughout this section, connections between the experiences of the students and teacher and their apparent growth in positive self-concept and cultural identity will be identified and discussed.

All of these interpretations of the stories of Buffalo, Raven, Ptarmigan, Hawk and Sparrow will be guided by my understanding of the Sacred Circle and of traditional Aboriginal education, especially as it is taught by Center Sky. The experiences of Buffalo and his students, Ptarmigan, Sparrow, Raven and Hawk, with the Native Studies 20 curriculum make it clear that the central factor in the students' successful growth in positive self-concept and cultural identity was the teacher, Buffalo--the way that he taught, the way that he organized the classroom, and the way he interacted with the students. Buffalo's teachers were Elders. In the words of Center Sky, the Elder who

participated in this study, we see the genesis and basis of Buffalo's teaching.

### Walking in Two Worlds--Center Sky and Buffalo

Center Sky was educated in both worlds--the Aboriginal way and the Eurocentric way. This formed the global view Center Sky had of himself both personally and culturally. Center Sky's story about the bush chicken eggs is an example of this. In his story, he found some bush eggs and his father built a fire to cook the eggs in. The eggs were placed in the fire's ashes and were cooked in five to ten minutes. This was a practical approach to teaching. It taught Center Sky about Mother Earth's gifts. Center Sky gained strength to believe in his own Aboriginal culture from his grandfather and father. His grandfather also taught Center Sky that all people are equal. This helped him to remain confident in his identity. Today he believes everyone should try to understand one another. As part of Center Sky's identity, he practices his native tongue daily. Center Sky believes language and positive cultural identity are priorities. He now teaches these Aboriginal ways to others. It is Center Sky's belief that a teacher must be grounded in this knowledge if young people are to learn about Aboriginal culture. Center Sky questions how anyone can speak about Aboriginal ways if he or she does not have the experience. In order to develop fully both culturally and pedagogically, Elders say you must get to the very heart of a person in order to be taught. Center Sky teaches this today on and off the reserve. Buffalo, like Center Sky, is educated in two ways, two worlds, and two

philosophies. Trying to mesh Aboriginal and Eurocentric world views in his teaching caused conflict for Buffalo. Center Sky helps us understand Buffalo's conflict when he describes his own education.

Buffalo had to take an Indian Studies elective for his Physical Education degree. This decision helped Buffalo decide to pursue a Native Studies degree. He began to develop a clearer view of his own Aboriginal identity. However, Buffalo's education was also informal. His cultural identity and self-concept were expanded the most through his involvement with the Elders, and his active participation in sweat lodges and ceremonies. Buffalo felt the more he learned, the less he understood. This made him feel he had a long journey to follow before he could truly understand it all. Buffalo believed that learning is never-ending. His teaching is, for him, a continuous exploration of Aboriginal identity, epistemology and pedagogy.

Buffalo fondly recalled a time when he attended a Sundance ceremony. He tried to copy the Clown Trickster going down the hill backwards. Buffalo soon discovered this Clown's task was to walk backwards at the Sundance ceremony. Buffalo found this moment was both embarrassing and humorous for him. It was occasions like this where Buffalo felt he learned the most about himself and the traditional Aboriginal ways. This also helped Buffalo realize the great importance of humour in teaching and learning.

Buffalo valued the Elders. He believed that the way they are honored by the



educational system is problematic. Honoraria are often inadequate. Elders' importance and value are undervalued. Buffalo believed Native Studies is a valid and respected discipline, and therefore, those who hold and increase the knowledge upon which it is based, the Elders, should be properly recognized. This recognition is important to the development of strong self-concept and cultural identity for Aboriginal teachers. It is also important for non-Aboriginal teachers, since the Elders are a strong source of knowledge and pedagogical competence for them too. If teachers value Elders and their traditional knowledge, so will students. This study shows that this leads to stronger cultural identity in Aboriginal students and perhaps will lead to a stronger Canadian identity for all students.

When Center Sky spoke about his learning the European way, he remembered things were not taught as the Elders did. Violence played a major part in his learning. In Aboriginal pedagogy, it is unthinkable to use violence. Center Sky's native ways were not recognized in school. Instead, the nuns used rulers and broom handles to "kill them," to abolish the native ways. This concerned Center Sky for he was taught by the Elders that no one's knowledge was superior. In this educational process Aboriginal parents were denied participation in the schooling of their children, leaving a void in the child's life. Center Sky's experience was not an unusual one. In his home, the community was never excluded, but the residential schools tried to eradicate Aboriginal knowledge from all

aspects of life, therefore severing all cultural ties. This drastic step had damaging effects on self-concepts and cultural identities of Aboriginal children. The schools saw Aboriginal knowledge as superstition, and as such, thought it to be dangerous (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). As a result, many Aboriginal children, like Center Sky, experienced pain and suffering in school and came to see their Aboriginality as dangerous or wrong.

Center Sky's school experience had a negative impact, although the influence of the Elders lessened it for him. He questioned this impact and wanted to know who was responsible for reprimanding an Aboriginal child who spoke his/her native tongue. Today, Center Sky feels empathy for all who, like himself, attended a residential school. When interviewing Center Sky, it was clear that school was a painful memory. It had not provided positive personal growth for him.

#### Buffalo: The Teacher

Like Center Sky, Buffalo's experience with the outside world has been challenging. Because Buffalo is Aboriginal, he has a stake in Native Studies. The importance of knowing oneself is vital and Buffalo believes this can be obtained through Aboriginal knowledge. He wishes to help others see this. However, barriers exist. Buffalo realizes, for example, that people do not understand treaty rights, except from a Eurocentric point of view. He has found Aboriginal histories are left out of school curricula. During his

teaching career, Buffalo has encountered colleagues who were reluctant to teach Native Studies. These colleagues believed they were not equipped to teach Native Studies because they had no background in the subject area. Their education did not include any Aboriginal history or sociology. The canon on which the present curriculum is based still has not made room for the knowledge upon which Native Studies is based (McCarthy, 1993). Most Saskatchewan teachers have not received adequate, if any, grounding in any type of Native Studies. Many are ignorant of traditional and modern Aboriginal knowledge and issues. But Saskatchewan Education (1992) says that Native Studies must be available to all learners. Saskatchewan Education (1992) also says that all teachers are accountable for teaching equitably.

When Buffalo learned to teach at the Eurocentric university, he too learned little that would help him validate Native Studies. The Elders were Buffalo's source of knowledge for the curriculum he taught in his Native Studies class. Because of his involvement with these teachers, he made the curriculum come alive by using the Sacred Circle as his foundation. This foundation made everything that he and the students did together effective. If it is the teacher's responsibility to develop positive self-concepts and cultural identities in Aboriginal students and all other learners, this seems an unreasonable expectation if they are not well prepared with the cultural understandings and knowledge they would need to do so.

