HOLISTIC LEARNING: A MODEL OF EDUCATION BASED ON
ABORIGINAL CULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

A THESIS
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BY
DIANE L. HILL

SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY
ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

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0-612-53622-X

Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis compares Western educational philosophy with traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy for the purpose of identifying some of the major beliefs, concepts, and principles that have shaped each of these philosophies and have determined the development of various learning and teaching methods.

Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge is discussed within the context of a model of education currently being practiced by the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI). This model encourages the use of learning/teaching processes that support an Aboriginal definition of "holistic learning" during which a learner is challenged to acquire the qualities and characteristics necessary "to become a whole person." By definition, a whole person is capable of balancing his/her mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual human capabilities both internally within one's self and externally in interaction with all life forms present throughout Creation.

This thesis challenges contemporary Western educational practitioners to consider the importance of documenting and accrediting knowledge that is not contained in books. It explains how traditional Aboriginal knowledge is an equally valid representation of the current truths that exist within the Western world today. This thesis relies heavily on personal interviews with First Nation leaders that focus on traditional Aboriginal teachings. It offers an example of an educational process that helps Aboriginal learners reclaim their cultural identity, develop an understanding of themselves, and become more conscious of a multi-cultural environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I prepared myself to write this thesis, I spoke with a Native elder who said:

Ideas are contained within a book, but ideas are also contained within a person. You tell me which ideas are more important, are more accurate, or are more "true". Just because some ideas are written down does not make them better than any of the other ideas occurring inside of people throughout the world.

People can become quite preoccupied with finding the "truth" and in knowing how and why the world works. Perhaps it is better to simply find out what ideas work best for you and then to practice them. When you need to understand things, go and seek out other ideas to give yourself food with which to feed your own thoughts and to find your own solutions. It does not matter whether these ideas come from a person or a book. (personal communication, J. E. Thomas, 1998. Cayuga Nation-Six Nations of the Grand River)

This thesis required the contributions and support of many individuals and organizations, too many to name, but who very generously supported my work. However, I wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal people of North America. I thank them for preserving their teachings and for passing down through their oral tradition a vast knowledge and wisdom that made this work possible. A special thanks is expressed to Chief Jacob E. Thomas who passed into the spirit world in August, 1998 before this work was completed. His words inspired me to recognize the knowledge that is not contained in books.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, approximately 633 Native communities may be grouped into several separate and distinct Aboriginal cultures. Each of these cultures possesses its own language and system of beliefs and practices. Yet, in spite of their cultural differences, Aboriginal people essentially maintain a common cultural philosophy based on a spiritual vision. This capacity fosters among them an unique understanding of the nature of the human being and how the human being interacts and behaves in the world.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of this common Aboriginal cultural philosophy, as well as important background information related to its historical disruption. In helping readers to understand the effects of cultural oppression, this chapter clarifies the problem as it relates to Aboriginal people and explains the need for an educational strategy that can help them to reclaim and restore their cultural identity.

Background to the Problem

Within Aboriginal cultural philosophy, important traditional teachings are found. These contain the principles, values, beliefs, and assumptions of a distinct culture of people. An Aboriginal world view and its teachings on life make it possible for Aboriginal people to be truly respectful and humanistic in their daily interactions with people. These teachings help Aboriginal people to understand the importance of co-existence and interdependence with the environment in which they live. From a common cultural philosophy, Aboriginal societies emerged and developed. Beliefs about the nature of the human being are made operational within a unique view of the world as a

concentric set of circular relationships. These beliefs and their attendant values are melded into the foundational principles on which various forms of Aboriginal social structure, spiritual practice, and educational methodology are established.

Traditional teachings are a means of transmitting the beliefs, values, and principles that Aboriginal people cherish. These teachings are preserved through an oral tradition and often take the form of stories or legends. Through "story-telling" (Thomas, 1997), Aboriginal people are made aware of the legends and historical accounts of their peoples' encounters and experiences. At times, these stories tell of a land that was harsh, but most often generous. Many of these stories are about survival. They depict the struggles of the people over treaty rights, and their battles for boundaries and territories. These stories reinforce the values and beliefs of Aboriginal people and instill attitudes of trust or wariness of both neighboring Aboriginal and visiting non-Aboriginal nations. As the central vehicle for transferring traditional Aboriginal knowledge, these stories are told and re-told to succeeding generations of people. This practice of story-telling still continues to the present day.

Traditional Aboriginal teachings may contain stories of hardship and suffering, as well as stories of kindness and love. For example, Aboriginal cultural teachings idealize the notion of "balance". Humans are thought to contain the capacity for what may be referred to in Aboriginal culture as the "desirable" and "not-so-desirable" human qualities and behavior--or what may be thought of in the Western world as "good" and "evil" but in less of a dichotomous way. In Aboriginal thought, both energies are necessary to life, and the presence of one does not negate the presence of the other. For example, good

triumphs over evil only in as much as it is necessary for any energy system to be brought back into balance. Thus, in Aboriginal thought, balance is one of the primary principles to which all of life adheres.

Traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy depicts a way of life that ensured the survival of Aboriginal peoples, but it is not without its flaws. Through their oral tradition, Aboriginal people understand that, like all human societies, their societies are subject also to the weaknesses of human thought and will. Historical accounts provide examples of individuals willfully choosing to exercise their freedom of choice in sometimes selfish and self-centered ways. In assuming positions of leadership, some Aboriginal people have failed to understand their individual desire for power and control and for this reason, many have exercised their human will in less than responsible ways. Through oral tradition, Aboriginal people are reminded of times past when the people strayed from their teachings, and the psycho-social development of their way of life faltered. However, it is from these oral teachings that the nature of the human being and the ways of the world are understood and that the need to adhere to their "original instructions" is impressed upon the people (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1994).

According to oral tradition, the traditional teachings inherent in an Aboriginal world view were intact prior to contact with the first Europeans. Later, as European settlements began to flourish in North America, a traditional Aboriginal way of life began to diminish. From an examination of their historical contact with non-Aboriginal cultures, the problem Aboriginal peoples faced was not a lack of "agency"--the capacity to act or to exert power--but, rather it was the power exerted by non-Aboriginal nations,

particularly in the struggles over land, that was often unequally matched. As settlements

developed, a new colonial government emerged, and oppressive measures governing the

lives of Aboriginal peoples were enacted. The Report of the Royal Commission on

Aboriginal Peoples (1996) states:

> [In] the new Canadian nation, when the government turned to address the con-
> stitutional responsibility for Indians and their lands assigned by the *Constitution
> Act, 1867*, it adopted a policy of assimilation....designed to move communities,
> and eventually all Aboriginal peoples, from their helpless 'savage' state to one of
> self-reliant 'civilization'; to make in Canada but one community—a non-
> Aboriginal, Christian one. (p. 333)

Historical analysis shows that under the forces of colonialism, Aboriginal peoples

were subjected to disease and abuse that disrupted their traditional cultural beliefs and

practices. As a consequence of this suffering, massive numbers of Aboriginal people

died. Thus, the impact of oppressive experiences not only interfered with the holistic

development of Aboriginal families, communities, and nations, but also created psycho-

social stressors that affected individual growth and development. In an attempt to ease

their suffering, large numbers of Aboriginal people accepted the beliefs, values, and

practices of the dominant Western culture.

In Canada, in the late 1800s, the residential boarding school system was

implemented as part of the process of colonization in the new world. It was an

educational system designed to transmit the beliefs and practices of the religious

authorities who operated them. The purpose of the residential boarding school was to

create a new mindset for Aboriginal people; the effects were unconscionable.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) explains:

> Put simply, the residential school system was an attempt by successive govern-
> ments to determine the fate of Aboriginal people in Canada by appropriating and
> reshaping their future in the form of thousands of children who were removed
> from their homes and communities and placed in the care of strangers. (p. 335)

Many dramatic changes occurred in the societal development of Aboriginal people

in North America. At the insistence of the Western cultural authorities who assumed

power and control over their lives, many Aboriginal people who attended residential

school adopted the beliefs and practices of the Western education that they received. As a

way of improving their quality of life, more and more Aboriginal families not only

adopted, but also internalized the socio-cultural beliefs and organizational patterns found

within Western culture. As The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

(1996) states:

> Marching out from the schools, the children, effectively re-socialized, imbued
> with the values of European culture, would be the vanguard of a magnificent
> metamorphosis; the 'savage' was to be made 'civilized', made fit to take up
> the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. (p. 335)

The ancestors of today's Aboriginal people were the direct recipients of the effects

from this clash between cultures. Many of them adjusted their belief systems, and then

passed these ideas on to succeeding generations of Aboriginal people. In contemporary

times, the most evident splits in Aboriginal communities occur between families who

adhere to traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices and those who have taken on

Western ways of thinking and behaving. Those Aboriginal people who strongly identify

with the values and practices associated with Western culture not only speak against, but

also strongly resist, their own traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices. In

retaliation, traditional Aboriginal families who have held onto their language and cultural

practices often ridicule those families who follow the ways of the "Whiteman." The

belief systems and inherent attitudes of these families are passed down to each successive

generation, producing fragmented Aboriginal communities rife with conflict and

disagreement.

The changes in family belief systems, created as a consequence of oppression, has

disrupted the psycho-social mechanisms that supported, at one time, the development of a

healthy and positive Native self-image and self-esteem. The mixture of cultural

characteristics and social practices found within contemporary Aboriginal cultures has

created a general confusion for many Aboriginal people and their communities. Today,

many Aboriginal people no longer know who they are or what makes them unique. The

socialization mechanisms by which Aboriginal people historically determined the

meaning and purpose of their lives have been greatly undermined as well. It is in this

sense that education as part of an overall process of civilizing became an oppressive tool.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) explains:

> It [civilizing] required a concerted attack on the ontology, on the basic cultural
> patterning of the children and on their world view. They had to be taught to see
> and understand the world as a European place within which only European values
> and beliefs had meaning; thus the wisdom of their cultures would seem to them
> only savage superstition. A wedge had to be driven not only physically between
> parent and child, but also culturally and spiritually. (p. 341)

Dysfunctional Aboriginal communities are the result of many years of oppressive

experience. High rates of suicide, alcoholism, family violence, sexual abuse,

unemployment and other social ills are still a large part of Aboriginal life today. The

residential boarding school system no longer exists, but its impact lingers on in the psychological and social make-up of Aboriginal people. Although the social situation has changed somewhat in recent years, the cycles of abuse continue to be transferred to succeeding generations of people through a variety of dysfunctional relating patterns. After years of internalizing the negative imagery associated with their historical oppression, many Aboriginal people have come to believe that their ability to live a quality of life beyond survival depends on how well they can mimic the cultural beliefs and practices of mainstream Western culture. Oppressive forces external to Aboriginal communities are no longer needed to convince the people that their original way of life is inappropriate. Now, individual family belief systems work to oppress other family belief systems found within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people now oppress and oppose one another.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to re-iterate the historical demise of Aboriginal people. Rather, this background is intended to provide readers with an awareness of this history so that they can understand better the need for a system of education that supports the cultural revitalization of Aboriginal people. Readers should now be more aware of the psychological and social impact of a system of education. Any educational model can and does affect a whole nation of people. On still another level, readers should also begin to understand why the necessary levels of trust for establishing a positive state of co-existence between Western European and First Nations people throughout the world has yet to be achieved. Lastly, and perhaps on a more global level, readers might begin to understand why other nations of people throughout the world continue to make war with

each other. Once negative imagery and belief is internalized within a people, it is then transferred to succeeding generations. Passing down what we have learned to others is a natural human phenomenon, not unique to Aboriginal people.

As a result of having internalized their oppression, many Aboriginal people suffer from a negative self-concept and low self-esteem, and they do not extend their trust easily. Therefore, living in accordance with the traditional Aboriginal principles associated with balance, reciprocity, and a peaceful co-existence becomes difficult for Aboriginal people who must live not only with themselves, but also with people from other cultures. This reality is an unfortunate one because many traditional Aboriginal teachings idealize the notions of "becoming one with all of our relations" and "having respect for all living things."

Problem Statement

Historically, as Elias and Merriam (1995) write, "The purpose of education has been the transmission of cultural heritage and the perpetuation of existing society" (p. 121). Webster's Dictionary (1981) explains that a culture exists because it "depends upon man's capacity for learning and for transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations" (p. 274). In the case of Aboriginal people, a large part of their traditional cultural knowledge deteriorated during the era of the residential boarding school educational system. Ironically, it would appear that in these contemporary times, the revitalization of Aboriginal cultural philosophy--its knowledge base and inherent skills-- will depend once more on the practice of education. If Aboriginal people are to reclaim their traditional knowledge base and rebuild their communities and nations, then they

must concern themselves once more with the practice of education both publicly within their communities and privately within their homes. Because education is an integral part of an overall process of socialization, much of what one learns in school will be transferred into the home and will affect a family's way of life and its belief system. The reverse is also true because whatever happens in the family and within the community affects the learner's perception of life and ultimately his/her performance in school.

Western models of education have greatly impacted and influenced the learning/teaching processes not only of Aboriginal people, but of all people. Today, many Aboriginal people, like so many other cultures of people, attend schools that are structured on Western thought and practices. The school curriculum contains very little information that is relevant to helping individuals--those who belong to Western culture and those who belong to other cultures--understand the importance of learning about themselves and about other non-Western cultures. Also, knowledge and skill development in learning how to function within a multi-cultural environment is often missing in the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school levels.

Even when choices related to curriculum content are available, many educational administrators and teachers have a tendency to choose material that follows Western ideological thought. Such is the case within many Aboriginal communities where community-based schools and other social institutions operate on principles, values, beliefs, and assumptions heavily derived from Western cultural philosophy. The internalization of Western cultural beliefs and practices from the time of early historical contact means that the majority of Aboriginal people fail to realize that many of their

assumptions about the world are based on the values and beliefs of another culture. Western cultural knowledge and skills are simply more prevalent than Aboriginal cultural knowledge and skills. Without a process for critical reflection (Brookfield, 1991), the influence of Western culture often goes unrecognized. The fact that Aboriginal cultural philosophy is not general knowledge either within the school system or within the home complicates the problem even further.

Today, many Aboriginal people drop out of Western educational systems. Thomas (1997) writes that "most Native adult students do not successfully complete post-secondary studies for a number of reasons. These range from personal factors to other factors such as lack of finances, lack of support systems, and inadequate academic preparation" (p. 1). Thomas goes on to say that most Native people have been unsuccessful during their earlier education for a variety of reasons. Many of them have developed negative attitudes towards the educational system and most have not completed high school. Many of these Aboriginal people return to their home communities and most, if they decide to return to formal education, will look for a "Native" program which will help them to reclaim some of their traditional Aboriginal knowledge and with it, their Native identity.

The pervasiveness of Western cultural institutions and practices means that many Aboriginal people believe that in order to succeed in today's business world, they must also learn and acquire certain occupational knowledge and skills that are consistent with the mainstream professional accreditation and licensing bodies. Unfortunately, many Aboriginal people decide to abandon their struggle for an education when forced to

compete for entry into mainstream careers and/or educational institutions. For Aboriginal people, and particularly for Aboriginal educators, this reality has become a double-edged sword.

Due to influences like the residential schools and the lack of opportunities for communicating Aboriginal oral history, traditional Aboriginal knowledge has not been consistently transmitted from one generation to the next. Therefore, large gaps in the Aboriginal knowledge base presently exist. However, these gaps should not be taken to mean that this knowledge does not exist. Rather, it simply means that traditional Aboriginal knowledge is not common knowledge amongst Aboriginal people today. This reality becomes even more problematic when compounded with the fact that many Aboriginal educators are graduates of Western academic institutions. Many of these educators, through a process of socialization of which education is an important part, have had their Aboriginal ideas replaced with Western concepts and ideology. In such instances, these educators will generally not support the development of educational programs grounded in traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and skills. Such educators have a tendency to believe that traditional Aboriginal knowledge and skills do not prepare their people adequately for mainstream life. They often pit themselves against other Aboriginal educators who believe that if an educational program is to be truly Aboriginal, then it simply cannot be a program that has a Native label attached to it. They contend that an Aboriginal program must transmit knowledge and skills that truly represent Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs, and practices. When Aboriginal learners themselves are added into the mix, oftentimes, many of them choose not to participate in

a traditional Aboriginal educational program because their previous educational experiences have shaped their beliefs in favor of Western cultural knowledge and skills.

The entire situation is unfortunate because an educational model based on a traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy of wholeness and balance would do much to clarify the confusing and conflicting beliefs of many Aboriginal people and to help in restoring their cultural identity and integrity as a people. Once cultural integrity is restored, the self-esteem and self-confidence of a people rises to a level that makes it possible for them to be more discerning and accepting of differences. People who know who they are exude a confidence that arises from a self-concept which no longer perceives or fears that someone or something else has control over their lives.

Aboriginal people are just one cultural group of people who would benefit from an educational process that seeks to restore their cultural identity and self-esteem. Helping Aboriginal people to become more conscious of their personal and social situations and their capacity to rise up from the ashes of their historical demise makes good educational sense. A critical consciousness and the ability to be discerning and critical thinkers are gifts that would benefit all people.

Today, educational programs for Aboriginal people are being designed with the goal of combating the effects of the residential boarding school system. Reversing the generational damage done to the psycho-social development of Aboriginal individuals, families, communities, and nations must begin with a more holistic model of education. In using holistic processes of learning and teaching, Aboriginal learners can be helped to explore the negative attitudes they direct against themselves, others, the educational

system, and against Western culture as a whole. In fact, learners from all cultures can be helped to broaden their perception of them-selves, others, and the world around them. A broader perception of reality will help all people to become more successful not only within a Western system of education, but also within all of life's endeavors.

In summary, the problem addressed in this thesis is the need to develop a holistic model of education that is community-based and that utilizes alternative methods of teaching and learning designed to support the educational success of learners from many different cultures. Therefore, the ideas and concepts contained within this thesis describe an Aboriginal cultural approach to education that should be viewed by readers as new "food with which to feed your own thoughts and to find your own solutions" (personal communication, J. E. Thomas, 1998). In brief, all educators can benefit from an examination of another culture's approach to education. But perhaps it will be the Aboriginal educators and Aboriginal learners who will derive the greatest benefit from reading a description of an educational model that supports a unique Aboriginal way of life.

Purpose and Contribution of the Thesis to the Field of Adult Education

The field of adult education is very broad and includes many different areas and aspects of study. In fact, this work was made possible simply because the field of adult education offers people like myself, the opportunity to study topics which have roots in other disciplines. In the following pages, I attempt to integrate, synthesize, and critique the information contained in both written and oral sources related to Aboriginal education, my area of study and holistic learning, which is the specific aspect of this study.

The overall purpose of this thesis is to describe a model of holistic education that utilizes processes of learning and teaching drawn from a philosophical framework which is rooted in traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices. Over the past 15 years, I have worked as an adult educator with Aboriginal people in the capacity of educational administrator, consultant, teacher, and healer. During this time, I have come to believe that it is important to articulate a view of education that will facilitate the development of educational programs for people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that are holistic and community-based. I believe that this thesis will serve this purpose because it presents a rationale for alternative forms of knowledge and educational practice.

In addition, this thesis will help adult educators to understand the need for educational models that support the development of individuals, and at the same time, teach them how to balance their cultural needs and societal interactions with others and the world beyond. In some measure, I believe that this thesis serves to move readers towards this understanding.

Finally, this thesis attempts to explain the importance of teaching people to maintain their cultural identity and cultural integrity as a prelude to helping them move towards a greater consciousness and understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them. For this reason, it constitutes a significant contribution not only to the field of adult education, but also to the development of a state of co-existence for all people within a multi-cultural setting.

Scope and Limitations of This Work

Originally when I began this work, my ambition was to learn more about holistic

learning. Therefore, in undertaking the research for this thesis, I was greatly interested in

expanding my knowledge and understanding of this topic. However, my unrelenting

interest in acquiring knowledge of teaching and learning methodologies that were firmly

embedded in the cultural philosophy and practices of Aboriginal people led me to further

refine my topic. I then proposed to study Aboriginal processes of learning and teaching

that were holistic according to an Aboriginal definition of the term. Thus, holistic

learning as it pertained to the education of Aboriginal people became the focus of my

interest and study.

Once my topic was established, I first embarked on a manual and computer search

for sources on the topic of holistic learning that I would use for this thesis specifically in

the literature review chapter. I did not search using related terms. Thus, the review of the

literature contained in this thesis does not purport to be a comprehensive examination of

all possible source materials related to holistic learning. In any event, few sources on the

topic of holistic learning in general were actually discovered.

I next decided to undertake a search and review of the oral history of my people.

Prior to my admission into the adult education program of Saint Francis Xavier

University, I had worked for 9 years as a consultant in the area of human resource

development for Aboriginal people. As part of a Native consulting firm, I travelled

throughout Canada and the United States and worked extensively with Aboriginal people

from a variety of cultures. I use quotations from my interviews with Aboriginal leaders to

inform my thesis. Over the years, I authored several publications where I make reference to Aboriginal cultural knowledge in the context of my work in human resource development, in adult education, and in healing. Much of my work over the years has been influenced by the oral teachings of many Aboriginal teachers and elders. Their knowledge and wisdom has greatly contributed to my education and has complemented the Aboriginal knowledge that I had already acquired as a consequence of being born a Mohawk woman who was raised on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory situated near Brantford, Ontario.

In explaining the outcomes of my research and in discussing my master's degree with my advisors, I spoke about the kind of Aboriginal knowledge that is not contained books. In response, they encouraged me to conduct a review of the traditional Aboriginal teachings contained within my unique oral history. I gathered these traditional Aboriginal teachings from interviews with elders and through the exchange of informal writings. In the pages that follow, I refer to these teachings as personal communications. These teachings, which reflect an Aboriginal practice of education, span the period from 1982 to the present. From these, I have cited and included quotations where appropriate in the thesis.

This thesis has a special focus that draws upon a model of holistic education as it is understood and practiced by Aboriginal educators working within the First Nations Technical Institute. This educational training institute, situated on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near Deseronto, Ontario, is wholly-owned and operated by Aboriginal people known as the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. For the past 13 years, I have worked

with Aboriginal adult learners enrolled in this Institute in varying educational capacities. I have also retained a part-time practice as a consultant, healer, and writer. Much of what will be discussed and described in this thesis has its roots in the work that I have undertaken within the Institute and in my community work with Aboriginal people.

Assumptions

During the course of my study, I have been influenced by my traditional Aboriginal teachings and by my involvement as a learner in mainstream Western educational institutions. Therefore, it is from these experiences that I make the following assumptions pertinent to the contents of this thesis.

In choosing holistic learning as the aspect of my study, I now see that I was greatly influenced by an Aboriginal definition of the word--holistic. My Aboriginal elders and teachers had taught me that holistic was derived from the notion to be whole. As one teacher told me, a whole person "is defined as a human being who has a physical body endowed with a mind and heart (emotions or feelings) that is empowered by spirit. These four aspects of one's self--body, mind, heart, and spirit--will need to be understood and developed within every human being" (personal communication, B. K-K. Bell, 1992). In researching my thesis topic, I assumed that I would find similar definitions for the term holistic.

From my personal educational experiences, I assumed that what seemed to be missing from my Western academic learning was the presence of a learning community that fostered and supported the development of relationships between people by providing an understanding and acceptance of individual and cultural differences where they

occurred. From my work as a healer, I assumed that the educational system, as a whole, would benefit from the utilization of teaching and learning processes designed to help learners understand themselves, as well as the world around them. From my teaching experiences as an Aboriginal adult educator, I assumed that given the choice, most educators would prefer to help people to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for creating a balance both within themselves and within the world beyond.

