UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY FIRST NATION EDUCATION THROUGH ANISHINABE *MENO-BIMAADZIWIN* ACTION RESEARCH

(Spine title: Understanding Success in Community First Nation Education)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program
in
Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43043-9
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43043-9

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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entitled:

Understanding Success In Community First Nation Education Through Anishinabe Meno-Bimaadziwin Action Research

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Date_____

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ABSTRACT

As involuntary minorities within their own ancestral lands, Canada's First Nation people have experienced trauma within western-based education systems such as federal residential and day schools, public, and independent schools, which has resulted, in many cases, in social devastation and economic disparity. An indigenous and community approach to education and research promises to provide a solution to such intergenerational problems.

This research provides compelling evidence that improvement to First Nation education is possible when initiated at the local community level. This is an important discovery as most non-native policies and initiatives designed to improve education for native people have failed. A community-based culturally relevant definition of success in education has been demonstrated to bring about increased levels of critical awareness that provide incentive for an informed response that contributes toward improvements to education for First Nation people at the community level.

This research involved my entry into the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community as a researcher, possessing both "insider" and "outsider" status, initiating relationships with people based upon our commonalities of culture and roles in society. In efforts to facilitate increased awareness levels in response to areas of difficulty within education, I facilitated a community-based inquiry using a culturally-based methodology that I have termed Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research.

The results were successful in that participation within the community-designed and community-driven research led to increased awareness and incentive for transformative action in

education at levels that surpassed community involvement within other initiatives that were not community-based. The results of this research provide insight into the potential that exists within a First Nation community to devise culturally relevant solutions to challenges that occur within education. These findings support the validity and effectiveness of community-based development and initiatives in education, and in other areas of local community development within First Nation communities. These findings provide a strong argument in favour of increased native jurisdiction and self-government initiatives at the local community level.

Keywords: native education, Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, action research, Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, culturally relevant education, critical awareness, transformative action.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, and to the advancement of education for First Nation people present and future. I also dedicate this work to my grandparents and great-grandparents for the legacy of strength and perseverance they have bestowed upon me and my children. Gi-Chi-Migwech!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation has been a healing journey for me personally as I work to move past the hurts of oppressive education policy. This journey has also helped me to better understand the intergenerational impact of racism against Canada's First Nation people. As demonstrated through my research, there is hope for people willing to envision a better tomorrow.

I wish to acknowledge my Dad, Allan, for believing in me. Thanks to Mom, Lou, for all the words of encouragement at just the right time. Thanks to my sisters, Tammy and Heather, who always knew when it was time for me to take a break. Especially, thanks to my beloved children, Arielle and Beverly, for patience, laughter, and tremendous inspiration. This journey would not have been possible without their support.

I would like to acknowledge the guidance of Dr. Rebecca Coulter as my supervisor. She has been a mentor in every area concerning my studies as a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. Rebecca believed in me at times more than I did, and this dissertation is a result, in part, of her encouragement and mentorship. Likewise, I wish to acknowledge Dr. Regna Darnell and Dr. Jerry Paquette for their invaluable contributions to my learning as members of my supervisory committee. Their ongoing support has been a significant factor in my success as a graduate student.

The following is a list of awards bestowed upon me throughout the duration of my studies within the Ph.D. program. These honours have encouraged and supported me within this research. I therefore humbly acknowledge and thank the following organizations for their

support:

- Casino Rama - Awards for Excellence - Graduate Student Scholarship
- Ted Nolan Foundation - Rose Nolan Memorial Scholarship
- National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation – Aboriginal Veterans Scholarship Trust
- SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship
- Graduate Recognition Tuition Scholarship – University of Western Ontatio
- Southern First Nations Secretariat
- Foundation for the Advancement of Aboriginal Youth
- Jeanette Corbière-Lavall and Mary Two Axe Early Scholarship - Native Women's Association of Canada
- Ontario Graduate Scholarship

Most of all, and far above all else, thanks be to God!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As First Nation people assume greater control of education within their communities, they are confronted with a wide range of challenges. Much of the scholarly literature (Kirkness, 1992; Haig-Brown, 1995; Bressette, 2000) and reports such as the *Hawthorn Report*, formally known as *A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs, and Policies (*Hawthorn, 1964), *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future – A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education* (Chiefs of Ontario, 2007), the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996), and *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1997) focus on problems, past and present. It is unquestionable that First Nation people experience significant difficulties in their lives on multiple levels (National Council of Welfare, 2007). Despite these realities, the original purpose of this thesis was to use action research to explore success within a specific community-based First Nation school and to motivate readers, especially First Nation people at the community level, to respond with reflexive effort in response to community-generated research.

During the course of the research, however, and for reasons that I explain later, the focus of the research shifted from a specific emphasis on the outcome of school success to a more process-oriented inquiry about how community engagement with education could lead to increased levels of ownership and participation and community-defined notions of success. As a result of my project, the research community assumed a greater role within community education as exemplified in revisions to the community's education vision statement. Ultimately this

statement reflected increased interest and the desire of community members to become involved with culturally relevant and community-oriented education initiatives.

Researcher Background

Reagan (2005) asserts that frequently in post-positivistic research, scholars and researchers will "as a sort of 'truth advertising' acquaint the reader with information about ....[the] researcher's own background. This process is referred to as identifying the author's position and includes relevant information about such factors as gender, language, race and ethnicity, nationality, academic training, ideology, and so on"(p. 17). I, too, believe that this form of identification or positioning is important, especially in response to Anishinabe cultural protocol.

I am Anishinabe. "Anishinabe" is an Ojibwe word that translates into English as the original or first people who are on the "good road" *(Meno-Bimaadziwin)* or path given to them by the Creator. This good path is guided by an Anishinabek concept known as *Meno-Bimaadziwin.* I explain this multifunctional concept in detail in chapter three. As Anishinabe people, we are taught that when we greet one another, we start first by honouring God the Creator as the giver and sustainer of all live. Then we identify our nation so as to recognize all of the sacrifices of our ancestors who went before us so that we could live here and enjoy today for the sake of the next generations to come, even as far ahead as the seventh generation into the future (Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock, 2003). When we identify ourselves in this way, we knowingly commit ourselves to the betterment of all life on the Earth.

My name is Christy Rochelle Bressette. I was age 30 when I was finally given my Anishinabe name by my Grandfather David Bressette. After taking time to observe my life since

infancy, he finally decided upon *Neta-NoKee-Kwe* which translates from Ojibwe to English as "Hard Working Woman." I am the mother of two wonderful children: my daughter, Arielle Mariah Bressette, and my son, Beverly Allan Bressette. At present, we live in the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation community. I am from the turtle clan, the teaching clan, and a descendant of a long line of educators. How I live my life by choice can be explained as having each foot in a different canoe traveling at different speeds and intensities down the river of life, without capsizing! This is tricky at times, but always exciting. As an Anishinabe person, I also contribute to mainstream society with reciprocal respect for all people and actively work to bridge gaps between native and non-native communities.

In reflecting on my position within this research, I am conscious that I possess a privileged position because of who I am, a native academic, and I am conscious of the dangers of speaking on behalf of other Anishinabe people who do not possess an audible voice. Therefore, I speak from my own perspective and cannot through my personal perspective assume to represent the position of all Anishinabek. It is because of the legacy of pain caused by misrepresentation through research that I am committed to accountability and responsibility within research. Therefore I have no intention of replicating these abuses through the bad research that I speak so vehemently against and in detail in chapter three.

After having acknowledged the care needed when approaching research within First Nation communities, I want to assert that there is tremendous value in having research done by a native person who is trained as an academic and can therefore navigate and translate western knowledge appropriately and effectively, thereby bridging cultures (Smith, 1999; Bressette, 2000; Turner, 2006). Doing this through my research will be my contribution to society.

Education for native people is intriguing for me as I am a member of a native community and my family and I have experienced a variety of educational experiences with outcomes ranging from barely surviving to thriving. So perplexed am I about the lack of success, in Anishinabe terms, for native people in the area of education that I am compelled to want to commit myself, as a graduate student, to better understand the underlying issues. My interest in education for native peoples builds upon my M.Ed. degree at the University of British Columbia wherein I endeavored to understand, from an Anishinabek perspective, the importance of leadership and control over education for Native American people (Bressette, 2000).

Research about indigenous knowledge as it applies to education is of growing interest (Reagan, 1996; Hampton, 1995; Hart, 1996; Ignas, 2004; Snively and Williams, 2006; Graveline, 2002; Warner, 2006) especially in the wake of a move to increased critical perspectives. Mainstream studies concerning native education, albeit largely negative in focus, have been fairly constant over the years. Scholarship, however, from the perspective of native people themselves is fast becoming an area of significance sufficient to the point of having the ability to inform theory and stimulate new approaches to practice in education. With increased momentum and interest in self-government and sovereignty issues (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997), it is likely that research in the area of education for native people by native people will be necessary to help establish a culturally relevant framework upon which further research can and will most likely be established.

The following is an excerpt from my M.Ed. thesis, *The importance of native leadership and control over native education*, that explains my interest in using a methodology appropriate for the native context:

> I strongly believe that in order to achieve a greater and more positive outcome regarding the successful education of First Nation people, greater emphasis must be placed upon the local community involvement in the development of culturally

> relevant curriculum. For example, Native people must be adequately and equally represented on public boards of education and other related committees to assist with decision making regarding curriculum content, development, implementation, and service delivery. It is through this community-oriented education process that native people come to assert more control over their collective lives. Native control over native educational endeavours will ensure that our youths are given the equal opportunity to contribute positively, productively, and progressively to Canadian society..... Such community-based educational endeavours will work to preserve, reinforce, reassert, and strengthen Native identity, culture and heritage. The successful implementation of these or similar philosophies of education will enable native people to survive as a distinct nation within a larger one. The revolutionary process must include 'learning to unlearn' the negative and destructive beliefs that have unconsciously worked to keep Native people in a passive, submissive, and repressed state for so long." (Bressette, 2000, p. xiii)

Although community engagement is crucial, I recognize that other important elements are necessary for success in education! Workable economies and authentic First-Nations jurisdiction mechanisms being two such elements. Equally important for improvements to First Nation socio-economic and political functioning are collaboration, solidarity, commitment to shared purposes, and high ethical standards amongst all community stakeholders. An awareness of the need for further development in these areas are needed through increased critical consciousness and partnerships with other indigenous communities, mainstream academics (Turner, 2006) and external agencies that can share examples of how to do this without compromising notions of sovereignty. With these elements in place, the objective of moving toward excellence in First-Nations education is more attainable.

Another important reason why I pursue this study is for the opportunity to bring Anishinabe perspectives into wider mainstream discussion. Although the designation of a Ph.D. will not advance my overall standing within the membership of my community, in keeping with a collective approach to viewing everybody as equal within Anishinabe society, the academic designation will enable me to better share my ideas with other native and non-native educators in efforts of furthering the goals of the Anishinabe nation as they pertain to improvements to

education. As Turner (2006) asserts, change, through increased awareness and definition of indigenous worldviews, is needed to shift attitudes concerning native people and this can be done through increased discourse and relationship building with non-native people. Turner (2006) terms advocates of indigenous perspectives as "word warriors." These are people who can, if allowed, play a vital role in furthering indigenous agendas or perspectives within academic circles of influence. This is gravely important as indigenous perspectives are necessary to better inform theory and practice regarding education for native people (Battiste, 2002; Bigelow & Peterson, 1998; Cavender, 2004). This research will help to create new data using an effective research methodology that respects, understands, and furthers Anishinabe philosophy, culture, and way of life.

Process: The Research Challenge

The research process, itself, is a dominant theme throughout the various phases of the project from planning to completion. Clearly, past, and to a large extent, present research projects have not availed much improvement in education for native peoples (*Hawthorne Report,* 1964; the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996). This fact leads me to question if it is the research that is to blame for the lack of positive change, or do problems remain due to the uncritical application of research in developing policy and practice? Or has much of the research ignored crucial structural and jurisdictional considerations? I propose that how we approach research, especially methodology, as it relates to education for native people, can make a difference with heightened potential for education community members through increased consciousness and participation in response to issues.

This approach of motivating people to increased levels of consciousness and responsive action within education will be facilitated through the blending of an action-research

methodology with Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* a concept I understand and use to encapsulate aspects of Anishinabe epistemology, philosophy, and methodology. If we can devise an improved participatory-based research system by focusing on issues that enable culturally-oriented notions of success and by using a methodology that respects the culture and values of Anishinabe people, then we can create a framework upon which to enhance successes not only for the Anishinabe, but potentially for many other groups as well through modeling.

Through an examination of the literature, readers are left to conclude that few Anishinabe consider research itself a solution to educational problems due to past negative experiences with research in general (Deloria, 1991). This is especially true of research that is disconnected from native epistemology (Smith, 1999). Another rationale explaining avoidance to organized inquiry is that there is little hope for a positive outcome when research has already flooded society with negative reports that create and sustain a negative outlook for native peoples. In a recent publication from Status of Women, Canada (2007) titled *A Holistic Framework for Aboriginal Policy Research*, we learn that: "many Aboriginal people are suspicious of just becoming another number in a statistical study out of context from their lives and communities" (p. 32). It is not surprising, then, that many native people will avoid research for this reason.

It is possible that an aversion, at the native community level, to research, and therefore a lack of responsive action to such research, is an act of uncritical efforts of resistance to the doom prophesied through past and present research. It is my position that without challenging questionable research and therefore the questionable impact on society, native and non-native people come to accept the findings of research at face value especially in the absence of research that speaks from an indigenous perspective. At this point, I am reminded of Kronick and Hargis' (1998) assertion that "resistance" should, in fact, be seen as a glimmer of hope in that people

who detect unfairness respond and are willing to oppose it in any way they can, even if the form of resistance is ineffective.

In their research on public perception of native parental involvement in public schools, Kronick and Hargis (1998) assert that increased critical insight be employed so native parents will not be seen as "apathetic" in regards to low attendance participation rates at school functions. Rather, society would be well advised to interpret such absences as a form of response to education systems that are not relevant to native lives and experiences. In much the same way some native parents resist school functions by not attending as a form of protest, which is an unfortunate response that ultimately further hinders home-school and parent-student relationships. I assert that native people similarly resist participation and or interest in formally organized research to escape the negative outcomes that they perceive or have experienced in the past.

Efforts of resistance, and ultimately transformation, could be more effective with critical and communicative skills needed to create and transmit new knowledge in contested areas. How will native people become better equipped with needed critical skills if many continue to resist oppression using ineffective or self-defeating strategies? How will native people climb out of the abyss of despair into which poor research has helped push them if they are too disillusioned or discouraged to think that life could be better? Part of the answers to these critical questions can be attained by recognizing that reliance upon one-sided or misinformed research to shape education policy and public perceptions of native peoples has thwarted indigenous appreciation of the value of research, thereby hindering reflection upon research and action for change. My position is that, due to the effect of federal policy and internal and oppressive mindsets, many native people in native communities have become handicapped when it comes to possessing

skills needed to critically identify oppression for what it is, the effects it can cause, and an effective response to it. For this reason, it could be argued that a closer relationship with established education systems could help to better equip native community members with more effective critical skills needed to help respond to oppression and to help reestablish a more accurate definition of success in education for native peoples using culturally-based approaches of motivating and engaging each other.

It is my position that an important part of success in First-Nation education rests with identifying the successes that do exist through research initiatives that are culturally sanctioned by native peoples within corresponding communities. It was my suspicion that if there were successes identifiable at the community level within education for First Nation people, it was because the focus of such education was culturally relevant and therefore supported within the community. Since data from my research confirm that this is the case, I expect that answers to many critical questions are waiting to come forth from people at the community level to shed light on other areas of hidden success. Based upon my experiences as an Anishinabe student, parent, and teacher, I assert that if research will focus on the positive or "what works," which is a methodological approach that mirrors a methodology known as "appreciative inquiry" (see chapter 3) and Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a culturally-based methodology, research can better assist with improvements in other areas of Anishinabe society.

Identifying culturally sanctioned forms of success will be accomplished by challenging the negative mindsets of research participants and getting them involved (Stephan and Vogt, 2004; Gregory, 2000; Bempechat, 1998). Community involvement and parental participation are certainly objectives of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper (Native Indian Brotherhood, 1972). The issue of community involvement is a reason why I sought to endorse

the methodology that I did because literature on the topic (Smith, 2000; Regnier, 1995; Freire, 2002) had demonstrated that when people are involved in education, they are in a better position to understand related issues and develop a firmer grasp on areas of needed improvements. I explain the use of action research and Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* as the methodology, used within this research project in chapter three.

Objective of the Research

The objective of this research was to implement a culturally sound methodology for research in First-Nation education at the community level that would increase awareness and therefore participation. Similar to the goal of appreciative inquiry (see chapter 3), this research was intended to facilitate awareness of the successes or positive features that currently exist within one First-Nation community and build upon that. Part of this process involved reexamining the definition of success in a meaningful way that accommodated the beliefs, culture, and values of Anishinabe people.

The objective within this community-based research project was to facilitate reflection and action among local education community members, leading to the creation of a school that is relevant to the culture of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and will facilitate and stimulate growth in community-building and development initiatives. I anticipate that this research will further a desire for community-level engagement in education compatible with mainstream Canadian education that will help to support development of culturally-sensitive education programming for native people through increased participation and increased awareness of issues that pertain to native peoples.

Other objectives of the research project were to raise awareness levels, create and encourage continued reflection, encourage critiques of "taken-for-granted" knowledge and practices, and

move education community members to revise and improve the current education systems; introduce new strategies to view education and leadership from a different perspective using consciousness-raising efforts like those employed by Freire and various feminists (Reinharz, 1992); increase collaboration in education with other First Nations and their community-level education initiatives; and establish an action plan [e.g., starting with a new vision statement for education] for improved successes for First Nation students and share/exchange information about First Nation success in community-based education.

Development of the objectives of this research project was based upon my own interpretation of relevant literature in the field, and upon interpretations of the members of the Community Research Committee (CRC) in response to the same. The objectives were also formed in response to challenges identified with the mindset regarding research of people at Chippewas of the Thames.

Justification for the Research

There is a need and desire for new research from a native perspective that will enable a paradigm shift and provide a new way of perceiving research. This research supports the investigation and use of culturally relevant research methodologies and it possesses the potential for providing a model to further other research initiatives that will support the goals of self-government and sovereignty. The right research can support and empower native communities in all areas of social, political, and economic development. It is not surprising that native people want a new approach to research. As Mihesuah (1998) asserts:

> Many [native people] are not satisfied with the manner in which they have been researched or with how they and their ancestors have been depicted in scholarly writings. Native peoples do not naturally view themselves as 'objects of study', nor do they appreciate scholars who have made lucrative careers from studying their histories and cultures. Because many established scholars and graduate students continue to use

> the same timeworn methodologies and sources without offering insightful answers to old questions about American Indians, another goal ... is to offer suggestions scholars might use to produce more criti-cultures. (p. xi)

This research is justified because we need effective lasting change within education provided by First-Nation schools, and we need First-Nation people to spearhead this transformation because change has not happened with non-native people at the steering wheel (Castellano, 2000). Control over education, and "control" is not interpreted within this research to necessarily mean separate from partnerships with mainstream education systems, is an essential part of self-government. Equipped with skills of critical consciousness and awareness, First Nation people are the best ones to know what the problems are and how best to solve them so that change is effective. The opposite of this has been true for many years, wherein native people have been kept at an arm's length from the discussion and policy table, and instead told what to do and how to do it. For meaningful "Indian control" of education, First-Nation people must be provided with meaningful space within which to participate.

Need for New Research from a Native Perspective

Fortunately, people from all parts of society are now questioning the whereabouts of native voices in research and rightly so as native people are no longer willing to remain only as the subjects of research. Unethical research is harmful to communities, lacks credibility, and jeopardizes future access to individuals who have much to teach us. The ethics of research needs to be defined within a framework that respects cultural sensitivity and difference (Castellano, 2004; Oakes, Riewe, Wilde, Dubois, & Edmunds, 2003).

There has been a serious need for new or renewed approaches to research for native people for generations. Mihesuah (1998) elaborates upon this need by drawing attention to the

dangers of having no researchers within the community: "if a tribe has no tribal historian [or authority], it generally will rely partially on studies written by outsiders" (p. 8). If reliance upon outsiders is continued, indigenous perspectives will, quite likely, move farther from the potential of better informing policy and, ultimately, practices may be lost altogether.

Involving native people in research processes are part of community and capacity development. There is an increasing need for native people to build their capacity to better service their own nations. Again, if native governments cannot make or have input on policies or practice due to a lack of involvement, then non-native entities will. It makes sense that scholars, administrators, leadership, and community members think in terms of what can be done to solve these collective problems from a native perspective (Mihesuah, 1998, p. 15).

There are situations where native communities are so frustrated with the results of ineffective research that all proposals of research within some native communities are systematically rejected (Anonymous, 2007). This response to research based upon past negative experiences leads to the dangers that Mihesuah outlines above. Furthering this notion, Mihesuah (1998) looks at the problem of exclusive non-native research and considers the advantages of having more native researchers write about native education as:

> most non-Indian scholars do not have the passion that only a writer involved personally in the topic can generate. In addition, unlike non-Indians writers who write professionally about Indians, Indians retain an often emotionally charged commitment to Indian issues that extends well beyond academia. (p. 14)

I agree that native peoples should assume greater leadership in areas of research, but I also see a place for non-native researchers to be able to partner with, as Turner (2006) suggests, but not walk ahead of native people in the creation of research and therefore understanding will benefit all people. In defining a "benefit" to all people, Turner (2006) explains the benefit of having non-native people involved in helping to further knowledge, positions, and viewpoints

informed and created by native perspectives for the purposes of improving mainstream attitudes and levels of understanding. He explains:

> ...it is predominantly non-aboriginal judges and politicians who have the ultimate power [within society at present] to protect and enforce aboriginal rights, and so it is important to find a justification of them [Indigenous ways-of-being] that such people can recognize and understand.' (p. 75)

It is true that for negative attitudes about native people to change in accordance with accurate data, mainstream society must become better informed. Since native people in Canada comprise a considerable minority in relation to the larger demographics within the country, it is hopeful that non-native people, such as academics, be encouraged to help disseminate accurate knowledge needed to transform inaccurate perceptions of native people.

Background to the Research

Looking From a Different Angle

Although I shifted my initial focus from identifying success within community education for First Nation communities to a focus that was more process or methodologically-oriented and looked at how to engage people at the community level within community education to ensure greater culturally-defined and determined definitions of success, a prominent theme of the importance of community-defined success in general continued to underline the entire research project. I decided to switch from the actual collection of answers to be used to define success in education for First-Nation people within the research community, in the absence of clear or noteworthy definitions for success, to a process-oriented action research study where community stakeholder participation was essential in determining conditions for success. Rather than creating another report that confirmed that education for First Nation people was not effective, in light of my initial findings, I decided to make use of this opportunity and shift the project to a

research-process oriented study. I believed, largely based upon my own experiences as an Anishinabe person living on-reserve and in close relationship with our community school, that there would be great merit in helping other Anishinabek community members understand and reap the benefits of engaging in critical reflection about education with the possibility of transformative action in response to the results.