Buffalo's teaching reflects his belief in the Sacred Circle. His students' success justifies this belief. Through his willingness to provide opportunity and choice, students were empowered to direct their own learning. They developed a strong belief in themselves and they learned to value the content of the class and the "Aboriginal" way in which it was taught. The idea of growth both intellectually, socially and personally for each individual was a priority for Buffalo. Each student's self-concept and ability to identify with who they are was important to him.

### The Students' Stories

Four major themes can be seen in Raven, Ptarmigan, Hawk and Sparrow's responses to the Native Studies 20 course. These themes are organization of the classroom, Buffalo's relationship with his students, Buffalo's pedagogy and curriculum content. They are derived from Buffalo's teaching style and interaction with his students; he says his classroom is based on his understanding of traditional Aboriginal pedagogy.

### Buffalo's Organization of the Classroom

Raven, Hawk, Sparrow and Ptarmigan all referred to the way in which the classroom was organized. They all agreed this class was different and the four students felt it helped them relax and be themselves. Sparrow remembered the desks were in a big circle and she felt this arrangement allowed everyone to see and to speak to one another. For her, it was easier to converse and she liked the friendly atmosphere. This room was

not like the other teacher-centered classes she attended where the students sat in rows and were expected to look straight ahead. Ptarmigan also felt this arrangement allowed students freedom to talk. Raven thought it was "so cool." None of her other classes were arranged like that. Both Raven and Ptarmigan believed their Native Studies class was comfortable and it allowed students to be themselves. In traditional Aboriginal ways, the Sacred Circle is a circle for explicit reasons. No one is left out, no one suffers the disrespect of seeing only someone's back. No one is more important than anyone else (Ermine, 1995; Graveline, 1998). As Buffalo's students said, the circle allowed them the freedom to relate to one another. The students' sense of self, often hurt in general interaction with dominant Canadian society, was strengthened in this circular classroom. Everyone mattered. Everyone was part of the whole. No one felt superior to anyone else.

The circle provided other opportunities for students to develop. Buffalo believed the majority of a person's time should be spent on finding solutions, not on identifying problems. His classroom organization reflected this belief. It invited dialogue. In the interviews, all four students had told stories of class discussions being routine. Students were allowed to express their own thoughts at any time. Hawk remembers she could say anything. There were no restrictions. Sparrow was a shy person, she expressed how easy it was to relate to others because of the circle. When ideas are shared, solutions are found. Everyone's ideas are recognized, so everyone shares responsibility for the solution.

No one's ideas are repressed. No one's ideas are allowed to oppress. This was apparent with the argument on banishment. Students were allowed to agree and disagree freely. This is in tune with a major Aboriginal belief (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Larocque, 1991).

### Buffalo's Relationships with his Students

Hampton (1989, 1995) and Nieto (1992) believe the teacher is a crucial link in the delivery of curricula. Through the teacher, curriculum "comes alive." Buffalo helped develop his students' self-worth. In so doing, he had a direct effect on their lives. This is apparent by the way these four students talk about him. Buffalo's relationship with his students shows the influence of the Sacred Circle teachings of his Elders. From inside of the circle, Buffalo would go around and ask his students how their lives were going. Buffalo asked for individual opinions. Hawk, for instance, felt she could talk freely and not feel "constricted." Hawk enjoyed the class because of her teacher. Buffalo provided students with the opportunity to express their opinions freely. Raven thought this was "neat." Her other classes were not like that. Raven thought Buffalo was not afraid to let the students talk. Both these girls felt respected and honoured. Their ideas and thoughts were worth something. Somebody wanted to listen.

In Buffalo's class, the teacher and student treated one another equally as in the Sacred Circle used by Elders. Hawk believed the physical arrangement of this class made equality possible through the interaction with one another. The other three student

participants agreed. For example, Ptarmigan felt all students were equal because of their position in the circle. No one was in front or behind another student. This environment helped the students to feel a sense of belonging. Being heard, valued and respected, these students blossomed. Confidence in their intelligence and in themselves as Aboriginal Canadians was nurtured. The students' developing sense of ownership of their own lives and learning was their response to feeling that they belonged and were worthy persons.

### Buffalo's Pedagogy

Buffalo's class was taught through stories and discussion. He did this partly to help those who did not read well. This decision was in balance with the basic philosophy of the Sacred Circle. Everyone is believed to learn as they are ready to learn. No one is to be discarded (Government of Canada, 1996; Graveline, 1998; Little Bear, 1994). This respectful approach was important to his students' developing self-concept. The multiple opportunities for class discussion in which individual students could participate made Sparrow feel secure. Hawk had felt constricted by the school system. She was happy to find a place where she could relate to others like herself. Buffalo's Native Studies course provided them with security.

Humour. Humour is central to Aboriginal philosophies of learning. The Trickster, or the Sacred Clown, is one of the most enduring Aboriginal images of the teacher (Archibald, Friesen, Smith & Sterling, 1993; Banks, 1991; Calliou, 1995; Government

of Canada, 1996). Buffalo encouraged his students to use humour and used it himself. It was a way of freeing yourself from the seriousness of the subject matter.

The four Aboriginal student participants had difficulty recalling assignments in detail, but they had an excellent memory of their teacher. Sparrow thought everyone liked Buffalo. He was a funny guy who "listened" to all of his students. Sparrow told how Buffalo joked around with them and how the students could reciprocate. This made Sparrow feel important, someone cared. Ptarmigan felt Native Studies 20 was fun. He thought his teacher let individuals work at their own pace, provided them with lots of breaks, and used a lot of humour in class. Ptarmigan felt Buffalo recognized individuality and respected growth. Raven told of how Buffalo teased and joked with her. She thought it was "so funny!" This gave Raven a sense of belonging, Buffalo connected with her sense of humour, and probably with the humour she heard at home.

Expectations. The philosophies of the Sacred Circle emphasize the responsibility of the learner. No one is forced to try to do something until he or she feels prepared to do it well (Archibald et al., 1993; Ermine, 1995; Regnier, 1995). Learning, it is believed, requires a natural movement toward wholeness (Regnier, 1995).

Buffalo treated his students like responsible people. He allowed choice in assignments. He did whatever he could to help them succeed, but he insisted on completed work and on standards. Sparrow remembered her teacher putting demands



on them. Buffalo expected them to learn from what he had taught. This gave her a sense of pride and accomplishment. Ptarmigan remembered the breaks in the semester—like showing movies or going to the gym. According to Ptarmigan, if a student really worked hard, Buffalo let that person have the period off. Buffalo recognized accomplishments. Raven remembered how Buffalo gave them work ahead of time and how he expected everyone to do it. Raven liked the responsibility and opportunity to prove herself as self-motivated. Raven remembered the students were never forced to watch a film. She recalled being able to read a book when her class watched a film on residential schools. This film was too much for her. She was glad to have had a choice. She felt her feelings were respected. Buffalo said "I believe when kids are having fun, then they forget themselves, and they are willing to learn."