From all of these assumptions, I developed one final assumption. I assumed that I could make a significant contribution to the field of adult education if I could articulate a holistic model of education that includes these assumptions and shows how they have shaped my own educational practice. I assume that the information contained in this thesis will help educators and learners alike to become more aware of how one's cultural assumptions determines an educational philosophy that begets specific teaching and learning processes.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this thesis, the term **Aboriginal** is capitalized because it is used interchangeably with Indian, Native, Native Indian, Native American and First Nations to describe the descendants of the original inhabitants or First Peoples of North America. Other terms used by various sources may identify Aboriginal people as being Metis, Inuit, or Indigenous.

The terms **non-Aboriginal** and **non-Native** includes all people who are not defined as Aboriginal.

The term **Western** is used to describe a culture of people of Western European descent who inhabit North America. **Whiteman** is a term used by Aboriginal people to refer to Western peoples. When discussing **Western culture** in this thesis, this term will include also Euro-Canadian and Euro-United States cultures because of their similarity.

Mainstream is a term used interchangeably with the term **Western** to describe the dominant cultural aspects in both Canada and the United States.

Traditional Aboriginal is used to refer to the knowledge and skills that are passed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition and experiential approach to learning and teaching. Such knowledge and skills contain the notions, beliefs, principles, values, and concepts that may be generally shared by most Aboriginal cultural groups and which can be derived from an examination of Aboriginal ceremonies, customs, and practices.

Within this thesis, the use of the term **holistic**, except where otherwise noted, will denote an Aboriginal definition of the word that embraces the qualities and characteristics necessary "to become a whole person." A whole person denotes a human being who is capable of balancing his/her mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual human capabilities both internally within one's self and externally in societal interaction with all life forms present throughout Creation.

Plan of Presentation

This introductory chapter provides the background information necessary for helping readers to gain insight into contemporary Aboriginal culture, its history, and the

current psycho-social struggles affecting Aboriginal people. It sets the stage for what follows in the other chapters.

In chapter 2, I review two categories of research--a review of selected literature and a review of the traditional Aboriginal teachings contained within my oral history. Both literary and oral sources in this review are presented in accordance with a specific topic. I begin chapter 2, with a discussion of shifting perceptions of reality. This discussion provides the foundational understanding necessary for comprehending the contrast between Western and traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophies that are discussed next in this chapter. These philosophies are best understood through a discussion of world views and associated definitions of knowledge. Cultural philosophies and knowledge definitions give rise invariably to an educational philosophy, and this topic is discussed in terms of an overall context of learning. A comparative view of adult educational philosophy and the methodology that encompasses specific processes for learning and teaching and teacher roles is presented next. Following this discussion is a section that addresses the role of consciousness-raising in education. Approaches to consciousness-raising precedes the discussion of two potential educational outcomes related to individual transformation and social change. Concluding chapter 2 is a section devoted to an examination of holistic education.

In chapter 3, I describe an Aboriginal approach to holistic education by placing it within the context of my work with Aboriginal adult learners enrolled in the Native Social Service Worker program of the First Nations Technical Institute. In this chapter, I discuss traditional Aboriginal educational philosophy more specifically and include a

definition of holistic learning as it is used within an Aboriginal framework. Traditional Aboriginal educational methodology for both teaching and learning is discussed in conjunction with the use of such contemporary educational strategies as a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment. The outcomes of this Aboriginal approach to holistic learning are presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 contains a summary of the key concepts and ideas contained in the preceding chapters. From this, I draw my conclusions and make my recommendations related to the outcomes of this study. This chapter ends with my personal reflection on the learning that I have acquired.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ORAL HISTORY

Throughout history, a behavior peculiar to human beings has been to wonder and to ponder the mysteries of life. The human desire to understand the world, to determine an order and to find out the truth related to the existence of the world and human beings has been occurring since time began. Even the concept of time itself would be created eventually from the human mind.

Shifting Perceptions of Reality

In pursuit of knowledge about the world, Ferguson (1980) explains that new ideas and new discoveries are "revising the very data base on which we have built our assumptions, our institutions, our lives" (p. 145). She notes that "physicists have 'proved' rationally that our rational ideas about the world in which we live are profoundly deficient" (p. 172). Emerging scientific thought, as Ferguson states, "promises far more than the old reductionist view. It reveals a rich, creative, dynamic interconnected reality" (p. 145). To illustrate her point, she presents several examples including the work of Ilya Prigogine, a Belgian physical chemist, who won the 1977 Nobel Peace prize for his "theory of dissipative structures." A dissipative structure is a "form or structure that is maintained by a continuous dissipation or consumption of energy" (p. 164). As Ferguson explains, all living things are dissipative structures in the sense that they represent a flowing wholeness that is highly organized, but always in flux. Complex dissipative structures are connected at many points and in many ways, and they require more energy to maintain their connections. Dissipative structures that become more complex become

even more unstable because continuous movements of energy through the system result in

fluctuations. Ferguson explains how the dissipation of energy, as demonstrated by

Prigogine's mathematics, creates the potential for sudden reordering or transformation.

Minor fluctuations of energy are dampened by the system and cause no change in

structural integrity. However, fluctuations that reach a critical size perturb the system or

shake it up by increasing the interactions within it.

According to Ferguson (1980), Prigogine's theory distinguishes life forms in

nature as being either open or closed systems. An open system such as a seed or living

creature continuously exchanges energy with the environment. In contrast, other life

forms such as rocks are considered to be closed systems because there is no internal

transformation of energy. It is on the point of open and closed systems that Aboriginal

thought and Western thought diverge.

As Samples and Hammond (1985) note, "Science is no more or no less than a way

of thinking and knowing about ourselves and the world we live in" (p. 43). Therefore,

within traditional Aboriginal culture, there exist elders, teachers, and spiritual leaders

who have also thought about and come to know themselves and the world. Ideas

resembling Prigogine's theory discussed previously is described in the following

statement of an Aboriginal teacher:

> An Aboriginal understanding of spirituality means that an Aboriginal person is
> not only energy conscious, but also energy sensitive. He/she possesses a high
> level of awareness and openness to energy in all of its forms. All Aboriginal
> cultures derive their understanding of life from a spiritual base. Thus, spirit to
> spirit communication is facilitated through one's understanding of energy, its
> movement and how it manifests throughout the Creation. (personal communi-
> cation, E. Hill, 1993)

Within the Aboriginal mind, all of life, rocks included, has a life force which means all of

life emits energy--a spiritual energy that connects all things within Creation. Therefore,

notions of relationships and interconnected reality present within Western scientific

thought occur also in Aboriginal teachings about the world. A Native teacher exemplifies

these thoughts as follows:

> Every life-form emits energy or "spirit" that can be transmitted throughout ever
> expanding circles of relationships. In this teaching, the concept of circular
> relationships is expressed through the imagery associated with visualizing a rock
> being thrown into the still mirror of a lake. One tiny circle emerges and another
> bigger one emerges out of that, until each circle continues out of the other in a
> perfect, singular, outward motion extending beyond one's sight. At no time are
> any of those circles not ever a part of the lake. (personal communication, B. K.-K.
> Bell, 1991)

According to Ferguson (1980), if the Western world truly understood their own

scientific discoveries, then they would be prompted more than ever before to undergo a

change in paradigm--a shift in perspective that allows information to come together in a

new form or structure. She believes that in the process of connecting information, people

will learn how to connect with each other because no one culture and no period in history

has had all the answers.

Scientific discoveries are beneficial, nevertheless, even if they are not common

knowledge or generally understood. In the words of Samples and Hammond (1985), "It

is such a central human passion to know about ourselves and the world we live in that it

is graceless to lose the breadth of the quest in our own narrowness" (p. 43). For people

who need proof, science does have the potential to move people towards a new way of

perceiving reality and of seeing the world.

In her work, Ferguson (1980) explains an Aboriginal perception of reality that differs from the one that is generally held by Western culture. She explains that through ceremonies and fasts, Aboriginal people have access to another reality that is achieved through inward reflection and altered states of consciousness. Through their oral tradition, Aboriginal people recount episodes and tales of mystical experiences and encounters with beings in a world that transcends the time, space, and form limitations of our everyday reality. She notes also how they have known about and accepted this reality for a long time. More (1987), in his research, agrees that "the legends often had highly symbolic meanings and involved intricate relationships--an aspect often ignored by non-Indians" (p. 23).

In discussing how Ojibwa Native people perceive reality, Dumont (1992) writes:

> The reality that we experience (perhaps most readily in dreams) is constantly intersecting with what we know as everyday reality. We are most aware of it when we are not so focused on everyday reality. The levels of reality are concurrent and have equal credibility. They provide 'true' experiences to which we must respond. (p. 76)

He notes how these true experiences are necessary for the development of an Aboriginal consciousness that is able to perceive the interdependent nature of all life. As these Aboriginal teachers explain:

> In Aboriginal thought, the political nature of the human being means that a person will be required to make decisions. If a person is also responsible for making decisions that affect others, then these decisions are better made if a person has developed a spiritual consciousness. People who are aware, conscious, and respectful of the spiritual nature of life and who understand how life functions cooperatively and not competitively make the best decision-makers. (personal communication, R. A. Antone & J. Dumont, 1992)

Dumont explains that Native legends and myths are not naive imaginings of a primitive, childish mind. He claims that the stories, ceremonies, and dream-fast experiences contain teachings that provide examples of how access to a "non-ordinary reality"--a reality occurring simultaneously with the present everyday reality--is achieved. In the dream-fast experience, Dumont contends that Ojibwa people are given the opportunity to establish "absolute contact with the spirit world" because they must live "their lives in a balance of the two realities" (p. 79).

Ordinary and non-ordinary realities intersecting and occurring simultaneously with each other imply an interconnected reality. This is a view of the world that is shared by many Aboriginal cultures throughout North America. As one Aboriginal teacher explains:

> In traditional Aboriginal ceremonies, people are totally cognizant of the inter-
> dependent nature of life. Speeches, songs, dances, and other ritual acts combine
> to form a spiritual energy of thankfulness that informs the many life-forms--all
> of which have spirit--that a mutually beneficial relationship is desirable. In this
> way, balance, both with and in the world, is maintained. (personal communica-
> tion, R. A. Antone, 1997).

In writing about Ojibwa Native people, Dumont (1992) concludes that "what we have called a special way of seeing the world is an original and fundamental kind of vision" (p. 79), a way of seeing that is available to people, if we would choose it.

Different perceptions of reality may be explained through an examination of the research devoted to the study of the human brain's capacity to perceive reality on varying levels. Wilber (1990) writes about the cognitive structures of human consciousness that support the creation of various "self-sense stages"--a feeling of personal "me-ness" that is

constructed by a series of exclusive identifications with hierarchic structures of consciousness (p. 296). He notes that these basic structures of consciousness do not change. Rather, they act like the rungs of a ladder that support the development of each new self-sense stage. As higher structures of consciousness emerge, the previous structures remain in existence and these can be simultaneously and continuously exercised and developed. In contrast to the basic structures of consciousness, the self-sense stages are transitory--meaning that they are temporary and subject to replacement. Yet, they are important because they form the moral material from which a person's "self-system" emerges (p. 282).

Wilber (1990) explains that a person's self-system exhibits the capacity to psycho-logically organize, integrate, and coordinate streams of events in a meaningful and coherent way, and is able to create for itself, a selective identity. This selective identity navigates the course of one's human development by either holding onto or letting go of previously developed senses of self, thereby ascending or descending the scale of consciousness. As the self-system climbs up the higher "rungs" of consciousness, he argues that a person has "perfect access to and use of all the preceding and lower basic structures (as well as) simultaneous access to the physical body, sensations, perceptions, feelings, images and representational symbols (or words)" associated with their reality (p. 302).

According to Wilber (1990), what the human being cannot access, at any given stage of self-moral development, are the responses associated with lower self-sense stages because these are essentially replaced. However, in making reference to other cultural

traditions, he concedes that the higher structures of consciousness can be accompanied by all sorts of "phase-temporary events and stages that ... often include spiraling returns to and recapitulations of lower levels, in all sorts of complex patterns and combinations" (p. 303). In his work, he makes reference to 11 basic structures of consciousness, but agrees that the highest levels that operate in the transpersonal realm, as well as the lowest pre-verbal early childhood levels are the most difficult to research and interpret. Therefore, their developmental characteristics and moral correlates are still more speculative and therefore, controversial. Wilber's major point is that "in attempting to integrate and synthesize Eastern and Western approaches (as well as Western approaches themselves), the differences between basic structures and transitional stages ought to be kept in mind" (p. 304). He notes that these differences are important because "the emergence of the basic structures can run far ahead of the self's willingness to 'climb up' them" (p. 304).

Ideas similar to Wilber (1990) are found in the following quotation from an Aboriginal teacher:

> All human growth and development occurs within a "learning" cycle. Human beings continually move through a cycle of awareness, struggle, building and preservation with each new glimpse or piece of information and/or new knowledge about one's self, others, and the world around them. This learning process occurs in a spiral that supports and promotes the development of a greater consciousness and a deeper understanding of one's self and the total environment as information from each new learning cycle is integrated into the whole of a person's perception. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1990).

Thus, it may not be that the brain produces consciousness of one's reality, but rather, consciousness creates how people perceive and interpret the reality around them.

Comparison of Western and Traditional Aboriginal Cultural Philosophy

Human beings are able to create culture and its inherent institutions and practices

because of a philosophy--a view of the world that contains sets of assumptions consisting

of values, feelings, and beliefs derived from their perception of reality. Operating as a

total system housed within the individual, a cultural philosophy becomes a powerful

determinant of human action and interaction within the world. This section is divided

into two parts: the first, a view of the world and the nature of the human being, and the

second, defining knowledge and knowledge creation.

A View of the World and the Nature of the Human Being

Elias and Merriam (1995) describe philosophical theories as "attempts to

understand the world and everything in it in an active and constructive manner" (pp. 2-3).

The task of philosophers is to raise questions about the common opinions and practices

of a people for the purpose of identifying the general principles by which phenomenon,

events, and realities are understood. According to Elias and Merriam, "The power of

philosophy lies in its ability to enable individuals to better understand and appreciate the

activities of every day life" (p. 5). In their view,

> anyone who acts is guided by some theory or some philosophy. We act for
> reason, good and/or bad, and generally have some understanding of what we are
> doing, why we are doing it, . . . and the consequences of our actions. (p. 5)

As a set of general principles by which a person understands the world, a

philosophy is an important determinant of one's perception of reality--what we see and

the meaning ascribed to how we see it. A philosophy provides a person with selected

vision because it is grounded in the beliefs and assumptions relevant to one's particular

culture. Based on my educational work with Aboriginal people, I (1995) have noted how "each Aboriginal culture has a unique knowledge and understanding of life and how their life is to be lived" (p. 4). As one traditional Ojibwa teacher explains:

> All peoples seek to understand the meaning of life and their place within the Creation. Their 'Creation Story' provides them with an understanding of their spiritual link to the Creator and the total Creation. This spiritual tie provides the Ojibwa person with a mechanism for discovering the 'truth', meaning, and purpose of his/her life. The ability to communicate with this spiritual force is a central part of the spiritual development of all people. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

From this unique knowledge and understanding of life, cultural philosophies are shaped, and some of them will conflict. Berry (1990) describes this philosophical conflict in the following words:

> As Europeans on this continent, we have had a certain sense of ourselves as above all other living forms, as lordly rulers of the continent. We see the North American continent as divinely presented to us to do with as we please. (p. 189)

He points out that Indian cultural philosophy embraces a reverence for the earth that offers a sense of place for both human and other living beings. With reference to Western culture, however, Berry admits that to develop a more intimate relationship to the earth would be "a difficult teaching for us, since we long ago lost our capacity for being present to the earth and its living forms in a mutually enhancing manner" (p. 190). Berry believes that Western culture suffers from an "unprecedented pathology that is embedded in our cultural traditions, in our religious traditions, in our very language, in our entire value system," (p. 10) and it is further imperiled by how science and technology is used.

Science has a strong impact on peoples of all cultures, especially on their view of the world and their understanding of the nature of the human being. In thinking about its impact, Steinem (1993) believes that science has become "the most powerful influence on the ways our minds and capabilities are valued" (p. 132). Also, she believes that religion has impacted, not only the Western view of the world, but also its view of the nature of the human being. Steinem notes how society is influenced by religious doctrines that "still undermine and resist any view of human nature as being part of a continuum of nature" (p. 132). This overriding perception meant that science was not exempt from the influence of religion. She argues that "through scientific methods, it was possible to speculate and then to postulate theories supported by evidence which was mustered--not necessarily in a dishonest way, but as a result of selective vision" (p. 132) that was shaped by religious thought.

In Western cultural philosophy, the study of science differs from the study of religion. However, in Aboriginal cultural philosophy, the study of science and religion has more in common. This understanding is explained in the following quotation:

> In the Aboriginal mind, a "spiritual" understanding of life differs from a "religious" understanding. A "spiritual" person understands "energy" and how it manifests itself throughout the Creation. In contrast, a "religious" person can uphold a belief in a "Creator" and adhere to certain values and ritual without a knowledge of energy and its movement. Religion is the expression of one's belief in the "spiritual". Aboriginal spirituality is not a religion, it is a "way of life" that requires awareness and consistent interaction with the environment. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1994)

From this teaching, Aboriginal people understand that a person who has a true knowledge of the spiritual realm experiences no contradiction in religious practices. In fact, as

P. Knudtson (1995) points out Aboriginal spirituality is actually "more akin to modern day 'quantum physics' than it is to religion" (personal communication).

This kind of Aboriginal world view may be thought of as being "holographic." As Ferguson (1980) explains, a holographic model of understanding enriches and enlarges many disciplines because it provides human beings with the opportunity to synthesize both the scientific and the spiritual perceptions of reality. According to Freire (1970), a kind of cultural synthesis becomes possible when the differences between two world views are not denied (p. 183). In fact, he believes that cultural synthesis is indeed based upon these differences.

In Freire's (1970) work, a discussion of culture with particular reference to how a person perceives his/her reality and place within the world is important. He notes that people "in their permanent relations with reality, produced not only material goods--but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts" (p. 91). Freire attests to the fact that "just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance" (p. 36). Steinem (1993) shares the notion that people must be active in the creation and development of themselves and their world view. She reasons that because "each individual is a literal microcosm of all the forces in the universe, it is not a long stretch to a view of human beings . . . as being part of and constantly influencing as well as responding to the larger universe" (p. 155).

This concept of mutuality in relationships that is present within traditional Aboriginal culture, is expressed in the following traditional teaching:

> In Aboriginal thought, a human being must learn how to function within a
> "total environment" of ever expanding circles of relationships. Beginning
> with one's family, the human being's interactions will extend into his/her
> clan, community, and nation; will move outward to other nations and races
> of people; and extend further still to include the global environment and all
> the universal elements within the Creation. A disruption in any one of these
> circles impacts on the whole. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1994)

In his experience as an educator working with Hopi and Navajo people, Rhodes (1988)

concurs:

> In this way of thinking, everything becomes a part of everything, with fewer
> discrete categories for observation or segregation of either ideas or people.
> This may lend itself to a more holistic observational technique, where the
> Anglo process of categorization lends itself to a more linear approach. (p. 24)

Rhodes contends that a holistic vision of the world is demonstrated by the fact that

"Navajos must fully understand something and have thought of all aspects of it before

they will act on that information, or try to act on it" (p. 23). In his master's thesis, which

had as its topic preparing Native adults for post-secondary education, Thomas (1997)

agrees that "the 'wholistic' view, used in place of 'holistic' because of the Native

preference for dealing with the whole person, requires that the individual be given the

'big picture' as a way of teaching and learning" (p. 36). Rhodes (1988) explains that

within Navajo culture, the people possess "the philosophical idea that the whole is more

important than the parts, even though it is made up of the parts" (p. 23). In addition, he

believes that "family and clan relationships are as important as the relationships of ideas.

The parts can be studied, but only in relation to the whole" (p. 23).

In examining the impact of a cultural philosophy, humans tend to apply the same general principles from their perception of the world to their view of the nature of the human being. This tendency is illustrated best in the following teaching:

> The Creator said that all of life moves within a great circle bound together in harmony and balance in four directions. When the human being, understands and lives by the principles and values that are the gifts of these four directions, he will know how to become a part of the natural harmony and balance of life. These gifts flow from the spiritual center of every human being, but people will need to learn how to exercise these gifts in their everyday lives. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

Thus, within traditional Aboriginal culture, the world was created so that it naturally operates on the principles of balance, harmony, and interdependence whereas:

> In the Ojibwa mind, the world teaches people about movement, so it is understood that all of life moves to maintain a balance. The earth is in constant motion, and so too, will be the life of the human being that is viewed as a "wheel" unto itself. A holistic approach to life will require a person to develop themselves in all four directions of the medicine wheel. (personal communication, B. K.-K. Bell, 1992)

Human beings may be naturally gifted with balance, but they are required to learn about their nature and how to exercise their gifts in order to maintain a balance. As one Ojibwa teacher clearly states:

> The whole person or the four aspects of one's self--body, mind, heart (emotions), and spirit--will need to be understood and developed within every human being. Later, a person will need to acquire the ability to balance the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energies both internally within one's self and then, externally within all of one's relationships in the world. (personal communication, B. K.-K. Bell, 1992)

Thomas (1997) agrees that "in most Native traditional cultures, the balance between the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual is preferred" (p. 83).

The principle of balance in relation to the nature of the human being is an

important concept, as the following quote explains:

> Everything in life is composed of energy, and Indigenous people who understand
> the "wholeness" of life know that human illness is a sign that the body is in a state
> of "dis-ease." Every individual is to learn how to maintain a balance. Thus,
> illness is viewed as being beneficial because it causes us to examine ourselves for
> the purpose of determining the imbalance. (personal communication, P. Deere,
> 1985)

And where it is believed that:

> Everything within creation has a life force or "spirit" that carries the potential
> to enhance life or to diminish it--to heal us or harm us. The central idea is to
> become familiar with the spiritual energy that exists in all things and in many
> forms through developing one's skills of discernment. All forces in nature
> exist to ensure a balance in life. (personal communication, E. Niganobe, 1994)

Common notions found within a traditional Aboriginal world view are often related to

principles of balance and of wholeness, as this traditional Ojibwa teacher points out:

> Human beings enter this life as complete and whole beings, and they possess the
> gifts of life that will help them to live in the world. The life that a person lives is
> both physical and spiritual. Because the true spiritual path of one's life does not
> change, while the physical life is always changing, a balance must be maintained.
> (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992)

An Aboriginal view of the nature of the human being, as one who enters the world

as a whole being in a state of balance, contradicts certain Western religious views. In this

regard, Kushner (1996) explains the impact religion has on how people perceive

themselves and their place within the world. He writes:

> To say that we [human beings] are destined to lose God's love or to go to Hell
> because of our sins is not a statement about us, but about the tentative nature of
> God's love and the conditional nature of God's forgiveness [as] a claim that God
> expects perfection from us and will settle for nothing less. (p. 32)

Kushner claims that the religious notion of human imperfection stems from the time of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In his view, when people fail to live up to either their own or society's expectations, they internalize this imperfect view of themselves by blaming themselves, others, and God for what happens. Kushner believes that people must learn first, how to analyze their personal beliefs; second, how to perceive their experiences in life as learning; and finally, how to forgive. In so doing, they learn how to accept themselves, and others, and to find their place within the world.

In examining the interplay between people and their society, Freire (1970) writes that people think about and encounter the world in three basic ways: "fatalistically, dynamically, and statically" (p. 97). He explains that the fatalistic view relates to the power of destiny, fate, or fortune, where a distorted view of God compels a person to attribute his/her suffering and sometimes, exploitation, as being God's will. The static view relates closely to the fatalistic view in that people see themselves as being subject to inevitable forces over which they have no power or control. In the static view, the world is perceived as a closed order or system--a given reality--to which people must adjust and from which there is no escape. Finally, there is the dynamic view, where people are able to perceive critically the reality of their world and how they exist, and where they are willing to act in its transformation. Freire concludes that all three views are the result of "a historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of peoples' behaviour" (p. 48). People's willingness to create and to transform themselves and their world depends on the view of reality that they hold.