Allow me to explain why I initially decided to frame this research within the positive framework that I did, meaning seeking out existent forms of success within community-based First Nation education instead of highlighting all of the troubles. In reflecting upon what I learned within a four year, research heavy, honour's history program at the University of Western Ontario, combined with what my Anishinabe parents and grandparents had taught me about research from the past, I concluded that a paradigm shift, reminiscent of the wisdom that helped to save and sustain indigenous peoples through centuries of peril and travail, was needed. But this shift to process would be based on and reflective of Anishinabe culture and reject the process that streamlined First-Nation people toward assimilation in the days of residential and day school.

It is a fact that in Canada, there exist numerous reports that provide an authoritative position on issues of education for Canada's native peoples. These reports (e.g., National Council of Welfare, 2007) are largely reflections upon the negative situations that exist within native communities, as noted earlier. Of these reports that attempt to investigate reasons behind such deplorable conditions for First Nation people, few offer an indigenous analysis. Given the vast array of reports and studies from many different levels of government and agencies, I seriously doubted that one more report, similar to bleak reports generated over the past centuries, would prompt effective improvements to education for native people. Instead, I sought to devise

a new way of looking at old problems and issues by providing an assessment of education for native people by native people at the grassroots community level. From reading the community, a new way to see education was needed because too much negativity associated with "education for native people" remained.

The need for effective research is warranted in direct response to widespread disillusionment toward education for native peoples possessed by native and non-native peoples (Berger, Epp and Moller, 2006; Cajete, 1994; Snively and Williams, 2006; Cleary and Peacock, 1998; Barman, 1995; Castallano, 2000; Hampton, 1993). The impact of the perpetuation of such unfavorable research and reporting is no doubt actualized to a large degree within native communities like unto a self-fulfilling prophesy (West, 1995; Haig-Brown, 1995). Based upon the consideration of literature in the field (Alfred, 1999; Mihesuah, 1998), and my own personal experiences, the impact of such reports, whether interpreted uncritically by native or non-native people, has negatively influenced "how native people perceive native education and themselves" (Riley, 1993, p. 8).

The danger of prolonged existence within a negative perspective and belief system is that oppressed peoples come to equate unequal life-standards as normal (Freire, 2002; West, 1995) thereby hindering progressive growth for the future. Through this research, I was interested to challenge people's perceptions regarding potential within education for native people from inside a native community and outward thereafter. I came to this research led by a belief that positive changes for education for native peoples at the community hinged upon the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community's willingness to reconsider education using culturally-based terms and understanding of education.

A Solution According to Anishinabe Cultural Perspectives

Part of my quest to find a better way to examine recurring issues in native education was to change the focus of the inquiry away from a focus on the negative and seek out the positives or successes that exist within education for native peoples. This approach of seeking out the "good," (Elliott, 1999, p, 14) as alluded to previously through a methodology known as "appreciative inquiry," adheres to Anishinabe philosophy that I bring forward using the term *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, which in brief, means a "good life" or walking a "good path" in life (Peacock and Wisuri, 2005; Rheault, 1999; Bell, 2006; Corbiere, 2000; E. Baxter, personal communication, October, 18, 2007). This paradigm shift leads researchers and participants within the research to consider issues in education through a positive holistic perspective or pedagogy of success. In my view, this philosophy should be considered by other cultures to help break down oppressive mindsets (West, 1995; Manson, Dinges, Grounds, & Kallgren, 1985) and to facilitate increased respect, understanding, and reciprocity across cultures.

Winds Shifting to a New Direction: Even the Winds have Blown Full Circle

Rightly so, many people are questioning the data from western-based research used to inform theory, practice, and policy as it relates to issues of education for native people. This line of critical questioning is not new; however, I wonder if the same old questions that are being asked again today are now strengthened by a native cultural resurgence or re-awakening fast manifesting itself everywhere on Turtle Island (Alfred, 1999). Marie Battiste, David Newhouse, Jo-ann Archibald and Richard Atleo, plenary speakers at the Canadian Association of University Teachers' (CAUT) forum for Aboriginal faculty, *Navigating the Academy*, asserted strongly that it is apparent from the rise in Aboriginal scholars, faculty, and programming at the community level and within the academy that an Aboriginal cultural renaissance is happening. Atleo (2008) asserts through a recollection of progressive developments in Aboriginal education from 1962 to

present day that indigenous knowledge, which is embedded within the heritage of the culture, has provided a framework for Aboriginal scholarship and social progress.

A recent development resulting from this cultural renaissance is growth of influential native organizations and academic programs all across the nation. One recent example of this is the proposed Canadian Association for the Study of Indigenous Education (CASIE) within the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). Battiste, a Mikmaq academic, spearheads this initiative and indicates that winds of change have begun to blow and are strong enough to incite varying degrees of action. Other people are empowered by their own cultural knowledge to ask critical questions about research, data, interpretation, and outcomes. An era of critical consciousness is strengthening awareness of issues that pertain to native people and education.

Ultimately, for many native people in Canada, education has and currently exists under the jurisdiction of the Crown, and within this system, the provincial education system has provided the benchmark for how education for native people is assessed and evaluated. Therefore western notions of success have become the measuring stick for education for native people (Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007). Essentially, native people have been twice removed from the central locus of control by the Crown and then the province. Limited measures of success can be claimed as a result of adherence to non-native approaches. Many education reports and reports related to educational outcomes for native peoples, for example RCAP (1996), the Kelowna Accord (2005), and the Ministers' National Working Group on Education Final Report (2002) cast the overall situation as problematic and negative.

I am convinced that notions of native self worth have been adversely affected by the results and interpretation of research, reports, and educational experiences over the decades (Clarke, 2002). Research is a dangerously powerful tool that can destroy an entire nation if not

done properly. This warning comes with moral and ethical implications. How people come to view themselves, because of how they were socialized or indoctrinated, has implications that must be sorted out. This is especially true of people who, as by-products of western-based education policies and institutions, have been indoctrinated to believe that non-native ways are superior on all levels (Schissel, 2003; Whattam, 2003; Said, 1978). As we will discuss below, the experiences of native people within federal and provincial education institutions has negatively impacted upon Canada's native nations (Miller, 1996; Johnson, 1988) and it is time to change this reality.

Something Familiar in the Air

Ideas about western-based education and education systems have been circulating for a long time now, largely without significant cultural advances for native peoples. It is an understatement to say that it is now time to look at education for native peoples in a different way. The quest for an alternative perspective to western-based research for the purposes of effecting education for native peoples provides potential strength for self-government initiatives and the furthering of native language and cultural development.

It is in the hope of a better future for Anishinabe people that I have chosen to look at issues pertaining to native education through a lens of culturally relevant and defined success. It is anticipated that if we can first look at successes in education within Anishinabe society and culture, in accordance with the notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, then we have something positive to build on in efforts to further success. This approach is a radical departure from western-based approaches to research that have managed to thwart Anishinabe cultural development for too long. Focusing on the negative gives us little to hope for; focusing on the positive (e.g., through appreciative inquiry (Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swimburne &Wilding, 2002; New Paradigm,

2008; International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000) provides us with hope to grasp onto in an effort to move forward (Freire, 1994).

Looking at Success

Part of looking at the success in education for native people requires a reexamination of how success is understood. I am not claiming that success can be arbitrarily defined any way one wants as long as the community agrees; however, in this particular example, native people must have their values respected as values, in part, comprise native culture. Largely, reports concerning education for native people have been completed using western definitions of success. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2007) defines success as a "degree or measure of succeeding; favorable or desired outcome; the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence" (para. 2). Again, observe how these definitions are premised upon value judgments associated with how people define and understand favorable outcomes. The accuracy of the definition above when applied to native society is not entirely accurate or applicable, and if it is used within native communities, one could argue the validity of its application due to the extent of indoctrination about what defines and constitutes success that native people have experienced for generations.

Oppressive policies and institutions have tried to shape how native people would see success. This was done by trying to reshape values systems to fall in line with the agenda of members of the dominant society. Consensus from the research community for this project revealed that success is something that was to be relevant to the people in the community. For me to understand what success then meant, I needed to understand what cultural relevancy meant and I did this using the notion of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* which incorporates aspects of Anishinabe philosophy.

Although more detail about the concept and process of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is provided in chapter three, I refer to it here as it is a methodological process that was helpful in defining what success in culturally relevant education meant at the community level. In short "*Meno-Bimaadziwin*" refers to a guiding process upon which to live a "good life." This same reflective process is also helpful in determining how we understand success in education for Anishinabe people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Reflection at the community level has revealed a need to determine Anishinabe definitions of success in education. A large part of this desire to redefine Anishinabe definitions of success is attributed to awareness, through community participation in this project, of oppressive or dominant influences that have shaped native and non-native mindsets and definitions of success in education. A dominant theme that emerged in response to my search for a starting point for reestablishing a definition of success in education for the Anishinabe was with the notion of cultural relevancy.

Defining Culturally Relevant Education (Success)

Culturally relevant education is not something that is easily defined. At the beginning of this research I was aware that the definition seemed vague because the word 'culture' can be broadly defined (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2007) and the concept of 'relevancy' debatable. Cultural relevancy is therefore understood within the context of this project as defined through the consensus of the research community and in accordance with the application of Anishinabe notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin.*

For people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, cultural relevancy is defined as a cognitive and actualized commitment to preserving and sustaining Anishinabe culture, values, and language through attitudes, lifestyles, overall participation, and programmes. It is for this

reason that cultural relevancy is synonymous with 'success' within the research community. The Anishinabe nation is broad reaching and diverse, incorporating descendants of the Three Fires Confederacy: Ojibway, Pottawatomi, and Odawa.

> The Three Fires Confederacy is the powerful alliance of the Anishinaabeg people, named after the three Nations of the Ojibway, Odawa and Pottawatomi. The Ojibway are the faithkeepers. The Odawa are the protectors. The Pottawatomi are the keepers of the fire...(*boodawaadam*)...which became the basis for their name *Boodewaadamii* (Ojibwe spelling) or *Bodéwadmi* (Potawatomi spelling). In this Council, the Ojibwe were addressed as the 'Older Brother,' the Odawa as the 'Middle Brother,' and the Potawatomi as the 'Younger Brother.' Consequently, whenever the three Anishinaabe nations are mentioned in this specific and consecutive order of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, it is an indicator implying Council of Three Fires as well." (Three Fires Confederacy Gathering, 2007a, para.1)

The Anishinabek are allied to many nations, including but not limited to "the Menominee, Ho-chunk, Miami, Kickapoo, Algonquian, Sauk/Fox, Naskapi, Wabunakeg, Lene Lenapi and Cree" (Three Fires Confederacy Gathering, 2007b, para. 12). With such diversity within Anishinabek nations, the people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation understand the importance of defining cultural relevance in terms that are meaningful to them as a community.

In addition to the definition above, cultural relevancy also encapsulates a commitment to preserving and sustaining traditional aspects of Anishinabe culture, values, and language. It includes a commitment to modern day efficiency and technology to better assist in making timeless wisdom accessible, valid, and applicable today. The *ICIE* (1972) policy paper of the National Indian Brotherhood recognizes that native people must be forward-oriented, bringing knowledge of yesterday to today to better prepare for a good tomorrow. *ICIE* provides commitment to cultural relevancy in education for First-Nation people. Likewise, people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation orient their modern and future lives toward cultural fulfillment according to the philosophy of "*Memo-Bimaadziwin*" wherein they endeavour, through reflection, to live a "good life" filled with satisfaction.

Dr Cecil King (2001), an Anishinabe from Wikwemikong, states that:

> Typically from the Western point of view, 'Making education relevant to First Nations' conveys the meaning of 'tinkering with the present education systems so that First Nations children can learn better the Western Education.' But for First Nations children, for us, what we feel it means or what we want it to mean 'as First Nations, we want our children to learn from a better educational system' that will give our children the knowledge of what it means to be a First Nations person. (p. 1)

This quote stresses the importance of accurately determining culturally relevant success in education for First Nation people through an understanding of how culture and success are defined within their specific community. A significant part of understanding cultural relevance means coming to grips with how success has been and is presently defined, and by whom.

Success is a construct that needs to be looked at critically. When native people are asked to define what success means to them, there must be a process afforded within that mode of inquiry that helps people understand how they have come to define and understand success. We cannot ignore the fact that for generations, First Nation people have been subject to the ideas and values of the dominant society. This has not been a voluntary process as policy has forced generations of native peoples from their home and families into residential, day, and public schools where they were indoctrinated into the ideals of mainstream society. Just how much of this exposure has influenced how First Nation people understand success and therefore notions of cultural relevancy are something that must be addressed at the outset of this research. I explain in detail in chapter four how a significant part of the research with people at Chippewas of the Thames First Nation involved their engagement in the consideration of this very matter, which in turn, led to increased levels of critical consciousness resulting in action.

A look at the definition of success using *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a label for an Anishinabe research methodology helped research participants redefine notions of success according to Anishinabe values and beliefs practiced within their community. This more accurate definition of

success was premised upon cultural relevancy defined as outcomes and initiatives that helped to support the educational and therefore holistic wellbeing of all community members. Relevancy within the community was associated with socio-emotional and overall wellbeing benefits for all community members. Therefore, within the community, it became apparent that the Anishinabe culture should form the basis of a framework for determining definitions of success in education. This community assertion is supported by the ideals espoused by the *ICIE* policy as it determined that relevancy in education was based upon an indigenous knowledge and epistemology which reinforce acceptable values and life practices.

King's (2001) assertion, cited above, helps readers understand the importance of indigenous knowledge as an education that has kept people alive since time immemorial. Traditional knowledge provided information that supported all areas of living and understanding. It was central to survival. In addition to its fundamental purpose of education for people to develop a plan of survival for present and future generations, amidst other efforts to find meaning in life, that plan was invariably based upon traditional knowledge. However, in the face of colonialism, native people were reeducated or socialized to fit a new plan not reflective of traditional or indigenous knowledge. Through a loss of control to determine the plan for survival (e.g. education), native people have been moved away from their culturally relevant plans, and if there are no plans for action to sustain a culturally specific life path, the dominant ideology will remain strong.

For me, this revelation of the need to redefine success through cultural relevancy speaks to the need for a goal or vision for education that reflects the culture of the focus community. The problem is how can people agree upon such an ideal if they are not cognizant of the issues surrounding the need for change? This need for the importance of awareness (conscientization)

and action compelled me to employ an Anishinabe life-methodology (*Meno-Bimaadziwin)* to address a problem affecting Anishinabe people.

Relevancy is what is really being considered here. King (2001) reveals that relevancy affords native people with "a separate way of dealing with the world - a mode of communication for expressing ...thoughts that [are] the gift of the Maker and a body [of] knowledge which will be lost forever, if they don't take it to themselves to value and protect it" (p. 6). What makes relevancy so appealing is what it can afford us with: self awareness, and therefore a reason to respond. Awareness of the benefits of a more relevant education program can help bring about increased levels of community support for education and action (Smith, 2000). This is important because many indigenous people have systematically forgotten who we used to be due to the effects of colonialism.

As seen in the examples of Maori schools and various educational programs in New Zealand, language-based and culture-based schools (Smith, 2000) are schools that meet the specific needs of their specific communities. Visions or plans are important in accomplishing this outcome especially within communities that are deeply entrenched within oppressive social relations.

Relevance can be seen as a way to bridge the gap between western knowledge and indigenous knowledge. This sounds good, but my critical question is "Who determines what is relevant within First-Nation education?" I question if First-Nation people possess the insight to know what education is or should be especially when many continue to live, reproduce, and sustain oppressive systems unknowingly (Freire, 2002). Unfortunately, I suspect that many First-Nation people have not been afforded the opportunity to acquire critical skills needed to address western hegemony in education and therefore accept, by default, mainstream definitions of

success, which are largely materialistic and consumer based. Adopting this definition of success further marginalizes many native people who struggle to compete socially, economically, or politically when aspiring to the standards of another culture.

School and innovative education programs have helped to address some of these issues raised by providing native people with an opportunity, through local focus on curriculum development, for legitimizing traditional knowledge, thereby making learning relevant (Smith, 2000; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997). King (2001) agrees that native people should protect the holistic way of understanding, and return to a holistic approach to life in general as there are many examples of how non-native ways of being and living have not helped the environment and mankind.

Atleo (2008), of the Nuu-chah-nulth nation, underscores King's position by stressing the ultimate importance of relationships. Recalling that good relationships are necessary for survival, Atleo prophesied, based upon his knowledge of the potential of indigenous knowledge, that native peoples are in a unique place as a subjugated group to be able to help all of mankind. What this means is that while the world has been allowed to 'develop' under values of exploitation, the demise of the world socially and ecologically is markedly observable. King and Atleo see traditional knowledge as a solution to this demise wherein native people can come alongside and help lead the world back onto the "good path" (*Meno-Bimaadziwin*) where all living and non-living things exist in harmony. As idealistic as this holistic approach to learning and being may sound, it is what the world presently lacks.

Navigating Two Worlds

When I asked an Anishinabe Elder at Chippewas of the Thames for a definition of success, she replied that success is defined as "a life that is lived and walked." What she implied by this is that success in life comes from living, or walking, in a way that protects and respects the self, family, and community while enjoying the overall experience of life. She explained to me that a good life, in this sense referring to "*Meno-Bimaadziwin*" as a philosophy and life method, is a life that is culturally relevant to general life experiences, helping future generations of Anishinabe people learn to be better caretakers of tomorrow (Cat.1-Id.01, February 29, 2006, personal communication; coding system described in detail in chapter 4).

Learning to be better caretakers of tomorrow means learning how to live well today, even though the western way and the Anishinabe way of navigating and understanding the world are not necessarily compatible due to differing values, learning styles, and different interpretation of knowledge. However, history has demonstrated that for Anishinabe people to survive, they have had to navigate their own world, plus the world of the dominant society and will need to continue doing so. Since this remains the situation today, the definition of success would have to incorporate a negotiation between both worlds. This reality would suggest a reconsideration and renegotiating of new relationships, based upon mutual respect, with mainstream society, especially in terms of increased levels of understanding and awareness of native world-views which can be furthered by the concept of native "word warriors" and non-native "fringe dwellers" that Turner (2006) supports, and for increased access to resources needed to best support education for First-Nation people to be ultimately successful in native and non-native worlds.

As western and Anishinabe notions of success are different at a philosophical and cultural level, it is not difficult to understand the impact of forcing an entire group of people to subscribe

to foreign cultural notions of success. All factors considered, some native people did experience non-native notions of "success" to some degree, but not without serious cultural compromise. For example, in recalling people's overall experiences in residential schools, my late grandfather David Bressette, told me that some people enjoyed learning about different types of agriculture, despite being forced to attend these institutions as children (D. Bressette, personal communication, June 12, 2001). However, at the same time, institutional hegemony via menial and domestic training designed to channel native people into the "lowest socio-economic rungs of society" limited the true potential and success of Anishinabe people of that generation and onward (Miller, 1996, p. 152).

The Notion of Success: What is Success?

One way to begin to define success for Anishinabe people is to look at the culture of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to determine areas of cultural relevance. For many Anishinabe, success is based upon healthy and meaningful interaction with each other within and outside of the community (Peacock and Wisuri, 2002; Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock, 2003). In keeping with Anishinabe culture, everybody in Anishinabe society has a place and purpose and therefore everybody and everything has value. Success is measured according to how well we progress together as a community, as a family, as a nation, and as a partner with others from non-native society (Peacock and Strand, 2002).

Unfortunately, because of generations of oppression through the application of non-native policy, many Anishinabe have lost sight of who they are in relation to a connection to creation. In order to survive, they have had to concede and fall under the subjugation of the dominant culture and ways of knowing. As many native people have lost cultural knowledge of

how to a live a life of fulfillment according to cultural values, a widespread sense of confusion and disillusionment within education and native society in general is observable. A community defined definition of culturally relevant success and therefore education can help address this problem.

Outline of the Thesis

In this chapter (Introduction), readers have become familiar with the goals of this research project and the momentum behind its design. Readers understand the background of the researcher and the background behind the research. The introductory chapter also reveals the rationale behind the selection of the research methodology for this project and what it promises to accomplish. Careful attention has been given to the justification for the research and the importance of ultimately developing a culturally-sound definition of success through a culturally responsive research methodology (e.g., Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research) as it pertains to education for First-Nation people. The remainder of the thesis is organized in five chapters briefly introduced below.

This research project has been based upon an extensive review of the literature which has strongly demonstrated a need for a research methodology that will promote positive action within education for First Nation communities. Thus chapter two (Framing the Research: Review of the Relevant Research) highlights specific areas within relevant and current research that influenced the design of this research project. Within this chapter, there are six focus areas that receive attention: the legitimacy and furthering of indigenous knowledge; ineffective and unsuccessful models of education for First Nation people; effective and culturally relevant education for First Nation people; notions of resistance and affirmation; the importance of

indigenous academics and research; and successful models of research and action for the education of First Nation people. The results of this comprehensive literature review speaks to the need for the development of an improved approach to research that brings about positive and required improvements to education for First-Nation people.

The third chapter (Methodology: Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research) explains how I brought together action research and the Anishinabe multifaceted concept of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* to form a culturally-appropriate methodology that resulted in increased community participation. Discussion about the importance of selecting the best-suited methodology includes considerations of how to overcome "bad" research, and the importance of indigenous knowledge as an entity that supports a culturally-based methodology.

To best understand how *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research come together, their individual attributes are considered. This review starts with an overview of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and consideration of how it can be applied within school and society. *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a label that encapsulates Anishinabe philosophy and epistemology as a methodology is fully explained as a proposed research methodology with attention given to its internal navigation system, which is reliant upon traditional teachings, and its approach to the interpretation of knowledge.

Action research and its purpose and principles as a methodology are also considered. Noteworthy principles of action research, which include reciprocity, relevancy, and reflexivity, are outlined. The methodology section of this chapter concludes with an explanation of how a blending of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* with action research provides new hope for research.

Chapter four (Doing the research) provides detailed accounts of how the data for this research project were collected. The process of doing the research is vital as "process" is a

central component of both Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research. Therefore this section considers numerous aspects of data collection and participant engagement. Included is a recounting of my introduction to the community as a researcher which addresses issues of researcher identity in relation to insider and outsider concerns. The participant identification process within the research also receives attention, along with issues pertaining to data collection, participant engagement, and researcher interaction with participants.

Prior to an investigation of and engagement with data, time is spent deliberating on factors that influenced data analysis. This includes the influence of relevant literature and the impact of other relevant research models. In preparation for data analysis, a review of the attributes of the chosen methodologies is provided to explain and ensure the full degree of involvement in data analysis called for by research participants. This discussion leads to an understanding on how data were theorized which leads to the identification of emergent themes that have helped community members of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation respond meaningfully to improvements for education at the community-level.