Each student was important to Buffalo. He wrote personalized messages on marked assignments. Sparrow thought that this was good because he wanted her to think and to open her eyes. Sparrow felt there was someone who believed in her, had confidence in her, felt she could make a difference. He wrote to her "you are the future leader."

Ptarmigan noted his teacher allowed each student flexibility. If a student had an assignment due for another class, Buffalo allowed the student to complete it in his class. Ptarmigan saw Buffalo's teaching to be very accommodating to a student's needs.

Respecting each individual's ability to make good decisions about his or her own workload added to his/her positive self-concept. Raven felt Buffalo cared about his students by the way he treated her outside the classroom. Sometimes Buffalo would ask Raven about her workload. He would sit down and listen to her. He even offered advice. Raven believed Buffalo was genuinely interested in her well-being. Positive self-concept is nurtured through recognition of one's status as a unique individual.

Relationships. The Sacred Circle, as the basis and frame of life in Buffalo's classroom, formed the social interactions of the students with each other. Trust and risk-taking are the values taught in the Sacred Circle. It was through the students' relationships that trust and risk were developed. This was a confidence builder for each one. They walked through the Four Directions, learning about human relationships as they learned content and academic skills. They learned to relate to other students, to their families and to content in new and healthier ways. Their identities were expanded and they had a deeper understanding of each one's relationship to self and to their culture.

Raven helped host the integrated cultural day for the Native Studies students from other high schools. She was sure the schools they invited would not come to their school in the "ghetto." They would either decline or make excuses. However, everyone attended. These feelings of inadequacy and "we are not good enough" were of major concern. However, the guest students really enjoyed the day. Raven and her colleagues

talked with them and made a presentation. Everything she and her friends had planned was judged "so awesome." Fear and poor self-concept were replaced with confidence. Raven's view of herself and others changed. Raven was even able to answer "foolish" questions without anger and disrespect toward the students who had come from the other schools. She now believed that these other high school students no longer considered her school unacceptable. Raven was able to let go of her apprehensions and replaced them with feelings of pride.

When Hawk felt she had to defend herself during the interactive cultural day, she knew how to do it. A "White" high school student asked her how to make a dreamcatcher. Hawk felt this student was assuming all Aboriginal people made them. This upset her. Hawk asked this student if she thought Hawk knew how to make one. The "White" student gave no answer. Hawk's determination and confidence to confront the issue was illustrated here. Her new experiences had taught Hawk how to approach uncomfortable situations, thus giving her problem solving skills. At the beginning of Native Studies 20, Hawk felt afraid to "offend" the non-Aboriginal students. Now Hawk felt ready to defend her world. She refused to be labelled. Hawk believed in herself.

Relationships with families also changed. Ptarmigan took pride in talking to his father's German relatives about his Aboriginal background and shared what he had learned in Native Studies 20. This was really important for him, for his identity. Raven discussed

Native Studies 20 topics with her grandmother and her mother. She wanted to be able to relate to what was happening at the reserve level. Raven wanted to connect with her relatives. She learned to value what she was taught. Realizing many people do not know what the treaties are, Raven's thoughts were: "Holy! I can't believe people just don't know about it." This new found knowledge helped Raven discover confidence in her ability to know the issues. When discussing how Aboriginal cultures suffered, Raven's mother commented "The language is lost." Raven disagreed. She felt it could be relearned. They discussed to what extent this was possible. Through these conversations and dialogue, Raven was able to relate to her extended family and begin to see how vast her cultural background was. These students, who may have felt they could not learn content now knew they could. As we can see, they felt much stronger.

### Curriculum Content

Buffalo believed students should have a variety of assignments to experience. Choices are important in the Sacred Circle. Film provided some interesting experiences. Raven found the film on residential schools too difficult to watch. She identified with the sense of pain, hurt and loss. It was too hard for her to handle. Raven had difficulty listening to words like "you're a stupid little Indian." But Raven had begun to see she was not the only one who felt this way. There were many others like her who were struggling. She was particularly sensitive to this because she had seen younger Aboriginal children

experience both physical and sexual abuse. The content of Native Studies 20 began to give her a framework within which to understand such experiences. Raven's identity and confidence were changing. No longer did she feel lost, but now felt capable of trying to face difficult situations.

Sparrow felt Aboriginal people are not respected or listened to. This bothered her, but Sparrow felt she had enough confidence to change herself and her situation. As a result, Sparrow wanted to stay in school and make her parents happy. Sparrow did not want to turn out like her sister. Sparrow's sister quit school at the age of sixteen and had three children. Sparrow wanted to feel pride in herself and her accomplishments. Sparrow did not want to be labelled lazy or unsuccessful. She wanted to "do something" with her life--just like Tina Keeper. Sparrow's acceptance of possibilities for a successful life, a life like Tina Keeper's, shows considerable growth in self-concept and identity.

Ptarmigan suggested an all Native school. He felt a school like this would provide an Aboriginal person comfort. Ptarmigan's self-concept had suffered. He had faced racism. He felt more secure with other Aboriginal people. Ptarmigan felt racism toward his people would be limited or nonexistent in such a school. His confidence and security in who he was depended upon his relationship to others. His desire for an all Aboriginal school shows the strength of appropriate context for learning.

Self-fulfilling prophecies. Buffalo's assignments, for example, the role model

assignment where Sparrow wrote about Tina Keeper, helped his students to resist the "self-fulfilling prophecies" provided by society, media, and Aboriginal life as these children had lived it. He gave them new prophecies to fulfill and they began to use them.

Sometimes Hawk was defensive. Hawk's self-confidence was unstable and still required further developing. This was apparent when she discussed possible employment opportunities. Hawk felt that if a "White" girl applied for the same job as she did, the employer would pick the White girl first. This thought angered Hawk. However, she believed it was important to say something. Hawk felt she would have enough courage to tell the employer her thoughts. She would move on and apply for another job. Strength to resist was growing in Hawk. Hawk's display of strength to defend herself was an indicator her self-concept was changing.

After completing Native Studies 20, Ptarmigan felt he had learned how to control his anger. He began to develop other ways to confront racism. The class discussions and films had helped him. They prepared him for the future by giving him the skills necessary to face racism. This was very important for Ptarmigan because it helped give him hope. Buffalo taught Ptarmigan he could make a difference. For Ptarmigan and the others, self-concepts and cultural identities are growing.