Defining Knowledge and Knowledge Creation

People create reality--both personal and social. Helping them to become conscious of both its content and its dynamics enlarges the philosophical view that people have of themselves, others, and the world. Important components within anyone's philosophical view are the various pieces of knowledge, acquired over time, that determine the principles by which people live. This next section discusses learning as the overall context in which knowledge is created.

Understanding Learning and How Learners Learn

The human brain's capacity to receive and process information and to perceive reality on varying levels of consciousness creates new assumptions for an enlarged view of learning. Griffin (1988) argues that the potential for human learning requires a new approach that "strives for whole-brain education" that "augments left-brain rationality with holistic, non-linear and intuitive strategies," and where the "confluence and fusion of the two processes are emphasized" (p. 126). Denis and Richter (1987) agree that there is a need to explore paths for learning and thinking that are something other than linear. From their observations of Native people, they report on the existence of an "intuitive learning modality" that "strongly resembles the stages in the [human] creative process" (p. 18).

Samples and Hammond (1985) support the notion of whole-brain learning. They refer to learning modalities that "characterize the way the brain takes in information (input), as well as the way it restructures and expresses information (output)" (p. 40).

They stress:

> symbolic-abstract [learning] modalities involve symbols and abstract codes (reading, writing, ciphering) that appeal to dominantly left brain activity. Visual-spatial, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences usually excite more right-brain processing. Synergic modalities synthesize the two hemispheres and other brain systems as well. (p. 40)

According to Samples and Hammond, excellence in education "must include other ways of accessing and processing experience," (p. 40) other than the rational and logical use of the mind. In making reference to Kolb's (1984) definition of learning style, Samples and Hammond note that "learning styles differ from learning modalities in a fundamental way. A learning style is the way we process information once we get it" (p. 40).

In writing about the concept of learning style, Kolb (1984) discusses two basic structural dimensions of the learning process. The first dimension consists of "two dialectically opposed modes of grasping experience--one through direct apprehension of immediate concrete experience, and the other through an indirect comprehension of symbolic representations of experience" (p. 58). He defines the second dimension, as "a transformation dimension that has two dialectically opposed modes of transforming experience"--one being through "intentional reflection, the other through extensional action" (p. 59). Thus, "the learning process at any given moment in time may be governed by one or all of these processes interacting simultaneously"--a "synthesis of which produces higher levels of learning" (p. 61). Kolb explains that all people learn differently. The two dimensions in his structural model allow for the emergence of "adaptive processes for learning" that are unique to the individual, but may "tend to emphasize some adaptive orientations over others" that tend to form a pattern (p. 62).

This somewhat stable and enduring pattern of grasping and transforming experience is

what Kolb refers to as a learning style because it arises "from consistent patterns of

transaction between the individual and his or her environment" (p. 63). Kolb notes that

"more powerful and adaptive forms of learning" emerge when "the four elementary

learning modes or strategies are used in combination" (p. 65).

Hill and George (1996), two Native adult educators, present a diagram depicting

an Aboriginal approach to learning that emphasizes the use of four distinct learning styles

within a circular process. They describe "four fundamental stages to learning--awareness,

struggle, building, and preservation" (p. 9). These stages may be correlated to four

distinct styles of learning--each of which utilize and emphasize specific aspects of the

human being. For example, the awareness stage is associated with an intuitive learning

style and spiritual aspect of the person; the struggle stage with a relational learning style

and emotional aspect; the building stage with a mental learning style and cognitive

aspect; and the preservation stage with a physical learning style or behavioral aspect

(p. 12). Hill and George believe that all four parts of the human being--spirit, heart

(emotion), mind, and body--are engaged in the learning process. They explain that

certain styles of learning, which may be understood as the human being's spiritual,

mental, emotional, and physical capacity for learning, may be called upon at times

determined by the individual as necessary for mastering the task at hand. Similar to Kolb

(1984), Hill and George contend that "we [human beings] learn in all four ways. We are

all working in some combination of the four [learning styles]" (p. 18).

In terms of Aboriginal people, research on learning styles provides some credence to the notion of left-brain/right-brain learning activity, as expressed previously by Samples and Hammond (1985). For example, Rhodes (1988) reports that "limited research indicates that the Native American population is more right brain dominant, more holistic, and more haptic than the general population" (p. 25). Rhodes further notes "that these are all areas in which our educational system is weak" (p. 25). Wallis (1983) in her work with Indian students at St. Mary's school in Red Lake, Minnesota concurs with Rhodes, and in her study notes that "there is a decided dependence on right-hemispheric functioning" for Native Americans (p. 41). In his analysis of the research related to learning styles, More (1987) suggests that Native people have:

- strength in global processing on both verbal and non-verbal tasks.
- strength in simultaneous processing with slower development of sequential processing abilities.
- strength in processing visual/spatial information.
- strength in using imagery for coding and understanding.
- weakness in verbal coding and understanding; (meaning they are) reflective more than impulsive. (p. 24)

He also reports how the "research shows a considerable overlap between Indian and non-Indian learning style patterns, especially where there are similarities in lifestyle" (p. 27). More concedes that cultural differences may have an impact on learning style, but differences in learning "are not found with sufficient consistency to suggest a uniquely Indian learning style" (p. 17). On the other hand, Kaulback (1984) refers to studies that "point to the fact that both Indian and Inuit children are most successful at processing visual information and have the most difficulty performing well on tasks saturated with verbal content" (p. 30). He notes how their "learning by doing and observational style of

learning has had a profound effect upon the development of certain skills" like perception and that "these [Native] children have acquired the ability to organize their observations and form concepts from them" (p. 33).

Apart from the discoveries made in regard to Aboriginal people, it appears that a more broadened approach to education through whole-brain learning would appeal to the general populace as well. In sharing her experiences about people in general, Griffin (1988) says that "rational mind and metamorphic mind are necessary partners" (p. 119). She defines the "metamorphic mind" as possessing a capability which goes "beyond what is usually described as right brain functioning . . . to include what is often described as the subconscious" (p. 119). She explains that "imagery is a right brain activity--for many it is visual, has no sense of time, is without words. . . .[and] comes out of the workings of the subconscious" (p. 119). Ferguson (1980) agrees, and explains that:

> The right brain sees context--and, therefore, meaning. Without intuition, we would still be in the cave. Every breakthrough, every leap in history, has depended on right-brain insights, the ability of the holistic brain to detect anomalies, process novelty, perceive relationships. (p. 297)

Nummela and Rosengren (1988), in writing about the concept of the "triune brain," added another dimension to the understanding of learning that is related to brain function. In their research, they observed the influence of emotion on the brain and concluded "that feelings and learning cannot be separated" (p. 101). The concept of the triune brain implies that the human brain is actually three brains in one. The first part known as the reptilian complex is responsible for the automatic behavior required to meet basic needs and governs the psychological changes necessary to ensure survival. The

second part or limbic system is responsible for emotion and acts as a monitor for all incoming information that carries with it a predominant function towards survival. The neocortex which constitutes five-sixths of the brain is referred to as the "human brain" and is responsible for the human capacity to reason. Nummela and Rosengren contend that the limbic system functions as an emotional filter that determines a person's acceptance and rejection of new information. These emotional barriers to learning exist at all times both on a conscious and unconscious level and will affect learning when the lower-brain functions related to survival and programmed behavior are triggered (p. 100).

Marsick (1985) agrees that "many of the blocks to learning stem from the affective domain through feelings of low self-esteem that even the highest achievers often have toward themselves as learners" (p. 7). She explains that within the context of higher education, other barriers to learning, in the form of internalized norms responsible for learner distress, must be overcome if learners are to become more self-directed. Marsick believes that educators need to recognize that "distress gets in the way of learning, but it can be discharged if dealt with, instead of denied" (p. 9).

In examining the role of play in adult learning, Melamed (1987) contends that a playful approach to learning stimulates an integrative and creative energy within adults that helps them to concentrate, to solve problems, and to try out new ideas through the exercise of their imagination. She argues that "play does not just belong to the realm of children because in the sense of wholeness and integration, play and learning are rooted in the same [creative] life force" (p. 21). In his work experience with Native adult learners, Thomas (1997) agrees that the use of humor, especially with Native people,

establishes the trust necessary for creating a positive learning climate and teacher/student

relationship. Thus, it would appear that the brain's capacity to effect learning is

influenced by a broad range of internal and external factors.

In the next section, I discuss several learning processes that lead to the creation of

knowledge and knowledge definitions.

Definitions of Knowledge and Knowledge Creation

In the process of learning, people create knowledge. O'Banion (1997) discusses

two models of learning related to both the acquisition and creation of knowledge. In the

first instance, he refers to a traditional objectivist view where "knowledge is objective

and exists outside of the individual" (p. 83). O'Banion states that the goal of the

educational process in this model is to ensure that the learner knows the external world

which is interpreted primarily by the teacher, and where mastery of knowledge is

demonstrated through school tests. This model of learning contrasts with the

constructivist view that "knowledge is constructed by each learner in terms of his or her

own perceptions of the world, [or from] the learner's mental models" (p. 83). The two

process goals of this model are to facilitate an in-depth examination of knowledge and to

develop multiple perspectives. Knowledge comes from experience in working with

problems and issues, and not from the memorization of information about problems and

issues. According to O'Banion, a constructivist view of education reflects the concept of

contextual learning where learners find meaningfulness in their education because of the

connections made from "learning by doing" (p. 84). In referring to contextualism and its

impact on the creation of a unique learning style, Kolb (1984) explains that "reality is

constantly being created by the person's experience" (p. 63) because both the person and the event are shaped by the context of the historical event.

Michelson (1996) offers a similar view; she points out that different knowledge is created and made available from different social and historical locations. In her opinion, Western academia needs to "relinquish the image of the rational consciousness constructing knowledge in detached and splendid isolation" (p. 191). She maintains that all knowledge is **situated knowledge** because it is "socially and historically situated in the matrix of the social relationships and social activity of the active human groups who create it" (p. 191). For Kolb (1984), learning is "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). He agrees that knowledge is "continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted" (p. 38). Freire (1970) concurs with the idea that "knowledge of one's world is created by people and is the result of their ability to reflect upon and to draw meaning from their experiences, from their perception of reality, and from their understanding of their history" (p. 73).

In Aboriginal thought, the human drive to fulfill the meaning and purpose of one's life leads to the creation of knowledge. The following Ojibwa teaching exemplifies this type of knowledge creation.

> A person's life path begins before the spirit enters this physical world. While at the Creator's side, people are given the intention and purpose of their life and are shown the course of their life path. Thus, the life force of the spirit contains both the will and the intention to live life, and the desire to fulfill that which the spirit is sent into the world to do. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

Aboriginal teachings embrace a form of knowledge that is created from one's journey through life and is facilitated by one's spiritual connection to the world. In writing about Indigenous people and their knowledge base, Brant-Castellano (in press) denotes three categories that overlap and interact with each other. She refers to the first category as being a traditional knowledge consisting of legends or stories about the Creation of the world; encounters with ancestors and spirits; experiences with the environment, family and clan genealogies; as well as, facts and information relating to an understanding of the world. Apart from providing information, knowledge reinforces values and beliefs, and instills attitudes within the people. Brant-Castellano terms empirical knowledge as a second category that derives from multiple sources. This term refers to the way in which people create knowledge from the careful observation of a particular phenomenon over extended periods of time. Information from the observations of many people is interpreted within the context of existing information with revisions to the current state of knowledge being made when different perspectives converge. Revealed knowledge is the term that she applies to the last category. Viewed as being spiritual in nature, this kind of knowledge is acquired through revelation and stems from a person's intuitive sense, his/her dreams, visions, and fasting experiences. An individual seeks this knowledge usually in response to a need for solving a problem or for ascertaining some direction or guidance related to one's life journey or purpose.

Because people tend to draw similar ideas, assumptions, and conclusions from their experience in the world, they possess similar kinds of knowledge. Kolb (1984) notes how the mandala (circle)--a "symbol of wholeness, unity, and integrity is to be

found in most of the world's religions" (p. 229). Similarly, from their experience in the

world, Ojibwa knowledge of the world is created. In the words of a traditional Ojibwa

teacher:

> The circle is a central and important symbol for how we view ourselves, the
> world, and life itself. To us, the circle was imprinted into the universe and set
> into motion from the very beginning of Creation. The sun, moon, and earth are
> circles. Everywhere life moves in a circular fashion. In living one's life, an
> Ojibwa person understands that his/her life path moves in a circle from spirit
> life to spirit life once again. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

In thinking about the concept of the circle as it applies to knowledge creation, Kolb

(1984) writes that the "typical four part structure of the mandala often represents dual

polarities [and, it is] the integration of these polarities that fuels the endless circular

process of knowing" (p. 229).

In this regard, Michelson (1997) believes that the knowledge held by other

cultures and sub-cultures provides Western culture with "an opportunity to enrich

academic learning with alternative ways of knowing" where knowledge can be valued

"for its difference from, rather than its similarity to, academic expertise" (p. 144). For

her, knowledge is a social product that humans make collectively, and it is important for

people to be able to perceive the world more broadly.

Michelson (1996) asserts that alternative ways of knowing stemming from

alternative cultural experiences are important, even though they challenge the current

definitions of knowledge espoused by Western institutions who assume both the power

and authority to determine "what kind of knowledge counts" (p. 192). In her work, she

encountered feminist and anti-racist theorists who argued that reason as a human function

stems from "a concept of a detached rule-bound process for arriving at knowledge within

the individual mind" (p. 191), which is the product of a specific intellectual history,

namely Western cultural history. From her analysis, Michelson concludes that:

> experience and knowledge are neither chronologically, nor logically distinct.
> They are more helpfully seen as mutually determined, with knowledge shaping
> experience as much as the reverse. . . .the knowledge through which we organize
> meaning cannot be separated from experience. (p. 190)

Michelson (1997) believes that "the separation of the content of knowledge from its

context--what one knows rather than where one has learned it" (p. 142)--would be

unacceptable to Western academia because it challenges sexist, racist, and classist

assumptions about the kind of people who are likely to know specific things.

However, the use of alternative sources of knowledge and ways of knowing can

lead to the development of enhanced cross-cultural or culturally sensitive learning

experiences. In facilitating Aboriginal perspectives amongst social work students,

Charter (1994) describes her use of a learning strategy that helped students to share their

feelings and personal experiences with regard to stereotyping. This strategy encourages

students to acknowledge their biases and negative attitudes towards others that included

stereotypical attitudes about Aboriginal peoples. Then, through various structured

learning activities set up with Aboriginal elders, resource people, and social agencies,

students were able to challenge these stereotypes. Later, many students "indicated that

they had changed their attitudes about Aboriginal people as a result of their experiences"

(p. 87). In this example, the creative use of alternative sources of knowledge from an

alternative cultural experience enhanced their learning.

Introduction to Educational Philosophy

According to Elias and Merriam (1995), the study of educational philosophy

encourages educators to develop an awareness of the principles and reasons for teaching.

As an interpretative theory, a philosophy of education like any thought system, originates

within a specific socio-cultural context--meaning that the development of thought is

greatly influenced by the particular problems, issues, and challenges existing within a

culture. Because a philosophy expresses itself in the development of a concrete type of

educational program and methodology, Elias and Merriam call attention to the problems

that often arise when a philosophy of education is applied in differing cultural contexts.

However, this does not mean that a particular theory cannot be adapted to other cultural

situations with some success.

This section is devoted to a discussion of some philosophical orientations

specifically relating to adult education. Where appropriate, traditional Aboriginal

teachings related to education are compared in this examination of adult educational

philosophy, its assumptions, and its teaching and learning methodology.

A Comparative View of Adult Educational Philosophy and Methodology

Relevant to people of all cultures is the importance of transmitting knowledge and

skills to future generations. As the following traditional Aboriginal teaching explains:

> The human being naturally wants to understand the workings of life and the power
> of Creation, and it is the spiritual energy that pushes a person to search for
> meaning. The Creator has provided people with a knowledge of the "circle of
> life" and the opportunities to develop the skill for living a life which has meaning
> and purpose. This is knowledge and skill that must be passed down to each
> generation. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1994)

On this same topic, Knowles (1980) explains how, at one time, it may have been appropriate to define education as a process of transmitting what is known, but accelerated cultural changes means that new knowledge becomes largely obsolete in a matter of years. According to Knowles, the great influx of adult learners entering the educational system has called into question the pedagogical model of education because it is derived from assumptions about children as learners. Thus, in arriving at his definition of **andragogy**, Knowles reasons that new assumptions relating to how adults learn are necessary. In keeping with this shift, Knowles defines the word, andragogy, a term coined by European adult educators, as being "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43). He views andragogy as being "simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions" (p. 43). In putting forth his andragogical assumptions, Knowles recognized the need for these to be tested on different learners in different situations (p. 43). Although his focus is on clarifying the concept of andragogy as it relates to adult education, he maintains that "the single most critical difference between children and adults as learners is the difference in assumptions we make" (p. 49) about them.

Some of Knowles' (1980) views are found within traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy in that Aboriginal people perceive no difference between the way children and adults learn. This understanding is illustrated in the words of one Aboriginal teacher:

> Children are "gifts" from the Creator who are on loan to their parents, and so each child must be helped to fulfill his/her purpose in life. Being greatly respected, their spiritual capacity is to be nurtured, and they are given much freedom to explore. A belief in the concept of "balance" with a focus on relationships is the

key to facilitating their learning. Like their parents, children will sometimes need direction and at other times, they will not. (personal communication, J. Armstrong, 1993)

O'Banion (1997) attempts to consolidate the differences in assumptions about child and adult learning when he describes pedagogy as "the science and art of education" (p. 82). In his opinion, differences between adult and child learning are minimized if "pedagogy is stretched to mean 'how learners learn', then applying what is known about learning [in general] becomes the underlying rationale" (p. 82) for both the educational process and organizational structure.

Over the years, numerous concepts, assumptions, and theories about learning and education in general have been analyzed from various philosophical perspectives. Yet, as Elias and Merriam (1995) contend, there have been few attempts to explore the philosophical approaches to adult education. Although these authors, themselves, raise the question of whether there is a distinct philosophy of adult education separate from education in general, Elias and Merriam believe that a systematic philosophical analysis of the major issues and problems in adult education add clarity to the field of educational study. Therefore, in their work, they analyze and summarize adult learning theory and its assumptions into six adult education philosophical orientations: liberal, progressive, behaviorist, humanistic, radical, and analytic. They discuss these orientations in a logical sequence. Similar ideas and notions presented in each philosophy exist within traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy. In the sections that follow, I point out the similarities between these philosophies and Aboriginal cultural philosophy.

Liberal Philosophy and Similarities

According to Elias and Merriam (1995), liberal adult education has been influenced by the oldest and most enduring philosophy of education in the Western world known as the liberal arts approach. This philosophy of education attempts to lead a person from a mere knowledge of facts to a level where principles or assumptions are grasped and where situations are analyzed so that an ordered synthesis can occur. A liberal education emphasizes learning the art of investigation, communication, and criticism through reading and the dialectical discussion of philosophy, literature, and works of art.

Elias and Merriam (1995) point out that when the liberal orientation is operationalized, the role of the teacher predominates because this philosophy is based on the assumption that many things are best taught by the teacher directly and often through the lecture method. Teachers derive their authority from their wisdom and command of their subject material. Thus, the education of teachers is an education in the liberal arts, and not in particular skills or techniques. Elias and Merriam, in concluding their analysis, note that the liberal education process promotes theoretical thinking by focusing on the operations of the intellect and its attempts to grasp and to comprehend truth. It emphasizes the human ability to contemplate theory through an intuitive approach to knowledge and places philosophy, religion, and the humanities in a superior place to science.

Ideas similar to liberal adult education exist within traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy and its approach to education. As one traditional teacher explains:

People must understand that the traditional teachings that contain their "original instructions" are usually transmitted through an oral tradition rich in meaning and symbolism. Any student of Ojibwa culture is continually reminded that the purpose of oral teaching is to provide the person with a great deal of individual freedom in pursuing a knowledge of life that is unique to one's spiritual path. Finding the meaning of life and one's purpose is an individual matter. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1994)

In regard to the role of the teacher, the following quotation provides a description:

The spiritual link that human beings have with the Creator and the total Creation is the primary mechanism through which people discover universal "truth" and the meaning and purpose of one's life. The ability to communicate with this spiritual force is a central part of the spiritual development of all human beings. In this way, many traditional teachings have come to the people. To Native people, all knowledge and understanding of life flows from the Creator. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

Progressive Philosophy and Similarities

According to Elias and Merriam (1995), the philosophical approach of progressive education more than any other school of thought has had the greatest impact upon adult educational philosophy and educational philosophy in general. As they explain, early progressive thought emphasized a child-centered approach to education and stressed a practical education based on experiment that liberated the talents and gifts of the child. Later, the goals of progressive education became both individual and social because liberating a learner's gifts and talents releases a potential for solving the social, political, and economic problems of society. Elias and Merriam point out that progressivism accepts the methods of science as a way for understanding the human person and for solving human problems in an evolving world. They further note that the progressive concepts of learning by experience, scientific inquiry, vocational and utilitarian training, community involvement, and responsiveness to social problems found expression in the

development of adult education. In other words, progressive adult education is "not restricted to schooling, but includes all those incidental and intentional activities that society uses to pass on values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills" (p. 55). In brief, "the school is just one agency responsible for transmitting culture," and so, learning is truly "life-long" (p. 55). People are born also with unlimited potential for growth and development, and because of their intelligence, they can adapt the environment to their own needs and achieve a satisfying life through scientific methods and experimental thinking.

In their discussion of progressive education, Elias and Merriam (1995) note that the role of the teacher is not only to capitalize on the learner's interests, but also to stimulate interest in those things educationally desirable. The teacher is one source, but not the sole source of knowledge. As they see it, the teacher focuses on helping learners to solve problems and to remove the emotional blocks to learning that confront them. Teachers are viewed as leaders of group activities and as helpers who become learners by sharing their own experiences and insights without imposing their own views.

Similar ideas to progressive educational thought exist within traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy and are explained in the following traditional teaching:

> Over the course of a lifetime, many forces are at work to shape the human person who enters this world with beginning "gifts"--qualities and traits with which she/he is born. People are responsible for determining what their gifts are, to learn how to use them, to develop their gifts to become whole and in balance, and in the end, to embody these gifts, so that they know "who they are" and "what they can do" for their people. (personal communication, R. A. Antone and J. Dumont, 1993)

In regard to the role of the teacher, the following quotation explains how:

> the Aboriginal child-rearing process teaches children responsibility for their decisions and prepares them for their role as adults who will one day make decisions for their people. To Aboriginal people, the opportunity to learn is present at all times because the many spiritual beings present within the Creation will act also as child's teachers and mentors. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989)

and where it is understood that:

> the spiritual capacity of children is to be nurtured and developed while they are still open to the spiritual world, and before they learn how to discount their dreams and intuitive experiences. As spiritual beings, children are as capable as adults of channelling messages from the spirit world to the people of their community in times of need. Thus, care-givers must develop the wisdom to help each child to fulfill his/her purpose or "calling" in life. (personal communication, J. Armstrong, 1993)

Behaviorist Philosophy and Similarities

Behaviorist adult education, according to Elias and Merriam (1995), is greatly

influenced by a system of psychology known as behaviorism. From this perspective,

knowledge is acquired through an inductive method where one can arrive at truth by

examining the information gained from the senses alone. Behaviorists believe that the

way to understand humans is through the observation of their behavior, and not through

the exploration of the inner, unobservable recesses of mind and emotion. Behaviorists

support an educational system that ensures peoples' survival by the careful control of

behavior that uses reward as the most effective reinforcer.