The fifth chapter (*Kendaasawin*: Research Findings) pulls the entire research project together in that it offers a community-oriented interpretation for identifying, examining, and furthering successes in education for First-Nation people using culturally supportive research methodologies. A significant portion of this chapter is devoted to a consideration of emergent themes that work to explain how to further notions of success in community-oriented education for First-Nation people. Traditional Anishinabe pedagogical approaches of non-interference-in-learning are considered in detail as indirect recommendations for establishing, sustaining, and furthering successes within First-Nation education.

In review of the overall project, a consideration of the effectiveness of action research and Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as community-oriented methodologies is undertaken to verify, solidify, and strengthen the success and the notion of community-based research within native communities and native education. In reviewing the research findings and therefore recommendations, I reflect upon the implications of this research for theory, practice, and policy.

The sixth chapter (The Next Cycle) provides an outstanding example of how the use of a culturally appropriate research methodology was successful in helping to raise the consciousness levels needed to increase participation levels within activities guided by the community for the purposes of improvements to education. This chapter outlines how the research community came together in response to this research to revisit the community`s education vision statement and make it more reflective of the desires of the membership and better accommodate Anishinabe-defined aspects of success for Anishinabe students. The last part of this chapter provides recommendations for the community to consider along with some concluding thoughts about where this research has led me.

Thus this thesis concludes on a high note as this example of a successful community-based initiative has promising implications for the application and use of culturally-approved methodologies, as adjudicated by the community, when they are applied to other community-based initiatives.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMING THE RESEARCH: REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT RESEARCH

The literature on First-Nations education strongly demonstrates a need for a research methodology and research that supports positive, culturally-based initiatives and action. This chapter highlights specific areas within current research that influenced the design and implementation of this research project. Within this consideration of relevant literature, there are six focus areas: the legitimacy and the furthering of indigenous knowledge; ineffective and unsuccessful models of education for First Nation people; effective and culturally relevant education for First-Nation people; notions of resistance and affirmation; the importance of indigenous academics and research; and successful models of research and action for education of First-Nation people. Knowledge of the existence of this literature also helped to inform research participants and therefore shaped many aspects of their decision making. I explain this in more detail in Chapter three.

Literature that Supports the Legitimacy and the Furthering of Indigenous Knowledge

> Indigenous scholars discovered that indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. As a concept, indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory — its methodology, evidence, and conclusions — reconceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes. Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship. (Battiste, 2002, p. 5)

Battiste's position provides a strong argument for the furthering of all knowledge through an understanding of indigenous forms of knowledge. In general, indigenous knowledge (IK) can refer to the traditions of communities that are passed down from one generation to the next through various means such as songs, stories, legends, teachings, dances and more. IK is valuable as it sustains and reinforces traditional beliefs, values, and practices. For many First Nation

communities, IK forms the basis of survival and is therefore something to return to in the face of troubles experienced today.

IK has come under intense assault over the past five centuries on Turtle Island as western society has sought to separate secular from spiritual knowledge (Toulouse, 2006b). Within First Nation cultures, this separation cannot be accomplished without compromise to the overall body of knowledge. For First Nation people, knowledge is holistic and cannot be segmented into separate parts. Nor can knowledge be dissected into secular and spiritual.

Despite a history of oppression against its application here in North America, indigenous knowledge has become an area of increased interest within academic circles (Smith, 1999; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). A reason behind the resurgence of indigenous knowledge is increased awareness and acceptance of the validity of alternative practices in general. An increased critical outlook on the world has resulted in a greater willingness to reconsider "alternative" or non-conventional interpretations of events and behaviors to broaden understandings of the world.

It is important to understand that indigenous knowledge is not just a body of knowledge brought forward from the past, but rather a way to incorporate the wisdom of yesterday with society and modern amenities of today by grounding what we do or propose to do in accordance with what is respectful to the earth, animals, and man-kind. Including indigenous knowledge within an educational equation is a way to re-vitalize and re-exert the culture and traditional values of native people. Bell, Anderson, Fortin, Ottoman, Rose, Simard, and Spencer (2004) agree, on the basis of their investigation of success in aboriginal schooling, that there is a need amongst many members of mainstream and aboriginal society to challenge and change erroneous

visions and beliefs about First Nation people (p. 140). Returning to IK has also been proven effective in healing abuses of the past (Smylie, Martin, Kaplan-Myrth, Steele, Tail & Hogg, 2003). A review of Battiste (2000), Battiste & Henderson (2000), Smith (1999), Deyhle, & Swisher (1997), Mihesuah & Wilson (2004) reveal common areas of significance regarding the importance of recognition and the application of indigenous knowledge within native communities.

A summary of the literature noted directly above reveals a need for identifying an oppressive past and understanding the circumstances that initiated and sustain(ed) those oppressive forces. My research demonstrates that when people become increasingly aware of injustices and forces that perpetuate injustices, they are more likely to engage with some form of critical response. A return to more culturally-oriented ways of learning and knowledge possesses the potential to assist people in obtaining grounded information so that it can be made sense of on a personal and intimate level. Within this form of application, IK can be used as a framework to help people critically evaluate life circumstances and to guide appropriate responses. This active process of reflection through the observance of IK is known to the Anishinabek as "*Meno-Bimaadziwin*" which means the "Good Life."

I am aware that the words "Good" and "Life", used commonly to define *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, are an adjective and a noun that when used together in English do not necessarily define the process of living that they do when used within Ojibwe. Readers will come to understand what is meant by the "process" of living known as *Meno-Bimaadziwin* in chapter three.

Critical theory and research (McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 2003; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; & Graveline, 1998) assert that increased levels of

consciousness through critical awareness are needed for reclaiming cultural identity and reasserting individual or collective beliefs within hegemonic structures. First Nation scholars (Graveline, 1998, Alfred, 1999; Smith, 1999; Bressette, 2000) assert that simply knowing who you are is incredibly empowering. IK, as a framework upon which to ground identity, possesses the potential for consciousness-raising. According to Graveline (1998), the function of critical awareness is to challenge dominant mindsets that accept and hence strengthen oppression. Convincing contemporary views about the importance of being critical within education, and society in general, are provided by Aronowitz & Giroux (1991), Freire (1973); Freire (2002), McCarthy (1993), McLaren (1998), Alfred (1999), and Deyhle & Swisher (1997).

Indigenous knowledge gives us as native people the strength to reclaim education using methods that are culturally appropriate and fitting (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Solomon, 1990; Waldram, 1997; Hilger, 1992; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997; Morris, 2000; Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Grough (2008) elaborates upon the definition of indigenous knowledge:

> Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a culture or society. Indigenous knowledge is also known as local knowledge, folk knowledge, people's knowledge, traditional wisdom or traditional science. This knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has been the basis for agriculture, food preparation, health care, education, conservation and the wide range of other activities that sustain a society and its environment in many parts of the world for many centuries. (para. 2)

A return to our roots as Anishinabek people helps us to gain the strength we need to go against the dominant grain of society and reassert our cultural legitimacy. IK also provides community members with culturally appropriate and proven strategies by which to initiate significant challenges to oppressive systems or systems that are not conducive to student learning. IK is empowering and legitimates culture as a positive and valuable force. This is important when considering the oppressive history and treatment that many First Nation people in Canada have

experienced and in some cases continue to experience. Such mistreatment has resulted in the creation of an unfortunate mindset or form of mental oppression that devalues First Nation culture (Irwin, 1997; Deleary, 2007; Freire, 2002; Bell, *et al*, 2004; Marsden, 2006). Said (1979), who is recognized as one of the founding figures of post-colonial theory, would strongly assert that inaccurate mindsets, regardless of who perpetuates them, have proven dangerous for everybody and must therefore be cast down and replaced with more accurate understandings.

Ineffective and Unsuccessful Models of Education for First Nation People

There are numerous examples of approaches to native education that have not worked for native people. These approaches, driven by federal policy which is largely based upon mainstream mindsets, are apparent when considering ineffective and unsuccessful education initiatives that have not worked well for native people within Canadian history. Examples of these failed "educational" initiatives are native residential schools, native federal day schools, forced public-school integration, and on-reserve (band) schools that exist outside of any meaningful jurisdictional structure and very often with insufficient funding (Marker, 2000).

A review of models used to educate, "socialize", or assimilate native people into non-native society demonstrates failure on multiple levels. In reflecting upon the majority of his experiences in residential school in *Indian School Days*, Johnson (1988) recounts a system that negatively impacted on every area of his life. Johnson and many other native people who lived to talk about their experiences of residential school explain education as assimilation-based and culturally devastating to native people and communities (Ward, 2004; Chrisjohn, 2006; Schissel, 2003; Miller, 1996). Although this was the case for many native people in Canada within residential schools, some native people did manage to obtain communication and reasoning skills

sufficient to enable them to speak out against this abuse today (D. Bressette, personal communication, June 12, 2001).

Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees (1995) verify the ineffectiveness of western-based assimilation-based systems of education for native people through their research on racism in Canada and argue that similar to "most other western, industrialized societies, racism has been pervasive in Canada through the well-documented processes of Christianization, subjugation, and in some cases, extermination. European colonists denied Canada's Aboriginal peoples their history, language, culture, land, livelihood, and dignity" (p. 60). Accordingly, racism manifested itself through direct policy initiatives. For example, as Miller (1991) indicates, the *Indian Act* was designed to initiate the assimilation of native people into the dominant society. This means that native peoples were expected to adopt foreign cultural attitudes and values of the dominant society.

The impact of the *Indian Act*, as a racist piece of legislation, was tremendously disruptive to native peoples. Blakney (2003) asserts that:

> With the imposition of the *Indian Act*, traditional ways, such as holistic thinking, consensual decision –making, and an emphasis on homogeneity of knowledge and skills were suppressed. In its place came an emphasis on process, specialization, centralization, hierarchical government, accounting and efficiency. This meant that 'Indians' had to learn and respond to Euro-Canadian rationalization strategies. The imposition of Euro-Canadian structures continues to distort Aboriginal societies and relations. (p. 6)

Adherence to the *Indian Act* meant that native peoples across Canada past and present were forced to give up their own cultural values, traditions, and languages (Richardson, 1993). Even the communities designated for native people were intended to disappear eventually (Samek, 1989). The reserve system separated colonizers from the colonized thereby systematically relegating native people to an insufficient supply of resources for success and prosperous living (Bienvenue and Goldstein, 1985). In general, it is concluded that the experience of centuries of dispossession,

oppression, and exploitation of native peoples in Canada is the direct result of pervasive and intractable racism. Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees (1995) conclude that this history and its consequences have ultimately forced First Nation peoples to "demand self-government, self-determination, and the negotiation of settlement of land claims" (p. 64) in efforts to undo a legacy of oppression. As part of this process, the ineffective and unsuccessful models of education for First Nation people mentioned above need to give way to the development of effective and culturally relevant education instead. A history of such unfortunate relationships can be provided as a rationale explaining the widespread aversion of native people to developing new and positive relationships and partnerships within mainstream systems such as public school boards.

Effective and Culturally Relevant Education for First Nation People

A Maori Example

The Maori people of *Aotearoa* (New Zealand) experience similar educational challenges to those of native people in Canada. Smith (2000) provides a social snapshot of Maori society: "as the indigenous population of New Zealand, Maori occupy the worst-case category with respect to negative social statistics: high levels of unemployment, poor housing conditions, high incarceration rates, significantly higher incidences of life-threatening diseases, much lower average levels of income, [and] widespread educational under attainment" (p. 14). Sadly, there are startling similarities when Maori conditions are compared to the condition of native people here in Canada as reported by the National Council of Welfare (2007); however, despite such oppression, the Maori have been able to create an effective and culturally relevant model of

education that can help form the basis of other forms of positive intervention for other indigenous groups globally.

This transformation within Maori education did not happen suddenly; however, it did happen and therefore provides other indigenous groups with encouragement and hope for a better way. History reveals that the Maori have suffered at the hand of the dominant society for generations. It was not until Maori Elders and leaders arrived at a heightened understanding through increased critical awareness about the impact of the loss of Maori language and culture that they responded to external oppression with an effective internal response.

In response to the threat of the annihilation of their language, Maori Elders and leaders came together and formulated a plan of resistance and survival to be undertaken at the community level. The plan was to develop a language immersion program for preschool Maori children. This community response to the crisis of the radical decline of language and culture engaged the Maori people to generally support the immersion initiative. What is important about this development was that the idea for language revitalization came from within the Maori community as a whole since they were the ones who best understood the situation and how to address the problem using what resources were available in the best culturally-based manner possible. The results of their successful response to oppression have afforded the Maori international attention.

This approach to problem solving is one that exemplifies what Freire (2002) means when he argues that people must participate in their own liberation. Therefore, it is my belief, and fortunately the belief of others, that native people, and only native people must take responsibility for their own liberation (for a telling parallel argument in a different domain see

Steele, 2006). Part of this realization and motivation for change occurred when the Maori become critically aware that the Pakeha (members of the non-native society) were just not going to deliver education according to Maori aspirations, regardless of any good intentions they might have for the Maori. Maori Elders and leaders led this critical awareness campaign at the community level and therefore experienced significant success because the method of resistance necessitated a return to indigenous forms of culturally relevant knowledge. IK provided a common cultural base upon which the Maori could unify. IK, similar to the use of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* within this research project, provided a methodology for culturally appropriate action and was highly successful because it was culturally familiar to the Maori and therefore fully endorsed by Maori communities. I will likewise suggest in chapter three that Anishinabe notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* can likewise provide a methodological framework upon which to initiate transformative action within Anishinabe communities.

As the Maori became increasingly aware of the extent of unchanging power imbalances, economic disparities, and ideological persuasion (e.g., through state curriculum and resources), they became increasingly able to deconstruct the existing structural impediments implicit within *Pakeha* (non-Maori) education and began to develop their own resistance initiatives. Maori communities (especially parents, grandparents, and students) through involvement and participation in the activities of *Te Kohanga Reo* (Maori preschool language immersion program) became increasingly critically aware about the politics of *Pakeha* oppression and the need for resistance but more than that, for transformative action.

The actions taken by the Maori were to effect social, cultural, and political transformation by designing and implementing their own culturally relevant educational interventions. This

action has been highly successful and continues to provide an example for other education initiatives within the Maori community.

Smith (2000) attributes the dramatic changes in the education system for Maori people to the reimplementation of culturally relevant programming in response to concerns about educational underachievement and loss of their language, knowledge, and culture. This successful revolution was grounded using "traditional and contemporary notions of *whanau* (family) values, practices, and structures" (Smith, 2000, p, 14). Smith goes on to explain that these revolutionary changes came about because Maori parents resolved to "go outside of the compulsory state schooling system to develop change" (p. 14).

A growing critical appreciation by Maori of ongoing problems such as unequal power relations, the structural role of western ideology and hegemony, and of class positioning has demonstrated a need for the emergence of critical consciousness. This has given strength to the *Kaupapa* Maori theory and practice as an effective strategy for change. Pipi, Cram, Hawke, Hawke, & Huriwai (2004) define *Kaupapa* Maori as "an emancipatory theory that has evolved alongside other theories such as feminism, and African-American and other worldwide indigenous theories in effort for improvements and equity. These named theories have common objectives such as the displacement of oppressive knowledge and a social change agenda" (Pipi, *et al.*, 2004, p. 141).

Reeducation

Smith (2000) reveals that a prerequisite for responsive action to oppression by Maori has been the critical reeducation of Maori parents "to enable them to become more politically aware of deeper meanings associated with schooling and education and subsequently to take action in

changing these circumstances" (p. 2). Re-education, especially through policy analysis, helps education community members to recognize how *Pakeha* ways have not worked:

> This is evident through policy analysis where it has been determined that Pakeha developed policies perpetuate unequal power relations sustaining an unbalanced political, cultural, social, and economic interest. These complex issues are critically addressed as they have been found to reproduce and perpetuate oppression through schooling through selective decision-making, hegemonic influence, economic control and manipulation of resource allocation, exercising social and cultural preferences, and so on-all of which are conducted in a societal context of unequal power relations. The difficulties related to the retention of Maori in state schooling are symptomatic of a plethora of underlying problems that militate against Maori as they attempt to gain equality in the Pekeha-dominant education system..."(Smith, 2000, p. 5)

Smith's research on the successes experienced by the Maori reveals that there is a need to develop an understanding of theoretical underpinnings or cultural frameworks that work to produce transformative action so that other indigenous communities can have a model to follow for transformative work within their own communities. Lessons learned from the Maori reveal that increased critical awareness has the potential to lead to increased levels of conscientization through participation and responsive action.

In reflection upon the lessons available to be learned from the example of the Maori, Smith (2000) asserts the importance of teachers asking critical questions to aid in the development of accountability "about the intentions, practices and roles that we assume as teachers, educators, and change agents"(p. 11). It is apparent through the Maori example that the entire process of becoming aware and acting on that knowledge is dependent upon the use of a culturally relevant framework such as the Maori traditional and contemporary notions of *whanau* (family) values, practices, and structures and the liberatory theory of *Kaupapa* Maori. These culturally based frameworks are similar to Anishinabe notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as I understand it which can be used to help form the basis of critical awareness and transformation within Anishinabe communities.

An Australian Example

Ernie Grant is an Elder of the Jirrbal people (also known as Dyribal) from the Tully area in North Queensland, Australia. Grant spent the early years of his life in the forest learning about the traditional life of his North Queensland rainforest people. In addition to traditional knowledge, Grant also possessed knowledge about ethnobotany and spirituality. In 1998, Grant developed a revolutionary educational framework for a holistic approach to indigenous studies for use with Aborigines called *My Land. My Tracks.* Grant was able to design this framework based upon his extensive knowledge and experience working within traditional, urban and regional, and non-aboriginal communities in Australia.

Grant is unique in that few indigenous educators possess both knowledge and experiences of traditional lore as well as training in western academia. The combination of these particular skills, according to Turner (2006), is what is needed to help move education and issues related to native people forward for the benefit of everyone. Grant's holistic framework has been demonstrated through the research of Exley & Bliss (2004) to be a powerful tool that assists with the development of Tasmanian cultural understandings for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people.

Grant's holistic framework helps learners understand the interrelationships of elements as they are understood and conveyed by aboriginal people. The holistic approach encompasses land, language, and culture in the context of time, place, and relationships. The framework is based upon these six elements as they come together to form a whole and therefore a holistic approach to education. Within the framework the key to understanding the holistic approach to learning is knowledge of the inseparable and interdependent relationship that aboriginal people have with

their land, their language, and their culture. These values form the basis of culturally relevant learning.

The Tasmanian Department of Education has successfully implemented Grant's framework as part of professional development for teachers (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2006). The framework has been met with success and teachers have endorsed the framework as an effective tool to support aboriginal cultural understandings through the curriculum. At present, the framework is being used to ground all work within the Aboriginal Education Unit in Tasmania (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2006). This framework comes to mainstream society at a good time because there has been little change reported in the gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal student learning outcomes over the past two decades (Exley and Bliss, 2004). A culturally relevant approach to understanding education, as demonstrated by the Maori and now Aborigines in Australia, increases the likelihood of success in education for aboriginal people. This commitment to improved interracial relationships as demonstrated through the implementation of Grant's framework by the Tasmanian Department of Education illustrates that new partnerships between native and non-native people are possible and can be advantageous for both (Turner, 2006).

Exley and Bliss (2004) have explored the importance of culturally relevant learning and its success with application with Aborigine learners through an investigation of a reading recovery research project undertaken by Education Queenland in Brisbane, Australia. Within this project, Exley and Bliss explored the application of Grant's framework used by teachers working with indigenous students:

> Grant (1998) explains that indigenous communities' holistic view of the world is significantly different from what is considered the 'norm' in western Society. There is a particular emphasis on the environmental cycles and patterns and the effect each has on the other...[He] argues that the links between these elements are often silenced by western discourses, which tends to present a more compartmentalized organization of

> knowledge in schools. The conflict of differing approaches...can be confusing and frustrating for all those involved in the learning process. He suggests that if all the elements of his framework are evident in both pictures and words [within text], then it is easier for indigenous students to connect with the text [because it is culturally relevant]. [Grant] maintains that teachers must assist students to orally build the field of knowledge, and make connections between the six elements of their life experiences and the visual text. (p. 2)

In this example, cultural relevance in learning is possible through the use of texts as demonstrated in the reading recovery research with indigenous Australian children. In Exley and Bliss' (2004) research, teachers who were part of the reading-recovery research project formulated categories that assisted aboriginal learners with their literacy objectives. The vast majority of teachers reported success when learning with texts that focused on the "representations of the students' local area, relevant experiences, and appropriate representations within the extended family – a direct application of the Grant framework" (p. 2).

The results of this research are helpful as they can be used as a motivational tool for change. The results of this research also possess the ability to effect meaningful change within mainstream education by calling attention to how representations of an indigenous student's world have been ignored or misrepresented by stereotypical conditions such as "indigenous people as lazy, alcoholic and/or criminal" (Exley and Bliss, 2004, p. 2).

Research from Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) suggests that access to books that are unrelated to students' lives and experiences send strong overt and covert messages that aboriginal students and their values and life experiences are not valued within the dominant society. Since this has been demonstrated to, in fact, be the case, it is not surprising that skills needed for literacy are not valued amongst some aboriginal children as most literature would fail to affirm their lives as relevant.

The data from Exley and Bliss' (2004) research on the importance of cultural relevancy affirm the validity and merit of using culturally appropriate forms of education. Their project has demonstrated how a learning community "has been able to produce culturally relevant texts and employ a culturally relevant [instructional and learning] framework for interaction between Indigenous students and their … teachers that has measurable benefits for the student`s literacy progress. [The acknowledgement of] such differences are important for they help [increase] …Indigenous student's access to [improved] life chances and life choices" (p. 4).

Similar to Smith's (2000) assertion about the importance of teachers developing and promoting a critical awareness, the Exley and Bliss (2004) study demonstrates the need for "those working with culturally diverse students to continue to cast a critical lens on the appropriateness of resources and teaching interactions to ensure that they are providing the most effective teaching experiences" (Exley and Bliss, 2004, p. 5) and this is done through collaboration with the people at the community-level.