Buffalo made the students work on several projects, which opened up new possibilities for them. His assignments helped each student evaluate his or her own

capabilities. Hawk felt the role model assignment gave her hope, helping her discover that her feelings of frustration and despair were legitimate. She found other Aboriginal people had experienced similar feelings. This was an important feature. Hawk was learning to relate to other strong Aboriginal people. Buffalo had helped Hawk develop her pride, and she was determined not to let anyone walk all over her because she was Indian. Hawk had learned to believe in herself and to display this belief with pride.

Raven felt that Buffalo had taught her to understand treaty rights. It was this knowledge that empowered Raven to develop the strength she needed to identify with herself as an Aboriginal woman. Furthermore, Raven was beginning to realize there is a wealth of information out there to give her confidence to stand up for herself and her identity. Buffalo helped with this. He had her examine one of his posters to help her identify why Aboriginal people belonged in Canada. This information validated and confirmed Raven's self-concept and cultural identity as an Aboriginal person.

As we have seen, self-concepts were changing. Raven, Ptarmigan, Hawk and Sparrow were redeveloping their identities; they began to see themselves as capable of taking positive action to change their own lives and others. They had begun to see themselves as ambassadors to the rest of the world. This recrystallization of their view of themselves is perhaps the most striking or significant characteristic of their stories about their experiences in Buffalo's Native Studies 20 course. Their new found

knowledge acquired in a classroom based on the Sacred Circle philosophy, helped establish positive self-concepts and cultural identities for Raven, Hawk, Sparrow and Ptarmigan. "It helped me realize that Natives are not at the very bottom. We can get somewhere. We can make a difference" (Ptarmigan).

### Taking the Mystery out of Native Studies

Aboriginal cultures and self-concepts were severely damaged by Eurocentric education through residential schooling (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). This damage, unfortunately, continues in today's schools. Recognition of the importance of self-concept and cultural identity remain a weakness in most schools (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Bouvier, 1989; Hampton, 1989, 1995). In this study, it is through Center Sky's recollection of his schooling that we begin to see how devastating this is. Buffalo and his students have shown us one path to redress these problems.

Center Sky's story of the "abolishing" of Native ways helps us to understand the deep seated fears which are, for many Aboriginal people, a clear result of the "nuns using broomsticks to kill," - to kill spirit, knowledge, culture, identity and self-worth. Aboriginal knowledge was soundly condemned as superstition, evil, and devil worship by those in government and education who formed the residential schools. It, like much pre-Christian knowledge in Europe, was feared as dangerous (Cashmore & Troyna, 1990; Miles, 1989).



Center Sky asked us, "who tried to abolish our ways?" He wants to know why they did this and who was behind this wrong. Center Sky's questions are justified since his life was altered both personally and culturally by these decisions. It is time to begin to answer Center Sky's questions. As the Elders taught Center Sky, through traditional Aboriginal ways and the Sacred Circle, no one knowledge base or culture is superior to another. It seems likely from the experience of Buffalo, Raven, Ptarmigan, Hawk and Sparrow, that an important step towards answering these questions must be taken. All educators, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike in Canada, must learn Aboriginal knowledge from those who have it--the Elders--and use that knowledge on an equal basis with the knowledge derived from Euro-Canadian roots. Only this seems likely to provide a way to educate Aboriginal students that will develop positive self-concept and cultural identity.

Some of Buffalo's colleagues acted as if they believed that Native Studies was dangerous, not really knowledge, or invalid as knowledge. Past fears were rearing their ugly heads again. Buffalo felt the need to defend and justify his world view, this Aboriginal knowledge base. His teachings by the Elders and experiences in the ceremonies gave him the confidence to stand behind what he believed in. This study also suggests that all educators must not defend or justify this knowledge, but simply learn it and use it.

Working with young adults, Buffalo felt that he could begin to transform negative attitudes towards Aboriginal knowledge as they appear in many young Aboriginal people. It is not only his dream and belief, but one that is supported by the Elders and the Sacred Circle's teachings. Thus, he is part of the great transformation and rebirth of this ancient knowledge and of its developing recognition as a modern and valuable foundation for school and society. The backlash experienced by teachers and students of Native Studies, as other teachers, community members and parents question the value of this discipline, can only be defeated as we come full circle within this transformation. As Hart and Holton (1993) told us, the teacher's role is key to students' development of positive self-concept and strong cultural identity. His or her consistent and respectful valuing of difference is essential to the growth of a new and just education for all Aboriginal children as well as all other Canadian children (as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 266).

The cycle of the Sacred Circle is now complete. The four questions I asked were:

- 1) What is the experience of an Aboriginal teacher and four Aboriginal students with the Native Studies 20 curriculum?
- 2) Can any effect, on the students' identity and self-concepts of their experiences in Native Studies 20, be discerned in their stories?
- 3) What is the relationship between their experience with Native Studies 20 and the teachings of a respected Aboriginal Elder about Aboriginal

education?

- 4) Do the Aboriginal students describe any effect which can be attributed to the use of Aboriginal knowledge in Native Studies 20?

The experiences of the Aboriginal teacher and four Aboriginal students are found in Northern Door: Heavenly Voices.

The results to the guiding questions are:

- 1) All four Aboriginal students spoke highly of their experiences in the Native Studies 20 course. They all felt their own knowledge about Aboriginal people increased. Through this experience their self-concepts and cultural identities changed. The student participants displayed confidence in their abilities and had hope for their future. I believe a positive change occurred for all of them in varying degrees.
- 2) The pedagogy Buffalo used in the classroom clearly indicated he implemented Aboriginal knowledge and teachings. He acknowledged he had learned this from the Elders. This was obvious by the way Buffalo arranged his room and in the freedom he gave students to discuss and explore any topic. The genuine concern he expressed for each of the students was displayed not only in his story, but also heard in the stories of the four Aboriginal students.

3) Elders teach through the Sacred Circle. It is their stories and ceremonies that help individuals understand their place. It is believed all who come, come when they are ready, ready to learn. They leave with the information they were looking for. This cycle repeats itself. This was true of Buffalo's students. They spoke of how they returned to the circle each day and discussion occurred. They spoke of the choices Buffalo gave them--allowing each one of them to determine what they were ready for. As a result, these four experienced a pedagogy similar to the pedagogy an Elder would display.

#### Some Concluding Thoughts

This study of the experiences of Buffalo, and of Hawk, Raven, Ptarmigan and Sparrow points to the likelihood that some very significant changes **must** be made in Saskatchewan education. These changes should involve how children are taught, how self-concept and cultural identity are developed, and how teachings, like Center Sky's, are incorporated.

1. Schools, teacher education, and teachers should begin the process of moving away from exclusively Eurocentric models of teaching and schooling, of curricular knowledge and of community school relations. To do this, teacher education programs have to teach Indian Studies, as well

as other cultural studies, race relations, and cross-cultural understanding all the way throughout the programs. Only knowledgeable teachers can teach to meet the goals of Native Studies 20 and of all other Saskatchewan curricula. In a province where Aboriginal people will make up nearly 30% of the school population by the year 2005, and where many new Canadians have come to reside, any other course of action is both ineffective and unjust.