According to Elias and Merriam (1995), the concept of learning how to learn and

the provision of remedial and job-oriented training in adult education is based upon

behavioristic thinking related to the survival of individuals and society. Behaviorism de-

emphasizes competition by stressing individual success reinforced by the positive rewards associated with cooperation and interdependence on a global level. They also note that behavioral objectives in educational settings, and the need for the objective and measurable outcomes present in competency-based adult education of which criterion-referenced evaluation, performance assessments, and feedback are a part are a direct outcome of a behaviorist view of learning.

Another direct outcome is the notion of accountability in education which is based on the assumption that society values education because it helps people to become more productive members of society. The influence of behaviorism in adult education can be seen in the development of individualized learning and instruction, the use of learning objectives as statements specifying the kind of behavior to be developed, the use of learning contracts, and computer based or computer assisted instruction where the responsibility for learning lies primarily with the learner.

From a behaviorist perspective, Elias and Merriam (1995) point out that the role of the teacher is to control the learning environment. Teaching should take place under favorable conditions where student behavior can be observed and controlled through positive reinforce-ment, and where individual differences can be more efficiently dealt with. In this process, the teacher designs an environment and plans in detail the conditions that will elicit the desired behavior and pre-determined responses and will extinguish behavior that is not desirable. It is not enough for the teacher to select appropriate learning activities, she/he must organize them so that they reinforce each

other. The learner's role in behavioral education is active rather than passive; learners must act so that their behavior can be reinforced.

Examples similar to behavioristic thought are illustrated in the following quotation:

> Every living thing holds the responsibility for determining how its particular life force is meant to function within the world. The teachings talk about how the "beings" in the natural world function together in a manner that is indicative of "cooperation", and not "competition". These beings know naturally how to support and sustain the other life-forms. Because all of life existed here before the coming of humankind, human beings have the most to learn. They need only to look to the Creation for the examples of how they can live. (personal communication, R. A. Antone and J. Dumont, 1992)

In reference to the notion of accountability, the following traditional teaching explains how:

> In Iroquoian cosmology, spiritual forces exist in both "seen" and "unseen" terms. They are given the power to sustain and to support life. Human beings are born with an innate ability to learn, and they will seek out what they need to survive. However, it is understood that the Creator has provided people with everything that they might need for their survival in this world. At no time do human beings cease being a part of Creation, so people must be continually thankful for life and for what they receive from the Creation. They are responsible for taking care of their mother, the Earth. (personal communication, E. Benedict, 1996)

In regard to the role of the teacher, traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy differs:

> When the original human was given gifts by the Creator to help him to live in the world, Anishinabe was taught by the very elements of Creation itself. The sweet-grass, tree, deer, and stone taught Anishinabe "by their very presence". This story tells us how "life within the natural world teaches". In fact, all of life has the capacity and willingness to provide for human beings and to teach them. The human being is the only life-form in Creation who must learn how to co-exist in the Creation. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992)

Humanistic Philosophy and Similarities

Humanistic education, as Elias and Merriam (1995) point out, is concerned with the development of the whole person with a special emphasis on the emotional and affective dimensions of personality. Humanistic principles are based on a view of human nature as being inherently good. Consequently, humans will grow in a manner that is beneficial to themselves and to society. Based on this view, there is little need to place faith in a force outside of the individual because the power is within the individual. In other words, human beings have freedom and autonomy in making personal choices that are proactive rather than reactive. The nurturance of each person's uniqueness and special talents and skills creates potential for the unlimited growth and development of not just intelligence, but of intuition and emotion as important components of the whole person. Elias and Merriam explain that the development of the self--what a person really is--and one's self-concept--who a person thinks she/he is--in relation to one's responsibility to others and humanity in general is advocated. Self-actualization is the goal towards which people continuously strive, and behavior is the result of a selective perception based on what is important to them and includes a definition of reality as being what one perceives it to be.

In adult education, Elias and Merriam (1995) note that humanistic assumptions surface in a variety of ways like the promotion of self-development and personal growth that does not occur in isolation from others. An equally valuable source of knowledge is the learner and the examination of the learner's own life experiences, values, attitudes, and emotions. Humanists oppose competition because it threatens and curtails learning,

instead they foster cooperative group learning experiences, discussions, and small group

projects as appropriate learning activities for developing the whole person.

Elias and Merriam (1995) describe the role of the teacher as helper, facilitator, and

partner in the learning process because the teacher does not necessarily know best,

especially when working with adult learners. The teacher guides or facilitates the

learning process in such a way that emphasis is placed on learning, not on teaching. The

teacher creates the conditions in which learning takes place and trusts the learner to

assume responsibility for learning. Thus, self-diagnosis of learning needs, and self-

evaluation are important educational strategies to employ in humanistic adult education.

Humanistic notions present within traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy are

illustrated in the teachings that follow:

> Human beings enter this life as complete and whole beings. They already possess
> the gifts of life to help them to live in the world. Creation teaches people that
> they are to strive towards fulfilling the highest principles of peace, cooperation,
> balance, and co-existence as being the true path of one's spiritual life that does not
> change. The "life road" teaching talks about the experiences associated with
> one's changing physical life that may cause a person to abandon his/her true self if
> healing work to examine these experiences is not done. Thus, in spite of "what
> you think you are," you can never know "who you are" until you look within.
> (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992)

And, where:

> Life experiences creating an imbalance in the human being are processed through
> healing work designed to help individuals to look within themselves--to unmask
> their true selves by examining the circles of trauma and hurt associated with their
> life experiences. This inner movement clears blocks, restores balance, and helps
> people to connect with their spiritual center. (personal communication, B. K.-K.
> Bell, 1991)

In regard to the role of the teacher, traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy explains:

> At a young age, Aboriginal children learn to evaluate information and to make choices. There is an inherent understanding of the need for freedom to process information at their own pace and to make choices that are appropriate for them. A person's influence over another is to be respected, and it should not be used to oppress or suppress an individual's growth and development. Individual choice is respected, but parents will continually explain to their children that they should be thinking not only about their own needs, but also about the needs of others which includes the impact that any decision has on the world around them up to "seven generations into the future". (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989)

In traditional Aboriginal philosophical thought, although the spiritual nature of the human is inherently good, their physical nature is subject to the "twinness of life." This understanding is expressed in the following teaching that stresses the importance of balance:

> From the very beginning when the Creator made this reality, he made it possible for everything to have a twin. This life that human beings live is a "twin" life that consists of a spiritual reality and a physical reality. The "twinness" of life exists also within our physical reality as explained in an Ojibwa story of twin brothers who are identical and equal except in their behavior and intentions towards life. The story advises that people should not desire or yearn to be like either one of these two, but rather to look for the middle path. (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993)

Radical Philosophy and Similarities

Elias and Merriam (1995) explain that radical adult education advocates the use of education to bring about social, political, and economic changes in society. It questions the basic values, structures, and practices of society and embraces a belief in the importance of human persons becoming cognizant of their ability to change the material and social conditions of their lives. The major goal of a radical education is humanization through a process of liberation. Radical theorists believe that knowledge

results from a process of becoming aware of one's objective reality through the development of higher levels of consciousness. Critical consciousness, the highest level, is facilitated through dialogical discussion and is marked by depth in the interpretation of problems, self-confidence in discussions, and acceptance of responsibility. Elias and Merriam point out that in this libertarian, dialogic form of problem-posing education, dialogue and social activity are essential components of the learning process.

Elias and Merriam (1995) explain that when a radical educational process is used problem-posing and dialogic education begins with an investigation of the problems found within the learner's cultural situation. The learner is encouraged to engage in a dialogue with the teacher for the purpose of exchanging perceptions relating to a problematic situation. Teachers learn from the students just as much as the students learn from them, and together, they decide on concrete actions to solve problems. In presenting material, teachers must be open to the clarification and modification of their own views. Higher levels of consciousness result from dialectical discussions that help learners to see that their present situation is not pre-determined, but can be changed.

Radical educational ideas apply more aptly to the contemporary societal situation of Aboriginal people as expressed in the following statement:

> The pervasiveness of Western belief systems and practices eventually caused many Aboriginal people to abandon their own cultural teachings as they started to identify with a cultural way of life that they perceived to be more acceptable. Many negative messages and images about being a Native person are internalized within the people. In using processes of self-examination, Native people can uncover the negative imagery that prevents them from strengthening their unique cultural identity. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1982)

In making reference to the development of a consciousness, traditional Aboriginal

teachers believe that:

> The knowledge, understanding, and practice of spirit to spirit communication is still an integral part of traditional Aboriginal life today. Because all Aboriginal cultures derive their teachings of life from a spiritual base, it follows that many of the learning and teaching activities that occur within Aboriginal societies are structured for the purpose of helping people to develop a "spiritual consciousness." (personal communication, E. Hill, 1993)

They also believe that:

> One's spiritual power of knowing begins with the development of a person's intuitive sense or one's natural human capacity to receive, to synthesize, and to integrate information. Understanding this capacity provides people with a new method of extracting information from one's personal and collective memory. The spiritual teachers often tell us that "the spirit knows what it has to do." They say that the spirit is quite capable of leading a person through a life where "every-thing happens for a reason." Understanding the spiritual world is important if people are to understand the choices associated with their physical life where the synchronistic events of one's life are the result of many energy forces that are set into motion. (personal communication, J. Lathlin, 1995)

In regard to the role of the teacher, the following is a description based on traditional

Aboriginal cultural philosophy:

> The influence that anyone has over the thinking of another should be nothing more than providing a person with an opportunity to learn. In sharing their life experiences, teachers who are mentors provide learners' with examples of another perspective on life. Both teachers and learners believe that life experiences are the greatest teachers and can provide profound lessons when the experiences are examined and shared with others. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989)

Analytic Philosophy and Similarities

In examining an analytic philosophy of education, Elias and Merriam (1995)

explain how it differs from other philosophies by concentrating on the analysis of

language as the exclusive function of philosophy. They point out how conceptual

analysis attempts to clarify the use of terminology and concepts employed in support of the knowledge, beliefs, actions, and activities of human life. In other words, no language, no matter how abstract, metaphysical, or theoretical is dismissed. Language is a social phenomenon where custom and social practices determine the meaning of words. Thus, in determining the meaning of words, analytic philosophers analyze how language is used in the arguments, metaphors, slogans, and statements developed by people and groups.

In analytic thought, several tools of logic are used to conduct an analysis of a concept for the purpose of arriving at a definition that can be used in developing philosophical statements or policies. Conceptual clarity is sought particularly in areas where confusion in the use of a term creates difficulties and differences in opinion and policy. In practice, conceptual analysis is a value-free or neutral philosophical activity. However, analytic philosophers, sometimes, make descriptive statements of what education should be. In analyzing the concept of adult education, they tend to restrict its use to the communication of knowledge that brings about a deepened awareness and consciousness in persons. Skill learning is included in this definition, only if the skills are intrinsically worth learning and are not merely instrumental skills. To analytic philosophers, the commitment of education is to the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and insight in whatever social directions these may lead. In their view, education cannot be used as an instrument for attaining non-educational goals, no matter how socially necessary or desirable these goals may be.

In traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy, the meaning of words is often determined by the use of language in custom and social practice. For example, much

cross-cultural confusion stems from a definition of the concept of Creator. As one

Aboriginal teacher explains:

> The institutionalization of spirituality created an understanding of "God" as an entity of great power and sometimes, personage who was usually male. Depending upon the teaching, God could be also quite punishing. In Aboriginal thought, the "Creator" is a great spirit or "mystery" who lives on the other side of the sky and who responds always to the people with love and compassion. The Creator is neither male, nor female, but rather an energy force that flows throughout Creation where all of life has been designed for co-existence. (personal communication, T. Greene, 1997)

Therefore, in comparing philosophies and world views that cross cultural lines, it is

important to understand language concepts in terms of how they are used within a

particular cultural setting. As another traditional Aboriginal teacher explains:

> It is difficult to teach a Native language without some understanding of the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the people. A language conveys a unique under- standing and world view. Thus, the nature of Aboriginal languages and the cultural beliefs that they convey stresses the importance of relationship. The words only have meaning when taken in the context of the surrounding environ- ment. (personal communication, J. E. Thomas, 1986)

The Role of Consciousness-Raising in Education

The commonly-held assumptions that constitute a specific cultural philosophy are

derived from a people's perception of reality. This perception is the filter through which

people interpret their observations of and experiences in the world. A greater

consciousness of the world leads to a broader perception of choices when dealing with

any problem because it helps humans to see reality more inclusively, to understand it

more clearly, and to integrate experience better. Therefore, it is important for educators

to understand how the assumptions contained within their particular cultural philosophy

shape the development of an educational philosophy from which both learning and teaching methodology is devised.

This section is divided into three parts. The first part discusses various approaches to consciousness-raising. Following this part is a discussion of individual transformation and social change as two potential outcomes of a consciousness-raising approach to education.

<u>Approaches to Consciousness-Raising</u>

Every principle, idea, and notion expressed through any philosophy is subject to human interpretation through the assumptions that we hold. Brookfield (1991) asserts that a person's perception of the world (world view) is shaped by one's assumptions which are "those taken-for-granted ideas, commonsense beliefs and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions" (p. 177) and underlie one's understanding of human nature. Assumptions are used as explanatory devices by which a person creates meaning, understands cause-and-effect, and generally, accounts for the events in his/her life (p. 177).

Brookfield (1991) believes that people have assumptions so internalized that helping them to become aware of the assumptions underlying their "habitual ways of thinking and living" (p. 178) is very difficult and problematic. However, he believes that it is important to help people to realize that their "fixed ways of thinking and living are only options among a range of alternatives" (p. 178). Brookfield contends that even though some of peoples' "assumptions might be distorted, wrong, or contextually relative" (p. 192), they can be reconstituted "to make them more inclusive and

integrative" (p. 177). He supports the notion that the ability to perceive reality, to reflect on one's assumptions and then to raise questions regarding one's common sense view of human activity are important skills central to the process of critical reflection (p. 177). He views this kind of exercise in critical thinking as being part of a **transformative learning** process because it encourages people to explore alternative ideas and to consider alternative forms of knowledge and ideological perspectives (p. 178).

Similarly, Mezirow (1985), in discussing whether an adult learner can be truly "self-directed," employs the term **meaning perspective** to describe the "structure of cultural and psychological assumptions with which our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience" (p. 21). He explains that a meaning perspective is made up of **meaning schemes** which are sets of related expectations that "guide the way we experience, feel, understand, judge, and act upon our situation" (p. 22). Because a meaning perspective defines a person's expectations, "it selectively orders what we learn and the way in which we learn it" (p. 22). According to Mezirow, a person can transform a meaning perspective through a process of becoming critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that one carries. Without awareness, these psychocultural assumptions have a tendency to constrain the way in which a person perceives and acts upon the world (p. 22). He further explains that a meaning perspective is transformed when a person understands the impact that his/her assumptions have on his/her ability to be "more inclusive and discriminating in the integration of experience" and more "open to discourse with alternative perspectives on disputed claims of validity" (p. 22).

In teaching Brazilian peasants literacy skills, Freire (1970) mentions how the develop-ment of a critical consciousness--**conscientization**--helped learners to perceive their personal and social reality as a world that could be transformed. Through conscientization, Freire explains how "that which had existed objectively, but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to 'stand out', assuming the character of a problem which challenges the mind" (p. 70). In Freire's view, the development of this awareness is a crucial aspect of education. He advocates "a problem-posing education" and regards dialogue as "indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality" (p. 71).

For Aboriginal people, the unveiling of reality is achieved through processes of self-examination. This understanding appears in the following quotation on the subject of embracing cultural teachings and rebuilding identity:

> Many Aboriginal people will need to undergo a process of self-examination to uncover the cultural assumptions that they have internalized from Western culture. This is important as many of these internalized assumptions invalidate traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices. (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1983)

Antone, Miller, and Myers (1986), in writing about the effects of oppression on Aboriginal societies, created the term, **ethnostress** to describe the consequences of the disruption of cultural beliefs on the development of a joyful Native identity or self-concept (p. 7). In their work, they found that many Aboriginal people had internalized or absorbed into their own thinking and cultural beliefs systems, the negative imagery and experiences associated with their historical contact with Western European cultures.

Education was the primary mechanism for bringing about this cultural disruption during the residential school period of their history.

Some of the Aboriginal beliefs and behaviors that were originally created for survival during this period of history continue to flourish within Aboriginal communities. As Antone, Miller, and Myers (1986) explain, these "distress patterns" work to disrupt relationships between people of the same culture, as well as their interaction and acceptance of people from other cultures. In helping Aboriginal people to liberate their thoughts and feelings, they encourage them to re-evaluate the impact of historical experience on their personal and social beliefs and behaviors. They write:

> If we realize that these destructive feelings and behavior are only patterns of distress, then we can move to rid ourselves of them. We can learn to heal ourselves and move towards our personal and collective liberation. We believe that these patterns can be destroyed or reversed, provided that we are committed to healing and to re-evaluating our current reality. (p. 37)

Antone, Miller, and Myers (1986), Brookfield (1991), Freire (1970), Marsick (1985), and Mezirow (1985) advocate the need for an educational process that can engage people in a process of critical reflection. As they see it, people must be helped to recognize that their perspectives may be based on faulty assumptions. Fortunately, various methodologies exist for helping people to become conscious of the cultural assumptions that they carry.

Brookfield (1991) advocates a process whereby people are able to analyze the critical incidents in their lives. He contends that "a fuller picture of participants' assumptive worlds is revealed when they describe both negative, as well as, positive incidents" (p. 186) in their lives. He maintains that it is easier for people to focus on

recalling specific situations, events, and people, rather than asking them to identify their general assumptions. He notes that critical incidents of a more intimate and personal nature have a tendency to reveal the core of one's being because people tend to present only partial representations of themselves in incidents that reflect their work and community life. When using his approach, Brookfield asks learners "to produce richly detailed accounts of specific events, and then move to a collaborative, inductive analysis of general elements embedded in these particular descriptions" (p. 181).

Mezirow (1985) advocates the use of critical reflectivity--"the bringing of one's assumptions, premises, criteria, schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them" (p. 25). He believes that the uniquely adult function of critical reflectivity is largely missing from the literature of adult learning theory despite the fact that it is an indispensable part of self-reflective learning; an essential part of dialogic learning; and a significant part of instrumental learning where all three are integral parts of self-directed learning. Mezirow explains that critical reflectivity differs from the prevailing concept of reflective thinking which is limited to the interpretation of data, the application of fact and principles, and the use of logical reasoning. Critical reflectivity can be accomplished through the three adult learning functions that Mezirow defines as follows:

> instrumental learning--task-oriented problem solving that is relevant for con-
> trolling the environment or other people; dialogic learning--by which we attempt
> to understand what others mean in communicating with us; and self-reflective
> learning--by which we come to understand ourselves. (pp. 17-18)

He explains that "dialogic learning enables one to recognize that distorting assumptions or ideologies that one has taken for granted often touch on one's self-concept" (p. 24).

This awareness "can lead to self-reflective learning if one attempts to understand how and why he or she has come to internalize these distortions in the first place" (p. 24). Mezirow notes that a clearer understanding of one's self is achieved by "identifying the psychocultural assumptions acquired earlier in life that have become dysfunctional in adulthood" (p. 18) and affect learning.

Freire (1970) advocates critical thinking using a generative themes methodology in which participants are presented with material detailing scenes and situations that are familiar to them. He claims the use of generative themes preserves the richness of the educational process by providing learners with the opportunity to examine the totality of their experience, rather than forcing them to learn concepts and ideas within one particular discipline (p. 113). In analyzing a generative theme, a facilitator engages the learner in a dialogue about his/her perception of the ideas and concepts which are interdisciplinary in nature. The dialogical nature of the process respects the right of the educator to suggest concepts, ideas, or alternative themes that may help learners to make connections, to fill a gap, or to illustrate a relationship between the theme being discussed and the educational program's content (p. 113). Freire contends that critical thinking is necessary if people are "to seek out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another" (p. 60). Thus, critical thinking must done by both the educator and the learner during the process of inquiry or when engaged in problem-posing education. Freire believes that critical thinking is a necessary part of praxis which he defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform" (p. 36) a social reality.

In reference to Aboriginal people, Thomas (1997) shares similar ideas when he contends that "if their prior experience is respected and utilized effectively, Native students are as capable of learning and thinking critically as well as anyone else and of taking full responsibility for that learning" (p. 96). In fact, he writes, "I have found that Native students require an approach to adult education that is designed in such a way as to draw on prior life experiences" (p. 84). He notes how this approach usually leads to their success in education. For Aboriginal people, Freire's (1970) banking concept of education, so characteristic of the oppressive education wrought upon Native people through the residential boarding school system, has now passed. Today, knowledge is no longer "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledge-able upon those whom they consider know nothing" (p. 58).

In working with Aboriginal adult learners enrolled in the First Nations Technical Institute, I (1995) have noted how the use of a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment helps learners to begin identifying their individual gifts and talents and to know "who they are" and "where they have come from" (p. 62). In helping learners either to write or to verbalize their life experiences, I have witnessed how the portfolio development process supports the Aboriginal learning process of storytelling. In introducing this process, I explain how the learner, in telling the story of his or her life, "becomes conscious of what she or he knows (knowledge), can do (skills), feels and believes (attitudes)" (p. 62). Thus, portfolio development for the purpose of prior learning assessment engages the participant in a process of learning that helps the learner to recognize competencies above and beyond a specific occupation and that flow into one's

total environment of family, community, and the world beyond. Thomas (1997) concurs; he explains that the traditional storytelling methodology utilizes prior experience, and in this way assists learners to understand new knowledge; provides time for contemplation; and facilitates the teaching of morals, values, and beliefs, as well as the concepts of relationships and patterns. Storytelling is a way of encouraging students to assume control of what is learned and how fast it is learned. In fostering critical reflection, learners will eventually understand the reasons why the story is being told. Marsick (1985) offers another technique for helping learners to become conscious of their internalized norms. She advocates the use of the re-evaluation counselling method in institutions of higher education where the development of self-directedness in learning is often necessary and encouraged. She believes that, through this method, "perspective transformation can and does take place . . . the individual can reflect critically on patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving" (p. 12) to overcome any barriers to learning.

Individual Transformation

In Steinem's (1993) view, change in education means that we must "learn to 'unlearn' and to demystify the forces that have told us what we 'should' be before we can value what we 'are'" (p. 109). According to her, "Change means more than just integrating females and people of color into the curriculum or into any existing structure, whether it is the work force or a view of history" (p. 129). It means finding a belief in a true self who resides within each of us. Steinem agrees with Plato who said "The soul knows who we are from the beginning" (p. 154).

In her analysis of current educational practice, Steinem (1993) points out that the impact of education on racial and ethnic self-esteem has often been acknowledged by educators in general. However, current education has also been responsible for suppressing self-esteem in the general population as well by treating students as if they were empty vessels without consideration for the wisdom gleaned from life experiences. She argues that for women, all races, and classes, education has separated "what we studied" from "how we lived." In other words, it has broken the link between mind and emotion, between what we have learned intellectually and what we have experienced. She claims that for "Native American students, who have only recently been able to learn about their own culture in some tribal schools, there has been a clear understanding that the content of education is just as crucial as providing access to it" (p. 125).