A Navajo Example

Manuelito (2005) has demonstrated through her study of the role of self-determination in the Ramah Navajo community school that community-based cultural education has made a positive difference for Navajo students. Her study begins with a review of history wherein she demonstrates how ongoing efforts for culturally-based survival have been an enduring condition of Navajo people in response to marginalization from the dominant society. The Navajo people have managed to survive and thrive because they have based their education upon traditional knowledge. This fact is demonstrated through the following excerpt from Manuelito`s research:

> The first successful tribally controlled schools were established among the five southeastern tribes: the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickawaw, Creek, and Seminole. By 1819, approximately 200 schools, seminaries, and academies were established among the five

> tribes before their forced removal to Oklahoma. The population of these tribes had a 90 percent literacy rate compared to the much lower literacy rate of non-Indian youth in surrounding communities and states...The educational success of the five tribes is credited to their having local, tribal control over their educational systems and community-based bilingual educational programs. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Dawes Act of 1887, and the Curtis Act of 1898 suppressed and eventually obliterated these early tribally controlled school systems. (p. 75)

During this dark time of oppression, under federal law, the Navajo suffered abuses in boarding schools similar to the negative experiences of Canada's and Australia's aboriginal people. It has taken close to a century before the redevelopment of tribally controlled schools (e.g., the Rough Rock Demonstration School and the Navajo Community College). What is of particular interest to me and significant for the purposes of this research is how this change from state control to local control came about and facilitated remarkable educational and cultural successes.

In the Navajo experience, similar to the experiences of the Maori and the Aborigines, Elders, leaders, and community members became intimately involved due to increased critical awareness of the relationship between social disparities and inadequate culturally irrelevant education. In response, Navajo Elders and community members demanded a change wherein education would return to local and culturally relevant control. When there was resistance to the Navajo effort to reacquire local control over education, Manuelito (2005) reports that Bertha Lorenzo, a frail Navajo Elder, threw down her blanket in protest at the Bureau of Indian Affairs building and refused to leave until Navajo treaty rights were observed and money made available for the provision of a community-based school (p. 77). This act, informed by increased critical awareness and desperation, eventually led to the funding of the Ramah Navajo High School which became the first contemporary Navajo community-controlled secondary school.

Manuelito (2005) demonstrates through her research that despite the harm done to the Navajo people through mainstream assimilative education initiatives "many Indian people [maintain] that formal education, properly applied, can advance and help them maintain their identities. Since the passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act, which provided for tribal and community-based schools, many Indian people have considered formal education to be a primary force in the survival of their language and cultures and the protector of their rights"(p. 73).

The examples considered above concerning the successes experienced by the Maori, Aborigines, and the Navajo provide convincing examples and evidence of how change is possible when people become critically aware of circumstances and motivated for action, especially when they can gather in strength grounded in community, culture, and indigenous knowledge.

Community-oriented education has been proven to increase the opportunity for the development of self-determination. Through her research, Manuelito (2005) asserts that community-based culturally relevant schooling provides

> colonized people [with] the opportunity to express and operationalize self-determination. Like other colonized people – Native Hawaiians, the Maori, Sami [of Norway] for example – American Indians [e.g., the Navajo] have enacted self-determination through community-based education for nearly 40 years. Community-based schooling, still a new idea for mainstream education provides a means for indigenous people to become active participants in shaping their own future through education. (p. 74)

Manuelito's comments on the importance of Navajo people shaping their own future through education echoes loudly Freire's (2002) sentiments about the importance of oppressed people playing a significant role in their own liberation. Manuelito considers the resultant impact of appropriate or culturally-based education and explains how such an education "refers to an indigenous epistemology [e.g., traditional Navajo education] which has been essential for the implementation for self-determination for the Ramah Navajo people" (p. 75).

The Navajo people have been able to re-establish success through community education that supports self-determination. They have been able to achieve and maintain self-determination through education through critical awareness that evolved through reflection and response. The attainment of self determination is a process along a road referred to by the Navajo as the "Pollen Road" or the "Beautiful Way." This concept of self-determination is best described in the words of a young Pine Hill (Ramah Navajo School) graduate:

> [If you choose this road, this is what's going to happen.]
> Miléí náásgó díni f fgo, náásgó yínáátgo, nizhónigo ná'atiindo,
>
> [If you look forward, if you walk forward, your road will be beautiful ahead of you.]
> But ... doo náásgó doo díni f fgo, t'óó bine'dii, t'óó hágóóshíí kwínísht'éh diníígo, éí doo náásgó ná'íínitt'agoo, éí doo á'anii ák'inaaniltzilgo, doo'ádonisínkeesgo
>
> [If you don't look ahead, just let things be, brag about oneself, if you don't go onward in school and don't do things for yourself, don't think for yourself ... you're going to be at a standstill]. (Manuelito, 2005, p. 79)

The thought behind this Navajo methodology of action and reflection parallels the methodologies for success proven effective by the Maori (e.g., *Te Kohanga Reo* and *Kaupapa* Maori), the Aborigines (e.g., Grant's 1998 *Framework)*, and the Anishinabe (e.g., *Meno-Bimaadziwin*). Similar to the Navajo's "Pollen Road," the Anishinabe people, through application of *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* the methodology that comes from an incorporation of aspects of Anishinabe philosophy and epistemology, likewise reflect upon their lives and make necessary adjustments to stay on the "good path."

In addition to the academic literature available on the subject of the importance and success associated with the use of culturally relevant community education systems, several high profile reports and studies, such as *Indian Control of Indian Education, Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future – A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education, Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan,*

Assembly of First Nation's Education Action Plan, and the National Council of Welfare Report, likewise support the use of culturally-based education programs that are relevant for native learners. Highlights from these reports are reviewed below.

To understand a driving impetus behind the development of these reports and research, one should become familiar with the *Hawthorn Report* and the *White Paper*.

Reports

The Hawthorn Report

In 1964, the Minister of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration commissioned a study to review the situation of the First Nation people in Canada in light of difficulties many native people were experiencing. The study that resulted, *A survey of contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, political, educational needs, and policies*, is commonly known as the *Hawthorn Report*. The report focused on two elements: factors contributing to difficulties experienced by First Nation people such as social, political, and economic conditions, and other conditions that were more administrative in nature, such as the internal organization of First Nation communities.

It was evident in the 1960s (and long before this from a First Nation perspective) that there were problems associated with education for First Nation people under Canada's administration. The *Hawthorn Report* verified officially that something needed to be done to help address the dire social situations experienced by Canada's First Nation people and the solution was, not surprisingly, assimilation. Accordingly, the federal government of Canada responded to the *Hawthorn Report* with the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (1969), also known as the *White Paper*.

The *White Paper*

The *White Paper* attempted to deal with the failure of an assimilation-based social control education program for native people in Canada through one more proposed assimilation or termination policy designed to finally eliminate the "Indian problem." Weaver (1981) considers three reasons why the federal government decided to respond with a termination policy: ongoing "public criticism of the government for the conditions of poverty in which Indians lived, criticism of the Indian Affairs department, and Prime Minister Trudeau's belief that no group of Canadians should have special status" (p. 377).

Ultimately, the *White Paper* called for the assimilation of all First Nation peoples into the mainstream of Canadian society, and the removal of First Nations from the Canadian Constitution. Weaver (1981), in *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-1970,* reports that the *White Paper* proposed the termination of "special status for Indian people and [the] transfer [of] responsibility for them to the provinces. It also proposed the repeal of the *Indian Act*, abolition of the Indian Affairs Department and a review of Indian treaties to see how they could be equitably ended" (Purich, 1983, p. 377).

Of particular interest in helping to explain the ongoing impetus for mistrustful attitudes and relationships between Canada's native people and the federal government is the example of how the *White Paper* was drafted and presented by the Canadian federal government.

> While the White Paper was being developed by a secret taskforce, public meetings were being held with Indian leaders to discuss the revisions to the *Indian Act*. Little wonder Indian people and some of the general public reacted with shock and horror when the White Paper announced the repeal of the *Indian Act*. Indian leaders felt they had been misled. Indian leaders immediately set about organizing Indian people and developing political organizations [e.g., Native Indian Brotherhood]. And the distrust Indian leaders developed for the federal government because of this affair is still evident today. (Purich, p. 377)

The Canadian government failed to accept its responsibility to Canada's First Nation people based upon treaty relationships and therefore failed to acknowledge past and present forms of oppression against First Nation people. This assault upon First Nation people in Canada was sufficient to effect an organized response from native peoples themselves by way of a document titled *Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE)* which was produced by the Native Indian Brotherhood in 1972.

Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE)

ICIE, in response to the *White Paper,* has been a significant source of overall inspiration and motivation for improvements to education for native people, especially in light of the history of native and non-native relationships. This policy paper has been a significant force behind many initiatives that strive, successfully or unsuccessfully, to facilitate improvements to education for First Nation people (Bressette, 2000). The premise of *ICIE* has been increased parental participation and local control. "Local control" has been largely interpreted by many native people to mean an entity separate from partnerships with mainstream education systems (McCue, 2004) and has therefore thwarted efforts for native and non-native people to come together to work on improvements to education for native people collectively.

Despite its helpful vision, *ICIE* policy was articulated poorly in that its identification of "Indian control" with exclusively "local control" has resulted in negative long-term effects which can help explain, in part, the lack of success within education initiatives for First-Nation people in Canada (McCue, 2004). McCue summarized this flaw within the ICIE policy paper in these terms:

> Along the way, Indian control of education became synonymous with local control. Admittedly, the policy paper was short on details in terms of what actually constituted "Indian control." But local control as an objective was clearly enunciated in the document and INAC cheerfully accepted this interpretation of Indian control because it fit conveniently with its emerging policy on devolution. (p. 4)

Despite this serious problem with *ICIE,* due to its part in inhibiting growth in partnerships with non-native people and in establishing authentic First-Nations education systems, perhaps largely in response to a long history of poor native and non-native relationships due to oppressive policies and proposed termination policies such as the *White Paper*, it did provide First Nation people with a framework to introduce native philosophy and cultural relevance in education for First Nation people.

> In Indian tradition each adult is personally responsible for each child, to see that he learns all he needs to know in order to live a good life. As our fathers had a clear idea of what made a good man and a good life in their society [Anishinabe notion of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*], so we modern Indians, want our children to learn that happiness and satisfaction come from: pride in one's self, understanding one's fellowmen, and, living in harmony with nature. These are lessons which are necessary for survival in this twentieth century. (Native Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 8)

The language that appears in the quote above reflects the sexist usage common in that period. It must also be stated that patrilineal and "father-child" or "Crown-native" based relationships imposed on native people were a strong force that effectively moved many native people away from traditional forms of government that were more egalitarian or matrilineal-based.

ICIE also includes a statement of values that reflects the importance of parental participation within education for First Nation children. The role of parents in education, as outlined in the excerpt below, is of paramount importance for success of native people in education.

> If we are to avoid the conflict of values which in the past has led to withdrawal and failure, Indian parents must have control of education with the responsibility of setting goals. What we want for our children can be summarized very briefly: to reinforce their

> Indian identity, [and] to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society. We are the best judges of the kind of school programs which can contribute to these goals without causing damage to the child. We must, therefore, reclaim our right to direct the education of our children. (Native Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 8)

In part, the *ICIE* paper evolved because of the coming together of native people united in the commonality of survival against oppression using the framework of culture and traditional knowledge.

In an effort to implement the ideas, or political aspirations possibly foreseen within the implementation of *ICIE*, the Assembly of First Nations (formerly known as the National Indian Brotherhood) completed and released *Tradition and education: Towards a vision of our future – A declaration of First Nations jurisdiction over education* in 1988.

Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future – A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education (AFN, 1988)

The review analyzed four aspects of First Nations education: jurisdiction, quality, management, and financing. The report affirmed that education is an inherent right which must be respected by all levels of government. In particular, First Nations governments must assure that children, teachers of their children, and community members fully understand that the concepts of self-government and self-sufficiency are related. This will involve an increase in levels of education (critical awareness) and may lead to transformative action.

In light of the issues raised above concerning the ability to support an entire education "system," I again raise the question of whether First Nation communities, as they exist today, can support an effective education system with stated high ideals apart from the resources that are available from established systems of education. The desire to "go-it-alone" in education without

access to adequate self-generated resources, which are a part of self-government, is an area where critical reflection is urgently needed.

A high degree of critical awareness must be attained for First Nation people to be able to engage at this level of proposed involvement (e.g., full control over education) effectively. It is anticipated, therefore, that motivation toward transformative action would be the result of increased critical awareness of injustices or inadequacies within education and native society in general.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal People

Another important report to consider when looking at examples of research and recommendations that support cultural relevancy and jurisdiction over education for native peoples is the one prepared in 1996 by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP).* *RCAP* is an extensive report that includes 440 recommendations for improvements to the relationship between native and non-native people and governments in Canada. In response to *RCAP*, Aboriginal communities and organizations lobby strongly for the implementation of the recommendations. Major recommendations of *RCAP* include the implementation of the following:

> -legislation, including a new Royal Proclamation stating Canada's commitment to a new relationship and companion legislation setting out a treaty process and recognition of Aboriginal nations and governments;
>
> -recognition of an Aboriginal order of government, subject to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, with authority over matters related to the good government and welfare of Aboriginal peoples and their territories;
>
> -replacement of the federal Department of Indian Affairs with two departments, one to implement the new relationship with Aboriginal nations and one to provide services for non-self-governing communities;
>
> -creation of an Aboriginal parliament;

-expansion of the Aboriginal land and resource base;

-recognition of Métis self-government, provision of a land base, and recognition of Métis rights to hunt and fish on Crown land; and

-initiatives to address social, education, health and housing needs, including the training of 10,000 health professionals over a ten-year period, the establishment of an Aboriginal peoples' university, and recognition of Aboriginal nations' authority over child welfare. (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996, par. 3)

RCAP is an extensive report that insists that part of restructuring and improving education for First Nation people necessitates a high level of critical awareness and therefore participation of as many native education community members as possible. Increased jurisdiction, over education which requires a full and critical understanding of issues involved in shaping a truly relevant First-Nations education, may facilitate improvements to First Nation education, especially when many other approaches that have not focused upon "jurisdictional" issues have failed. The community-oriented research generated through *RCAP* from native communities provides a strong and culturally relevant basis upon which to ground subsequent research and action in education.

Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

In January 1998, the government responded to the *RCAP* report through the creation of *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan.* This document sets out a policy framework for future government action based on four objectives with each objective encompassing a number of elements:

-A new partnership among Aboriginal people and other Canadians that reflects our mutual interdependence and enables us to work together to build a better future.

-Financially viable Aboriginal governments able to generate their own revenues and able to operate with secure, predictable government transfers.

-Aboriginal governments reflective of, and responsive to, their communities' needs and values.

> -A quality of life for Aboriginal people like other Canadians. (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1997, p. 7)

This plan promised to bring about great things for native people, but significant results have yet to be realized. Insufficient funding and control over jurisdiction continues to remain an area of significant difficulty which only strengthens my concerns for the future generation of native people if a new way to solve this old problem is not obtained.

Assembly of First Nation's Education Action Plan

In 2005, the AFN created an education action plan in efforts to help further develop and refine the *ICIE* policy to aid in the actualization of increased jurisdiction over education for native people. The vision of the education action plan was for "the development and implementation of sustainable education systems under the full control and jurisdiction of First Nations based on the recognition of inherent Aboriginal and treaty rights, and under international law" (AFN, 2005). Jurisdiction is the central focus of this education plan and it may be the missing element has stood in the way of conclusive action.

> There is a need to recognize First Nations jurisdiction as a central tenet of education reform. Since before the last century, formal education has been used by colonizing governments as a tool for the assimilation of First Nation peoples. In 2004, Canada's Auditor General identified an education gap of 28 years between First Nation peoples living on reserve and the Canadian population as a whole, and she indicated that this gap is increasing. Even more significant, there is growing evidence to support the premise that all reform - whether in education or elsewhere – must be based on Indigenous' people control over their own institutions in order for reforms to be effective.
> (AFN, 2005, p. 2)

However encouraging the call for increased jurisdiction over education may sound, the question of adequate preparedness through capacity development for self-sufficiency, which is a bold departure from a victim-mindset, comes to mind.

Another impetus for the action plan was a need for a response to a burgeoning young native population. The demographic information on Canada's native population reveals that there

exists and will exist very soon a large population of native youth that will require access to training and skills. These potentially skilled groups of people could effectively address any projected or present labour shortages in Canada. Not only this, the AFN is acutely aware of the limited degrees of success experienced by many native students in past and present times under non-native education systems.

> Of the almost 120,000 on-reserve Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) students recorded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in 2001-02, only 32 percent are graduating from Grades 12-13. This results in 68 percent of the school-aged population having less than a high school education. The results are similar for First Nation students attending provincial schools. Human development indicators are generally lower for First Nations than for the general population in Canada. The higher rate of population growth in First Nation communities has created an associated demand for increased services such as education. For example, 40 percent of Canada's Registered Indian population is under the age of 19, while the same figure for the rest of Canada is only 25 percent. (AFN, 2005, p. 3)

The AFN's action plan deduces that meaningful change to education for native people has not occurred because there has been little opportunity for native peoples to assume full jurisdiction over education with full financial and political support of the federal government. This is an especially difficult fact to accept when the AFN's action plan reveals the results of "recent research [that] shows that the best and most lasting solutions are developed when First Nations are the ones creating them. [Therefore] the [AFN's] action plan outlines some of the most pressing challenges facing First Nations, and identifie[s] where strategic investments in First Nation capacities, skills, and education are needed to build efficient, effective and self-governing institutions" (AFN, 2005, p. 3).

Despite the plan's lean suggestions on how this will be accomplished, there are two areas of focus within the education action plan that most likely will facilitate positive change in education where there has been little measurable success before. These are in the assumption of jurisdiction of education and its full sustainability. According to the AFN's action plan,

"sustainability requires adequate, stable and predictable long term funding arrangements. This includes funding that is sufficient to meet the needs arising from the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over education at all levels. This would support real improvements to the delivery of education that would, in turn, translate into improvements across a range of human development indicators for First Nation peoples and communities" (AFN, 2005, p. 5).

The AFN's action plan provides a model in support of educational relevancy based upon increased jurisdiction over education. This idea is wonderful if it is financially feasible. Other reports, such as the National Council of Welfare Report (2007), likewise provide research to validate increased jurisdiction to facilitate the introduction of increasingly culturally relevant content and methodology to education for native peoples.

National Council of Welfare Report

The National Council of Welfare (2007) issued a report titled, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to act.* It was written to help actualize the demands of native people for action in response to long demonstrated needs. This report functions to inform Canadians of the overall needs that pertain to native peoples in Canada. It is anticipated that increased public awareness of the dire and inequitable situations experienced by Canada's native peoples will provide public pressure on the government to respond in new ways (e.g., a move toward reforms in education for native people based upon culturally relevant education) that will imbue poverty-stricken native children and youth with an increased chance of success in life.

The National Council of Welfare Report was developed in cooperation with native individuals and organizations and provides a "portrait of Aboriginal peoples from the perspective of the communities and the social connections upon which children and youth depend. The report combines statistics with the voices of influential Aboriginal people the Council

interviewed, to give true meaning to the numbers" (National Council Welfare Report, 2007, p. vi). This report demonstrates that native people should have input in the creation of their own culturally relevant education based programs and solutions to address their unique challenges as they themselves are the people who know how best to respond in culturally effective ways at the community level.

Summary

The reports considered above verify the needs for improvements to First Nation education. These reports come with proposed recommendations and solutions. After consideration of these reports, a disturbing yet critical question surfaces: if success through the implementation of recommendations are possible, why has success in education for First Nation people not occurred? I surmise that the answer to this question is because of misunderstandings about what "full jurisdiction" and "local control" mean to First Nation people themselves. A critical look at self-government is needed to better plan how to obtain it in a meaningful way. Another reason mostly likely contributing to such lack of action and therefore success is the lack of funding needed to implement true community-based solutions.

What can be seen from an overview of these high profile policies and native and non-native responses to such is a vicious cycle that prohibits people from moving forward. I surmise, based upon analysis of the reports considered above, that attempts to effect lasting changes and improvements to education have failed, in part at least, because there has been insufficient financial and political support for establishing a common definition and understanding of "local control" and "jurisdiction" between or among native peoples themselves and certainly between native and non-native peoples (Turner, 2006) necessary for the planning and implementation of improvements to education for First Nation people at the community-level.

An additional point to consider is the lack of involvement of native people collectively in the formulation of solutions to issues at and beyond the community level. Yes, many reports have included some native perspectives within their considerations; however, the voice of the general population at the community level has been largely ignored. Without the opportunity of people at the community level to critically understand, buy into, and assume ownership of solutions, any amount of money allocated to native education will not be able to bring about significant change.

Notions of Resistance and Affirmation

In this section, I explore several theory-informed approaches to critical awareness and transformative action (Said, 1979; Freire, 2002; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; McCarthy, 1993; McLaren, 1998; Alfred, 1999; and Deyhle & Swisher, 1997) to demonstrate that a more effective way to incite positive action within education for First Nation people can exist. I focus specifically on the work of Freire and Said because their work on marginalization, political consciousness, and resistance has helped to inform my own understanding of First Nation education.

Paulo Freire

Freire was a Brazilian educator who made a significant impact on thinking about progressive practice in response to oppression. Freire's contributions help people understand the link between educational practice and liberation. The basis of his action-based pedagogy rests on a belief in the dialectical nature of the world wherein people are actively engaged in critically investigating the truths of their worlds (Withham, 1982, p. 93). Examples of this progressive philosophy can be seen through Freire's pedagogy of literacy education where learners not only read the word, but also read the world and therefore better understand oppression and engage in

efforts to challenge it. Such action involves the development of critical consciousness through critical awareness wherein oppressed people come to question the nature of their historical and social situations. Critical consciousness moves oppressed groups closer to the opportunity of creating and participating within a true participation-driven democracy.

Freirean epistemology functions to challenge the unchallenged. This is similar to Weiler's (1991) notion of "shattering ...western metanarratives" (p. 23). The creation and validation of narratives, stories, or perspectives that disrupt the "grand narrative" or the mainstream "world-view" ideology or hegemony is at the center of Freire's pedagogy.

Freire's pedagogy could contribute important insights to a model that would at least ensure that First-Nation peoples participate increasingly in the design and evaluation of their own education systems.

Edward Said

Said was born in Jerusalem, Palestine in 1935. Later, he and his family became refugees during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and moved to Cairo. His early education had been in élite colonial schools (English public schools) designed by the British to bring up a generation of Arabs with natural ties to Britain. This situation is similar to the educational experiences that native children in Canada incurred in efforts to assimilate and force them to submit to Canadian society.

Edward Said had an English first name and an Arab last name, and his family were protestant Palestinians. As many such aspects of his life situated him as an anomaly, and he did not fit into the set places where society would expect him to fit, the decision to move to the

United States when he was an adult was easier. In the U.S.A., Said graduated from Princeton University with a Master's degree and then attended Harvard University and received his Ph.D.

Said is known for describing and then critiquing a mindset termed "Orientalism." Orientalism was the culmination of false assumptions that formed the basis of western attitudes towards the east. The concept of orientalism, as Said used it to explain how the west views uncritically the east, helped me to understand how many Canadians have become influenced by unchallenged attitudes and erroneous idea about native people largely disseminated through non-native textbooks and media. This explains how many people in Canada can simply ignore the fact that many First Nation people live in poverty and hopelessness every day and not do more to understand the origin of this oppression. I am encouraged by Said and his commitment to help people better realize the limits of their understandings about the "other" and how these understandings influence negative attitudes.