2. Continual inservice and curricular redevelopment, based on Aboriginal and non-Eurocentric philosophies and forms of knowledge, should be a feature of Saskatchewan education.
3. Elders and other traditional teachers must be respected and sought out in the same manner and for the same purpose as university scholars. Their teachings are foundational. They have been educating themselves for a lifetime. It is time their value is recognized. They have knowledge which teachers need if they are to succeed in teaching all children to develop strong self-concepts and confidence in their cultural identities.
4. Students develop positive self-concepts best in a warm, safe and culturally appropriate environments. It is through alternative epistemologies and pedagogies that teachers may find new and effective ways of creating such

environments.

Aboriginal cultures have been suppressed and denied. Aboriginal children who experienced the residential schools were led to believe their culture was invalid and evil. Today we clearly see the results of this evil, in the lives of all of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. As the Sacred Circle teaches us--what affects one part of the social body affects all. Until we heal the results of the suppression of Aboriginal knowledge, beliefs and values, all will share in the harm. So, Native Studies should no longer be seen as exotic. In this study, the stories of Center Sky, Buffalo, Sparrow, Ptarmigan, Hawk and Raven show us how the knowledge and values of the Sacred Circle and other Aboriginal philosophies, when honoured, changed the lives of teachers and students.

"As the old people say, 'Be proud of who you are and don't overrate yourself above anyone.' It is important to remember we are all equal."

- Center Sky

## Riding Two Horses

This circle is now complete. No longer am I a graduate student. I am now beginning a new role as an emerging researcher who lives and practices in two worlds. It is these two worlds that I have written about. I have begun to understand their distinct differences. Eurocentric epistemology, from my years of experience, is linear. The rules and regulations for pedagogy are distinct. There is an assumption that a learner's knowledge is limited by what the learner has been taught. It is aggressive and competitive in nature. Individuality is handsomely rewarded. There is the belief that the more knowledge obtained, the more powerful a person becomes. The underlying assumption of Eurocentric epistemology appears to be a polar opposite to those of Aboriginal cultures. Often it appeared one had to prove themselves to acquire such knowledge.

These were some of the challenges I felt occurred as I walked, and sometimes stumbled, through this academic process. To begin with, trying to establish this thesis' basic premise and helping other academic educators understand this, using the Eurocentric guidelines, proved challenging. Throughout the various stages of this study, I found the writing process created roadblocks and anxiety at times. Direct and sometimes aggressive approaches to the writing left the impression that this Aboriginal knowledge was not justified. On these occasions my own Aboriginal learnings were contradicted. However, through the continuous hours of work, encouragement and guidance of my teachers, this process was able to come to a close.

The second world, the one I am more familiar with, is Aboriginal epistemology. It has no beginning and no end. As in the Sacred Circle. All parts are equal; all parts are interconnected. This pedagogy is used by the Elders. For example, Elders, like Center Sky and Betty McKenna, use it when they teach. Their ceremonies and stories are cyclical and it is this cyclical process that contributes to the learner in a non threatening way. This process was used throughout this thesis because I have been taught by the Elders to believe learners return when they are ready and willing to seek out further knowledge.

Riding these "two horses" has been challenging, difficult and rewarding. It is this challenge to work and write in two worlds that I feel, as a parent, an educator, and as a researcher, is important. This challenge may help us establish a place for Aboriginal epistemology in academia. Canadian children have the right and obligation to learn accurate information about Canada's First People around the Sacred Circle.

As taught by my mother, grandmother and all my relations, the time has come for me to take my place--my place in two worlds.

Megwetch. All my relations.



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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A****Questions for the Student's Interview**

1. What is your name?
2. When were you born?
3. Where were you born?
4. Are you Indian or Metis?
5. Which word, or words, best describes where you have been raised and educated?  
urban, rural and/or reserve
6. Have you taken Native Studies 10?
7. How did it prepare you for Native Studies 20?
8. How did you learn about Native Studies?
9. Can you tell me a story about what a day in Native Studies 20 was like?
10. What kinds of assignments did the teacher have you do? Do you remember any of the projects, assignments, or topics?
11. Are there any stories that you could tell me that would help others understand what it is like to be an Indian or Metis student in a Native Studies class?
12. If you were going to photograph your favourite moment from Native Studies, could you tell me what you would see, hear and feel?
13. Can you give me an example of how Indian and Metis people are treated in the community?
14. How has Native Studies affected your personal life as a student?
15. If you had an opportunity to take Native Studies 30, would you? Why and what would you expect to learn?
16. What were the teacher's expectations of the students?

17. Is there a need for Native Studies in high school? If so, why? Why not?
18. How did you learn about the Native Studies class?
19. What do you remember the room looked like? Was there anything on the walls? Can you describe what you saw?
20. Did you attend the Indian and Metis cultural day? What do you remember happened at the Indian and Metis cultural day? What was that like?
21. What kinds of ideas do you remember learning about Indian and Metis people?
22. Can you give me an example of how the teacher worked with the students?
23. How has your choice to take Native Studies influenced your life as a student?
24. What is it like to be a Indian/Metis student in a Native Studies class?
25. What was it like to be a student in Native Studies 20?
26. In your experience, how did students in Native Studies 20 do?
27. How are students dealing with the opportunity to take Native Studies instead of Social Studies?
28. From your perspective, which experiences assisted the students to acquire skills and understandings about Indian and Metis people?
29. How has your involvement as a Native Studies student shaped you as a student in your high school?
30. How did you choose to take this class?
31. What lingers with you about your experiences with Native Studies 20?
32. Are there experiences from Native Studies that shape an Indian/Metis student's identity?
33. How is an Indian/Metis student's identity shaped? Their way of thinking?
34. Where can your experiences from Native Studies take you?
35. How or what does Native Studies contribute to a school, to the lives of students/teachers?
36. Could you give me a question I didn't ask that you would like to answer?

**APPENDIX B****Questions for the Teacher's Interview**

1. What is your name?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. What degrees and/or certificates do you have?
4. Which word or words best describe where you have been raised and educated?  
urban, rural and/or reserve
5. Are you Indian or Metis?
6. How did you get started in teaching Native Studies?
7. What classes and/or experiences helped prepare you to teach Native Studies 20?
8. How long have you been teaching at \_\_\_\_\_ Collegiate?
9. What other schools and/or grades have you taught?
10. What topics did you cover in Native Studies 20?
11. What topics interested the students the most?
12. If you had to convince parents that Native Studies 20 was a valid class to take, what would you tell them?
13. Can you describe what a typical day was like in Native Studies 20 last semester?
14. What expectations did you have for the students enrolled in the Native Studies 20 program?
15. Do you think Native Studies helped in developing the identity of Indian and Metis students? yes or no What are your reasons to support this statement?
16. Can you remember a story about a student who was affected by this class?
17. What materials and/or human resources did you use in Native Studies 20?
18. How important were these resources?
19. How did the set up of your class compare to the other classrooms in the high school?
20. Did your Native Studies 20 class participate in any activities outside the classroom? Can you describe one of those activities and how it affected the class?