Consciousness-raising as an integral part of the educational process is important for everyone, but it is particularly important for people who come from oppressed cultures. Steinem (1993) quotes from a book written by a Black author:

> The black bourgeoisie--the element which has striven more than any other element among Negroes to make itself over in the image of the white man-- exhibits most strikingly the inferiority complex of those who would escape their racial identification. (p. 126)

Steinem notes that this author's observations are just as true of any group whose core self-esteem is low and who therefore crave situational esteem and approval from those they view as above them. She says:

> the marks of self-hatred are the same: acceptance of an internal ranking system based on approval from the powerful, refusal to help or identify with one's own group, and an obsession with fashion, appearance, and other forms of conspicuous consumption. (p. 126)

For people who view their education as a means of helping them to achieve success and acceptance in the mainstream, sharing a way of life found in the mainstream becomes an overpowering aspiration and attraction. When oppressed people enter institutions of higher learning and feel grateful for being there, unfortunately they internalize the messages about who they are more eagerly. In reference to Brazilian peasants, Freire (1970) agrees that "the oppressed suffer from a duality. They are at one and the same time, themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (pp. 32-33). He points out that this is "the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account" (p. 33). He also adds, "Almost never do they realize that they, too, 'know things', that they have learned in their relations with the world" (p. 50). On this same topic, he notes:

> self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So, often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end, they become convinced of their own unfitness. (p. 49)

When they do succeed in becoming like the oppressor, they will often strike out in a type of horizontal violence at their own people for the pettiest reasons. Marsick (1985) agrees that "people of working or lower class background have an even greater struggle since they must break through greater barriers to speaking up in class, believing that they have something worthwhile to say, and in trusting their thinking" (p. 7).

Oppression, however, occurs much more generally than most people think as the following quotation explains:

> In Western society, many people have experienced some type of systematic mis-
> treatment occurring through physical violence, but usually through the disregard
> of feelings and emotion, the discounting of a person's abilities or the invalidation
> of his/her knowledge and intelligence. People tend to internalize their
> mistreatment by accepting it as 'it's just the way things are', and to unconsciously
> externalize it, by mistreating others. (personal communication, D. Jenson, 1994).

Brookfield (1991) warns educators to be aware of group-think in which people operate on

the illusion that all right-thinking people agree. Hence, it is important to encourage

learners to consider the possibility that their assumptions mirror the group-think of their

field (or culture), rather than being accurately grounded in their own experiences (p. 185).

He explains how a member of any group may feel pressured to avoid questioning

accepted assumptions for fear of destroying the group's unity or of bringing criticism onto

one's self (p. 179).

Antone, Miller and Myers (1986), Brookfield (1991), Freire (1970), Marsick

(1985) and Mezirow (1985) agree that consciousness-raising is an important part of

education because it is emancipatory. Once a structure of assumptions (belief system,

ideology, or paradigm) is brought into consciousness, it can be negated in favor of an

alternative perspective, or a synthesis as a way to reconcile elements of contradiction

within a person. Mezirow (1985) says, "Such learning is painful because it often involves

a comprehensive reassessment of one's self and the very criteria that one has been using

to make crucial value judgments about one's life" (p. 24). Brookfield (1991) agrees that

educators who foster this kind of transformative learning and assist people in questioning

the assumptions underlying their structures of understanding must do so with care and

sensitivity so that their self-esteem is left relatively intact. In his opinion, "It is no good

encouraging people to recognize and analyze their assumptions if their self-esteem is destroyed in the process" (p. 179).

The affective dimension of learning plays a critical role in the transformation process. Nummela and Rosengren (1988) explain how, in the past, "the affective was treated separately from the cognitive, (and teachers) interested in cognitive development had little to say when dealing with students who would not respond to reason" (p. 102). Samples and Hammond (1985) refer to the exclusion of the affective in instructional and educational practices as a kind of myopia that excludes three quarters of a learner's capacity when only cognitive approaches are utilized. Griffin (1988) contends that a person who is capable of shifting and transforming emotions is equally capable of shifting viewpoints and considering a situation from its multiple perspectives. Brookfield (1991) explains that "displays of emotion do not betoken pedagogic failure" (p. 191). Rather, they can frequently be welcomed as doses of reality where entrenched prejudices can surface and be analyzed for the purpose of understanding how they block out the possibility of participants taking on each other's perspectives, and how they can see their own views from another ideological vantage point. Consciousness-raising on an individual level impacts the educational system and vice versa. It leads to self-transformation. As Mezirow (1985) states:

> there is probably no such thing as a self-directed learner, except in the sense that there is a learner who can participate fully and freely in the dialogue through which we test our interests and perspectives against those of others and accordingly modify them and our learning goals. (p. 27)

As Ferguson (1980) explains, "Memories, including deeply entrenched patterns of behavior and thought are dissipative structures" (p. 169). They are patterns or forms stored in the brain. Thus, old patterns are likeliest to change when they are greatly perturbed or shaken by states of consciousness that activate a significant energy flow. The parts reorganize into a new whole, and the belief system transforms into another order. Each transformation makes the next transformation likelier because each one creates a new level of complexity. Kushner (1996) supports this notion of energy change. In defining forgiveness, he explains how it requires:

> a letting go not only of the negative energy--the sense of bitterness and resentment we carry with us when we remember how someone--or something like education-- has hurt us, but also of the meanings which we learned as a result of that and similar injuries we incurred through life. (p. 106)

In the case of Aboriginal adult learners, consciousness-raising combined with the infusion of cultural knowledge into the educational curriculum contributes to the development of their self-esteem and educational success. As Thomas (1997) puts it:

> In my teaching, I often utilize elders as a way of developing the spiritual dimension and the self-esteem of [Native] students. Elders help the students to see that their ways of living may be different from what they are learning in books; it does not mean that their cultural ways are inferior. (p. 90)

He believes that a higher self-esteem, "in turn, contributes to the development of self-confidence and one's ability to learn successfully" (p. 83) in any situation.

Social Change

In general, the self-esteem of all people could benefit from a consciousness-raising approach to education. As Steinem (1993) remarks, low self-esteem is the result of many socialization factors like living with parents who denigrate us. Mezirow (1985)

claims that the process of socialization makes us heir to distorting assumptions. He

agrees that traumatic childhood events can cause us to learn specific prohibitions such as

never confront, never succeed, never express feelings, never be the center of attention,

never do less than better than others, and so on. The inhibitory rule fades from

consciousness, but it continues to influence adult behavior by evoking feelings of anxiety

when adult action threatens to violate the rule. Marsick (1985) learned from her work

that when people are reminded of past experiences in which they were denigrated for their

inability to learn, they may not be able to listen clearly to new information. Nummela

and Rosengren (1988) stress that continued research on the barriers to learning is crucial

for educators because they clearly indicate that feelings and emotional attachment are

integral parts of learning. They note that "if teachers want their students to learn, they

need to be aware of these barriers created in the classroom, as well as, those brought from

home in addition to attitudes held by particular cultural groups" (pp. 100-101).

In his work, Freire (1970) explains how a human perception of reality influences

the institutions of child-rearing and education found within a culture, an understanding

that is also found within the following Aboriginal cultural teaching:

> Mother is the child's first teacher. In Iroquoian society, women are responsible
> for teaching their children about the various kinship ties that exist within the clan,
> between clans within the nation, and with all of the natural world. How one
> learns and what one learns is largely determined by an individual's perception of
> the total environment, but mother, in particular, carries the greatest responsibility
> for teaching her children. Family is an important source of information and
> learning. (personal communication, R. Henry, 1984)

From his research, Kaulback (1984) agrees with the notion that cultural differences

related to child-rearing affect learning. In reference to Aboriginal people, he writes:

> although far from conclusive, there is a growing body of research to suggest that distinctively different child-rearing practices—one stressing observational learning and another emphasizing verbalization—has fostered the development of very different styles of learning among Native and White children. (p. 34)

More (1987) agrees that "child raising practices are related to learning style" in that "a major characteristic of traditional Native life was that children were allowed to explore and be independent as soon as they were able" (pp. 23-24). He notes that "watch-then-do" was the primary method whereby the child acquired skills within the family group, and explanations and questions in verbal form were minimized. As Freire (1970) puts it: home and school do not exist in the abstract. Rather, they are situated in a context that is relative to a historical time and place, and one will influence the other.

In moving beyond the limits imposed by the process of socialization, Mezirow (1985) believes that **perspective transformation** can provide adult learners with:

> alternative perspectives for understanding how social practices and institutions can be modified so as to create a society in which adults can be liberated to participate fully as self-directed learners in the quest for the meaning of their lives—to explore fully the meaning of experience. (p. 29)

Through perspective transformation, he writes, "a self-directed learner can often see the necessity of taking collective action to make institutions more responsive to the learning needs of those whom they serve" (p. 29). Steinem (1993) agrees that "when one member of a group changes, the balance shifts for everyone, and when one group changes, it shifts the balance of society" (p. 127). She provides an example of how Native Americans in the United States "whose history and languages were forbidden in schools well into the 1970s, were aided by bilingual education laws that Hispanic Americans initiated" (p. 29). Thus, educational changes can have wide-ranging effects.

However, before implementing new approaches to learning, particularly, in the case of critical reflection, Brookfield (1991) cautions educators first to reflect critically on their own assumptions and meaning perspectives. Charter (1994) concurs and recommends that adult educators "consider how their own personal educational experiences, beliefs and values may influence the adult learners they teach" (p. 93). Through an examination of their personal and professional philosophies about education, Charter believes that adult educators can surface personal bias and ethical dilemmas that potentially can block their appreciation of alternative methods of facilitating learning. This kind of self-analysis may be hard work, but as Ferguson (1980) states, "Only that which is deeply felt can change us. Rational arguments alone cannot penetrate the layers of fear and conditioning that comprise our crippling belief system" (p. 35). But, in facing one's fear, the results can be positive. Thomas (1997) remarks that in "understand-ing why I do what I do and its relationship to the literature has not only provided me with a personal philosophy, but [has] given me confidence as an adult educator" (p. 99).

Freire (1970) agrees that the process of conscientization applies to both educators and the people they teach. Put simply, he believes that "the more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate" (p. 101) and provide the opportunity for every entity in society to develop and to transform. Michelson (1997) cautions educators by noting that the development of instruments and policies for recognizing knowledge and other ways of knowing can never be a neutral process. In her view, values and cultural assumptions will enter invariably into any process that professes to be concerned with the assessment

of knowledge and skills. From her experience in South Africa, where the majority Black

population in power is now considering the recognition and assessment of prior learning,

Michelson (1997) notes that "the issue at stake here is the definition of socially useful

knowledge" (p. 149). She raises the question of "whose interests will that definition

serve?" (p. 149). Freire (1970) raises a similar caution for people who wish to surmount

their oppression. He declares that conscientization only has meaning when the oppressed

can become the "restorers of humanity" for both themselves and their oppressors. In

other words, "The oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity, become in

turn oppressors of the oppressors" (p. 28). Michelson (1997) agrees that it is important

for people, as a whole, "to collectively explore experience as part of a strategy to

understand one's own oppression and to make links between personal and social history"

(p. 145). Only through the raising of their consciousness will people come to understand

that it is important for them to question their philosophy, determine the source of their

views, transform their perception, and then act upon the world.

Holistic Education

Nummela and Rosengren (1988) contend that research on how the brain processes

information means that "teachers will need to acknowledge that the student is

experiencing learning at multiple levels at all times, including the unconscious, and that

all processes are continually active" (p. 102). They point out that thought is a part of a

whole process. Based on his analysis, Rhodes (1988) concludes that the formal

educational process, as it stands, has been largely ineffective for Native American

students. However, as Samples and Hammond (1985) further add, the formal educational

process is also ineffective for the general population as well, when one takes into account

an understanding of learning styles and modalities that imply the development of a more

holistic perspective in instructional planning and teaching practices. Nummela and

Rosengren (1988) share similar sentiments. They suggest that "new integrative teaching

strategies based on new systems must be developed" (p. 102). They contend that an

interactive teaching process is more effective than a didactic one in facilitating learning

that allows students to express feelings and emotions through verbal and non-verbal

behavior.

Rhodes (1988) agrees that where Native American students are involved

particularly, a more holistic approach to education is needed. He suggests using a multi-

level approach that fosters a broader base and context for understanding and encouraging

the study of many aspects at the same time, including recognition of the inter-

relationships involved. He proposes the dissolution of subject area boundaries as a

technique for developing a holistic approach. Rhodes further suggests an examination of

the Native American practice of storytelling where the speaker uses a circular or spiral

process rather than a linear one in capturing the details, the context, the surroundings, and

the feelings that are just as important as the main points in creating a whole picture. He

illustrates this concept by giving an example of a Navajo student who expressed his

frustration when asked to summarize the main points of a story by saying, "There are no

main points. They don't make sense without all the rest" (p. 23). Dumont (1992) affirms

the fact that Aboriginal people have a "capacity for all-around circular vision" (p. 79) that

makes for a unique experiencing of the world different from a culture which chooses to

view the world in a tangible and linear fashion. More (1987) agrees that storytelling is an extremely effective method for teaching complex concepts. He notes how the method allows the learner to understand at his/her own level of cognitive and emotional development, so that "when a learner recalls a story or legend later, it has acquired an even deeper meaning" (p. 23). Ferguson (1980) recommends the use of a "synectic approach to learning" that is "based on making connections that relate the new to the familiar--an ability that has been discouraged in many people" (p. 305), resulting in a kind of pattern blindness as the inability to see relationships or detect meaning.

Perhaps holistic education is not the most appropriate term that can be applied to a system of education that incorporates many of the assumptions about learning and teaching discussed previously. Rhodes (1988) notes that "there is much confusion about the term 'holistic' in education" (p. 26). Ferguson (1980) offers another term that describes a system of whole person education known as **transpersonal education** (p. 287). She explains that this system promotes an understanding of the integration of mind and body; knowledge of two major modes of consciousness and how they interact; as well as the potential of altered and expanded states of consciousness. In her view, transpersonal education emphasizes the continuum of knowledge, rather than subject, and the common ground of human experience that transcends ethnic or national differences. It aids the learner's search for meaning, the need to discern forms and patterns, and deepens "one's awareness of how a paradigm shifts and how frustration and struggle precede insights" (p. 288).

In the next chapter, I provide a description of an Aboriginal approach to holistic education. This approach is based on the understanding that I acquired from my study and on the results of my educational work with Aboriginal adult learners enrolled in the Native social service worker program offered through the First Nations Technical Institute.

CHAPTER 3

AN ABORIGINAL APPROACH TO HOLISTIC EDUCATION

For the purposes of this chapter, new learning is understood as the knowledge, skills, attitudes (feelings and beliefs), and insights that I have acquired since 1995. This new learning is contained within a description of a holistic model of education that is currently being practiced within FNTI's Native social service worker program, and which forms the basis of this chapter. This chapter describes my study in which I became part of a teaching team that was to implement a FNTI social service worker program. Also, I provide a description of an educational philosophy that is based on traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy and a definition of holistic learning. This description precedes a discussion on the development of the traditional Aboriginal teaching and learning methodology employed within the program. This educational methodology is discussed further in conjunction with the use of a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment as a contemporary educational strategy. A description of the outcomes of this Aboriginal approach to holistic learning according to an Aboriginal understanding of the concept completes this chapter.

Overview of the First Nations Technical Institute

The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) located on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near Deseronto, Ontario is Aboriginally-owned by the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and operates as a post-secondary educational institution. FNTI's educational and training programs offer diplomas and certificates in human services, small business management, computer science, media studies, and aviation to name but a few. The

learners enrolled in FNTI's programs are primarily Aboriginal people who represent various First Nation communities situated throughout the province of Ontario. These First Nation communities constitute primarily three distinct cultures of Aboriginal people. These are the Ojibway, Cree, and Iroquoian cultures.

In Canada, there is no totally free-standing, fully accredited, Aboriginal post-secondary institution. Therefore, no Aboriginal college can grant diplomas, degrees, and/or certificates without the assistance of a governmentally recognized and approved educational partner. For FNTI, two Ontario Colleges, Loyalist College of Belleville and Canadore College of North Bay, act as these accrediting partners. FNTI assumes responsibility for curriculum design and educational program delivery as these relate to Aboriginal or First Nations people.

From the time of its incorporation in 1985, FNTI has been committed to the design, development, and delivery of educational programs for Aboriginal adult learners that are learner-centered and culturally-relevant. FNTI faculty and staff believe in helping Aboriginal adult learners acquire the knowledge and skills related to the concept of life-long learning and the skills associated with learning how to learn.

Within the human services department of FNTI, the faculty, including myself, share this understanding and have expanded it to include the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights associated with helping Aboriginal adult learners to continue in their learning regardless of where it occurs. Although it is generally understood that Aboriginal learners must be proficient and competent in an occupational role, we also believe that these learners must be proficient in the many roles and functions required by their unique

cultural and societal affiliations. Therefore, the human services faculty and staff have spent much time and attention on the definition, clarification, and articulation of an Aboriginal learning model that is largely based on traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy. As a teaching member of this staff, I am convinced of the value of this model. Our work has been slowly influencing other educational departments within the Institute, as well as other educational institutions within the province of Ontario and beyond. This chapter discusses the educational approach used specifically within FNTI's Native social service worker program.

Background of FNTI's Educational Experience with Aboriginal Adult Learners

Since 1985, many adult educators, including myself, have shared their thoughts and experiences during the various educational conferences and meetings hosted by FNTI. From these discussions, a number of startling common sense observations became clear. In general, the number of adults who did not complete secondary school was increasing. Of those adults who did succeed, many functioned at an elementary level of literacy and numeracy at best. Many adults in general whether they were of Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal descent were considered illiterate in that their reading, writing, and mathematical computation skills did not meet the established entry level requirements for either college or university. The demand for adult basic education programs at the community level increased as the drop-out rates in non-Aboriginal populations of learners became higher. Aboriginal learners were affected as well, and an even higher rate of drop-outs occurred more prevalently amongst Aboriginal populations on the whole. From these observations, it appeared that many people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

alike, were neither successful in accessing post-secondary education, nor successful in completing it once they were enrolled in the system. It was these observations that helped FNTI's administration and faculty to recognize the demand for an educational service that could meet the needs of a large population of Aboriginal adult learners.

When the human services department of FNTI investigated further the problem of why the educational system could neither attract, nor retain its learners, the need for an Aboriginal adult learner profile emerged. Several faculty, myself included, reviewed an existing profile that was based on an analysis of the barriers that adult learners faced more generally. From this review, it was discovered that many adult learners had to overcome many personal, situational, and institutional barriers if they were first, to access and second, to succeed within the educational system. With further analysis, it was discovered that Aboriginal adult learners shared many of the barriers associated with adult learners in general. However, for Aboriginal adult learners, their unique cultural background that included life experiences tainted by the impact of generational abuse stemming from their historical oppression, created even further obstacles to their educational success.

Addressing Educational Needs

In reference to educational program design, FNTI's administration decided to address these issues by securing on secondment the services of two Loyalist College faculty members. At the same time, in 1985, the concept of prior learning assessment (PLA) was being initiated formally in Quebec as a new educational strategy. As the ideas associated with PLA began to burgeon, PLA was eventually introduced into Ontario's

provincial college system in 1989. In the years leading up to the formal inception of PLA

in Ontario, FNTI's administration was fortunate to have had exposure to the unique

educational concepts related to the use and implementation of a PLA system that was

envisioned by Loyalist College adult educators. This exposure to the PLA educational

strategy subsequently influenced the design and development of FNTI's Aboriginal

approach to holistic education.

Because the current educational system did not seem to be meeting the needs of

adult learners in general, and of Aboriginal adult learners in particular, FNTI's

management was willing to take a risk and to implement a new educational approach.

During discussions with FNTI's management, the two Loyalist College adult educators,

who had agreed to be seconded to FNTI, expressed some very strong beliefs and opinions

about how the educational system was unfair and inept not only in its ability to

accommodate the needs of adult learners, but also in its response to the conditions

affecting their learning needs. These two adult educators believed that many of the

barriers faced by adult learners in general could be overcome if a system of prior learning

assessment was initiated. In response to these views, FNTI's management requested

these two adult educators to develop a "social service worker" program for Aboriginal

adult learners. Their task would be difficult in that their experiences with Aboriginal

people were quite limited. Fortunately, these two Loyalist College adult educators who

were appointed as program managers within FNTI realized their weaknesses and

limitations, and quickly arranged to select and to hire both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

people as instructors. Once secured, the process of coming to terms with one another, as

unique human beings who possessed marked differences in cultural beliefs and educational practice, was then set into motion. Working together, these people became the teaching team and the inevitable designers and creators of the Aboriginal model of holistic education discussed in this chapter. In 1986, I was fortunate to have been hired as one of the primary Aboriginal instructors who participated in the development of this learning model.

Traditional Aboriginal Educational Philosophy

Before describing the holistic model of education employed by FNTI in the delivery of its Native social service worker program, I will provide readers with some understanding of what is meant by traditional Aboriginal educational philosophy. An understanding of this educational philosophy is important because it inspires one's activities and gives direction to practice. The power of philosophy lies in its ability to help people to better understand and appreciate the activities of everyday life. This is the philosophy that we tried to incorporate into our social service worker program.

Therefore, the following section is divided into two parts. In the first part, the importance of traditional Aboriginal knowledge will be addressed as background information necessary for helping readers to understand in the second part, a definition of holistic learning within a traditional Aboriginal educational framework.

The Importance of Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge

In exploring the meaning of knowledge as it pertains to Aboriginal people, I make neither a claim, nor an assumption that the knowledge presented within this chapter is universal for all people. From my understanding, Aboriginal people do not possess a

monopoly on the truth. However, from my traditional Aboriginal teachings about life and the world, I have come to understand and to believe that it is important to give expression to the truths that I and my people have experienced. In this account, there exists a collective body of knowledge--facts or truths--shared by Aboriginal people in general, as well as, a personal body of knowledge held by myself as an individual. Personal knowledge or personal truths vary from individual to individual, and such truths are colored undoubtedly by the individual's current knowledge base which is comprised of one's cultural assumptions that stem from his/her life experiences.

Therefore, when an Aboriginal person is asked to speak the truth, she/he will often respond by saying that she/he cannot tell you the truth, but only what she/he knows. The acceptance of information as being a truth often depends upon the amount of trust that is extended to the person who is speaking and depends upon one's capacity for discernment--an intuitive sense that interfaces itself with what is already known by the individual receiving the communication. Therefore, truth is the degree to which I can trust what I know and feel, and my sense of truth will be tempered by the cultural assumptions that shape my understanding of my life experiences. Discernment in knowing how to use and apply what is known provides the wisdom that enables a person to balance the collective truths with his/her personal truths. In reading this account, I can only describe what I know from my educational and life experiences. It will be left up to the reader to determine whether the knowledge contained within this description qualifies itself as being either a collective or a personal truth. Also, the body of knowledge contained in what is being described here and referred to as traditional Aboriginal

educational philosophy should not be viewed as being less than, but simply, different

from Western cultural knowledge. It is important for people to keep in mind that they can

benefit from many different cultural perspectives and world views.