The objective of Said's *Orientalism* is coming to know the true 'Oriental':

> ...the orient and the orientals are considered by Orientalism as an 'object of study, stamped with otherness – as all that is different, whether it be 'subject' or 'object' – but a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character ... This 'object' of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or 'subject' which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined – and acted-by others. (Said, 1979, p. 97)

Edward Said shares a common experience with many First Nation people in Canada in that he experienced oppression based upon a lack of information of others and therefore sees the need to address ignorance and inaccurate understandings at basic levels (e.g., at the community level).

Said described and spoke against the "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture" (Windschuttle, 1999). In a political commentary in *The*

Nation, Said argued that false notions of Asia and the Middle East in western culture justified European and American colonial and imperial objectives.

> So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression. (Said, 1980, para.10)

This oppressive mindset presented by Said helps to explain western foreign policy and how many have come to view and respond to native peoples based upon inaccurate understandings.

It was only after becoming "credentialized" within western society that Said began to question his identity. He began to re-connect with his cultural origins, and started tracing his own educational and personal development as an "oriental" (Said, 1979, p. 26). It was through awareness of how his identity had been influenced by notions of orientalism that Said was able to understand the world and the oppressive forces therein and speak to and against them.

Said's approach to addressing oppression is similar to the experiences of many indigenous scholars who managed to gain credentials within the academy, only to later use their western credentials to facilitate increased awareness of levels of oppression needed to move forward with transformative action. In these examples, credentialization through the western academy, as endorsed by Turner (2006) can be helpful in the sense that the oppressed can become equipped with skills needed to understand and challenge oppression. Said and Freire, and many contemporary native academics (Alfred, 1999; Benton-Banai, 1988; Bressette, 2000; Deleary, 2007; Deloria, 2001; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Mihesuah, 1998) likewise believe that the oppressed are those who must initiate change through awareness and action.

Moving Toward Critical Awareness

Said argues that change can only come after awareness and empowerment through knowledge – after we theorize our oppression. This notion of critical consciousness is central within the theoretical and pedagogical approaches of Said and Freire. Critical consciousness is achieved when one develops a critical awareness of the contradictions of one's world, believes that oppression can be overcome, and acts on the basis of this new understanding (Withham, 1982, p. 92). Critical awareness or consciousness is more than becoming aware; it is about action. Conscientization is the liberating process through which people critically understand their reality, establish praxis (a dialectical interaction of reflection and action), and thereby begin to humanize themselves (Freire, 2002, p. 44).

Critical consciousness is an active process, endorsed by Said and Freire. It does not come to pass by analyzing the problematic situation alone. Rather, transformation comes via action with as many stakeholders as possible. Dialogue acts as a means for "fostering critical consciousness about social reality, an understanding based on knowledge of how people and issues are historically and politically situated" (Sohng, 1995, p. 7). Change is possible when we are aware of and come out of our false consciousness. Freire asserts that people "get courage to overcome [their] dependence when [through critical awareness they] realize that [they are] dependent" (Freire, 2002, p. 61).

Through reflection upon his own life and social influences, Said saw the need to break down harmful and narrow paradigms of understanding and challenge Orientalism and liberate people from limiting and oppressive thought. Said explains how Orientalism works to distance the powerful dominant group from the powerless and marginalized. Hence, Said's *Orientalism* exposes such oppression and cultural domination for the benefit of all people. This insight

illuminates the dangers associated with uncritically employing and abiding within oppressive social structures and discourses.

Being the self-reflexive thinker that he was, Said well understood the theoretical origins of his thoughts and therefore insisted that "...everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient" (Said, 1979, p. 20). This statement has far reaching implications for all researchers. Accordingly, we, as researchers, must critically reflect upon who we are as researchers, and who others are, and challenge notions of knowledge and power. This is especially true when people come to understand their own biases about native people.

There are important implications for what Said says here for community-based research in First-Nation communities. It is essential that all community stakeholders know who they are, what they want, and what their potential is. It is also important that others know and respect who First-Nation people are. A research methodology committed to awareness raising and action that will help facilitate increased levels of consciousness is therefore ideal. The lesson learned from Said's battle against the impact of the uncritical acceptance of orientalism is a strong model for researchers to emulate, as one must first become aware of one's self and the factors that shaped the self before one can begin to understand the other. Greater self awareness is obtained through Peshkin's notion of "subjective audit" through which we come to understand who we are and how our research and understanding can become influenced through our own objectivism (Barone, 1992). In this context, a subjective audit means becoming conscious of how personal feelings or interpretations may not be objective and are therefore harmful in perpetuating wrong and unhelpful attitudes.

Understanding Oppression

Graveline (1998) observes that:

> in spite of the potential and actual contradictions, I support the use of consciousness-raising in the classroom, to engage in struggle within schools, to change them and society through the personal transformation of students. (p. 90)

Graveline's assertion about the importance of understanding oppression can be facilitated by the use of post-colonial approaches to inquiry. Freire's (2002) approach to understanding the world can be seen as post-colonial. Post-colonialism works to empower people and help people to better understand their present realities. Post-colonialism also provides researchers with the ability to survey the past and present critically in a way that illuminates the complexities of oppression and power. A post-colonial approach allows the marginalized or disempowered to challenge hegemony. Said (1979) attests to the need for challenges to canons. This is evident in his assertion that Orientalist thought is strengthened via "sovereign Western consciousness - out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged" (p. 8). The post-colonial approach of becoming aware of and examining dominant discourse critically can help people move closer to a critical understanding of realities and thus to negotiating appropriate action to address inequalities.

The immersion programs of the Maori already mentioned are an example of the success that can result from increased critical awareness, to critical consciousness, and then to transformative action. The oppressed, through participation in education programs, became increasingly conscious of the degree of their oppression and worked for changes and improvements through community re-education initiatives, thus transforming their society by raising issues that need to likewise be acknowledged within non-native society (Smith, 2000).

When people possess post-colonial insight into forces such as oppression, addressing oppression becomes easier. Oppression is central to the focus of both Said and Freire. Both strive to expose oppression for what it is and demonstrate how to move beyond its grasp. Oppression,

according to Weiler (1991), is widespread and the world system is based on the exploitation of oppressed groups (p. 23). This statement well summarizes Said's (1979) O*rientalism and* Freire`s (2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

A good place for researchers to begin their assessment and understanding of oppression is to look at who the oppressed are. According to Greene (1988) the oppressed "are the individuals who have systematically lost their way, lost their sense of purpose, lost their self-appreciation and have lost their voices" (p. 3). This description fits Canada's First Nation people who are located within unfair and deplorable circumstances largely attributable to external exploitation, victimization, and powerlessness.

Freire sees oppression as a system that prevents people from perceiving the world accurately. In addition to understanding the centrality of material (e.g., economic) circumstances as forces of oppression, other forces sustaining oppression are ignorance and powerful dominant ideologies. For many people, oppressive reality involves adapting to a way of life imposed by others. Therefore oppression is a force that few have control over, especially if they do not even realize that they are indeed oppressed. On this same note, Bell, *et al.* (2004) assert that a reality of oppression is that "while Aboriginal communities in Canada may influence the education their children receive, the majority have no real control" (p. 34).

Education Sustaining Oppression

Increased critical awareness helps us to see that often education can sustain oppression. Said and Freire identify the western notion of legitimacy as a major contributor to ongoing oppression. They believe that ongoing problems stem from the arrogance of 'westerners' in their determination to "classify and to determine another" (Said, 1979, p. 54). In *Orientalism*, Said has

identified the shocking extent of Western hegemony. He states that "...to get clarification of the Orient, Westerners do not go to Oriental sources for correction and verification, but rather to Orientalist works" (Said, 1979, p. 67). This example parallels closely the lack of involvement of native peoples at the community level in efforts to bring about meaningful and lasting change to education for them.

In many cases outside non-native "experts" attempt to solve problems for First Nation communities, largely without adequate consultation and or involvement of the people at the community level. Therefore, some of the resultant disillusionment at the community level ensues in response to situations of powerlessness which further complicates and removes the opportunity for marginalized groups to participate in naming and creating their own realities.

Schools themselves as institutions can also be sites of oppression (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007; Schissel, 2003; Adams & Bell, 2007). Schools have been shown to perpetuate the present socio-economic structure in favour of the privileged. An oppression-based education system can be viewed as a major contributor of student alienation. In addition, students also must contend with rigid hierarchies within most mainstream schools, and the "banking-model" concept of education where people are deprived of the development of critical discernment and prevented from intervening in the world as transformers (Freire, 2002, p. 73). The banking-model education system is similar to Lockean developmental theory (Crain, 2000, p. 6) where the learner relies upon another for legitimization and knowledge. To combat this, Freire believes in "problem-posing" education where people are "put into a critical confrontation with their own problems and are allowed to be responsible for resultant change" (Freire, 1973, p. 87).

According to the critical education theory of Freire, conformity to pre-established notions or universal truths is reinforced in schools making oppression the hidden socialized objective of

major social institutions (Freire, 2002, p. 155). Despite this objective, education is central to Freire's notion of liberation. According to Freire and Said, people must be fully engaged with decision making; demand and participate within the day to day control over their own lives; and actively practice and participate within the experience of freedom. This process means that all people, especially the oppressed, "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover [or rediscover] how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2002, p. 34). By establishing and practicing freedom as praxis, the oppressed come into a new awareness and identity that empowers them and makes liberation a possibility. This was seen to be true amongst the Maori, the Aborigines, and the Navajos. This overall review helps researchers to understand the importance of investigating the history and the forces that perpetuate oppression.

In review of this section it is interesting to note that while "education" has in numerous ways led to the demise of many native nations here in Canada, it can be redefined and used to be a liberating and transformative force.

Summary

> Books about fierce lions will do until lions can talk back. (Said, 1979, p. 95)

This quote means that the oppressed will have to start talking before a new discourse can emerge sufficient to challenge old ways of thinking. The same assertion from Said speaks volumes about the increased need for research and writing about education for First Nation people by First Nation people. There is need for greater understanding of how to best support all areas of First-Nations education such as curriculum development, instruction, teacher training, and culturally relevant resources, in a way that provides both native and non-native people opportunity to contribute. Said encourages the oppressed to reclaim their true identity but he

speaks caution to those who solely rely upon dominant or slanted discourses (e.g., books, curriculum, newspapers) for knowledge. Said warns that "to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin" (p. 93).

The positions of Said and Freire have empowerment and engagement as common outcomes. Empowerment increases the likelihood of increased participation, dialogue, unity, and new models of inquiry. Dialogue, participation, and conscientization are central to transformation, and the pedagogical approaches of Said and Freire move the consideration of oppressive forces such as colonialism, imperialism, westernization, and the struggles against it into discussion. Not only that, if we solely rely on what the written text says, then there is no place for oral tradition (which is central within Anishinabe learning culture) to have an active role within First-Nations education. Therefore, educators must ensure that empowerment comes through culturally relevant and meaningful approaches.

There is a significant link between the objectives of Said and Freire and the aspirations of Canada's First-Nation community. These responses to oppression provide an avenue for marginalized people to critically assess and understand their lives, and respond. Many people can be prepared for action through critical approaches to education. These pedagogical approaches can be used to help raise awareness and increase participation and dialogue about education as a focal point. Greene (1988) also affirms that education can help people ascend to higher levels of consciousness, morality, and humanity:

> It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they [the oppressed] may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p. 12)

Before one can unlearn to relearn, there must be an understanding and posed alternative(s) that situate the oppressed in a better situation (Said, 1979, p. 28). Education can be the solution as those "learning to read and write, come to new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation[s] in which they find themselves (Freire, 2002, p. 29). Freire argues that the marginalized can be enabled to realize that they do have power over their oppressor and can successfully resist and fight for equality. This is perhaps the most rewarding, practical, and encouraging aspect of Freire's concept of liberation. In fact, Freire's pedagogy is a powerful praxis of success. The combination of theory and practice can lead to action, which can lead to transformation.

The importance of education lies in its ability to put people into a "critical confrontation" with their own problems and encourage people to be responsible for any resultant change. Thus education must begin with that level at which the people perceive their reality so that their own existential situation can be posed as the problem (Withham, 1982, p. 94). The combination of this theoretical stance within participation-based action research opens up the possibility of achieving heightened success in First Nations education.

The Importance of Indigenous Academics and Research

Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) claim that indigenous scholars are in a unique position "to enlarge the scope of research paradigms in ways that will benefit all research traditions" (p. 13). This is possible by considering the fact that indigenous research methodologies have enabled indigenous peoples to survive and thrive since time immemorial. Such research approaches help people observe and understand the world and its relationships in different ways and in contrast to dominant Eurocentric ways of interpreting the world. Therefore, indigenous knowledge furthered

by indigenous scholars creates new perspectives and knowledge that can be useful for all people. At the same time, there is also room for non-native writers and academics to further these notions within their various circles-of-influence to bring about a paradigm shift needed within dominant society to challenge and change negative ideas about native people before positive change on a large scale can ensue (Turner, 2006).

Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk Nation)

Alfred is an example of an indigenous scholar who has used his academic training to address needs at the community level. Alfred (1999) asserts the need for an indigenous intelligentsia rooted in tradition (culturally-based) to help identify solutions to problems from within indigenous communities themselves (p. 143). In order for native people to push past oppression, there must be a comprehensive understanding of it, together with a plan for action premised upon increased self-identity.

> There is unquestionable pathos in the material and social reality of most reserves. Yet above all the crisis we face is a crisis of the mind; a lack of conscience and consciousness. Material poverty and social dysfunction are merely visible [on the] surface of a deep pool of internal suffering. The underlying cause of that suffering is alienation – separation from our heritage and from ourselves. Indigenous nations are slowly dissolving with the continuing loss of language, land, and young people. Although the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island - the land now called Canada and the United States – have survived the most severe and extended genocide in human history, the war is not over yet. (Alfred, 1999, p. xv)

Alfred's (1999) approach to decolonization, together with wisdom of Elders and teachers from many different Anishinabe nations, is that all people become educated both in the ways of our ancestors and in new knowledge and skills of today required to carry our communities forward. The objective of decolonization will be accomplished based on principles of resistance and of restoration of an indigenous political culture. Alfred (1999) challenges us to act: "Don't preserve tradition - live it. Let us develop a good mind [*Meno-Bimaadziwin*] and do what is

necessary to heal the damage done to us and bring back to life the culture of peace, power, and righteousness that is the indigenous way" (p. 145) and necessary for transformative work at the community level. Alfred and other scholars in support of indigenous causes (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Deloria, 1991; Benton-Banai, 1988; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, and Archibald, 1997; Toulouse, 2007) would have readers understand that it is not enough to imagine a better future for Canada's native peoples without a plan and commitment to action.

Devon Abbot Mihesuah (Oklahoma Choctaw Nation) **& Angela Cavendar-Wilson** (Wahpetunwan Dakota Nation)

Indigenizing the academy is an important and effective strategy in bringing about awareness of the effect of colonialism and oppression. Accordingly, Mihesuah & Cavendar-Wilson (2004) assert that colonialism is

> the major historical evil that our people have had to face; and we understand it mainly in material terms, as political injustices, domination, dispossession of lands, or economic oppression. Some understandings of colonialism touch on how some of the psychological or spiritual effects of all of the material loss, manifested in dysfunctional or self-destructive behaviours. But I believe that the true meaning of 'colonialism' emerges from a consideration of how we as Indigenous peoples have lost the freedom to exist as indigenous peoples in almost every single sphere of our existence [e.g., education]. (p. 89)

Because of this reality it is essential that native people gain an increased level of awareness of the degree of oppression and its impact and acquire skills to challenge and work against it.

Mihesuah & Wilson (2004) believe that indigenous academics can be highly effective as teachers who empower native students with a truthful sense of identity.

> The core of our existence as nations is in our traditional cultures. The strongest weapon that we have against the power of the state to destroy us at the core is truth. We need to turn away from defining our purpose and methods by Western academic standards and be accountable to our cultural heritage and to our people. We need to perform self-sacrifice as a warrior places himself or herself between danger and the people. Where the obvious dance today is assimilation, I say this: to be a real Indigenous intellectual, one must be a warrior of the truth. Fulfilling our purpose means engaging in resistance with the moral purpose of contending against imperial and commercial power and its suffusion into the way we live our lives and see the world. (p. 95)

Bringing truth and empowerment to the community is essential for positive change in native communities. Mihesuah & Wilson understand that the leadership of indigenous academics can be a powerful force that initiates transformative action at the local community level. It will be demonstrated in chapter five of this thesis that the influence of an indigenous academic can indeed be a powerful and transformative force at the community level.

Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux Nation)

Deloria (1991) asserts that challenges to oppression come from being informed about oppression and also from having the opportunity to generate, engage with, and extend knowledge. Lack of access to knowledge and limited or no opportunity for knowledge creation is unethical, yet, unfortunately, as Deloria asserts, this practice persists within many native communities today.

> Western civilization, unfortunately, does not link knowledge and morality but rather, it connects knowledge and power and makes them equivalent. Today with an information `superhighway' now looming on the horizon, we are told that a lack of access to information will doom people to a life of meaninglessness -- and poverty. As we look around and observe modern industrial society, however, there is no question that information, in and of itself, is useless and that as more data is generated, ethical and moral decisions are taking on a fantasy dimension in which a `lack of evidence to indict' is the moral equivalent of the good deed. (p. 1)

Deloria (1991) highlights that a significant problem within education for native learners is the lack of opportunity to engage with knowledge in a meaningful and culturally relevant manner and this further distances native people from the success that many could be experiencing in education at the community level and beyond. When knowledge is validated outside of the native community, learning within the community becomes meaningless.

In efforts to assist native people in reclaiming the right to knowledge creation, Deloria (1991) asserts that native peoples need to be taught how to critically discern the world around

them to dispel erroneous notions and replace them with truth. This requires a cultural re-connection of children to the Elders, and everyone else in between.

Edward Benton-Banai (Ojibwe – Anishinabe)

Benton-Banai is an indigenous scholar who has accomplished much for the cause of Anishinabek people through his academic influence. In 1971, he founded the Red School House in Minnesota as an alternative education program for Anishinabe students from K-12. The program is modeled on curriculum that blends academics and native culture together. Here, culturally relevant programming is designed by native students, staff, parents, and the director, Eddie Benton-Banai. This engaged process has included native people at all levels of education and has therefore been highly successful in raising consciousness levels sufficient to foster a desire for increased transformative action.

A significant part of the success experienced at the Red School House is attributed to the large efforts aimed at increasing an overall awareness of the situations and realities of injustice experienced by native peoples throughout mainstream society and even at community-based levels. Fortunately, Native American intellectualism, motivated by increased levels of critical awareness, is a strong force sweeping throughout Turtle Island that is helping to challenge, through re-education, inaccuracies about native people and redefine what success in community-oriented education looks like.

In response to ineffective education systems that assault indigenous cultures, Benton-Banai (1988) attests that:

> education is like a weapon. Instead of guns, there exists school systems that ignore Indian history and culture; textbooks that falsely represent the settlement of this country; and movies and media that misunderstand Indian culture and portray Indian life in a shadow, token way. Still the purpose is the same: to absorb Indian people into the melting pot of American [and Canadian] society and to forget the real history of this country and the

> injustices done to its Native people. The old ways, these teachings, are seen as unnecessary to the modern world. It is becoming more and more evident today that many Americans feel the philosophy advocated by traditional Native people, the respect for all living things, is a roadblock to American progress. (p. 112)

A return to tradition in the sense of respecting and acknowledging indigenous knowledge has been the most effective way to rekindle a passion for learning amongst First Nation people. Benton-Banai (1988) explains how the increased engagement of community-based education stakeholders is making a positive difference within society in general.

> They [Native people] are finding their way to the Sweat Lodges, Spirit Ceremonies, Drum Societies, Midewiwin Lodges, Pipe Ceremonies, Longhouse Meetings, Sun Dances, and Kivas that have survived to this day.... people today seem to be trying to take control over their own lives and the destinies of their children. They are pushing for recognition of the hunting and fishing rights guaranteed to Native people through treaties with the United States [and Canada]. They are seeking payment for and restoration of stolen land. They are trying to re-establish traditional religious ceremonies as a day-to-day source of strength and way of living. They are protesting the existence of corrupt [government] and seeking recognition for traditional forms of Indian government. They are forming their own schools to balance the knowledge of modern survival with the knowledge of Native culture and philosophy. (p. 112)

The following are a consideration of indigenous scholars and works which have contributed to a rise in Native American intellectualism and therefore a cultural resurgence on Turtle Island: Alfred (1999) in *Peace, power, righteousness: An indigenous manifesto;* Alfred (2005) in *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*; and Grande (2004) in *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought. Red Pedagogy* is a response to European critical theory and a call for recognition of indigenous intellectual disciplines which have influenced thought and have been integrated into all cultures of the earth. Other indigenous scholars and works are McConaghy (2002) in *Rethinking Indigenous education: Culturalism, colonialism, and the politics of knowing;* Adams (1999) in *Tortured peoples: The politics of colonization;* Adams (1975) in *Prison of grass: Canada from the native point of view;* and Miller (2000) in *Skyscrapers hide the heavens*. It could be argued that the increase in indigenous

scholars advocating for culturally-based and culturally-relevant improvements to education has led to the development of successful models of research for transformative action.

Successful Models of Research and Action for Education of First Nation People

Models that have worked for Canada's native peoples have been models that recognize and value indigenous culture, languages, beliefs and values. Not surprisingly, many of the people responsible for the creation of such initiatives are native people themselves. Fortunately, there are increasingly numerous examples of culturally-based education models created by native people that provide effective ideals on how to promote culture and identity within organizations for the purposes of creating strength and success in community-oriented education. It is understandable therefore, from Anishinabe perspectives, that education has become the grounding force upon which numerous native organizations and nations (e.g., the Maori, Aborigines, and the Navajo) have initiated the transformation of harsh and inequitable realities within society and education into workable models of action and education for the benefit of the overall population.

There are several research initiatives in particular that provide valuable insight when considering culturally-based models that promote success for community-oriented education for First Nation people. These exemplary models, explained in greater detail below, are the *Restoration of Jurisdiction f*

or Education Project of the Union of Ontario Indians, and Bell, *et al.* (2004) and Fulford, *et al.'s* (2007) research on success in Aboriginal schooling. Other examples of research that provide successful models of action for education are Bell (2006), Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald (1997), Toulouse (2007), as well as research completed by the Canadian

Council on Learning (2007) that focuses upon holistic lifelong learning models for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. These examples will be considered in greater detail below.