## APPENDIX C

### Questions for the Elder's Interview

1. What is your name?  
Where do you live?
2. What types of work do you do?  
Where do you do your work?
3. Are you familiar with the Native Studies classes that are taught in the high schools? Please explain what you know about them.
4. Have you ever been invited to speak to students in Native Studies 20?  
What did you say to them?
5. What does it mean to you to be a Cree person?
6. Why is it important for young Cree people to know their Cree culture?
7. How can schools teach about cultural identity and self-concept?
8. What kinds of things need to be included in schools for Indian and Metis students?
9. What future direction should education be taking for Indian and Metis students?
10. What are some of the resources and/or experiences should schools be providing?
11. What are the advantages of attending a First Nations school on a reserve?
12. What are the advantages of attending a non-First Nations school?

## APPENDIX D

### Teaching Style

#### Axial Coding

1. responsibilities
2. interaction between teacher and student
3. learning styles
4. expectations
5. relaxed atmosphere
6. fun
7. humour
8. relationships with teacher
9. trust factor
10. recognition
11. self image
12. comfort zones
13. unsure

## APPENDIX E

### Instructional Methods

1. assignments
2. description of assignments
3. developing skills
4. the passing of information
5. projects
6. evaluation
7. group work
8. environmental influences
9. creativity
10. art work
11. stimulation
12. active learning
13. decision making
14. risk taker
15. perceptions
16. opinions expressed
17. interpretations
18. discussions between teacher and students
19. problem solving

## APPENDIX F

### Roots

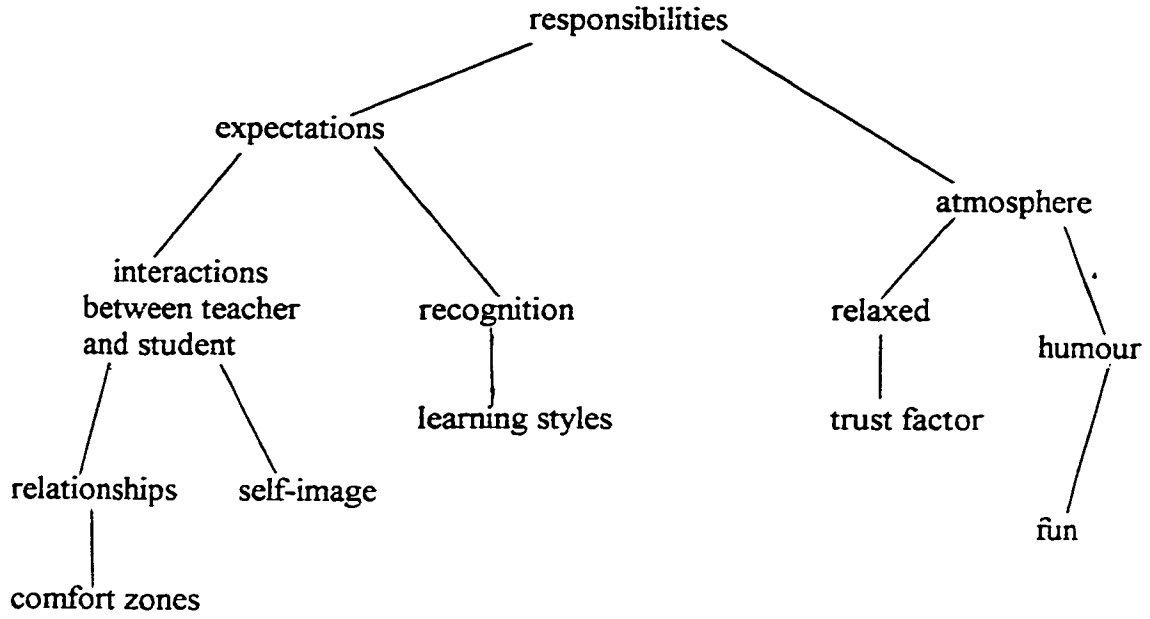
1. kinship
2. family
3. circle
4. community
5. connections
6. unity
7. sense of belonging
8. feeling (affective domain)
9. pride
10. sharing
11. equality
12. relationship with friends
13. role models
14. relationship with others
15. family ties and influences
16. family concerns and issues