Aboriginal World View

To establish a context or frame of reference for discussion, I will begin by noting

that in an Aboriginal person's world view, there are many relationships that interconnect

and extend beyond our human relationships. In Aboriginal thought, an individual's total

PRESERVATION

Universe

Nation

Community

Family - Clan
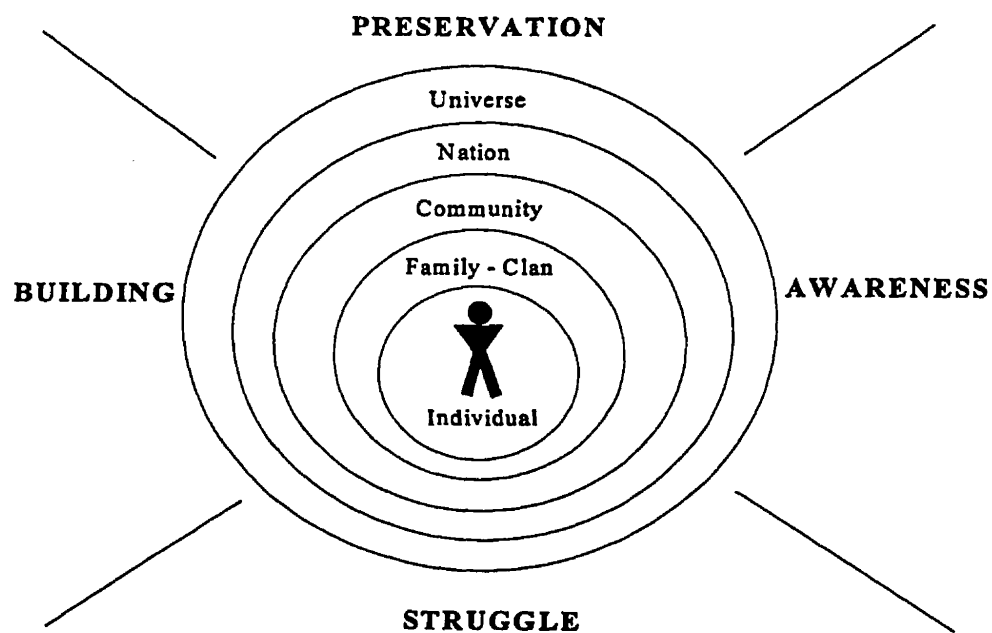
BUILDING

AWARENESS

Individual

STRUGGLE

Figure 1. An Aboriginal person's world view.

environment will influence the thoughts, feelings, spirit, and actions of a person including

his/her interactions with others and the world. An appreciation of an Aboriginal concept

of the total environment requires that a human being learn how to communicate with and

to function within ever expanding circles of relationship to and involvement with the

outside world. An Aboriginal world view, as depicted in Figure 1, denotes kinship ties to

every element present within the Creation, beginning with one's human relations and

extending outwardly to include the entire universe.

Within Aboriginal cultural philosophy, these circles of relationships constitute a

person's total environment. Each of these circles in this world view represents and

contains many different forms of life. From this perception of reality, an Aboriginal

person understands that each and every life form is quite simply a particular manifestation

of the spiritual energy that flows throughout the entire Creation. Thus, everyone and

everything is spiritually connected, and everyone and everything has a function and role

to play in ensuring that the universe continues to operate in a state of balance. In

Aboriginal thought, all human beings possess the capacity for a consciousness that is able

to perceive the spiritual nature of life, and then to understand how all of life is

interconnected. If human beings can become aware also of their individual role and

purpose in life, then it follows that people become naturally respectful and sincerely

thankful for the spirits of the many life forms that provide them with food, water, and the

air that they breathe. For Aboriginal people, human beings who possess these qualities

naturally desire to maintain a balance within themselves that includes finding a balance in

their interactions with others and the world in its most broadest sense. For this kind of

person, balance is vital not only for human survival, but also for the survival of all life. It

is a form of balance that can be achieved only through the development of a spiritual

consciousness that actively seeks to apply and to integrate into daily living the principles associated with the concepts of harmony, co-existence, reciprocity, and interdependence.

However, living a balanced life does not in any way deny the existence of the twin. In Aboriginal cultural philosophy, everything in life has a twin--an energy opposite. Balance in life is only possible because of the existence of these energy twins. In fact, life as we know it could not exist without them. On a more simplistic level, if life were designed to be always positive, there would quite simply be no need for balance. Thus, positive and negative ion charges exist within the universe in many forms, and the twinness of life exists within the human being in the form of what may be understood as positive and negative energy and intent. In Aboriginal thought, living life in either extreme creates an imbalance. Thus, disruptions created by an imbalance in any one of various circles of interconnected relationships in an Aboriginal person's world view impacts on the whole by either filtering downward to the individual or rippling outward throughout the universe.

Challenges of An Aboriginal World View

Initially, when traditional Aboriginal teachers on contract with the human services department of FNTI presented this Aboriginal world view to the entire teaching team, some of us dismissed the concepts as being little more than religious fanaticism; others remained silent, but quietly worked to get their point across. Overall, in retrospect, we were quite challenged by the logic of the presentation. However, it would take years for us to understand fully the ramifications of the message contained in this Aboriginal world view.

Looking back on my educational experience in the Native social service worker program, I now believe that for some of us the truth and understanding of the message being conveyed in an Aboriginal world view was obscured by our failure to connect our emotions with the (thoughts) knowledge in our heads. We knew what was happening, but we could not feel, and if we could feel it, perhaps we were afraid, confused, or simply did not know how to articulate what we were feeling. In any event, our understanding of the importance of an Aboriginal world view and the traditional knowledge inherent was largely lost in the early stages of the program's development. In retrospect, I believe that it was because we could not feel its truth. No one person in particular is to be blamed for this lack of awareness. For some of us, our life experiences did not provide us with the experience of feeling the earth or becoming one with all of our relations. Issues related to program design and curriculum development, created by a Western system of education that upheld and valued a very different set of cultural assumptions and beliefs about reality, the world, and the nature of the human being, were hard to ignore. Additionally, as individuals, our minds were filled with our own unique set of beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions related to the question of what constituted a legitimate and valid form of education. Thus, we were challenged from the outset to consider a broader definition of education, training, and social service work. In the beginning, some of us would tread lightly because we feared that alternative forms of knowledge and a new approach to education and learning would neither be generally accepted, nor understood either by the academic authorities or by Aboriginal people, themselves.

Finally, we decided to design a Native social service worker program based on traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy as a way to revitalize and to restore the self-respect and cultural integrity of those Aboriginal adult learners who enrolled into our program. We then began developing a curriculum and educational methodology aimed at reversing the social and psychological damage and generational trauma created by their historical encounter with the residential school system and their early contact with people from other cultures. By providing Aboriginal adult learners with the training and education necessary for liberating themselves from their internalized oppression, we believed that we could prepare social service workers who had the capacity to address the underlying causes of their Native community's dysfunction. By learning to help themselves, these Aboriginal adult learners would then help other Native people.

Establishing Our Mission and Philosophy

Over the years, issues related to program design and delivery were key areas of both debate and discussion for the faculty of the Native social service worker program. At times, the tasks associated with thinking through the course content and designing teaching and learning strategies became overwhelming and very time consuming, but we persevered because of a perceived need for understanding and consensus. To help the process, FNTI had contracted Aboriginal elders and traditional teachers, and we discussed, at length, within the context of three major Aboriginal languages (Mohawk, Oneida, and Ojibwa), the meaning of various educational terms, concepts, and processes. Finally, the teaching team agreed upon what we perceived to be a traditional Aboriginal educational philosophy--one that was based on the traditional cultural beliefs and

practices of Aboriginal people in general. This educational philosophy is contained in the following four paragraphs:

> The Creator has provided all life forms with a set of instructions for how they are to live within this world. These original instructions given by the Creator consist of a knowledge of life and the ability to live life in a balanced and complete way.

> Human beings differ from the other beings of Creation who by their very nature follow the instructions given to them. It is natural for them to do so. Human beings because of their nature must discover the knowledge of life which is contained within them and develop the skills to live their life in the way that the Creator intended.

> Human beings must learn how to live a life of quality which has meaning. They must learn how to live in harmony and balance within the Creation. They must develop the skills which will help them to discern and to know what the Creator has intended for them, both as individuals and as a people.

> To follow the original instructions given by the Creator means that human beings must learn to live in a state of co-existence with all of their relations. These original instructions provide people with a knowledge of the circle of life and how life is to be lived. This is knowledge and skill which must be passed down from generation to generation. (Hill, 1995, pp. 4-5)

> Based on this traditional Aboriginal educational philosophy, we then formulated a

mission statement, as follows:

> FNTI is an Aboriginal place of learning. The Human Service programs are founded upon our original instructions from the Creator that furthers the fullest understanding, maintenance, and development of the whole person within the total environment.

In fulfilling this mission statement, the teaching team envisioned several goals that would need to be achieved. These are stated as follows:

> 1. To develop an educational framework rooted in Aboriginal knowledge of our original instructions.

2. To develop Human Services programs that are rooted in Aboriginal knowledge and Indigenous experience.

3. To provide Indigenous approaches to experience and development.

4. To facilitate the understanding of the whole person in the total environment.

5. To facilitate the development of the whole person in the total environment.

6. To facilitate the maintenance of the whole person in the total environment.

Deciding on Our Teaching Approach

Developing an educational framework was perhaps the hardest issue to address in the articulation of a holistic approach to education. Because many Aboriginal people had internalized Western cultural beliefs and practices as a result of their many educational and life experiences, our aim was to devise an alternative form of learning--one that was derived from a unique understanding of the learning process. To accomplish this task, we focused our attention on a method of learning, growth, and development that could provide the Aboriginal adult learner with the opportunity to develop him/herself as a whole person who could take pride and have confidence in their Native identity and culture. We believed that if we helped them to move through a learning cycle of awareness, struggle, building, and preservation in all aspects--spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically--and through many of the relationships associated with each circle of their total environment--family, clan, community, nation, and the world--then we could empower them to undertake the learning necessary for their continued growth and development. Because many Aboriginal people would need help in surfacing, identifying, understanding, and moving beyond the cultural assumptions that they had

acquired over the years, we knew that our educational task would be difficult. However, the method of holistic learning discussed in the next part became the essential foundational component of the Native social service worker program's educational framework.

Defining Holistic Learning Within a Traditional Aboriginal Framework

As human beings grow to adulthood, they are capable of learning in a wide variety of ways and at astounding speeds. In the first few years of life, human beings learn language, and social and physical skills at a rate that will likely not be equaled again. Much of this learning is acquired by trial and error and is motivated by one's natural curiosity, interest, and the need to solve the basic problems encountered through daily living. As a team, we worked to develop a holistic model of learning that was based on these ideas and the understanding that follows.

When a human being enters the formal system of schooling, their natural curiosity and ability to acquire the information and skills needed to solve their problems becomes limited by the needs of the educational system to maintain control over what is taught and what is learned. Within formally structured educational institutions, learning becomes much more narrowly defined, and certain types of learning and styles of teaching predominate. Often the common methods of teaching do not fit either the learning style or the interests of a large number of adult learners, and this leads to boredom, attendance problems, shoddy academic work and high drop-out rates. Certain educational experiences can compound the problem even further by ignoring what the person has learned through everyday living or by directing the adult learner to a common starting

point in a curriculum that limits the adult learner's choice of study options and activities that would meet his/her individual interests, learning needs, and experiences.

Many Aboriginal adult learners who have experienced this type of schooling often believe that they cannot learn or that they are not as smart as the rest of the learners. To address this problem with Aboriginal adult learners, the teaching team of the Native social service worker program decided that every effort should be made to have the learning activity match the learner's unique learning style. We understood that adult learners had the capacity to learn in several different ways. Thus, through self-assessment and various forms of testing, activities, and discussion, we worked to help Aboriginal adult learners become aware of their unique and individual learning style. We also helped them to become aware of their ability to develop the other learning styles necessary for them to survive not only in a formal educational context, but also in the world more broadly defined.

Deciding on a Learning Style Assessment Tool

In the initial stages of developing the Native social service worker program, the teaching team struggled to find a learning styles assessment tool that would provide the Aboriginal adult learner with an adequate tool for self-assessment and discussion. This struggle led to the development of a learning styles assessment for Native people that was predicated on a traditional Aboriginal cultural understanding of the whole person, and the notion that "all of life moves within a circular pattern" for the purpose of maintaining a balance within the world.

PRESERVATION
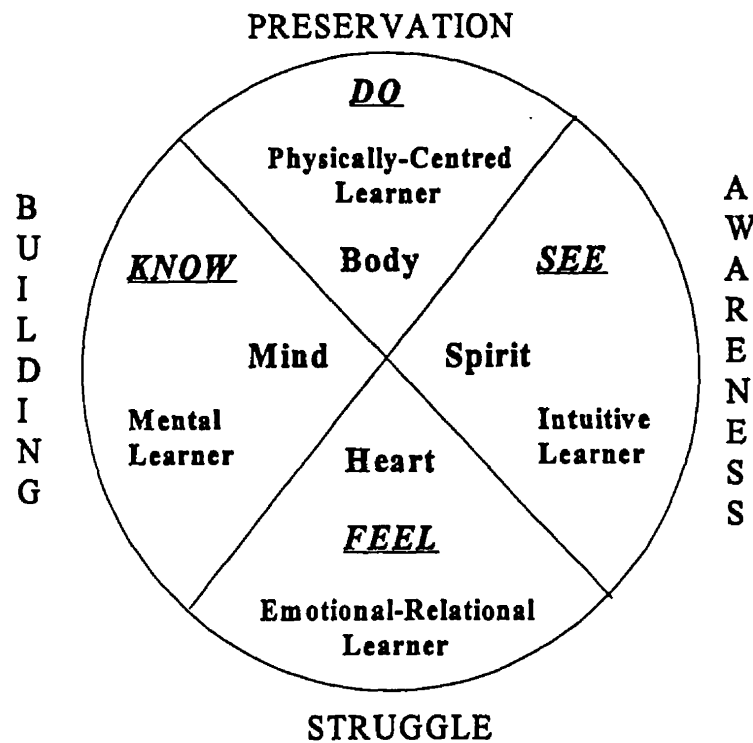
Figure 2. An Aboriginal approach to learning.

In Aboriginal thought, a whole person consists of spirit, heart, mind, and body--

the capacity to see, feel, know, and do. Therefore, in the learning process, a whole person

engages his or her physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual capacities in receiving data

or information for the brain to process. Understanding one's self well enough to know

how one takes in information and then processes it increases a person's ability to take

control of the learning process. In an Aboriginal approach, balance is important, and

learning activities are designed to help the learner to develop his/her capacity for learning

in four primary ways. These are the intuitive (spiritual), emotional-relational, mental, and

physically-centered learning styles as depicted in Figure 2. We then incorporated these dimensions and understandings into our study.

According to an Aboriginal definition of holistic learning, to develop the whole person means that human beings must be helped to identify and to develop their innate human capacities and abilities in the four above-noted aspects of self. Then, in an Aboriginal sense, human beings must learn how to achieve a balance first within themselves, and second, in all of their external relationships with and in the world and beyond.

For Aboriginal people, all growth and development occurs within a cycle of learning where the first step in this cyclical movement begins often with an intuitive sense--an **awareness** of one's needs in relation to one's self, family, community, nation, and one's place within the universe. Once a person is aware of a need or problem, then he/she makes a decision to personally **struggle** with the feelings or emotions associated with an influx of new information about one's self, others, and other aspects of one's total environment. Sometimes, this new information contradicts the assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that a person already holds. In this second stage of the cycle, attitudes and beliefs often change through an internal struggle with the contradictions present in one's thoughts and emotions or feelings. Resolution of the contradiction leads to the establishment or **building** of new knowledge constructs in the third stage. The fourth and final step occurs when a person integrates the new knowledge, belief, and/or attitude into a new sense of self or self-concept. A learning cycle completes a full circle when an individual is able to balance his/her internal capacities and can **preserve** a new sense of

self while facing the external realities associated with one's life. The cycle repeats itself with each new awareness, need, or intuitive sense.

Although the previous description of the learning cycle begins with an awareness and moves in a logical pattern towards an action, it should be noted that for some learners, a logical sequence is not possible; they simply "jump" around in the cycle. For example, a person can act or do something first, then engage in a struggle with his/her feelings about the action, and only later think about what he/she knows or has learned from the experience before even becoming aware of or seeing why he/she had acted in the first place. Thus, even though Aboriginal adult learners may identify a preferred learning style or find that they often respond in a particular patterned way to most learning situations, they are encouraged to develop their weaker styles. Over the years, the teaching team has discovered how an awareness and understanding of one's choices in learning style provides Aboriginal adult learners with a greater confidence in handling the various learning situations that they encounter.

The learning cycle described above denotes a process that repeats itself in a never ending spiral. In our educational experiences with Aboriginal adult learners, we have observed how human beings move continually through a cycle of awareness, struggle, building, and preservation with each new piece of information and/or glimpse of new knowledge. In Aboriginal thought, this spiralling process of learning supports and promotes the development of a greater and deeper human understanding as new levels of consciousness about one's self, others, and one's total environment are achieved. The learning cycle occurs again and again throughout the lifetime of an individual. Therefore,

learning is considered to be life-long. As information from each new learning cycle is integrated into a person's perception, the spiral effect results in an ever increasing expansion of knowledge and understanding.

Using Learning Styles Assessments

In delivering FNTI's Native social service worker program, learning style assessments are conducted at every program orientation session. Aboriginal adult learners are asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire and are provided later with descriptions of the various learning styles for their analysis and discussion with one of the facilitators. From these experiences, the teaching team recognized how an understanding of the learning cycle enhanced the self-esteem of Aboriginal adult learners. It was important for them to know why they may not readily under-stand what was being presented to them in any given learning situation. In working with these Aboriginal adult learners in both groups and individually, we observed how a learner was much more likely to ask questions and to request that the information be re-formatted in a such way that their learning and subsequent understanding of the material, task, or activity could be facilitated better. Also, we discovered that the learning needs of the participants often demanded flexibility in the styles of teaching that could accommodate differences in learning style. Thus, facilitators were challenged to exercise their creativity in the design of their overall training process, as well as in the development of various teaching/learning activities. In some cases, facilitators found that they were not as flexible in handling certain tasks as they had originally thought. In light of this

awareness, the teaching team responded by agreeing to share jointly in the delivery and facilitation of the learning tasks.

Assessing Feedback from Learners

When Aboriginal adult learners were asked to provide feedback on what they had learned, many of them commented on how their previous formal educational experiences seemed to exclude knowledge and understanding of the spiritual and emotional dimensions of not just the learning process, but of themselves, as human beings. For many, their formal educational experiences focused largely on the development of the mental and physical capacities that supported, namely, the acquisition of knowledge and skills on a largely cognitive level. Generally speaking, as a result of their FNTI educational experience, many Aboriginal adult learners have remarked how they had become more whole as a result of their participation in the Native social service worker program.

Description of Educational Methodology Used Within a Holistic Model of Education

Within the Native social service worker program, we attempted to work from the learners' needs as defined by them and from what we considered most appropriate to their individual work settings and Native community situations. Thus, the teaching faculty was not as concerned with content as much as they were with helping Aboriginal adult learners to develop the critical thinking skills necessary for them to view their societal affiliations, their com-munities' issues, and their life situations as problems to be solved. In this approach to education, the facilitators continually stressed to the Aboriginal adult learner the importance of becoming aware of his/her total environment. Therefore,

learners were taught to analyze and to determine not only what was needed to do their job, but also what was needed to live life within the context of their total environment and their Aboriginal cultural identity.

Implementing Learning and Teaching Activities

The educational methodology in this kind of learning model endeavors to help the Aboriginal adult learner to develop a broader more holistic view of self, others, and the world surrounding them. Learning and teaching activities were designed to provide opportunities for adult learners to enhance their knowledge, skills, attitudes (feelings and beliefs), and insights in a manner that would allow them to function in a more empowered and balanced way both within themselves as individuals, and then outwardly in their relationships with other people and ultimately, with all things within the total Creation. Therefore, it was important that the teaching faculty view themselves as facilitators of learning. Their goal whether in teaching or in learning was to help Aboriginal adult learners to analyze, to problem-solve, and to create solutions to problems that stemmed from their many and varied life experiences. Also, the unique cultural and societal affiliation that many Aboriginal adult learners brought to the learning environment often required them to be able to develop these solutions from the perspective of their particular Aboriginal cultural orientation. In many cases, Aboriginal adult learners were encouraged to develop solutions and strategies that supported the re-vitalization of their specific cultural beliefs and practices as some of these had been either forgotten, replaced, or anglicized due to the impact of the residential school system and the influence of Christianity.

Understanding the Facilitator's Role

Because traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs vary from community to community, a rigid and heavy emphasis on the specific content of a course is not as important as the ability to be able to think about and to analyze the topics associated with a specific area of study. Therefore, learning facilitators are not viewed as subject experts. They are required to possess some knowledge of the subject area, but most importantly, they must be willing to share what they know by drawing on their own life experiences. Facilitators must possess the ability to explore, in partnership with the Aboriginal adult learner, the subject, topics and/or material related to any particular area of study. The job of a facilitator is to facilitate thinking; to help the learner analyze a particular subject, reading, task and/or activity; to help learners identify concepts; to pose questions that are important in developing the learners' understanding; to help learners grasp principles and assumptions so that linkages between facts and ideas can occur; and finally, to help learners identify, access, and evaluate the resources--both human and material--necessary for their continued learning, growth, and development.

In the Native social service worker program, people are treated as textbooks. Adult learners are coached through processes designed for identifying, extracting, and evaluating the knowledge, skills, attitudes (feelings and beliefs) and insights from the presentations, discussions, readings, and tasks. Learning activities are designed to provide opportunities where life experiences can be shared openly by the facilitators, resource people, as well as the learners themselves. Working in conjunction with a learning facilitator, adult learners are helped to identify the learning needs that will help

them to understand and to develop more positive relationships with themselves, others, and the world more broadly. By the same token, Aboriginal adult learners are encouraged also to identify the knowledge and skills required for them to be successful within their specific occupations.

In conducting this approach to learning, we found that teachers who have a tendency to want to lecture often find this particular educational methodology difficult to grasp. In our experience with Aboriginal adult learners, we have found that they prefer teachers who can facilitate a learning process, who can design tasks and activities for self-teaching and exploration, and who can engage them in a discussion and analysis of the topic at hand for the purpose of assessment and evaluation. Also, we found that Aboriginal adult learners, who are encouraged to do their own research on the subjects that interest them and that are in some way related to the topic of study, are more highly motivated to complete their studies and their individualized educational program objectives. In this style of learning and teaching, facilitators share their knowledge and avoid making the definitive statement on any subject being discussed. Therefore, a good facilitator is someone who can balance his/her knowledge content with his/her ability to demonstrate and to develop within the adult learner his or her skills for processing information. Over the years, we have found that an educational methodology that helps the Aboriginal adult learner to develop his/her critical thinking skills prepares the learner for success within other educational contexts, as well as within institutions of higher learning.

Traditional Aboriginal Techniques of Teaching and Learning

Because of the emphasis on whole person development, Aboriginal adult learners within the Native social service worker program are introduced to various methods, processes, and techniques that they can use in their work, with their families, and in daily life. Facilitators search constantly for learning activities that can support and motivate Aboriginal adult learners to continue with their growth, development, and learning well beyond graduation. Therefore, an adult learner who undertakes this approach to learning receives instruction and facilitation in several areas related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for broader application. To help achieve this objective, actual program delivery methods require a blending of both experiential and traditional Aboriginal cultural techniques and processes for learning and teaching.

Incorporating the Senses in Learning

In the development of learning skills that support whole person development, traditional Aboriginal cultural practices often pay close attention to the development of one's physical senses. In Aboriginal thought, the six senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and the extra-sensory perception known as intuition are viewed as doorways for the influx of information pertinent to an Aboriginal person's learning and human development. In an Aboriginal view of learning and teaching, humans possess the capacity to experience life in its broadest terms. Human teachers, acting as facilitators, help people to process and to understand the teachings inherent within their varied life experiences. Often, traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practice emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills in situations where the very elements of Creation

(e.g., fire, water, air, and earth) are considered to be the primary teachers. Therefore, Aboriginal adult learners are encouraged to participate in learning activities that emphasize traditional teachings and an introduction to the ceremonial practices associated with the sweat lodge, fasting, and use of traditional medicines. Going hand in hand with the use of experiential exercises to stimulate and to develop the human senses is the need to help Aboriginal adult learners to become cognizant of the observation and self-reflection skills necessary for processing their learning experiences.