Restoration of Jurisdiction for Education of the Union of Ontario Indians

The Restoration of Jurisdiction (ROJ) project of the Union of Ontario Indians (UOI) is a response to ongoing struggles that native people have experienced in relation to the loss of control of education over their life. As a result, the ROJ is committed to negotiating the transfer of control, through an aggregated system, back to First Nation people. This project is different from many others in that it is an idea that is not being imposed on the people at the community-level by either INAC or UOI. The ROJ proposes a project that is deeply grassroots and self-governed. In an information brochure of the ROJ, it is noted that the people within the organization anticipate that increased awareness and engagement at the community level can help restore and reclaim the law-making authority of the Anishinabe Nation (Niigan Zhaa-daa: Let's go forward, 2003).

It must be noted, however, that just because people are aware of something, they do not necessarily act upon that knowledge, especially if that action places people in a place outside of their comfort zone or in a position where privileged positions can be disturbed or interrupted. However, increased awareness of situations in need of improvement is indeed a step toward the possibility of responsive action. Regnier (1995) in his research on Aboriginal anti-racist pedagogy demonstrated that, in some cases, people are incited to act after awareness descended upon them via their participation in programs purposely designed to enhance and protect the culture. These same phenomena were also demonstrated to be true within Smith's (2000) research on transformative action with the Maori communities.

Community facilitators for the ROJ project use a form of action research within Aboriginal communities and have experienced increased participation, understanding, and contributions amongst First Nation community members (K. Schuyler, personal communication, February 17, 2005). Increased participation has led to an increase in dialogue and awareness. The ROJ community facilitators who work within UOI affiliated communities take direction from the communities at the local level and this input affects how individual First Nations will approach the goal of achieving increased jurisdiction over education.

This research approach is gradually working to create awareness at all levels of society; however, people must be encouraged and provided with the opportunity, through increased awareness and skills acquisition (e.g., cognitive and communicative), to critically reflect upon the many issues surrounding First Nation education. This includes the process of examining what one thinks about education and why one thinks that particular way. When people are encouraged to critically reflect and discuss issues, a dialogue is initiated, more ideas can circulate, and people can move closer to defining and creating workable and relevant solutions to problems. Action research facilitates awareness and consciousness-raising that helps research participants to better understand past and present circumstances sufficiently to move toward increased transformative action.

As Aboriginal communities confront the challenges of assuming increased influence over education that exist within and outside of their communities, it becomes imperative to consider what kind of schooling should be developed and offered and how best the needs of First Nation children and their families can be met. Apart from or in addition to the proposed Anishinabek Education System wherein member nations of the UOI plan to be united under the "*Kinomaadswin* Education Body" to support the delivery of education programs and services

(Union of Ontario Indians, 2007b), or through an arrangement with established mainstream education systems, action is required to effect needed changes to education for First-Nation people.

The Restoration of Jurisdiction project of the Union of Ontario Indians is committed to increasing the jurisdiction over education for First Nation people. However, two ROJ community facilitators reported that it has been difficult to challenge "old" thinking and introduce "new" thinking regarding education amongst many First Nation people (K. Schuyler, personal communication, February 14, 2005; G. George, personal communication, October 04, 2003). I am not surprised by this finding at all as the information considered up to this point in this chapter strongly suggests that people need to come to increased levels of awareness to become sufficiently critically aware to generate a response. At the same time, other research considered within this review suggests that people are increasingly likely to become critically aware when there are motivating forces present within the community itself (e.g., participants within community-based research programs).

In general, research produced by the ROJ has verified a desire at the community level within UOI member nations for increased involvement in meaningful education. Ideally, all education stakeholders must develop a thorough understanding of the implications of the ROJ's project objectives, and objectives of all other education systems possibly identified as one with which to partner. Understanding fundamental goals and objectives is important and can initiate much good between native and non-native people as has been demonstrated through the successful implementation of Grant's holistic approach to indigenous studies for use with Aborigines and non-native educators in *My Land. My Tracks* (Exley & Bliss, 2004). The ROJ's proposed aggregated system of education can be a stimulating incentive for increased awareness

and action as First Nation people undertake critical reflections and evaluations necessary to justify and develop schools that provide cultural relevancy necessary for student success.

Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE)

Although work sponsored by organizations like the SAEE are not entirely in support of educational, social, and political ideas espoused by many First-Nation groups, the research generated under their funding is helpful in identifying areas of "success" and challenges that pertain to educational achievement in First Nation communities. Although Said and Freire would not agree that success can be attained for everybody using definitions of success created and espoused by dominant perspectives of society, reports generated from the SAEE that measure success according to western standards can be useful when considered through a critical perspective.

The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE) has been instrumental in initiating studies to help educators better understand issues that native people face in education. Accordingly, a research project titled *Sharing our success: Ten case studies in Aboriginal schooling* has emerged (Bell, *et al.*, 2004). A significant part of this project's success has been elaboration of case studies of ten "excellent schools" with high numbers of First-Nation students for consideration. Within *Sharing our success,* research participants have had their perspectives considered and this is important, as Bell, *et al.* (2004) claim, because "any review of the research on Aboriginal schooling for the purposes of informing practice and policy in Canada must encompass [culturally-relevant] approaches and stakeholder perspectives"(p. 31).

In addition to the insight provided above, Bell, *et al.* (2004) identified other reasons that have contributed to failure in education for First Nation people:

1) Federal policy has been moving in the right direction since 1972, but federal authorities have failed to take the decisive steps necessary to restore full control [jurisdiction] of education to Aboriginal people;

2) Nearly 70% of Aboriginal education has been in the hands of provincial or territorial authorities, with few mechanisms for active accountability to Aboriginal people and the involvement of parents [again, a jurisdictional issue];

3) Aboriginal people have been restrained [funding and jurisdiction] in their efforts to implement curriculum that would transmit their linguistic and cultural heritage to the next generation;

4) Financial resources to reverse the impact of past policies have been inadequate. (p. 34)

Although the research of Fulford, *et al.* (2007) was a continuation of a series of school profiles initiated by Bell, *et al* (2004), these documents have yet to raise the question of how success is defined within First Nation communities. Certainly success as measured by values dominant within western society has been and can be tracked; however, how do we define what success means to First Nation people, and how can that notion be supported and actualized?

These research reports of the SAEE can be valuable if they are used to model examples of how to honour First Nation people through the inclusion of viewpoints at the community-level. The case study approach used within SAEE studies help to provide an awareness raising component wherein readers have the opportunity to understand the uniqueness and diversity that exists within First Nation communities from all across Canada. Stories of pride and achievement shared from different schools and communities situate educators to better understand issues in efforts to improve schooling for First Nation people according to the wishes of the people.

I am conscious that the SAEE may have some other agenda concerning First Nation education through the creation of these reports (Bell, *et al.* 2004 & Fulford, *et at.* 2007) and it may not have been created for the purposes that I would hope for, but for the merits they possess, I value these reports as examples of models to emulate in helping research participants become

critical consumers of information. This is exactly what my thesis is about: raising notions of critical awareness that can lead to action and encourage people to think differently about success in education especially when many have been indoctrinated to believe that the "white way" is the "right way."

Other Anishinabe Research Models - Bell (2006)

Another helpful example of research as a model that helps encourage positive change for community education is Bell's (2006) *Just do it: Providing Anishnaabe culture-based education.* This research provides the impetus for the continued development of education that is culturally relevant to learners. This is a helpful model of research providing compelling evidence that education programs that are responsive to the needs of the community can produce increased levels of success for most stakeholders. Again, within this research, success is mirrored from the example of mainstream society. However, this model of research focuses on the purposeful inclusion of culture-based Anishinabe programming as a vehicle to promote success and to further the strength of the culture through awareness among all education stakeholders.

Bell's (2006) study demonstrates that increased consciousness heightens the potential for increased transformation. This is demonstrated through the creation of the "*Anishnaabe Bimaadziwin* Cultural Healing and Learning Program" which has become a model for the creation of off-reserve culturally-based educational spaces for native children. This school has been designed to assist students in achieving academic parity with the public school system while developing strong notions of their Anishinabek cultural identity.

It would seem that if students can succeed within mainstream educational settings that they have been incorporated into the hegemonic culture. Although this may be the case for some

students all is not lost especially if one considers the personal stories of many indigenous academics wherein they have demonstrated that a thorough understanding of non-native culture through western based education systems is necessary to be able to resist assimilation effectively.

Freire and Said both experienced the necessity of knowing both worlds to be able to effectively speak against oppression when they detected it. It has been established that a cultural renaissance is happening on Turtle Island because native people have come into an awareness of the abuse they have been put through via oppressive systems of education. Native people are now, ironically, in a position through the use of their western-based credentials to do something about it and with authority to do so. This is my story anyway, and it is also the story of so many other indigenous scholars.

The models of successful research and projects considered so far help readers to envision the possibility of better education for First Nation people and communities when learning is culturally relevant and representative of the student population. It is also important to consider projects that provide readers with a true sense of the effort required to help make such innovative projects a reality. The profile of the Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan provides this clear example.

Joe Duquette High School

Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, and Archibald (1997) provide a glimpse of the realities of working for change in the face of challenges and great odds in *Making the spirit dance within: Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal community*. The profiling of this successful alternative education program helps to increase awareness and empower other native communities to create culturally relevant programming where none exist. Accordingly, the Joe

Duquette High School in Saskatoon offers an educational option to students who have not experienced success in mainstream education programs. There are two aspirations at Joe Duquette. One is to provide a high quality secondary school experience for native students, and the second is to encourage the physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth of every student and staff member at the school.

> Healing of the self and ultimately the family and the community is a central objective at Joe Duquette using a medicine wheel model where spirituality and healing are central to the school. The vision statement of the school has strong emphasis on healing: The Joe Duquette High School is a healing place which nurtures the mind, body, and soul of its students. The school offers a program of studies which affirms the contemporary world of Indian people. The school supports the uniqueness and creativity of the individual and fosters self-actualization in a cooperative environment. Our focus is on healing all members of the school. (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, and Archibald, 1997, p. vii)

It has been my experience that many alternative education programs for native students have been designed to accommodate and incorporate the culture of the students directly into the programming and philosophy. This could be because communities are given the latitude to intervene in designing education programs only after students have failed out of the public school system. The program that I observed at Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, the research community of this project, and alternative education programming within my own community, allow the student to approach education in a culturally relevant manner. This may help to explain the success that many native students experience within alternative education programs at the community-level.

Examples of how success (e.g., personal and cultural development and attainment of transferable skills) is accomplished through programs like that of Joe Duquette High school are further extended through a paper given by Toulouse (2006a) at the Circle of Light Conference in Toronto (November 2007) hosted by the Ontario Ministry of Education and INAC..

Anishinabe Models of Intervention

In her paper titled *Supporting Aboriginal student success: Self-esteem and identity, a living teachings approach,* Toulouse (2006a) builds upon the success identified within programs that are culturally-based. She makes connections between notions of aboriginal student success, and self-esteem and identity. Within this culturally informed approach, Anishinabe good life teachings (*Meno-Bimaadziwin*) are used to facilitate improvements for all education stakeholders. The seven "Good Life" teachings (respect, love, bravery, wisdom, humility, honesty and truth), which are a part of the Anishinabe notion of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, and their implications for success in education for Anishinabek students will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

Toulouse extends the ideas presented within this paper with a proposed framework of success for Anishinabek lifelong education in another paper titled *Aboriginal students and self-esteem: A framework for success in lifelong education* (2007).

> Building Aboriginal student self-esteem is rooted in honouring 'who Aboriginal students are' and 'where they have come from'. This calls upon us as educators to actively engage, and demonstrate respect for, Aboriginal teachings and the Aboriginal vision of education as a lifelong process. Within this process, 'learners' include children, youth, adults, and the Elders/ Elderly. Thus, Aboriginal education fosters a deep sense of community. It also offers rich opportunities to support learners across many dimensions integrating their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth. (p. 1)

Toulouse's endorsement of culturally based programs is based upon her own personal experience as an Anishinabe person, student, and educator.

Anishinabe life philosophy maintains that people can live together, side-by-side, in this world and still maintain their distinctiveness without compromising relationships with others who are different. I, as an Anishinabe person, similarly appreciate the example provided by the Haudenasaunee Two Row Wampum Treaty wherein it is modeled how different nations can live side by side in parallel harmony without interfering or forcing ideology upon the other. The Two

Row Wampum treaty is an agreement made between the Haudenosaunee (Five Nations of the Iroquois) and the Dutch in 1613. This treaty was recorded in a wampum belt (made with shell beads from the North Atlantic). The pattern of the belt consists of two rows of purple wampum beads against a background of white beads. The purple beads represent a Haudenosaunee canoe and a European ship going down the river of life together. The vessels run parallel but never touch. Peace between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch settlers is represented by the three white stripes in between the purple (Degiya'goh Resources, 2008).

I state the importance and value of togetherness in society while maintaining distinctiveness because it is possible and desirable amongst many native peoples. Such a relationship requires mutual reciprocity based upon respect and information. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) recognizes the value of appreciating and acknowledging "others" and has therefore developed, in partnership with native people, a holistic lifelong learning model to assist educators in understanding how success is measured in First Nation, Inuit, and Métis learning.

Holistic Lifelong Learning Models - Canadian Council on Learning

The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit holistic lifelong learning models represent the link between native lifelong learning and community well-being, and can be used as a culturally friendly framework for measuring success in lifelong learning. This model is supported by the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit *Tapiriit Kanatami*, the Métis National Council, and the Native Women's Association of Canada as it provides opportunity for Aboriginal peoples in Canada to redefine meanings of success in education in culturally relevant ways:

> Increasingly, Aboriginal communities are administering educational programs and services formerly delivered by non-Aboriginal governments. They are developing culturally relevant curricula and community-based language and culture programs, and creating their own educational institutions. Yet as Aboriginal people work to improve community well-being through lifelong learning, they recognize the need to identify appropriate measurement tools that will help them access what is working and what is not.
>
> Redefining how success is measured in First Nation, Inuit, and Métis learning will be accomplished in four ways:
> -outline the key characteristics of holistic lifelong learning for First Nation, Inuit, and Métis;
> -identif[y] data gaps and challenges that limit non-Aboriginal understanding of Aboriginal learning;
> -present three Holistic Lifelong Learning Models for First Nations, Inuit and Métis; and
> -propose how each model can be used to develop a national, holistic framework for measuring lifelong learning. (Canadian Council of Learning, 2007, para. 3)

This model is included within this literature review as it provides an example of how mainstream education systems can partner with native communities and incorporate culturally-based and indigenous knowledge, learning strategies, and native philosophies for the improvement of education for native learners at all levels. What should be emphasized is the fact this particular initiative is the product of ongoing partnerships with native and non-native education stakeholders. These models put forward by the Canadian Council on Learning represent a more holistic approach to learning and assessment that is representative and reflective of native culture.

Conclusion

The literature says that change is possible when people are made aware of issues at fundamental base levels and when there is an increase in critical consciousness combined with an increase in skills that motivate people to transformative action. The research is clear that transformative work within education for native people is increasingly successful through the facilitation of increased levels of awareness at the community level coupled with opportunities to

act in meaningful (culturally-relevant) ways (e.g. through aggregation) and, perhaps, in collaboration with established systems of education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: ANISHINABE *MENO-BIMAADZIWIN* ACTION RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter identifies the research methodologies Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research that were blended and used within this research project to create a new culturally-based research methodology called Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research. To best understand how *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research come together, their individual attributes are examined. Within this chapter, attention is given to the internal navigation system of *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* which is reliant upon Anishinabe traditional teachings, and its approach to the interpretation of knowledge. This review begins with an overview of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and moves onward to focus on how it can be applied within school and society. The second half of this chapter provides a review of action research, and its purpose and principles as a methodology. Noteworthy principles of action research, which include reciprocity, relevancy, and reflexivity, are outlined.

This chapter concludes with an explanation of how a blending of the notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* with action research forms a culturally-appropriate methodology (termed Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research) that, when employed, results in increased participation within education for First Nation people.

Methodology

It is argued that "research" in general has had a negative impact on many native people all across Turtle Island (Deloria, 1991; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). It also became increasingly obvious through comments received from the research participants in this project that there were

serious trust issues surrounding the concepts of "research" and "researcher." These problems centered on patterns of disregard for the local ethos, issues of authority, protocols and ownership, and the primacy accorded to conventions of western-based knowledge (Deloria, 1991). By not evaluating their own ethics and methodologies researchers have marginalized native people as the "other" and further distanced them from being a part of any solution.

To help overcome the problems left behind after poorly conducted research with native people, Oakes, Riewe, Wilde, Dubois, Edmunds (2003) recommend the following approach to help create more positive attitudes toward research in general:

> It is important to not only adopt the methods appropriate to the community but to appreciate an alternative epistemology. Anybody can learn by doing something, but to break away from a particular frame of mind and attempt to explore another is the challenge. Traditional knowledge has a spiritual component and in order to appreciate the nature of an individual's or community's spirituality a 'researcher' should...[recognize]...the context and truth of the knowledge [as interpreted and determined by people from the community using Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a guide]. All depends on how in-depth a 'researcher' wants to submerge into the lifestyle and learn about a traditional knowledge. A researcher must be flexible in personality and belief and spend lots of time working with the mentors to experience a more accurate sense of traditional knowledge. Take any opportunity to interact with the community as much as possible. Social functions such as feasts and Pow Wow's provide a fantastic chance to ask for people's blessing to proceed with the project. Offering elders or any community member your services shows initiative and advances the principles of reciprocity and respect. (p. 189)

In consideration of the recommendations of Oakes, *et al.* (2003) and the concern expressed by community members during my preliminary visits to the research community, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, I knew that if I wanted to make a positive difference through this research project, the research methodology would have to be one that openly addressed concerns surrounding research for and about native people.

Identifying the Need for a Better Research Methodology

My interest now is not in reiterating socio-economic challenges clearly identified in numerous reports that are available (e.g., *RCAP*, 1996; *National Council of Welfare*, 2007) but in

understanding why such problems persist at the local community level. I am interested in seeking culturally appropriate (familiar, community-approved, Anishinabe-rooted) and community-oriented (derived by the community) remedies to ongoing issues within education for First Nation people. In endeavouring to select a culturally appropriate and community-based methodology to help investigate success in education within a First-Nation community school, I needed to spend time with the research community to get a sense of who the people were and what the issues were that pertained to education.

I came into the research not fully confident about what methodology to use. I felt I needed to spend a significant amount of time engaging with community members in general through interactions (e.g., volunteerism) within the school and community. This informal effort to initially enter into the community to obtain a better sense of who the people were and what their concerns were about, helped me to understand that the image of research had to be changed from that of being something that was ill-informed, non-consultative, non-participatory, and invasive to something friendly and familiar, helpful, and involving. My search for such a methodology led me to consider "appreciative inquiry."

Appreciative Inquiry

> The appreciated world came into being with the development of man's capability for self-reflection, a faculty encompassing much more than just thinking. It holds the world—the physical, social, and spiritual aspects of man's world—as we view it not just through the understanding that our mind composes of it but through all forms of experience. It embraces our appreciation of what this world can do to and for us, and what we can do to and for it... Thus, the appreciated world becomes the motor for change induced by human action. (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000, para. 4)

Appreciative inquiry, as a relatively recent approach within western organizational studies, has its roots in action research and organizational development. Appreciative inquiry research, as noted within the quote above, is directed towards appreciating what it is about the

social world that is positive, and exploring it. Contrary to "problem-solving" research, appreciative inquiry represents a movement towards a social constructionist position in which the social world is created and constructed by debates and questions that we have about it (Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swimburne, & Wilding, 2002; Cooperrider, 1999). Appreciative inquiry asks the question, "What is working well around here?" instead of "What problem are you having?" As a mode of inquiry, it fosters reciprocity between participants and researchers (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000).

Appreciative inquiry, or a model similar to it, would be appropriate for community-oriented research within native communities because of the potential it would bring to increase critical engagement of native people in issues concerning student achievement (Elliott, 1999, p. 14). For example, in efforts of community members to find out what works well, they can begin to formulate the basis of their success using something similar to appreciative inquiry's four "D" cycle (Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver) (New Paradigm, 2008, para. 4). This approach is similar to Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin's* reflexivity component and similar to action research's cyclical approach to research using a "plan, act, observe, and reflect cycle." It is my view that the enhanced imaginative capacity of this methodology and related methodologies (e.g., Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research) can make a major contribution to setting the stage for increased success and academic achievement in education for native students.

Appreciative inquiry helps to undo the effects of research that disempowers the research community through excessive outside intervention and control. This type of intrusive research, commonly experienced by native groups, possesses the tendency to leave the people feeling discouraged, inadequate, and incapable of solving their own problems. An appreciative inquiry

approach or one similar to it "shifts away from the problem-oriented methods toward processes that build on community achievements, existing strengths, and local skills ... to help communities create a shared vision of an equitable and sustainable future and then move toward it through locally initiated and managed project activities" (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000, para. 2).

This positive approach to research outlined above is reflective of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* in terms of a life guiding methodology practiced by many Anishinabe people in effort to live a "good life." Our aim at the community level should be to seek out and test educational research processes that are conducive to increased participation, identify areas of potential and current success, and thereby challenge oppressive notions, ideas, mindsets that both native and non-native people may have concerning education for First-Nation people.

The consideration of a variety of research methodologies, when compared with needs I observed while visiting the community, led me to consider action research as an approach for this research. After coming to understand a bit more about action research, I recognized that it was already an underlying aspect of research presently available within Anishinabe society in the form of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as I understand and use it. I then came to acknowledge the importance of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a powerful and useful force that encapsulates many aspects of Anishinabe philosophy and epistemology sufficient to form a research methodology that supported awareness and action. Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* as I understand it from listening and learning from Elders and reading literature from other native scholars (Rheault, 2006; Bell, 2006; Toulouse, 2006), can be the basis for a research methodology that is culturally-based and reflexive.

Due to their propensity to further increased levels of consciousness (awareness) and participation-based action, action research and Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* became a culturally logical choice of methodology to assist Anishinabe people within the research community to assume a more active role in community development through education in community schools. Within this research equation, I, as the researcher, was merely a facilitator of the much larger role and responsibility of community research to be done by and for the people. I, as a research facilitator engaged within this culturally-based methodology of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research, acknowledged what Oakes, *et al.* (2003) assert about the ideal researcher within a native community. That person should be a researcher who is a committed participant and learner throughout the process and is both a co-researcher and co-learner. Anishinabe philosophy and epistemology strongly support such co-researching and co-learning as part of a holistic approach to education.

Central to participatory research is the role of strengthening the awareness of the people in their own abilities. When this kind of methodology is applied within a native community, it is an important step forward that helps people move past the hurt of acultural research. This research methodology is more than a standard action-research methodology in that within the framework of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* local culture is infused into the overall factor or equation for success.

A significant strength of this research is the success associated with the blending of action research with Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* to address issues of awareness and improvement within First Nation communities. To better appreciate the coming together of these two research methodologies, one should endeavour to understand each separately. I will define *Meno-*

Bimaadziwin and action research separately later, but I first explain the need for transformative research with First Nation communities.