APPENDIX G

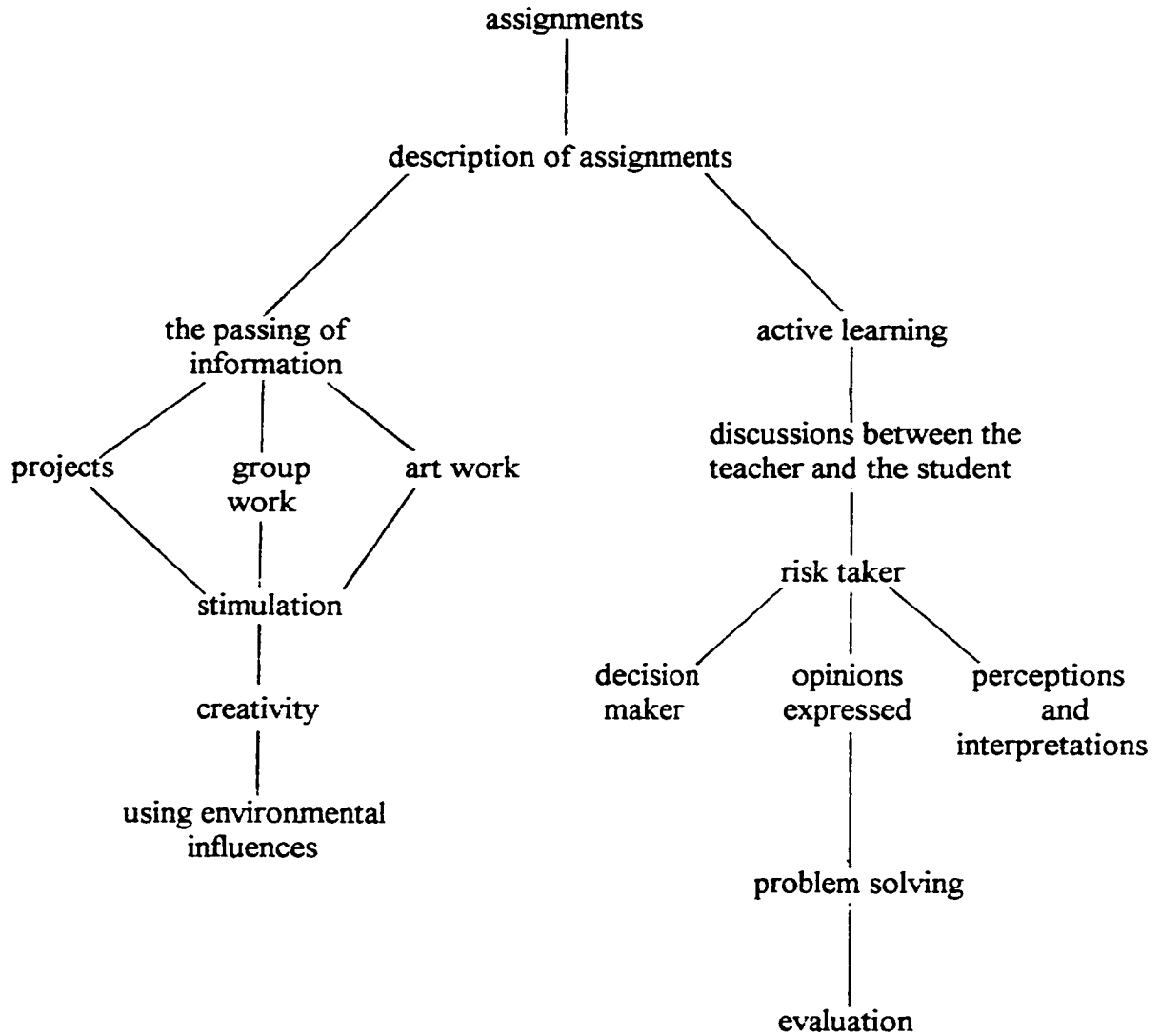
Teaching Style Chart

Selective Coding



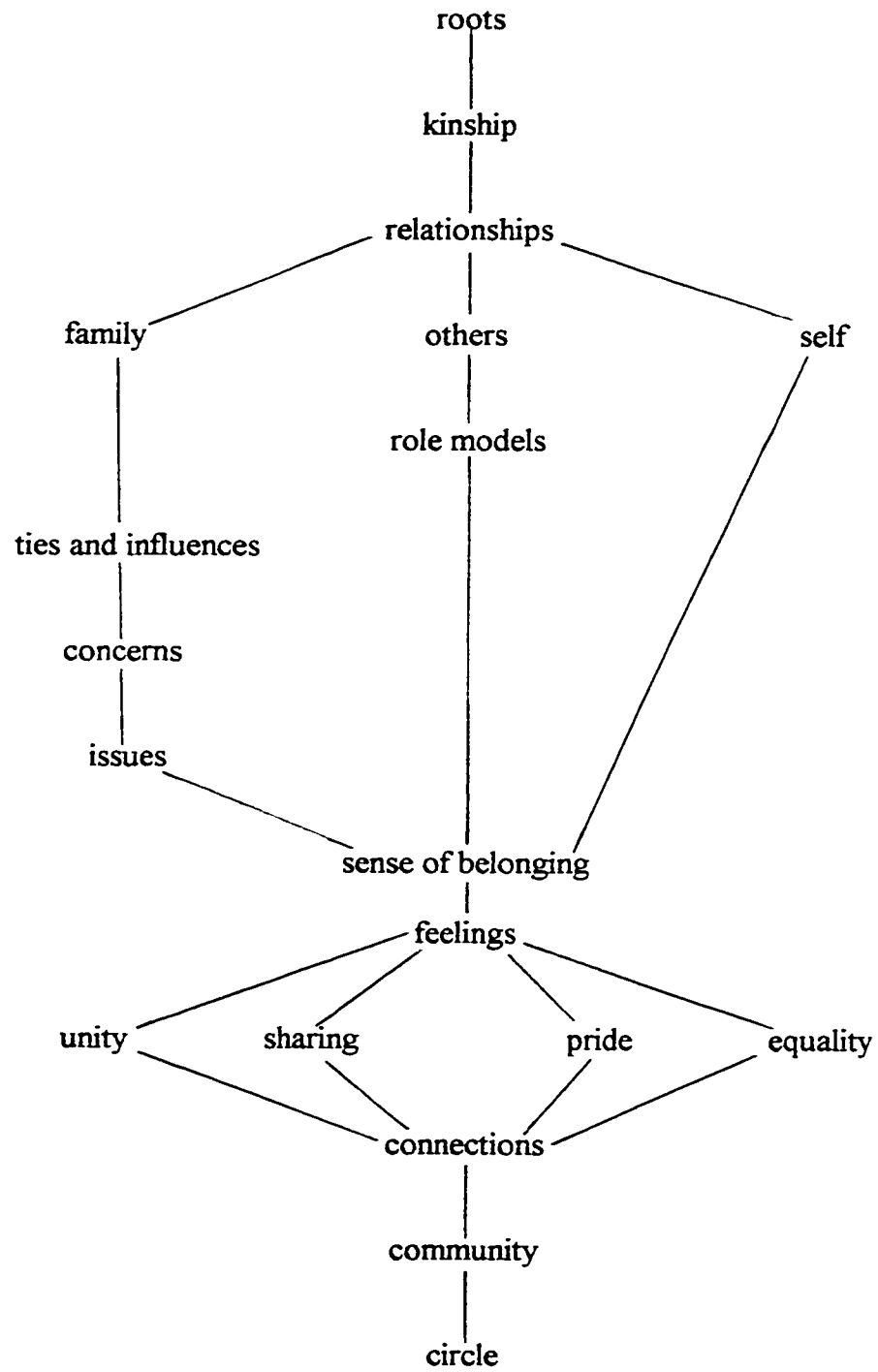
## APPENDIX H

## Instructional Methods Chart



## APPENDIX I

## Roots Chart



**APPENDIX J**  
**Letters of Permission**

[ L e t t e r h e a d ]

Date

Inside Address

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Your help is important and needed! Students taking grade eleven Native Studies will be asked to be part of a study to discover the effect of this course on cultural identity and self concept. To this end, students, with the permission of parents or guardians, will be asked to complete a questionnaire. Some will be interviewed

I ask your permission to have [ ] participate in a study. Please indicate on the enclosed permission slip whether or not you agree. Please return the permission slip with your child as soon as possible. Your response will be strictly confidential and participation by your child is voluntary. Furthermore, if your son or daughter wants to withdraw from the study, he or she may do so at any time.