Integrating Dialogue

Because Aboriginal teachings stem from an oral tradition, the use of dialogue plays an extremely important role in traditional Aboriginal learning processes. Small group discussions, individual interviews, and activities that encourage questions and answers are used to develop the Aboriginal adult learner's capacity for oral discussion and presentation. Engaging Aboriginal adult learners in dialectical discussions and public presentation helps them to reclaim their skills for oration and storytelling--the two most vital elements of a traditional Aboriginal educational practice that is based on an oral tradition. In these processes, Aboriginal adult learners practice the communication skills of summarizing, feedback, and reflection. These skills are significant and integral parts of any counselling process and are the core of the educational program. The practice of oral tradition in an Aboriginal learning and teaching process develops a person's ability to listen, think, reason, discern truth, and make choices that are appropriate to the individual's life path and unique life experiences.

Valuing Listening

Listening skills, both external to others for the purpose of memory retention and comprehension and internal to one's own intuitive thoughts, aid in the development of a learner's spiritual capacity for creativity. In the teaching team's view, a person's ability to problem-solve often necessitates creativity. Consequently, in the Native social service worker program, we foster creativity by helping the learner to develop his/her ability to image and to visualize. Meditative exercises, relaxation sessions, and guided visualization are some methods used to quiet a learner's mind, so that his/her intuitive sense can engage in the creative process. Knowledge and skill related to the development of and trust in one's intuition forms an integral part of the traditional Aboriginal practice of spirit to spirit communication that hinges on a person's openness and sensitivity to spiritual energy in all of its forms. Knowledge and skills related to the development of this type of spiritual consciousness requires a learning method-ology that stems from an understanding of the continuing interaction of all life present in the universe.

Using Rituals

A traditional Aboriginal educational methodology utilizes teaching, sharing, and healing circles to facilitate the development of social skills and the release of emotional burdens that block both creativity and learning. Such circles provide Aboriginal adult learners with the opportunity to learn from each other's experience while, at the same time, helping them to build and establish supportive relationships. In a traditional Aboriginal cultural sense, these types of circles emphasize the self-reflection skills of looking within and seeing one's self where the responsibility for one's perceptions and

actions can be understood and accepted. Circles provide the Aboriginal adult learner with

a forum for venting painful feelings and for examining unhealthy relating patterns that

stem from one's negative life experiences. Thus, knowledge of feelings and skills in

identifying the roots of one's behavior are key components in the creation of an

understanding necessary for building and preserving all of one's relationships that begin

with the family and extend outwardly to one's clan, community, nation, and inevitably to

the rest of humanity and the world. In traditional Aboriginal thought, healing circles

facilitate the discovery of a person's true identity, one's special gifts and abilities, and the

purpose and meaning of one's journey through life.

Speaking in the First Language

Finally and wherever possible, Aboriginal adult learners are encouraged to use

their original languages both in public speaking and in class discussions. The Aboriginal

adult learner who is fluent in his/her first language understands that all Aboriginal

languages are living languages in that they depict a picture of an object in relationship to

something else. In this sense, most Aboriginal words are verbs that describe an action.

As one traditional Aboriginal language teacher explained, an Aboriginal language

provides people with a sense of relationship, and a different comprehension of how

everything in the world is connected. In comparing this notion with Western thought, a

person could say that they have a life of their own, but in Aboriginal thought, the life of a

person is expressed in the notion of "what the Creator has given to me". In this sense, an

Aboriginal person does not exist except in relationship to the Creator. Thus, in the

English language and in Western thought, the two--person and Creator--are often thought

about and viewed as being separate entities. Therefore, in Aboriginal thought, the world functions very differently from the world viewed through a Western perspective. Because Aboriginal languages can enrich a person's philosophical understanding of the world, the use of an Aboriginal adult learner's first language and the active translation of the Aboriginal terms and phrases employed by a language speaker supports the development of comparison and comprehension skills used in critical thinking.

Portfolio-Assisted Learning Within a Holistic Model of Education

At the time of the Native social service worker program's inception, portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment was viewed as an important educational strategy for helping Aboriginal adult learners to identify and to extract from their life experiences, the knowledge and skills related to their program of study. Only later, when learners began to document their life experiences did we realize PLA's greater potential in helping learners to understand how they perceive and then evaluate information according to their basic cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs about self, others, and life in general. In this section, I explain the concept of prior learning assessment and how portfolio development is used within the Aboriginal approach to holistic education discussed in this thesis so far.

The Concept of Prior Learning Assessment

PLA is understood by most adult educators to mean the measurement of learning gained through experiences other than those associated with formal post-secondary educational courses and programs. This type of learning can be acquired through many avenues such as work experience, community involvement, volunteer work, and

independent study, to name just a few. In theory, it is possible for a person's prior learning experiences to be assessed for knowledge and skills at the post-secondary level whether these are acquired under the sponsorship of business, industry, government and/or social service organizations or related to a specific job or not. It is in this sense that the concept of prior learning assessment supports the premise that adults acquire knowledge and skills through many means of formal and informal study. A PLA system evaluates this learning and matches it to a program of study for the purpose of either granting academic credit or applying for exemptions from courses of study. Through PLA, it is possible for learning, acquired from the varied life experiences associated with an Aboriginal adult learner's family, community, and his/her total environment, to be assessed and accredited at the post-secondary level. As well, a PLA system carries the potential of being able to help many working adults and immigrant populations to secure full-time employment in their fields of expertise. In theory, PLA offers these individuals a mechanism by which they can gain legitimacy and recognition for the education that they may have obtained from outside of the province of Ontario and that previously went unrecognized by provincial educational institutions and by self-governing, professional trade, licensing bodies.

In viewing the potential of PLA, it became obvious to our faculty that if a system of prior learning assessment was effective for helping adult learners, in general, to access post-secondary education and to receive post-secondary accreditation, then it would indeed be effective for helping Aboriginal adult learners to do the same.

Use of a Portfolio-Assisted Prior Learning Assessment

Although the use of a PLA system provided the human services teaching team with a greatly needed insight into the Aboriginal adult learner, the journey towards this new under-standing was not without struggle. When the concept of a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment was presented to the Aboriginal adult learners enrolled within FNTI's Native social service worker program, many of them expressed a discomfort and in some cases, a deep fear about recording life experiences that they felt were better left forgotten. The historical impact of Western culture had created dysfunctional communities of Aboriginal people who felt and experienced much pain from the generational abuse affecting their lives. In general, many Aboriginal learners, regardless of age, were burdened with painful memories associated with both their current and past life experiences. The majority of Aboriginal adult learners, when they began the process of sharing and recording their life experiences in a written portfolio format, surfaced these painful memories. When they did, their ability to focus and to pay attention to the present for the purposes of learning for the future was greatly disrupted. Low self-esteem and a need to help Aboriginal adult learners to process and overcome their pain became major educational issues, and the FNTI human services team responded by introducing healing activities into the Native social service worker program curriculum. At the same time, traditional Aboriginal cultural teachings were becoming increasingly more important as Aboriginal adult learners searched for the positive qualities and attributes associated with being Native people.

Over the years, portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment in the Native social service worker (NSSW) program has been expanded into the following uses. These are:

1. to seek exemption from 75% of the academic program,

2. to seek exemption from specific courses,

3. to receive professional accreditation in a related field of study,

4. to prove competency related to specific job performance,

5. to identify learning needs, goals, and personal interests,

6. to expand their personal resumes in seeking a career change, and

7. to document academic knowledge and skills specifically related to program outcomes.

Challenges in Using PLA

While PLA has been a useful tool in our educational practice with Aboriginal adult learners, it has not been without its drawbacks. For example, in our educational experience, we have had to debate issues related to who is responsible for naming the learning and for determining the validity of knowledge and skills that do not match the current definitions of knowledge espoused by Western academic institutions. At FNTI, we, too, have had to work at accepting a definition of knowledge and skill that does not match the Western educational mind-set because we work with Aboriginal adult learners whose knowledge and skills are very much situated within the context of the culture, communities, and territories in which they live. Because of these realities and our focus on the importance of an educational process that is learner-centered, we have made a conscious effort both to encourage and to preserve traditional Aboriginal knowledge and

skills within its particular program of study and in its use of PLA through the portfolio development process.

From a traditional Aboriginal cultural perspective, a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment has been useful in helping both learning facilitators and Aboriginal adult learners to understand the importance and use of life experience in educating Aboriginal people. In the Native social service worker program, both groups have benefitted from knowing how to identify, to extract, and then to articulate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights contained within a specific life experience or experiential exercise. In this sense, portfolio development has been an important process not only for creating self-awareness, but also for facilitating learning.

In utilizing various portfolio development processes, Aboriginal adult learners have come to understand how their openness and acceptance of new information is often curtailed by some very strong opinions and views that are supported by equally strong emotions and beliefs. In our educational experience, on the one hand, we have found that the type of self-reflective learning inherent within a portfolio development process has been invaluable in helping Aboriginal adult learners to understand the importance of their own culture and language in a world that is moving many of them away from their unique cultural identity. On the other hand, through portfolio development, we have been able to help many Aboriginal adult learners to appreciate a reality and a world view that supports the existence of many different life-forms which includes people from many different cultures. Therefore, in facilitating a traditional Aboriginal belief in co-existence, portfolio development has helped many Aboriginal adult learners realize that they may be

blocking another perspective or world view because of feelings and beliefs stemming

from their negative life experiences with people from both their own and other cultures.

Also, we have found that the telling of one's story in an autobiographical section

of a portfolio supports traditional Aboriginal methods of learning/teaching related to the

practice of storytelling through an oral tradition. Thus, where Aboriginal adult learners

previously failed to make the connections necessary for increasing their appreciation and

understanding of traditional Aboriginal "ways of knowing," an examination of their own

life experiences helped them to comprehend the meaning of the traditional teachings

associated with their particular oral tradition. For Aboriginal people, traditional

Aboriginal knowledge and skill is rooted in their life experience. Portfolio development

has provided the means for helping both the facilitators and the adult learners to

recognize the value and importance of their traditional knowledge.

Overall Value of Portfolio in Our PLA Process

In summary, the FNTI Native social service worker teaching team concluded that

the use of a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment has benefitted Aboriginal adult

learners in several ways. Firstly, the documentation of their prior learning experiences

through a portfolio development process provided Aboriginal adult learners with the

opportunity to discover and to identify the sources of conflict that many of them had with

their Native identity and with people from other cultures. Secondly, the teaching team

became quite excited by the fact that the portfolio development process provided

Aboriginal adult learners with the opportunity to document life experiences that contained

knowledge and skills that went well beyond a formal area of academic study related to

Native social services. Thirdly, and over time, it became clear that the knowledge and skills associated with one's traditional Aboriginal cultural heritage and life experience could now be expressed and validated in a way that had never been done before. In fact, portfolio development, when placed within an Aboriginal cultural context, provided not only a mechanism for validating knowledge and skills, but also a means for empowering Aboriginal people with confidence and self-esteem in themselves as human beings and as Native people who possessed a valuable cultural heritage.

Over the years, the teaching team has become very cognizant of the personal, situational, and cultural issues that affect the learning and teaching of Aboriginal adult learners. Great efforts have been made in attempting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal adult learners and in helping them to overcome the barriers that they perceive are blocking their learning and educational success. Because the teaching team of the Native social service worker program began using portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment shortly after the program's inception, PLA has become an important strategy for recognizing and accrediting learning at the community college level. Thus, PLA plays an integral role within FNTI's educational philosophy and practice. Today, several training programs within other educational departments of FNTI have added a portfolio development component to their system of delivery.

In 1987, FNTI organized its first Canada-wide conference on the use of prior learning assessment as a new educational strategy. Over the years, FNTI has acquired an extensive library of material resources that support the recognition of PLA as a viable strategy in the delivery and accreditation of post-secondary learning. To demonstrate

their commitment to PLA, FNTI's management created a separate department in 1994

that has become home to the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment

(CAPLA). CAPLA continues to advocate for the wide-spread use of PLA both within the

private and public sectors. People from a cross-section of education, business and

industry, labor unions, and government agencies throughout Canada and the United States

compose the membership of this non-profit association.

Since 1985, FNTI and its various educational programs have experienced many

changes related to educational program design, delivery, and evaluation methods. From

our educational experiences with Aboriginal adult learners, the human services teaching

team responsible for the Native social service worker program endeavored to create a

program of holistic learning. As a result of our efforts, we believe that we have made

major strides in creating an Aboriginal approach to holistic education that is largely based

on an understanding of traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy and incorporates the

creative use of such modern educational strategies as a portfolio-assisted prior learning

assessment.

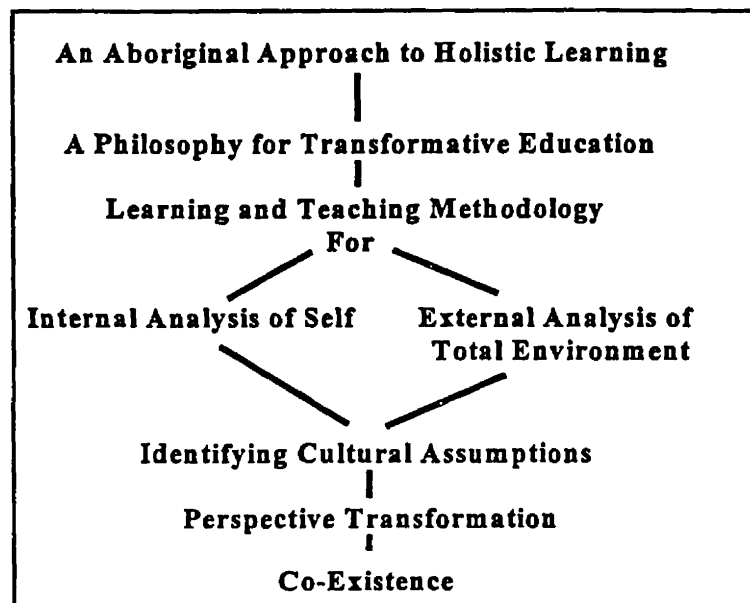Outcomes of An Aboriginal Approach to Holistic Education

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│     An Aboriginal Approach to Holistic Learning       │
│                         │                             │
│     A Philosophy for Transformative Education         │
│                         │                             │
│        Learning and Teaching Methodology              │
│                       For                             │
│                      ╱     ╲                          │
│                     ╱       ╲                         │
│   Internal Analysis of Self    External Analysis of   │
│                     ╲           Total Environment     │
│                      ╲         ╱                      │
│                       ╲       ╱                       │
│            Identifying Cultural Assumptions           │
│                         │                             │
│             Perspective Transformation                │
│                         I                             │
│                   Co-Existence                        │
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Figure 3. An Aboriginal approach to holistic education.

In summarizing the educational outcomes of this Aboriginal approach to holistic

education, I offer Figure 3 as an aid to this discussion. It illustrates an Aboriginal

approach to holistic education that is based on an Aboriginal definition of holistic

learning. An Aboriginal definition requires the development of the whole person in four

aspects of self, namely, spirit (spiritual), heart (emotional), mind (mental), and body

(physical). Learners are challenged to learn how to achieve a balance within themselves

and within all of the many external relation-ships associated with a total environment that

consists of concentric rings of relationships that begin with family and extend outwardly

to incorporate all of the various aspects of the universe. In learning how to achieve

balance, learners are introduced to a concept of life-long learning that occurs usually, but

not necessarily, through a cycle beginning with an awareness that leads a person to

struggle with his/her internal contradictions, and finally, results in the building of new

knowledge constructs that the person then utilizes to preserve a new sense of self or

world view. The spiral effect of learning that is integral to any process of growth and

development results in an ever increasing expansion of knowledge and understanding.

Thus, in moving through the learning cycle again and again, learners develop a greater

understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them.

Effectiveness of an Aboriginal Approach

Knowledge and understanding of the learning process enables Aboriginal adult

learners to take control of their learning. Differences in learning style are accepted by the

learner, and an understanding of one's capacity to learn in four primary ways provides a

person with the opportunity to develop him/herself as a whole person. The Aboriginal

approach to understanding one's total environment for the purpose of achieving balance

in each and every circle of one's many relationships requires adult learners to become

aware of the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical realities of the world surrounding

them. For many Aboriginal people in general, the historical disruption of their traditional

cultural beliefs and practices has resulted in individual, family, and community

dysfunction due to the psycho-social generational traumas associated with having

internalized their oppression.

In helping Aboriginal adult learners to overcome the effects of their oppression, a

philosophy of education must be broad enough to allow for the continuing growth,

development, and transformation of not only the Aboriginal person, but also his/her

family, community, nation, and society as a whole. Thus, a philosophy of education

based on a traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy supports a transformative process of education. It provides Aboriginal adult learners with the opportunity to transform the perceptions that they hold of themselves, others, and the very universe surrounding them by introducing them to an alternative form of knowledge that is based on a traditional Aboriginal cultural world view.

This type of transformative educational philosophy provides the overall context in which both learning and teaching methodologies are created and developed. In this Aboriginal approach to holistic education, learning/teaching processes and activities are directed towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills for examining and evaluating one's internal world of self and/or self-concept, as well as, the external world or total environment outside of one's self. From an Aboriginal cultural perspective, adult learners must balance learning about themselves with learning about others and the world around them. In this model, it is simply not enough for adult learners to analyze and to understand the outside world, they must also be able to analyze and to understand themselves.

Value of Identifying Cultural Assumptions

In analyzing themselves, others, and the various aspects of their total environment, adult learners, in this model, learn how to identify the cultural assumptions, values, beliefs, and emotions that comprise the perceptual filter through which they determine the meaning of their life experiences. By identifying and challenging the personal views, opinions, and beliefs that limit their understanding and acceptance of new information in all forms, the perspectives of adult learners are transformed. Therefore, an

internal examination of the assumptions and emotions that one carries often leads a

person towards healing, especially in cases where negative feelings and beliefs about

one's self, other people, and about the world in general are perceived to be contradictory,

wrong, or distorted. Thus, healing is learning according to a traditional Aboriginal view

of education.

An Aboriginal approach to this type of perspective transformation entails also a

movement towards forgiveness that is understood to be a part of the healing/learning

process as explained in the following statement:

> Forgiveness provides people with the potential to renew both themselves and
> their life. When people can no longer act upon or live out their principles, then it
> is time to "look within". To truly forgive, people must go back through all of
> their experiences to explore both the feelings and the beliefs that have shaped
> them. With healing, people will never forget, but they can change their perception
> of their experiences by releasing the negative feelings associated with them.
> (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992)

In an Aboriginal view, transforming one's perception of self, others, and the world in

general includes transforming one's negative emotions as well. With each inner change,

new knowledge becomes integrated into the whole of a person's perception where a shift

in one's ideological perspective is initiated by an awareness that one may be blocking out

the views, opinions, and emotions of other people.

In conclusion, the FNTI educational experience with Aboriginal adult learners

enrolled in the Native social service worker program has taught us that conflict between

people is more easily resolved when they can truly understand, forgive, and accept both

personal and cultural differences. An Aboriginal notion of co-existence flourishes when

equality is based on a true respect and acceptance of difference, rather than on sameness.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section, I present a summary of the study, a set of conclusions based on what I learned from my involvement in the study, and recommendations that flow from these conclusions. The summary takes the form of a compendium containing the sum and substance of my fuller statement about the study as expressed in the first three chapters. I blend together, as though woven, ideas from the literature with my experiences from conducting the study. The result is an interweaving in summary form of an Aboriginal-specific perspective on learning with a more general Western cultural perspective. In putting together my conclusions, I attempt to move beyond my own beliefs and preferences by taking a more inclusive approach. The recommendations that follow each conclusion are directed to adult educators who have similar interests as my own.

Summary of the Study

In the first part of the summary, I focus specifically on traditional Aboriginal teachings and their learning implications before I focus on a more general perspective. In this way, I set the stage for the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

Specific Perspective

This thesis explains how, in traditional Aboriginal thought, everything becomes a part of everything else with fewer discrete categories for observation or segregation of ideas (Rhodes, 1988). In other words, by observing the qualities and characteristics of their own human existence, and those associated with the interaction of all life within the

natural world that surrounded, traditional Aboriginal people came to understand "how the natural world teaches" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992). By transforming their experience into a "knowledge of life and how life should be lived" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993), traditional Aboriginal teachings were devised. They contain a knowledge of the "original instructions" for "how to live one's life with meaning and purpose" that included the "desire to fulfill that which the spirit is sent into the world to do" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993, 1994). Existing amongst traditional Aboriginal people since the beginning of Creation, this knowledge and skill is conveyed in Aboriginal languages that "stress the importance of relationship" (personal communication, J. E. Thomas, 1986). They are "transmitted through an oral tradition that provides the individual with much freedom in pursuing a knowledge of life related to one's spiritual path" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1994). In traditional Aboriginal thought, a spiritual link to the Creator--"an energy force that flows throughout the Creation" (personal communication, T. Greene, 1997) is very important because "it provides a mechanism for discovering the 'truth', meaning, and purpose of one's life" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993).

In addition to possessing a spiritual knowledge of the circle of life (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1993, 1994), traditional Aboriginal people were also astute observers. By focusing on their human qualities, they observed that the whole of their being consisted of four parts--mind, body, heart, and spirit (personal communications, B. K.-K. Bell, 1992; J. Dumont, 1993). From watching the interaction of the life around them, they observed the circular nature and movement of the world (personal

communications, B. K.-K. Bell, 1992; J. Dumont, 1994), and how life functioned

cooperatively, and not competitively (personal communication, R. A. Antone &

J. Dumont, 1992). In my study, the learners noted how their own human existence

"moved in a circle from birth to death--from spirit life to spirit life once again" (personal

communication, J. Dumont, 1993). In examining the nature of everything around them,

they saw "how everything in life had a twin," and they came to understand their own

duality in having "both a physical and spiritual reality" (personal communication,

J. Dumont, 1990, 1993). From their observations of the natural world, they noticed that

"twin energies" (personal communication, P. Deere, 1985) existed not only within their

own being, but also within all things. They observed and felt the spirit of the universe

and knew that this "energy existed within all things within the Creation" and that this

"life-force or spirit" (personal communication, B. K.-K. Bell, 1991) existed inside of the

human being as well. For example, one of my learners remarked, "Since I have been

taking this program, I am much more aware of the energy in the classroom and of the

people who I sit beside each day. Sometimes, both people and classroom can feel very

negative."

In formulating an understanding of themselves and their world, the ancestors of

today's Aboriginal people reasoned that "all of life exists as an interconnected reality"

that was "designed by a Creator to function in a state of balance, harmony and

interdependence" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992, 1993). Based on this view,

everyone and everything has a responsibility for determining how its particular life-force

is meant to function for the purpose of sustaining life and for co-existence (personal

communication, R. A. Antone & J. Dumont, 1992). In my study of the Native social

service worker program, Aboriginal learners often commented about the uncertainty they

felt when asked to explain why they were born. Because many of these Aboriginal adult

learners had a history of abuse, it was common for them to feel that life was not worth

living. Thus, in explaining that human beings enter the world with "beginning gifts"

(personal communication, D. Paul, 1990), many Aboriginal adult learners became more

willing to learn how to identify their gifts and embrace them so that they could know

"who they are" and "what they can do" for their people and the world as a whole

(personal communications, R. A. Antone & J. Dumont 1993; P. Sandy, 1984;

E. Silversmith, 1986). In many cases, Aboriginal adult learners, enrolled in the Native

social service worker program, were also more willing to pursue a program of learning

that could help them to not only find, but also, fulfill their vocation in life. Taken in this

context, "Aboriginal spirituality is not a religion, it is a way of life" (personal

communication, J. Dumont, 1994). It requires people to interact consistently with their

environment (personal communications, J. Dumont, 1994; D. Paul, 1990) and to become

consciously aware of themselves, others, and the world around them (personal

communications, R. A. Antone, 1993; J. Mohawk, 1984; E. Niganobe, 1991;

J. E. Thomas, 1987). Viewed in this way, a traditional Aboriginal person must acquire

not just the knowledge, but also the skills of discernment (personal communications,

T. Greene, 1996; E. Hill, 1993; E. Niganobe, 1996) associated with a respect for the

spiritual nature of all life (personal communication, R. A. Antone & J. Dumont 1992)

because everything exists only in relationship to something else. Therefore, in all aspects

of life that includes also ceremony (personal communications, E. Niganobe, 1992, 1993; P. Sandy, 1994, 1995; J. E. Thomas, 1985), "people express not only their thankfulness" (personal communication, E. Benedict, 1996), but also their "intent" (personal communication, T. Greene, 1996) for the continuation of a mutually beneficial relationship with all of the life forces that support and sustain their lives (personal communications, R. A. Antone, 1997; E. Benedict, 1996).