Need for Transformative Research with First Nation Communities

For reasons already mentioned, many native people have chosen to remain uninformed or be "resistant" participants, rather than becoming informed and equipped with the knowledge to make change. Hence, failure to collaborate, especially amongst community members, adds to initial problems and further complicates issues. According to Cook (2004)

> ...neglecting to recognize the need for ongoing collaboration or co-labouring/ toiling together... amongst those who influence policy and organisational structures can leave traditional boundary walls standing with practitioners [and other education stakeholders] trying to remove them stone by stone. (p. 95)

In other words, real change requires the informed help of everyone.

As a teacher, administrator, school board member, and a parent of two children in a First-Nation school who desires organizational improvements to education, I can well relate to Cook's (2004) position and identify with the sentiments and frustration expressed when attempting to address and challenge issues at the community level without adequate understanding and/or support from members of the community. How to incite interest and action in education at the community level has therefore become a guiding focus for me as I endeavour to explore success in education for First-Nation people.

A Culturally Appropriate Methodology

Much consideration has gone into the methodology guiding the overall process of this research. Based upon consideration of the overall needs of First Nation people within education, as the people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and I see them (e.g., a redefinition of education that is meaningful and responsive to the culture of the community while maintaining

consistency with mainstream school systems), and in response to the findings of the literature review, it was clear that the research had to allow for the use of culturally-appropriate methods including self-reflection and encourage action based upon that reflection for the purpose of finding meaning and therefore responsible change. Baskin (2006) asserts that such methods can include oral traditions, prayer, fasting, dream interpretation, ceremonies, and silence. Our ancestors passed on knowledge of these methods through generational teachings.

Although I value these methods outlined by Baskin (2006) and research participants, I did not encounter a detailed explanation of how research participants in my study came to be informed through the explicit use of traditional methods. This does not mean that people did not use traditional methods to influence their understandings; however, it did remind me of the ambivalent effect of my insider-outsider status on the disclosure of information of this nature. Another point to consider is that within Anishinabe culture many Elders do not share information with just anyone at any time. This is especially true about traditional teachings. Instead, Elders wait until the student demonstrates a desire to learn more for the purposes of making improvements to their own life or the lives of others.

In the example of this research, the Elders and members of the general population (due to time constraints) did not have an opportunity to get to know me on a deep personal level wherein they could sufficiently ascertain my own intimate readiness for access to some privileged knowledge (e.g., how knowing can be established through traditional methods such as oral traditions, prayer, fasting, dream interpretation, ceremonies, and silence). It must be stated that it can sometimes take years for a person to prepare sufficiently before Elders would consider him or her ready for a sharing of knowledge of traditional methods. Unfortunately, within the limited

time scope of this research, I did not have the time to develop such a rapport with Elders or other community members.

When considering a methodology for this project, I was also mindful of how knowledge is defined within many Anishinabe communities. Therefore, I wanted to use a methodology that respects how the Anishinabe culture views "knowledge" through an epistemological and philosophical lens. In trying to understand how knowledge is interpreted from native vantage points, I considered what Ermine (1995) had to say about epistemology: "Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self" (p. 108). The self is an important part of Anishinabe beings, and, therefore, self-reflection is an important component of knowledge creation. Self-reflection and increased critical self-awareness are needed to help find answers to problems as people individually and collectively contemplate what they know (Freire, 2002). Critical self-reflection is clearly not uniquely an aboriginal way of generating knowledge; however, it is a fundamental component of knowledge construction that is wisely made use of within this research in efforts to help facilitate meaningful changes at the community level and beyond.

An indigenous epistemology centers on each individual's inherent ability for introspection and her/his ability to act upon personal revelations. This way of thinking is reflective of how I understand and use Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a viable research methodology. In the sense of assisting individuals to become participatory and reflective of reality and therefore in positions enabling increased tendencies for transformative action, *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research mesh together naturally producing an effective and culturally familiar methodology that is culturally-sensitive and conducive of action based upon reflection.

At this point, I will provide overviews of how I interpret both *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research in accordance with the objective of my research to develop a methodology that emphasizes increased community-based awareness levels and responsive action based upon reflection.

What is *Meno-Bimaadziwin?*

As explained in various places already within the text, the word *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is being used within this research project as a label for aboriginal philosophies and ideas of holism and balance. It is also being used as a term that provides a cultural epistemology to help orient the nature and scope of content and knowledge from an Anishinabe perspective. It may be a linguistic distortion to treat the words *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as possessing all of these significations; however, with my clarification of all of its applications, I believe that the term and concept of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* helps readers to better understand the importance of a holistic and integrative approach to education for First-Nation people.

It must be noted here that my approved ethical review protocol stipulated that all the participants from the research community would be anonymous. However, in the course of my research, one individual specifically asked that I use his name and position in my thesis in order to clearly identify him with the position he was taking and the views he expressed. In my judgment, and in the judgment of the ethical review committee when I presented this development to them, I deemed that this posed no negative implications for him or the research community. With his expressed request for identification, and upon the written permission of the Ethics Research Office, I identify Eli Baxter, who is also the culture and language teacher at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School.

The definition of the Anishinabe "concept" of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is complex yet simple at the same time. Eli Baxter (personal communication, October 18, 2007) explains that within Anishinabe philosophy everybody experiences "life" in varying degrees based upon various circumstances. In life, we sometimes go off the "good path", but we can always choose to return. It is our choice to stay on this path or to wander off, but ultimately when we fail to learn a life lesson, we are fated to repeat the lesson until we get it right or until we go on into the spirit world. In this definition, Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* functions also as an epistemology which helps to orient an understanding of the nature of knowledge, according to Anishinabe ways of being, and its presuppositions and foundations, and, to a large extent, its validity.

According to Anishinabe teachings, on our way through life, we experience "good" and "bad," but we keep on going. The concept of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* teaches us that we must stop and reflect upon each experience so that we fully know the difference between right and wrong, and can therefore make better decisions in other parts of our journey through life. This reflexive approach, premised upon reflection in response to life through *Meno-Bimaadziwin* requires that we be active participants in life, working to make things better for ourselves and all others as we see fit, collectively. Simply stated, *Meno-Bimaadziwin* means combining active participation in life, reflection, and work for a common good. This approach to life may not be that much different from the basic moral imperatives of virtually all the world's great religions; however, *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* as a combination of culturally based attributes, is what is important to many native people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and therefore an empowering and useful vehicle or methodology to help bring about meaningful change at the community level and beyond.

According to the political manifesto of the Union of Ontario Indians (2006), *Bimaadziwin* is a sacred concept about living in harmony, health, and well-being through our individual and collective balance of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self. Balance is attained through organization within life and this organization is dependent upon reflection. What this means on an individual basis is variously interpreted; however, what is common to *Meno-Bimaadziwin* at a larger level is the importance of reflection and ensuing response. Reflection is needed to understand the self and the responses of the self in relation to the environment sufficiently to be able to act on that information to help ensure a "good life." According to Rheault (1998), "*Bimaadziwin* [as an application of Anishinabe philosophy used as a methodology for increased culturally-based understanding] is the idea of the unity and dignity of all beings" (p. 111). To me, this means that it is always good to walk a life that is respectful and in balance, together with all others, where all areas of our being are equally considered and important. Similarly, this holistic approach is how education, according to many Anishinabe educators, should also be approached (Bopp, 1985; Rheault, 1998; Solomon, 1990).

The concept of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is intricately interwoven throughout Anishinabe teachings. At the core of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is reflection and action. As we take the time to reflect upon our life and the experiences that come and go throughout our journey through life, we gain insight into our self and can therefore choose how to respond in a way that keeps us on the "good path" or alternatively on a path of imbalance. The "good path" is a state of mind and state of being that promotes total wellness of the entire being. Staying on the "good path," also known as the "Red Road," is a lifelong objective.

Eli Baxter explains that in his experiences as an Ojibwe culture and language teacher within a community school, he sees and frequently initiates opportunities to help equip

Anishinabe children and families with skills needed for them to use as they endeavour to walk a good path: "People need language together with an understanding of where that language comes from and what it means. Being rooted in the Anishinabe culture and language provides grounding necessary for a strong identity" (personal communication, October, 18, 2007).

Application within School and Society

Although *Meno-Bimaadziwin* has a strong philosophical foundation, its applications are quite methodological in terms of research. For example, Elders help us to understand the difference between good and bad by telling us stories (oral tradition) to which we listen and then we decide for ourselves how to live. One way to infuse traditional teachings and values into the community is by bringing traditional teaching and values into the school. People need to fully understand why traditional teachings are coming into the school because many have been indoctrinated into believing in a destructive dichotomy of good and evil. If people understand that returning to traditional knowledge, defined as sacred traditional information about spirituality, medicine, life philosophy (e.g., *Meno-Bimaadziwin*), customs, protocol, and more, will protect our society from acculturation, there will be less fear and ensuing opposition.

Rheault (1998) tries to explain the importance of understanding an Anishinabe life philosophy as part of a culturally-based epistemology that can enrich our understanding of life from first cry to final breath:

> The Elders teach that each individual is complete at birth, and the task of life is to actualize each aspect of the potential person. Such potential includes seeking out, for instance, the meaning inherent in a person's name, one's clan, one's special abilities, and one's role in life. At a young age, a person is taught the ability of choice-making as she/he listened to the telling of cultural stories and traditional teaching which, in turn actualize the listener's potential as choice-makers. This leads to the special way of seeing mentioned by James Dumont (Ojibwe) (1992) which entail a primacy of perception, although this is a physical-spiritual perception that transcends space-time. Humans are beings that find meaning in a physical-spiritual existence. As we have seen, this

> philosophy is centered in Creation and all that it entails. All things are interconnected; one's place in Creation brings balance and belonging in the world. (p. 115)

Rheault's (1998) insight helps us to understand how people are gradually recognizing the "rigorous intellectual traditions inherent in traditional knowledge. This intellectual tradition of inquiry and discussion is central to Anishinabe philosophy. Anishinabe philosophy is also an expression of one of the main tenets of *Bimaadziwin*" (p. 92).

Eli Baxter, the Ojibwe culture and language teacher at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, likewise sees a significant place for the application of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* with education systems for First Nation people. He explains that "in school we tell kids the difference between good and bad, but ultimately the choice for application and action is theirs. If they make the wrong decision, they can reflect upon what they learned from traditional teachings and self-correct and get back onto the good path that consists of balance and health" (E. Baxter, personal communication, October 18, 2007). Ultimately, the actualization of traditional teachings led to consciousness about the need for *Meno-Bimaadziwin*. The strength of this conscious state of being is what was taken away from Anishinabe people through harsh governmental policies, including residential schooling. Due to this oppression, traditional knowledge went underground and Anishinabe people had diminished access to culturally appropriate guidance and direction.

Many Anishinabe communities in Ontario now have access to band-operated schools. The title "band-operated school" makes these schools sound like examples of successful self-governing institutions. However, many of these schools are "band-operated" in name only, lacking resources, funding, and jurisdictional control within a functionally aggregated First-Nations system sufficient to initiate a true sense of self-government. First Nations are striving for a meaningful place within education therefore First-Nations schools are ideal locations for

beginning to reinstate essential components of traditional teachings that encapsulate *Meno-Bimaadziwin*. With the idea of increased participation within education, as sought by the Union of Ontario Indians through the Restoration of Jurisdiction Program for Governance and Education (Union of Ontario Indians, 2007), there is an opportunity for native people to come together in solidarity, for example, through a proposed aggregated system of education (see for example, UOI, 2007b). This proposed development could be the start of the ability and desire for improved relationships with mainstream education systems.

Increasingly, people are coming to know more about the concepts I represent through *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a methodology to emphasize holism and balance. This is partly in response to the cultural and spiritual renaissance occurring within many native nations across Canada and the United States. Evidence of such an increased cultural and spiritual renaissance is noted within the literature reviewed in chapter two (e.g., Smith, 2000; Exley & Bliss, 2004; Manuelito, 2005; Alfred, 1999; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Deloria, 1991; Benton-Banai, 1988; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, and Archibald, 1997; Toulouse, 2007; Grande, 2004; McConaghy, 2002; Adams, 1975; Miller, 2000). This cultural and spiritual renaissance has led to an intellectual renaissance wherein Aboriginal people all across Turtle Island are returning to more wholistic ways of living, being, thinking, and reflecting. This has positive implications for education in that *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, as it is used within the context of this research, helps people reflect upon their present reality within education and other areas of life for the sake of improvement.

Application to the Research

This research project demonstrates that all areas of education must be equally addressed by all participants and I believe that the best way to do this is through the application of *Meno-*

Bimaadziwin, which calls for active participation, reflection, and reflexive response. Through reflection upon all areas of education, community living, and self, the likelihood of resultant responses to areas of concern highlighted through the reflective process increases and provides people with the initiative and incentive to act, especially in areas that are out of balance and therefore require attention. If people are encouraged and provided with skills like self-reflection and various communication tools to reflect upon and share such insight about their lives, especially from a culturally informed perspective, the chances of group action towards transformation are increased. For me, the desire to apply *Meno-Bimaadziwin* resonates with Freire's (2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Said's (1979) *Orientalism* as it helps to motivate people for action through increased "critical consciousness" and therefore the potential for meaningful change.

I see *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as action and relationship-oriented more than subject/ object oriented. This perspective is possible because *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is interpreted as a process and therefore a way to "walk a good life." It is understood that *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* as a reflective practice and life philosophy, goes beyond a cognitive exercise of examination, discussion, and description to include the lived-process of experiential knowledge actualized through living.

Meno-Bimaadziwin as a Methodology

Anishinabe culture asserts that all living and non-living entities have a right to exist in peace and harmony. This means that harmony and balance within and outside of the self is necessary. This also means that when it comes to solving problems, all points of view are considered. This philosophical approach requires that as many community members as possible participate in community problem solving to ensure that community-based and culturally-relevant outcomes, based upon reflection, ultimately lead to reflexivity and some degree of

action. Basically the application of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is necessary within education for First Nation people to fulfill the objectives established by the 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy which, in part, remains incomplete due to inaction at the community level.

Non-native organizational practices and policies (e.g., residential schools and the *Indian Act)* have gradually pushed native people away from reflexive, active participation, and involvement in education (Miller, 1996; Schissel, 2003; Ward, 2004; Whattam, 2003; Grant, 2004; Milloy, 1999). Despite such challenges, a return to a culturally-based philosophy of communal obligations initiated and sustained by an ever present struggle for survival against various forces of both internal and external oppression has provided native people with a participatory framework that has encouraged dialogue, networking, communication, action, and transformation (e.g., Smith, 2000; Exley & Bliss, 2004; Manuelito, 2005).

Many negative colonial policies, especially federal Indian education policy, have been destructive to native culture and have therefore affected adversely all areas of education, especially informed and critical participation within the community of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Cultural relevancy is necessary for arriving at more productive and proactive outcomes in education for First-Nation people. With this clear to me through feedback from my initial visits to the community, and in response to relevant literature (Rheault, 1998; Bopp, 1985; Solomon, 1990; Toulouse, 2006a), my investigation shifted away from trying to identify success, to engaging people in a process to assume greater degrees of ownership and involvement within education.

Navigation System within *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Which Represents Hallmark Values in Ojibwe Culture

Meno-Bimaadziwin is guided by the seven teachings of the Anishinabe: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. All are dependent on self-reflection since walking a good life means knowing and living a set of teachings that help to actualize potentiality. It is in this sense that I understand and use the word *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a term in reference to a cultural epistemology. Below is a chart created by Toulouse (2006a) that helps people achieve success in education through the guidance of the Seven Teachings:

Ojibwe Good Life Teachings and Implications for Education

Teaching	Implications for Education
Respect	By having high expectation for the Aboriginal student through honouring their culture, language, and worldview in our schools.
Love	By demonstrating our belief (as educators) that all Aboriginal students can and will succeed through our own commitment to their learning/ teaching styles.
Bravery	By committing to change our school curriculum through including the contributions, innovations and inventions of Aboriginal people.
Wisdom	By sharing our best practices on Aboriginal Education with each other through on-going Professional Development and Research that focuses on imbuing equity.
Humility	By acknowledging that we have limited knowledge about the diversity of Aboriginal People and accessing key First Nation resources to enhance that state.
Honesty	By accepting that we have failed Aboriginal students in the past and reviewing those factors to encourage change in the education system (increased parental/ guardian involvement, schools, teacher education).
Truth	By evaluating the school success (with measureable outcomes) of Aboriginal students as a key indicators of 'how' inclusive our curriculum and pedagogy really is.

(Toulouse, 2006a, p. 3)

Toulouse's overview of the application of the Seven Teachings helps to explain that if people walk according to these teachings, they can experience *Meno-Bimaadziwin* sufficiently to help them progress onto a new area of challenge in their life's calling. The essence of my use of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is, as Toulouse (2006a) presents it, to provide a broad avenue for communities to integrate contemporary knowledge with local practices. This is done by using *Meno-Bimaadziwin* simultaneously and interchangeably as a philosophy, epistemology, and a research methodology. Within each of these subsets, *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is always used to provide a cultural perspective needed to help Anishinabe people understand and appreciate the many areas of challenge concerning education within present day contemporary society.

Meno-Bimaadziwin and Knowledge

Meno-Bimaadziwin also has implications for how knowledge is interpreted. Rheault (1998) asserts that for Anishinabe people, "life is central rather than knowledge or wisdom" (p. 105). This would seem to be a significant departure from how mainstream society sees knowledge as power-giving to life. Knowledge, according to an Anishinabe outlook, is a step towards *Meno-Bimaadziwin* rather than the result of a good life. This interpretation of knowledge has implications for my research because knowledge is not the end product of our life. Instead, life can be a product of experiencing knowledge. For people to experience life, they need to participate in the best life possible and continually reflect and react in response to make it better. To me, *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is similar to action research in that people fare best when they can get involved and have a say and an active role in determining their life outcome.

What is Action Research?

Action research is not the easiest research methodology to define. After actively seeking a firm definition of this research approach, I have concluded that the definition of action research is fairly fluid, and largely dependent upon the nature of the project being undertaken. However, Carr & Kemmis' (1986) definition of action research is helpful.

> Action research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (p. 162)

Carr & Kemmis elaborate upon this definition to say that "action research recognizes that thought and action arise from practices in particular situations, and that situations themselves can be transformed by transforming the practices that constitute them and the understandings that make them meaningful" (p. 184). This implies that if stakeholders want improvements/ transformations to Anishinabe education, they must become aware of the issues within education and possess or develop the approaches needed to address them.

Mills (2000) points out that in action research "...information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment [and on educational practices in general], and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved" (p. 6). This definition asserts that the objective of action research as a research methodology is to enhance the lives and experiences of all education stakeholders. This definition well clarifies my intended use of action research, as the data that I obtained and shared through this research project significantly assisted research participants in moving closer to such endpoints.

The information that I have gathered about action research comes from a number of sources (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Mills, 2000; Robinson, 2003; Brydon-Miller, 2003; Lennie,

Hatcher & Morgan, 2003; Waters-Adams & Nias, 2003; Robertson, 2000). Below I highlight the key characteristics of action research as it applies to my research and as it compares closely to *Meno-Bimaadziwin.*

Purpose of Action Research

The purpose of action research as a research methodology is to help create an increased level of understanding through active work or action as co-researchers within a community. By engaging in action research, awareness levels of research participants are heightened. This encourages critical reflection, which is necessary to identify and challenge established mental constructs or beliefs. In this sense, action research is similar to *Meno-Bimaadziwin* in that native peoples are encouraged to return to more culturally appropriate forms of engagement and effective communication required for higher levels of participation, cooperation, and sharing. I have seen through my own experiences that traditional, oral-based societies respond more favorably to research that supports openness, sharing, and participation (Bressette, 2000).

Another interesting characteristic of action research is that it requires immersion in the focal problem of the research. Projects operating with an action-research methodology are driven by the community co-participants' and the "outside" researcher's passionate quest for understanding. Water-Adams & Nias (2003) report from their findings that "without this [passionate] attitude, and the commitment that follows from it, validity within the process will be compromised" (p. 290). Many parents who have children in First Nation school systems and other community education stakeholders have experienced, in one form or another, the negative effects of federal "Indian" policy for education (e.g., residential school, on-reserve day school, forced immersion into public schools, and even band-operated schools where First Nations

exercise little control). Any success experienced within these systems is debatable; however, one constant remains, and that involves the limited degree of ownership native people experience(d) concerning education. Parents want their children to have a better experience than they themselves had. When given the meaningful opportunity to become active change agents, through action research and *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, education stakeholders have an opportunity to approach improvements with interest and in a culturally appropriate way using traditional teachings as a grounding force. When interest in student growth and learning transforms into action and change, passion for community and participation can be reignited.

Action Research as a Methodology

As a methodology, action research challenges research participants to engage in areas of education in ways that many had never experienced before due to the dark ages that ensued upon the imposition of mainstream approaches to education on Canada's First Nation people. Action research provides an opportunity to free people to question hegemonic beliefs and cultural self-doubt. Accordingly, it is appropriate to view action research in this project as critical action research, also known as emancipatory action research. Like Robertson's (2000) research, which has clearly demonstrated that when education stakeholders are successfully challenged in their thinking via self-reflection (e.g., in a way that parallels my understanding and use of *Meno-Bimaadziwin)* regarding their practices, beliefs, or mental constructs, they can encounter a liberating or emancipatory experience that can provide encouragement for others to move forward in their thinking.

Critical action research, which is really a blending of the principles *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research, promises to help many Anishinabe education stakeholders evaluate and

reevaluate past, present, and future education practices with heightened understanding (critical awareness). I anticipated that this approach to research, which encourages dialogue, participation, critique, and review, would be emancipatory for people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation especially as growth is generated from discussion and challenge. Critical action research was especially helpful within the context of this research as participants ultimately came to ask difficult questions about education for First-Nation people and reflected critically upon their answers.

Principles of Action Research

According to Robertson (2000), there are three underlying principles of action research: reciprocity, reflexivity and reflection. Each of these principles of action is important within their application in Anishinabe culture.

Action Research and Reciprocity

Reciprocity or mutual benefit is the key to success within action-research initiatives. For reciprocity to occur there must be an exchange of information or views and the establishment and extension of dialogue. For example, as I worked with school leaders and other stakeholders at the interface of theory and practice, such praxis worked to enhance understanding and therefore participation in school. According to Robertson (2000), increased awareness and interaction are the objectives of reciprocity and are essential to effectual change (p. 309). Similarly, within *Meno-Bimaadziwin,* reciprocity between actual experiences and reflection is central.

Action Research and Relevancy

Action research requires relevancy for the research participants. Within this research project, participants were challenged in their thinking and benefitted from increased collaboration on subjects of relevance. This was evidenced through the desire for and creation of a new community vision statement for education. Not only were the objects of discussion relevant, meaning that presentation of issues led to furthering of discourse about those subjects for research participants, but the content and culturally relevant methods discussed within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation worked to increase levels of participation and resultant action. Robertson (2000) would concur, based upon the results of his research, that methods such as relevancy, "support and challenge [subjects] to reflect on their practice as they create new knowledge" (p. 310). Whyte (1991) also reports that in studies where subjects were fully involved in research of relevance and personal significance to their lives, they benefited in numerous ways from the research project itself, well before the final report was published.