The study is being done to fulfil a requirement for the completion of my Masters Degree in Education at the University of Regina. The Regina Public School Board has given permission for this study to be conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Centennial School at 791-8559. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely

Juanita Tuharsky

<b>PERMISSION SLIP</b>	
I _____ agree to allow _____ to participate in the	
Name of Parent or Guardian	Name of Student
study concerning Native Studies 20 course discussed above.	
_____ (Parent or Guardian Signature)	_____ (Student Signature)

**[Letterhead]**

Date

Inside Address

Dear Student:

Your help is needed! The Grade Eleven Native Studies course will be a part of a study to discover the effect of this course on cultural identity and self-concept. I seek your permission to take part in this study.

You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire and may be selected to be interviewed. Interviewing will involve one or two sessions and a follow-up interview to make sure your thoughts were accurately recorded. This project will take sixteen to twenty weeks. Please note that all the raw data collected from this study will be held in strict confidence.

The study is being done to fulfil a requirement for the completion of my Masters Degree in Education at the University of Regina. The Regina Public School Board has given permission for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Centennial School at 791-8559. Please return the permission slip from the letter to your parents or guardians as soon as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Juanita Tuharsky

[Letterhead]

Date

Inside Address

Dear Mr \_\_\_\_\_

Your help is needed! I will be conducting a study on the Grade Eleven Native Studies course to discover the value of this course in enhancing cultural identity and a positive self-concept. I request your participation.

I would be grateful if you allowed me to interview you. There may be one to two separate interviews lasting about an hour each, and one to two hours to review and revise the data obtained from these interviews. I also would like to spend some time in your classroom to observe how the students participate and interact with the curriculum. This will allow me to acquaint myself with the students because I would like to interview eight of them. The study should take about sixteen to twenty weeks. Raw data from this study will be strictly confidential.

The study is being done to fulfil a requirement for the completion of my Masters Degree in Education at the University of Regina. The Regina Public School Board has given permission for the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and may withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at Centennial School at 791-8559. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Juanita Tuharsky

PERMISSION SLIP

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the study regarding  
(Your Name)

Native Studies 20 as discussed above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Teacher's Signature)

[Letterhead]

Date:

Inside Address:

Dear Mr

Your help is needed! I am doing a study on students taking Grade Eleven Native Studies. I would like to know whether this course affects cultural identity and self-concept.

I would like to interview you. There may be one or two interviews lasting about an hour each. When these are transcribed I would like to meet with you again to make sure that your thoughts have been recorded accurately and if necessary I will revise the data. Please note that all the raw data from this study is strictly confidential.

The study is being done to fulfil a requirement for the completion of my Masters Degree in Education at the University of Regina. The Regina Public School Board has given permission for this study. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Centennial School at 791-8559 or at home at 545-3450. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Juanita Tuharsky

PERMISSION SLIP

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the study regarding  
(Your Name)

Native Studies 20 as discussed above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Elder's Signature)



**APPENDIX K**

**Ethics Review**

# HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

## Application for Approval for Research Procedures

### **Section 1: Identification and Purposes**

1. **Date:** April 22, 1996      **Revised:** June 24, 1996

**Name of Applicant(s):**                      Juanita Tuharsky

**Address:** 2631 Atkinson Street  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
S4N 3Y1

**Title of Research:** Perceptions of Students, Teachers and an Elder About Whether The Saskatchewan Native Studies Curriculum is Helping Native Students Enhance the Development of Cultural Identity and Self Concept

2. **If the project will be part of a thesis, or class requirement, give the name of the supervisor:**

Hellmut Lang

**Department or Faculty:**

Faculty of Education

3. **Purposes.** Give a brief outline of the main features and variables of the research problem. Include a brief statement that described the significance and potential benefits of the study.

In Saskatchewan Education's Native Studies 20 curriculum there are nine goals. Three of these pertain directly to self concept and cultural identity: to help individuals clarify their identities; to develop an understanding of and sensitivity towards other cultural groups; and to facilitate development by Indian and Metis students' of a positive identity. It is important to examine how much of the curriculum content and teaching methods influence this development of cultural identity and positive self-concept.

There has been no comprehensive investigation of the Native Studies curriculum in the province. The data obtained through this study will help define cultural identity and self-concept. The study also may reveal the influence of various parts of the curriculum on students. Finally, the study will show the role teachers have played in developing cultural identity. These findings may suggest curriculum improvements to Saskatchewan Education and the Regina Public School Board.

**Section II: Subjects****1. Briefly describe the number and kind of subjects required for data collection.**

The researcher will give a questionnaire to approximately thirty participants. Indian and Metis students, teachers and an Elder will be the subjects.

**2. What information about the research problem and their role in the project will potential subjects be given?**

The attitudes of Indian and Metis students about cultural identity and self-concept will be examined. Has the content in the curriculum influenced attitudes? How influential is the teacher in the development of the cultural identity of students? Did students' attitudes change? An Elder will be interviewed to define what cultural identity means to Indian people. This information will be used to clarify and identify cultural identity.

**3. How will consent of the subjects to participate be obtained?**

Letters will be sent to the students, parents or guardians, the teacher and the Elder seeking consent to participate in the study. The letter will state that participation is voluntary, and that the individual may withdraw at any time. The letter will include a permission slip for participants to sign and return.

**4. What will the subjects be required to do in the course of the project?**

Students will be asked to complete a questionnaire. After questionnaires have been collected, eight students will be asked to be interviewed. An Elder and a teacher will be interviewed. Letters to participants will specify approximately how much time will be required to participate and how each will participate.

**5. What assurances will the subjects be given and what precautions will be taken regarding the confidentiality of the data and information which they provide in the study?**

Pseudonyms will be used for teachers, students and the schools involved. The identity of the Elder will not be concealed. Nevertheless, he/she will have the right to revise or delete any statements he or she recorded during the interviews.

**6. Will children be used as a source of data?**

Yes X

No

If Yes, indicate how consent will be obtained on their behalf. See Section II, item 3.

7. Will the researchers or any member of the research team be in a position of power or authority in relation to his/her subjects? (For example: A teacher doing research and using her class as subjects or a counsellor collecting research data from his clients.)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No   X  

If Yes, explain why and indicate how subjects will be debriefed after the study.

8. Will any deception of any kind be necessary in the project?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No   x  

If Yes, explain why and indicate how subjects will be debriefed after the study.

### Section III: Access to Data and Findings

1. Who will have access to the original data of the study?

The researcher and her committee members will have access to the original data of the study. Confidentially will be ensured.

2. Will subjects have access to the findings of the study?

The subjects will have access to the findings. They will be allowed to see their questionnaires and to review the data from their interviews. They will be given an opportunity to review and revise their responses. A copy of the completed study will be sent to the schools involved, the teachers and the Elder.

3. What will be the final disposition of the original data after the study is completed?

The data will be kept in a filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed.

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Signature of Applicant(s)

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Signature of Advisor or Instructor