From a traditional Aboriginal perspective, the concept of the total environment consists of "a series of ever expanding circles of relationships that begin with the individual, include one's family, community, and nation and extend beyond to encompass all of the universal elements" (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1994). Thus, a traditional Aboriginal view of the world is holistic, and an "imbalance or disruption in one circle impacts on the wholeness of life" (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1994) creating "dis-ease" in many forms (personal communication, P. Deere, 1985).

In perceiving the existence of two separate realities--"an ordinary everyday physical reality and a non-ordinary spiritual reality," traditional Aboriginal people must acquire both the knowledge and skills to live "their lives in a balance of the two realities" (Dumont, 1992, p. 79). Also, they must find a balance between the life-diminishing and life-enhancing qualities and human intent (personal communications, P. Deere, 1985; E. Niganobe, 1994) that exists within themselves, others, and the world around them (personal communications, J. Mohawk, 1984; J. E. Thomas, 1987).

In the Native social service worker program, the teaching team observed how Aboriginal adult learners benefitted from a learning program that helped them to analyze

themselves, as well as the world around them. For the majority of Aboriginal adult

learners in the program, learning about themselves helped them to achieve higher levels

of self-esteem. Because in journeying through life, these adult learners had undergone

certain life experiences that had caused many of them to abandon themselves and their

principles (personal communications, B. K.-K. Bell, 1991; J. Dumont, 1992, 1993). In

some cases, Aboriginal adult learners chose to abandon their cultural teachings, their

unique cultural identity, and their relationship to the environment" (personal

communication, R. A. Antone, 1982) in favor of an ideology that they perceived was

more acceptable. Because the "true path of one's spiritual life does not change" (personal

communication, J. Dumont, 1992), it may be necessary to "look within" (personal

communication, E. Niganobe, 1995), for the purpose of exploring the life experiences

related to "one's changing (physical) life" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992).

Using "processes of self-examination" and "healing", traditional Aboriginal people learn

how to release the negative feelings associated with their negative life experiences, so

that they can change their perception of the experience (personal communications, R. A.

Antone, 1992; B. K.-K. Bell, 1991; J. Dumont, 1992) and move towards the kind of

"forgiveness that provides people with the potential to renew both themselves and their

life" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992). This kind of knowledge and skill is

important because even in Western cultures, many people have experienced "some type

of mistreatment through physical violence, but usually, through the disregard of feelings

and emotion, the discounting of one's abilities or the invalidation of one's knowledge and

intelligence" (personal communication, D. Jenson, 1984). In the case of Aboriginal

people today, many of them will need to uncover the cultural assumptions from Western culture that invalidate traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices (personal communications, R. A. Antone, 1983; D. Jenson, 1984), if they are "to remove the blocks, restore balance and reconnect to one's spiritual center" (personal communication, B. K.-K. Bell, 1991). This understanding is important because "the human being is the only life-form who must learn how to co-exist" (personal communication, J. Dumont, 1992).

Thus, "the influence that anyone has over the thinking of another should be nothing more than providing a person with an opportunity to learn through the sharing of their life experiences" (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989). To traditional Aboriginal people, life experiences can be "the greatest teachers and can provide profound lessons when they are shared and examined with others" (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989). In their cultures, "the mother is considered to be the child's first teacher", so "family is an important source of information and learning" (personal communication, R. Henry, 1984) along with the "many other spiritual beings within the Creation who act as teachers and mentors" (personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1989). Thus, the spiritual capacity of children is to be nurtured and developed before they learn how to discount their dreams and intuitive experiences (personal communications, J. Armstrong, 1993; J. Lathlin, 1995). Because traditional Aboriginal people believe that the spirit knows what it has to do and is capable of leading a person through life (personal communications, W. Fine Day, 1984; J. Lathlin, 1995), the spiritual development of children begins early. They are provided "with much freedom to explore within a learning framework that focuses on balance and relationships" (personal

communication, J. Armstrong, 1993), and where eventually, they will "learn how to

identify their gifts and to fulfill their purpose in life" (personal communication, D. Paul,

1990).

Over the years, the teaching team has incorporated these ideas into an educational

philosophy that has guided the development of our Native social service worker program.

Today, many traditional Aboriginal "learning and teaching activities are structured for the

purpose of helping people to develop a spiritual consciousness" (personal communi-

cation, E. Hill, 1993) that can facilitate human growth and development "in a spiralling

movement towards every expanding levels of consciousness and a deeper understanding

(personal communication, R. A. Antone, 1990).

General Perspective

In perceiving their reality, every culture of people develops its own "philosophical

view" (Elias & Merriam, 1995) that is comprised of "a set of cultural assumptions"

(Brookfield, 1991) used to explain the events and experiences of their lives. Thus, for

several Western educators, adult learners must be helped to become aware of how their

cultural assumptions, "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1985), and "internalized norms"

(Marsick, 1985) limit and restrict their learning, their passage through life, and their

ability to co-exist in a multi-cultural environment. To them, education must become a

process by which people are helped to develop a "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1970)

about themselves and the world in which they live (Antone, Miller, & Myers, 1986,

Brookfield, Marsick, Mezirow). By using "processes of self-examination" (Antone,

Miller, & Myers) and by exploring the critical incidents (Brookfield) within their life

experiences, many adult learners can be helped to examine the perceptual filters through which they view themselves, others, and the world around them. In our program, for instance, the identification of the cultural assumptions contained within the life experiences of Aboriginal adult learners was facilitated through the portfolio development aspect of our PLA strategy. By transforming their perspectives, many Aboriginal adult learners were able to develop a higher level of self-esteem that helped them to become more confident and therefore, more successful in their learning endeavors and social interactions both inside the classroom and outside in the world more broadly.

In expanding one's view of the educational process, this study discusses how research on whole brain learning (Griffin, 1988), intuitive learning (Griffin, 1987; Denis and Richter, 1987), "triune brain functions" (Nummela & Rosengren, 1988), learning styles (Hill & George, 1996; Kaulback, 1984; Kolb, 1984; More, 1987; Rhodes, 1988; Samples & Hammond, 1985; Wallis, 1983), and the "basic structures of consciousness" (Wilber, 1990) support an understanding of the human brain's capacity to experience and to process information on multiple levels. Specifically, in the development of our Aboriginal approach to holistic education, this research provided the supporting rationale for the Aboriginal cultural assumptions that the teaching team made in regard to helping adult learners develop themselves as whole people--mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Additional research related to the "influence of distressful feelings" (Marsick) in creating "emotional barriers to learning" (Nummela & Rosengren, 1988), and the influence of humor (Thomas, 1997) and play (Melamed, 1987) in enhancing

learning indicated the need for more inclusive and holistic processes of learning and teaching. From our educational experience with Aboriginal adult learners, this research supported greatly the affective and intuitive dimensions of our educational process and helped us to recognize the importance of achieving a balance between the objective and subjective learning and teaching methods that we employed. Models of adult learning such as andragogy (Knowles, 1980) which includes the notion of "learning how to learn" (Smith, 1983) contain examples of learning/teaching processes that are based on new cultural assumptions related to how adults learn. Thus, the overall research to which this study refers implies the need for a paradigm shift (Ferguson, 1980) to a more holistic educational process that can develop not only adult learners, but also society as a whole. In an Aboriginal world view, educational processes affect not only how people relate to each other, but also how they relate to everything else in the world. Thus, the Aboriginal concept of accountability in education is much broader than simply meeting the needs of the adult learner, the institution, and society as a whole. It includes learning to be accountable for the impact that our human activity has on the earth and beyond.

This study suggests that adult learners are not the only group who could benefit from a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1985) in their current view of education. Adult educators, themselves, would benefit from an examination of the beliefs and notions that comprise their educational philosophy, shape their practice, (Charter, 1994; Elias & Merriam, 1995) and determine their "acceptance and validation of non-Western forms of knowledge" (Michelson, 1996) and ways of facilitating learning (Charter, 1994). In developing the Native social service worker program, we experienced first hand the

difficulties associated with the acceptance of a new approach to education. In fact, the

creation of our Aboriginal approach to holistic education was made possible precisely

because the members of the teaching team were able to critically reflect on their

individual educational philosophies and perspectives.

In considering a traditional Aboriginal educative process, the use of prior life

experiences (Thomas, 1997) and the "assessment of the learning--knowledge, skills,

attitudes (feelings and beliefs) and insights" (Hill, 1995) contained in these experiences

become valuable learning processes for both adult learners and adult educators. They

support not only the traditional Aboriginal practice of storytelling (Rhodes, 1988;

Thomas), but also a method of education in which the critical reflection (Antone, Miller,

& Myers, 1986; Brookfield, 1991; Freire, 1970; Marsick, 1985; Mezirow, 1985)

associated with a transformative learning process (Brookfield) becomes an integral part of

a holistic model of education that raises not only the consciousness, but also the "self-

esteem" (Steinem, 1993) of adult learners.

Educational processes that foster an awareness and an acceptance of "alternative

ways of knowing" (Michelson, 1997) that exist within a multi-cultural environment help

adult learners to perceive themselves and their world more broadly. For example,

traditional Aboriginal cultural philosophy contains knowledge that supports the

development of a "spiritual consciousness" (personal communication, E. Hill, 1993)

capable of perceiving the nature of life as an "interconnected reality" (personal

communication, Dumont, 1992) that is both physical and spiritual. It is a model of

education that supports a view of education different from certain Western cultural views

(Berry, 1990) and certain Western religions (Kushner, 1996), but nevertheless, is useful for the expansion of a philosophical view of the world that inevitably filters down to influence one's educational philosophy and practice.

When discussing the importance of alternative world views, this study implores educators to consider how knowledge is situated (Michelson, 1996) in the social and historical reality of the people who create it (Freire, 1970). We took our Aboriginal knowledge and shaped it into an educational philosophy and practice that has been successful in supporting the whole person development that Aboriginal adult learners needed for them to be successful in more than just their educational pursuits. Thus, the acceptance of traditional Aboriginal knowledge in its various forms (Brant-Castellano, in press) can be construed as a move towards a constructivist view of education (O'Banion, 1997) that is pertinent to the creation of knowledge. It is an educational view that supports the need for contextual learning (Kolb, 1984; O'Banion) in an environment that requires a more holistic approach to education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In comparing FNTI's Aboriginal approach to holistic education with the ideas and concepts contained in the literature and oral history review, I have concluded that the major strengths center on its view of learning as a process of balancing one's external analysis of the world with the internal analysis of one's self. Learning about one's self has the potential for initiating changes in a human being's perceptual filter that may prevent the consideration and acceptance of other ideological perspectives, cultural belief systems, and educational philosophies. From an Aboriginal perspective, learning about

one's self leads inevitably to the healing necessary for individual transformation and a true forgiveness of one's self and others that makes living in a state of co-existence possible. Thus, learning is both an outcome and a life-long process of transforming one's experiences into a knowledge and an understanding that supports a person's unique development in becoming a human being who can live his/her life with meaning and purpose.

In describing an Aboriginal approach to holistic education, I have become aware of what Knowles (1980) calls panacea addiction--the either-or thinking that is based on a simple and single solution to a complex problem. Because of the influence of his work on my thinking, I have become very aware of my personal tendency to form an ideological attachment to the Aboriginal-based educational model that has worked for me. Therefore, in assessing the value of an Aboriginal approach to holistic education, I have attempted to move beyond my own ideological attachments in drawing the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. I have concluded that the concept of human freedom goes beyond simply being able to adapt to the social and educational expectations present in the world around us. In learning about the nature of personal and social realities, I have found that it is important for Aboriginal adult educators to pursue the freedom to create and develop educational programs for Aboriginal people that are based on a unique cultural perception of the truths associated with their view of reality. Thus, in my own work with Aboriginal adult learners, I have watched how they have moved towards a greater degree of self-directedness and control of their learning with each validation of the various aspects

related to their unique cultural perspective. Over the years, I have come to believe that an educational framework based on the use of culturally-appropriate learning and teaching methodologies designed to support the development of the whole person in the broadest use of the term--meaning mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually--will help not only Aboriginal adult learners, but also adult learners more generally. Therefore, I recommend that adult educators seriously consider the use of an educational process that can validate alternative cultural knowledge and experience and balance the internal (subjective) analysis of one's self with the external (objective) analysis of the world.

2. In attempting to articulate an Aboriginal approach to holistic education, I have found new labels for describing the learning and teaching processes that have been employed by myself and my colleagues in our educational work. In using the learning processes associated with critical reflection (Brookfield, 1991) and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1985), I, and those who have been working with me, have been able to help Aboriginal adult learners to perceive themselves, their own culture, and the cultures of other people more broadly. In many cases, the individual transformations that have resulted from the use of these processes have led to the development of a learning community that has encouraged the building of supportive relationships and has fostered an environment where individual and cultural differences are more acceptable. In such a learning environment, adult learners can and do learn from each other, especially when cultural diversity is encouraged. Therefore, I recommend that adult educators endeavor to acquire a knowledge and understanding of the educational concepts necessary for facilitating not just traditional Aboriginal learning and teaching processes, but also the

methods associated with other cultural experiences, particularly when working with culturally diverse groups of adult learners.

3. Based on this study, I have learned that the assessment of one's prior learning experiences and an examination of the critical incidents (Brookfield, 1991) in an adult learner's life are capable of producing the same results. In preparing their academic portfolios, many Aboriginal adult learners are provided with the opportunity to understand how the events of their lives have shaped not only their knowledge and skills, but also their attitudes (feelings and beliefs). Thus, I have concluded that a portfolio-assisted prior learning assessment has the potential to provide adult learners with valuable insights into their cultural assumptions, and how these may be affecting the view they have of themselves, others, their relationship to the natural world, and their ability to consider other ideological perspectives different from their own. Therefore, I recommend portfolio-assisted PLA as an effective tool for helping both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adult learners to name their learning and to build the levels of self-esteem required for the preservation of their cultural identity and cultural integrity, while helping people from other cultures to do the same.

4. In using learning processes, like portfolio development and critical incident examination, it is important for adult educators to create a learning climate that provides adult learners with the safety they need for exploring the inner dimensions of themselves. Time and flexibility in program delivery must also be considered as such processes can become very time-consuming. The quality of interaction between the facilitator and the adult learners engaged in this kind of educational process is another important

consideration. If the facilitator has problems in sharing or has not undergone a similar process of self-examination, then the acceptable levels of trust and understanding may be lacking in the facilitation process. Therefore, I recommend that adult educators experience these processes first before they attempt to implement them.

5. In developing a more holistic approach to learning, I have concluded that adult educators must consider the affective, intuitive, and experiential dimensions of the learning process in addition to the cognitive dimension. In working with Aboriginal adult learners, I have observed how the use of the learning processes associated with the affective, intuitive, and experiential dimensions helped them to develop a greater awareness of themselves as whole people who are self-directed and capable of learning in several different ways. In general, this awareness is important to the development of an adult learner's capacity for learning how to learn (Smith, 1983) effectively in a variety of formal and informal situations and settings. Therefore, I recommend that adult educators become comfortable and confident with the use of these various learning dimensions (e.g. affective, intuitive, and experiential) before they attempt to facilitate a more holistic approach to learning.

6. In utilizing the learning styles material and critical reflection processes associated with learning how to learn, I have concluded that it is important for adult educators to consider the word, learning, as being both a noun and a verb. Used as a noun, learning can be the result of a process of transforming one's experience into an outcome or knowledge--a fact or piece of information. Used as a verb, learning refers to the process whereby the learner is actively engaged in the process of integrating the

knowledge in the whole of his/her perception that creates one's understanding. In working with Aboriginal adult learners, I have found that facilitating an understanding is a much more difficult process to effect. It is easy to transfer knowledge--facts or information, but the understanding related to its meaning and application is subject to individual interpretation and may take years to develop. For example, when Aboriginal adult learners were asked to document their life experiences during a portfolio process, many of them were able to provide facts and information related to how certain events in their lives had transpired. In short, they could describe what happened to them. However, when they were asked to place the event into a larger context and to explain its significance in shaping their overall world view, many Aboriginal adult learners struggled to articulate their under-standing. Initially, many of them viewed their experiences as isolated events that had no significant meaning or relevance to how they perceived themselves, others, and the world around them. Therefore, in facilitating any educational process, I recommend adult educators to consider seriously, at the outset, the kind of learning--knowledge or understanding--that they would expect their adult learners to acquire.

7. In evaluating the results of any learning process, I advise adult educators to avoid making judgments on what an adult learner perceives and/or identifies as being his/her knowledge or understanding. In providing the adult learner with the freedom to learn, there is no room for should-be or ought-to-be preferences in the educational process, particularly when affective, intuitive, or experiential learning processes are employed. This caution is especially relevant to adult educators who are working with

adult learners from a culture different from their own. Therefore, I recommend that adult educators examine their own educational philosophies for the purpose of surfacing the cultural assumptions that might become potential sources of conflict in the evaluation process.

8. Finally, in considering the questions relating to what is socially useful knowledge and by whose standards is this to be determined, I have concluded that community-based educational programs can provide the freedom of choice necessary for fulfilling the aspirations, interests, and needs of the people who comprise the community collective. They are the people who must determine the standards and the kinds of knowledge that are socially useful. In retrospect, I arrived at this conclusion when I was considering whether or not an Aboriginal approach to holistic education could be applied more generally. I have decided that the philosophical problems associated with the development of a spiritual consciousness would make the broad application of this model very difficult to implement, even for some groups of Aboriginal people themselves. Also, the concept of accountability contained in an Aboriginal approach to holistic education can be potentially more controversial because it requires adult educators to consider not just the needs of the adult learner, the institution, the community, and humanity as a whole, but also the needs of the earth and the entire universe. However, because the starting point for organizing educational program content is usually the present, concrete situation reflecting the aspirations and experiences of the people, it may well be that the human abuse of the earth will eventually require the development of a more holistic educational process in the end. Nonetheless, I recommend that this

Aboriginal approach to holistic education be considered as an educational model suitable for community-based implementation.

Personal Reflection

In establishing a learning plan for the academic study that would lead eventually to the development of this thesis, I was asked to state my overall learning goal. I wrote that I wanted:

> To articulate a holistic model of education that utilizes processes of learning and teaching within an Aboriginal framework and that facilitates the development of community-based educational programs for Aboriginal people.

In meeting this goal, I identified Aboriginal education as my area of study and holistic learning as my specific aspect. During the course of my study, I stepped beyond the limits of mainstream literature and a Western educational context. However, I believe that my adult educational philosophy and practice has been enriched by my exposure to the ideas and concepts stemming from an alternative form of knowledge and world view that I found in Aboriginal oral history. In analyzing the Western-based literature and comparing it with my oral history, I was pleased to discover the existence of similar educational concepts and methods, although few in number.

Overall, I believe that this study has provided me with the opportunity for a cross-cultural educational experience, the ramifications of which I greatly undervalued until I agreed to be interviewed by a journalist from the Winnipeg Free Press in December of 1998. This journalist was investigating the question of whether there should be a separate school for the Aboriginal people living in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, a request that was put forth by Aboriginal people themselves. As I explained to the journalist FNTI's

Aboriginal approach to holistic education and its unique strength in helping Aboriginal people to understand themselves, others, and the world around them, he interrupted our conversation with his own personal reflection. He said:

> I used to live in Toronto where I wrote for a multi-cultural magazine called Diversity. When I was interviewing the East Indian Sikhs, they told me that they wanted their own schools because the White people were teaching their children how to be racist and non-accepting and that they feared their children would be rejected. Then several hours later, I spoke with the East Indian Muslims who said that they wanted their own schools because the White people were teaching their children how to be tolerant and accepting and that they feared their children would be assimilated. So, you tell me the answer. Could FNTI's Aboriginal approach to holistic education benefit all people or is it just for Aboriginal people?

Stunned by his comments and questions, I did not have an answer at the time. Later, after giving some thought to his questions, I decided that if people of all cultures could be helped to transform their perspectives of one another and of the world in which they lived, then perhaps achieving a state of co-existence in a world so full of diversity could be possible. However, I now leave these questions for you--the readers--to consider. Could FNTI's Aboriginal approach to holistic education benefit all people or is it just for Aboriginal people?

In closing, I believe that this study and my experiences in conducting it have enhanced my understanding of the important need to facilitate educational processes that can identify the cultural assumptions responsible for preventing the consideration of the other educational philosophies, ideological perspectives, and world views associated with cultural co-existence. In fact, I now speak from my own personal experience because in undertaking this study, I had to become more aware of my own cultural assumptions.

In the beginning of this study, I perceived that I was being asked to use Western forms of knowledge to legitimize and to validate traditional Aboriginal forms of knowledge and skills. In other words, I believed that the knowledge contained in my Aboriginal world view would be judged as being unacceptable because it did not correspond to Western academic norms or forms of knowledge. I was aware that I had this assumption, and initially, I also believed that somehow I had to justify and prove that the knowledge related to holistic learning contained in my Aboriginal oral history was at least equivalent, if not better than the knowledge contained in a Western cultural view. Because of these assumptions, my anger and resentment towards Western culture and its system of education grew with every piece of literature that I reviewed. As I continued to study, my emotions intensified until they reached a point where I had to look inside of myself to find the experiences that had shaped the assumptions responsible for my perception. Through self-examination, I then realized that my assumptions were based on my previous educational experiences in a secondary school where I had been told by various teachers that the beliefs of Aboriginal people were merely superstitious folklore and that their customs and practices had no particular relevance to the real world. In remembering these experiences and similar experiences of prejudicial treatment by non-Native people, I began to cry from the hurt and shame associated with my personal experiences of having been misunderstood, judged, and not accepted. In releasing these negative emotions, I was able to change my perception, transform my perspective, move to forgiveness, and complete my educational study by recognizing and honoring the knowledge and wisdom held by traditional Aboriginal people.

In having completed this thesis, I now believe that I needed to make reference to certain Western-based terms, concepts, and ideas because this was a language that could help to facilitate an understanding of the truths contained in my Aboriginal cultural view. If I have been able to help Western-educated audiences, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, move towards a greater understanding and acceptance of the traditional Aboriginal knowledge related to a model of holistic education, then I believe that I have accomplished much more than simply meeting my learning goal. Perhaps, however, my greatest accomplishment has been in learning how the validation of my specific Aboriginal cultural knowledge and experience has become a matter related to my own personal perception, belief, and feelings of internal acceptance. This educational study has provided me the opportunity to identify and to reconstitute a personal set of cultural assumptions that had prevented me from positively validating not only myself as an Aboriginal person, but also my own Aboriginal-specific knowledge.

As a final thought, I would like to thank the Creator for providing me with this insight and the opportunity to complete the educational study that led to the development of this thesis. This work has enhanced my own educational practice and enriched it in a manner that has allowed me to share with others the unique educational experiences related to an Aboriginal cultural perspective.

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