Action Research and Reflexivity

Reflexivity can mean responsive self-awareness. This is a process of becoming "critically aware." According to Robertson's (2000) research, "...critical inquiry, which achieves reflexivity, is a mutually beneficial process for the development and self-awareness of both researcher and research [partners]" (p. 321). This process of becoming aware of situations and circumstances is crucially important for stakeholders as Robertson's (2000) research reveals that subjects "did begin to take actions to transform their own situations as they became more critically aware of current issues affecting them in their educational [organizations]" (p. 322). This process is also known as a "model-in-action" wherein we reflect, learn, and make

improvements. In linking this application to my research, it remains questionable if the research community can accomplish transformative action in education unless they are provided with additional skills to continue to critically reflect upon their lives and circumstances.

Reflection is essential to self-awareness. In fact, "...'reflection-in-action' consists of on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena" (Robertson, 2000, p. 323). The process of reflection involves including all research participants to help investigate the problems related to First Nation education. As insiders endeavour to understand the issues better, they are increasingly likely to come to an understanding of the need for change and how to do such in a meaningful way. Reflection as part of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research (and central to Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research) offers the participants opportunity to reflect and challenge the "known" and "given," and then reflect again on what might be in the future. The emancipatory outcome of such research and action is increased participation and greater awareness via dialogue.

New Hope: Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research

Blending

In reflection upon a variety of possible methodologies for use within this project, I was drawn to action research as this methodology was somehow already familiar to me. It was not until after I was already engaged with the research process that I realized that what I was doing with action research was what other Anishinabe writers label "*Meno-Bimaadziwin*." What is noteworthy about this initial "hint" of familiarity with action research, discovered through my own reflections, was that I was so consumed with validating my research project with a "recognized" (meaning recognized by western academic institutions) methodology that I became

blind to the research methodology that was available to me all along. For the most part, I have spent most of my life within western-based institutions and am not surprised that I systematically overlooked a culturally-oriented approach, meaning *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a research methodology, to research in the search for something more "legitimate."

Prior to this revelation, I determined that action research would be an acceptable research methodology for me to use for what I had hoped to accomplish. However, after my epiphany about *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, it made sense for me to take the participatory components of action research and the active reflection components of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and create a research methodology that was culturally familiar to the people within the research community and thus would encourage them to become more active within the role of research.

The literature also revealed to me that a familiar and responsive methodology, like this proposed blending of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research, was indeed useful within First-Nation communities because insightful community-based and culturally relevant approaches to research are already being conducted by insiders within First-Nation communities. Cook's (2004) research tells us that

> ...what is specific to action research as a form of inquiry is that it uses the experience of being committed, to trying to improve some practical aspect of a practical situation as a means for developing our understanding of it. It is research conceived and carried out mainly by 'insiders' by those engaged and committed to the situation, not by outsiders, not by spectators...(p. 80)

Cook offers a definition of the kind of research that I wish to conduct, as numerous approaches to generating knowledge by "outsiders" have failed to improve ownership and involvement of native people within community-based education.

There are benefits to amalgamating the two methodologies, especially when we consider the fact that government policies toward native people have historically created conditions and perceptions of powerlessness within native communities. Involvement within active research

processes help to build the analytical and critical skills of community members and in doing so returns control and power to the community. An action-research approach combined with *Meno-Bimaadziwin* encourages communities to integrate contemporary knowledge with local practices, thereby allowing people to develop and identify knowledge as relevant to improving communities.

As a note of clarity on the matter, to me, Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* as a methodology provides people with a method based upon critical reflection and reflective response as organizing principles underlying the study of education for First-Nation people. This system of organization provides a method by which to filter information in efforts to make their meaning relevant to the lives of Anishinabe people. As a philosophy, a system of beliefs accepted as authoritative by Anishinabe people, Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, helps to organize principles and underlying rules.

Likewise, Hoare, Levy, and Robinson (1993) claim that creating enabling conditions for greater control by natives of their own communities depends upon the creation of a more equal relationship with non-native society, requiring, in turn, the development of a critical consciousness among native people (p. 54). I interpret this to mean that methodology should also help to address power imbalances that exist within education systems.

As will become clear within this project, the following objectives of the research were accomplished through the application of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research:

- Investigating as a community the First-Nation local initiatives in education for the purpose of recommending relevant improvements;
- Raising awareness levels, creating and encouraging continued reflection, encouraging critiques of "taken-for-granted" knowledge and practices, and striving to move stakeholders to revise and improve the current education systems;

- Introducing new strategies to view education and leadership from a different perspective using consciousness-raising efforts like those employed by Freire and various feminists (Reinharz, 1992);
- Increasing collaboration amongst other First Nations and First-Nation community-oriented based education initiatives, with hopes of extending these relationships to new partnerships based upon mutual respect with mainstream education systems and society in general;
- Increasing collaboration with other mainstream education systems; and
- Initiating the start of a vision statement to base an action plan for improved successes for First Nation students and sharing/exchanging information about First Nation success in community-based education.

One aspect within both the methodology of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research is a cyclical and repeating pattern of reflection. Within this cycle are opportunities for observation, planning, action, and reflection (Kerr & Anderson, 2005). This method allows for reflection upon experience and information and then appropriate responsive action according to some desired outcome objective (e.g., to better define and support culturally relevant notions of success with the research community).

Summary

In reflection upon this chapter, I realized that I adopted a blended methodology that complemented the methodologies used by Anishinabe Elders and teachers from my life experiences and from the experiences of people within the research community. Elders and teachers taught me how to "learn by working" or by action as they themselves did when they were young. I believe that a blended approach to methodology was the best way, within this research, to gain a better understanding of and respect for traditional knowledge and its application within the world for the purposes of improvement. Oakes, *et al.* (2003) agree with the pursuit of culturally relevant research methodology saying that anyone "adopting such a

methodology will find themselves in the community for a long time and will actually learn by experiencing traditional knowledge" (p. 183).

CHAPTER 4

DOING THE RESEARCH

This chapter reflects on the research process. Such a discussion is important because it leads to an understanding on how data were theorized which, in turn, leads to the identification of emergent areas of focus that help to define aspects of culturally-relevant success for First-Nation education. This chapter will provide an account of how the data were collected using the methodology outlined in chapter three. The process (data collection and data analysis) used within this research is vital as process is a central component of both *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research.

Prior to an investigation of and engagement with data, I reviewed influences on data collection and analysis. Such topics include the influence of relevant literature and the impact of other relevant research models. I am careful to include consideration of researcher identity issues in relation to "insider" and "outsider" concerns. The participant-identification process within the research receives attention along with issues pertaining to data collection, participant engagement, and researcher interaction with participants.

Introduction

Because of the nature of this research, collection of data and analysis was an exciting part of the overall research process as it involved action on the part of the researcher and the research participants (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996; Herr & Anderson, 2005). According to the methodology of action research, data analysis requires the input of research participants (Hustler, Cassidy, and Cuff, 1986). The methodologies of action research combined with the notion of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* (Pflug, 2000; Rheault, 1998; Bell, 2006; Toulouse, 2006b) and

an awareness of the importance of Anishinabe cultural protocol and philosophy (Hilger, 1992; Peacock & Wisuri, 2002) were effective in facilitating the objective of orienting stakeholders to increased action through the consideration of factors that influence the understanding of successes in First-Nation education in the community school studied. Success was a point of initial focus that would provide opportunity for the furthering of dialogue. This action-oriented study was driven by favorable preliminary results of data collection, meaning that many community members were eager to analyze the effectiveness of community education as part of the process of identifying success.

Research has revealed many foci or patterns of success in relation to education for First-Nation communities. The use of qualitative methodologies like *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and action research strongly assisted with the identification of areas of focus that define success within First Nation education.

Introducing the Research Community

The research project took place on the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community which is approximately thirty minutes west of London, Ontario. It is a rural community set along the Thames River. It is neighbour to the Oneidas of the Thames across the Thames River, and also situated directly beside the Munsee-Delaware nation. Cultural diversity amongst these native communities is celebrated well. This Anishinabe community has a total on-reserve population of approximately 843 people. Here, children have access to a daycare centre which subscribes to the Aboriginal Head Start program. From there, the majority of students transition to Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School which serves students from junior kindergarten to grade eight. As

of 2007, there were approximately 160 students attending this community school. Each grade has a classroom and each classroom is allocated one teacher.

At Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, there are one resource teacher, three resource/social workers (RSW), and one school counselor available to support the students, teachers, and parents. After completion of their elementary school program, students are bussed into London, Ontario where they attend public secondary school. There is an alternative secondary-school program available within the First Nation community should students require this service. It was here at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School that I met and worked almost exclusively with three different groups of research participants, students and parents; teachers and education support workers; and educational administrators and community leaders.

Researcher Introduction to the Community

My initially approved ethics protocol (#0410-4) sought permission to approach members of the elected Chief and Council and/or members of the Board of Education of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to gain knowledge of what an acceptable and relevant community research project would look like. This initial input from the community was essential in drafting an outline for a research project that would be "relevant to and for the community" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Information obtained from informal discussions was necessary for the development of a final research proposal.

At a meeting at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation with the Board of Education (Dec. 1, 2005), I presented my research proposal and answered questions. At this meeting, the Board of Education made a motion to support my research proposal. I received notice of expressed permission from the elected Chief and Council and the elected members of the Board

of Education via Mrs. Leslee White-Eye, Council Education Portfolio, to conduct research within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community.

After final acceptance of my formal research proposal was granted by the Chief and Council and the Board of Education, I began to establish trust with the general education stakeholders of the community, in keeping with the recommendations of Fine (1996). I initially introduced myself to the community through a *Letter of Information* sent out via school newsletters and the general band/community newsletter (see Appendix B). The letter accomplished several objectives. It introduced me as a fellow Anishinabe person and researcher; introduced the research as accepted by Chief and Council and the Board of Education; and explained my personal interests and research objectives within the project.

Insider/ Outsider Issues

It has been my experience that many First Nation people do not respond well to research in the community based upon past negative experiences associated with research. This observation is supported by literature in this area (McKinley & Deyhle, 2000; Deloria, 2001). Mihesuah (1998) helps people understand how negative stereotypes have also negatively impacted native and non-native relationships by recalling how, for the past five centuries, non-native people have had unrestricted power to describe and control so many aspect of native life. This has contributed to an unethical and unbalanced view of native people. Mihesuah (1998) furthers his concern by stressing that

> academia has served to preserve much about American Indian culture, history, and knowledge, and has presented Indian culture in new media forms. On the other hand, many tribal people and Indian scholars are not comfortable with what has been written, sometimes thinking that the scholarship is not correct, or that sacred knowledge is inappropriately revealed, or the tone of discussion inappropriate. (p. 181)

Considering these issues surrounding research and native peoples, there is a history of unfortunate circumstances associated with research that native people are wise not to ignore. Even local research initiatives are frequently met with hesitancy and/or resistance. In response to research, community members want questions answered about the nature of the research, what the research is about, who will benefit from the data, and how the data will be used. Basically native people want and deserve answers about research that were not provided before.

Within this project, I came to the research community as both an insider and outsider. I am an insider as I am also a member of the Anishinabe nation. As an Anishinabe citizen, I possess a common past and present day struggle that is congruent with the majority of experiences of people in my research community. We speak the same language, share the same culture, and experience similar challenges in our collective relationships with mainstream society. Yet, despite these similarities, I am also an outsider as I come from a sister community, the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, and therefore did not possess information on an intimate level about the dynamics and relationships within the research community. Accordingly, I remained an outsider until I proved my trustworthiness.

As a researcher, I reflect upon the sentiments of Oakes, *et al.* (2003) wherein "trust and respect from the community is paramount for the success of the project, but it does not come automatically - it has to be earned. Plenty of time and hard work needs to be spent in order to accomplish this goal" (p. 184). A consideration of insider/ outsider issues is vital at the outset of this research. Mihesuah (1998) sums up these concerns with few pointed questions:

> How can an outsider really understand life on reservations, the struggle for recognition, sovereignty, economic development, preservation of language and culture? Perhaps they can gain a high degree of empathy and act as 'brokers' of sorts, but it takes American Indians ...themselves to understand the depth of meaning incorporated in Indian education to ask appropriate questions and find appropriate answers. (p. 195)

Such expressed concerns have helped to frame how I have designed and approached the notion of research in general.

Overcoming Insider-Outsider Issues

Although the *Letter of Information* helped to introduce me and the research to the community, it was not sufficient to break down the barriers that researchers encounter within marginalized communities. I understood, based upon other relevant research (Valaskakis, 2005; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Bartenek & Louis, 1996; Dabulkis-Hunter, 2003; Brayboy & Deyhle 2000) that there would most likely be challenges or barriers to the proposed research. The largest concern was that I was perceived by the research community as an "outsider" to the community. As it stood, even though I am Anishinabe, I was still considered an outsider to many and this presented a problem surrounding trust and relationship issues.

As a remedy to this situation, I was committed to establishing stronger interpersonal relationships and connections in every situation where this opportunity presented itself. Within these places of opportunity, I stressed similarities that I had with the research community such as a shared history, culture, language, and historical educational experiences. To further solidify positive relationships with research participants, I shared my professional experiences of being a teacher to help community members realize that I was familiar with many of the education related issues that they had experienced. In addition to reiterating the fact that the overall Ph.D. program, which was part of the research conducted with the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community, would require an average commitment of five to six years to helping make improvements for First-Nation education, I also shared my personal rationale for wanting to do this research.

My reasons for engaging within this research were based upon my own experiences in education. I am interested in improvement to the education of the children within the present generation, especially those attending First-Nation community schools, and the betterment of First-Nation education for the future generations. Based upon the feedback that I received from community members, it was clear that once people understood the fact that I had decided to pursue graduate studies for the overall benefit of Anishinabe people, lingering apprehensiveness dissipated significantly.

Many community members appreciated the fact that I wore many different hats such as Anishinabe student, mother, teacher, and community leader. Many appreciated my rationale for doing this research project and likewise indicated that their participation within the research was their personal contribution toward helping to facilitate improvements to education for First Nation people.

Before I engaged any community member with any form of introduction or request, I presented a copy of my clean criminal police records check and my Ontario College of Teacher's record to the Board of Education and to the principal of Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School. It was important for me to present myself as someone who presented no risk to the safety of the members of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. By providing this information, I anticipated that members of the Board of Education and the principal could speak to any qualification or safety concerns that might arise from community members about me. I believe that my offering this information before being asked to demonstrated a willingness on my part to be forthcoming and honest with all people in the research community. This was a significant step forward in becoming accepted as an insider.

It is important to investigate the importance of insider-outsider issues because a thread of this reality runs throughout the project. For the purposes of this research, insider-outsider issues are crucially important. The history of research with native people has not been without controversy (Mihesuah, 1998; Deloria, 2001). Some researchers, for the sake of their research or for material gain, have stolen artifacts and sacred stories for profit sake (D. Bressette, personal communication, June 4, 2001). In many cases, researchers came and took whatever information they could about a subject and the people never received anything in return. This is partially why I selected action research as a research methodology as I believe that if native people were going to be providing data to a research project, then they must also have input in developing the findings.

When thinking about a possible research community, I purposely sought another First Nation community other than my own to eliminate any biases or skewing of results. Accordingly, this decision meant that wherever I went, I would be somewhat of an outsider within the research community. Being an outsider is significant within research because this status hinders a researcher's full entry into a community and, therefore, potentially compromises her ability to fully understand or comprehend situations and circumstances accurately. Ultimately, my status as an insider or outsider would affect the acceptance of the proposed project, and the type of relationship that I would have with research participants. It would also determine the type of questions that I could ask and the type of answers that I could expect.

Navigating Insider-Outsider Research Status

As I anticipated, moving towards "insider" status in relation to research greatly assisted with the collection of new data that research participants have withheld from outsider researchers for generations. At the same time, the ability to maintain my "outsider" status likewise helped

me to avoid areas of difficulty that characterize research done by an insider within her own community. According to Smith (1999):

> the critical issues with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity [hence my use of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* blended with action research as a methodology]. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality of richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities. For this reason insider researchers need to build particular sorts of research-based support systems and relationships with their communities. They have to be skilled at defining clear research goals and 'lines of relating' which are specific to the project and somewhat different from their own family networks. (p. 136)

This insight helped me approach the research as "objectively" as possible to avoid the difficulties that Smith identified.

To me, the ability to successfully navigate between insider and outsider research status was a significant accomplishment within this research project as doing so helped to address the problem raised by Smith's (1999) claim that "non-indigenous experts have claimed considerable acceptability amongst their own colleagues and peers, government officials and society on the basis of their research, [to the point that] indigenous voices have been silenced or 'othered' in the process" (p. 139).

I anticipated that engagement within the context of insider-outsider research would not be easy, as there are numerous issues for indigenous researchers seeking to work within indigenous contexts. Accordingly, Smith (1999) recommends that "indigenous researchers work within a set of insider dynamics [that require] considerable sensitivity, skill, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through" (p. 10). Likewise, Menzies (2001), in his reflections on research with, for, and among indigenous peoples, concurs that research possesses the potential to significantly silence Aboriginal people. Not surprisingly, helping to reestablish an audible voice for Anishinabe learners was an important objective within the research.

As an insider researcher within a First Nation community, I paid special attention to my research approach and benefitted from advice offered by Smith (1999) in relation to research with indigenous peoples:

> Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical [similar to Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin*] as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position. The outside 'expert' role has been and continues to be problematic for indigenous communities. (p. 139)

While conscious of insider insight, Smith goes on to explain how the "official insider voice" can become problematic when the researcher or subjects assume that because they "live" the experiences under study, they "know" and this validates experiences. However, as Smith wisely cautions, "for a researcher [or research community] to assume that their own experience [or a limited selection of perspectives] is all that is required is arrogant" (p. 139). Polkinghorne likewise cautions researchers not to assume any position uncritically within research. He stresses that "...we must take a self-critical stance regarding the assumptions we incorporate into our empirical approaches. No longer does following the correct method guarantee true results. Method does not give truth; it corrects guesses" (Lather, 1986, p. 65). Polkinghorne's sentiments helped me to understand the value of incorporating a critical mindset when contemplating methodology and ensuing data as a researcher with insider status. In response to these concerns raised within literature, my awareness and commitment to address insider-outsider concerns with balance became a priority within my research.

The research that I was involved in was working within a First-Nation community as both an insider and outsider. Smith (1999) discusses the problems associated with articulating an indigenous research agenda and highlights some of the issues that researchers must pay attention to:

> Many of the issues raised by indigenous researchers are addressed in the research literature in relation to both insider and outsider research. Most research methodologies assume that the researcher is an outsider able to observe without being implicated in the scene. This is related to positivism and notions of objectivity and neutrality. Feminist research and other more critical approaches have made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research. Indigenous research approaches problematize the insider model in different ways because there are multiple ways of both being an insider and an outsider in indigenous contexts. (p. 136)

This insight from Smith speaks to the precarious positions that I encountered as an indigenous researcher within a First-Nation community. Attention to the questions raised concerning this research approach ultimately helped me to select a fitting research methodology.

Participant Identification Process

The process of identifying research participants amidst community members involved circulating information letters. All anticipated groups of research participants received the same information letter. These letters were disseminated in a variety of ways: via community newsletters; directly from my hand to all teachers, staff, and as many parents that I came in contact with at the school; sent home with the students via the school; and hand delivered to community leaders and to people I met out in the community.

Once individuals indicated an interest in the proposed research, I contacted them personally or via telephone to provide them with more detailed information and to provide them with a second and more detailed letter (see Appendix B). In all cases, I had the opportunity to review the content of the letter with the individuals and provide them with opportunity to have questions or concerns addressed. Children received a letter that was age-appropriate explaining the content in appropriate terminology (See Appendix B).

After having the project explained fully, the research participants were provided with the opportunity to give their written consent to participate in the research. This exercise followed the process outlined in my approved ethical review protocol (See appendix A).

Community Research Committee (CRC)

In acknowledgement of the concerns raised by Smith (1999) and Polkinghorne (1988), I recognized that this project needed to be driven by representatives from the research community. Therefore I devised the notion of a Community Research Committee (CRC) that would act as a steering committee and a force that could help ensure that the research maintained a relevant and community focus. It was important to have a CRC to make this research project familiar to the participants so they could, in turn, conduct new inquiries in other areas based upon the skill acquired through their involvement within this research project.

The CRC would ensure through their influence and intimate knowledge of the school and research community, optimal community involvement to the point that I would be merely a facilitator of the research. This committee was set up formally shortly after I received notice from the Board of Education and Chief and Council that my proposal of research was accepted. As I received completed consent to invitations to participate in the research, I asked respondents from each of the three research focus groups that I devised (i.e., students and parents; teachers and education support workers; and education administrators and community leaders) if they were interested in sitting on the CRC. Many were interested; however, due to time and family constraints, few were able to volunteer. As it turned out, I ended up with a representative from each of the three focus groups. The names of these representatives remain confidential as per the stipulations of my ethical review protocol.

Prior to meeting with the members of the CRC I proposed some expectations and informal terms of reference for the CRC to abide by. By terms of reference I mean an outline of the responsibilities of the CRC (e.g., attend all meetings and provide input on data presented and direction as a response). The members of the CRC would not be permitted access to raw data wherein other research participants could be identified, but instead they would be presented with themed or emergent focus areas from the research to consider and discuss. It was explained to the members of the CRC that they were needed to guide this research project in efforts to make this research community-based, and research completed by the people, for the people. I would be merely a facilitator of their community-based research.

Basically, the CRC functioned as the community steering committee for this research project. Members of CRC supported my proposed research objective to identify successes within the community school, which soon evolved into a study of how to better define success itself within education for people within the community. The process for this investigation and ensuing action followed the action research cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kerr & Anderson, 2005). There were five research cycles in total and they focused consecutively on success, communication, parental engagement, community ownership within education, and planning for the future.

With the CRC, I reviewed the preliminary results of my literature review and considered the vital importance of Anishinabe culture (Waldram, 1997; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999) and protocol within research (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001, Anderson, 2002) and reviewed successes of other research initiatives within community-based research and research conducted within First Nation/ indigenous communities in general (Bell, *et al.* 2004; Fulford, *et al.* 2007; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald,

1997; Reagan, 2005; Szasz, 1999; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Battiste & Barman, 1995). Members of the CRC decided that the use of qualitative research methodologies that were "people-centered" (Stephan & Vogt, 2004) and "culturally responsive" (Mihesuah, 1998) to the members of the community would be appropriate.

The CRC's Consideration of Methodology

As outlined above, the CRC supported the research by generating a focus area for each cycle of investigation after considering results from the previous cycle of inquiry (e.g., planning, action, observation, and reflection). It became my responsibility to follow through with the CRC's reflective action plan of presenting a new focus area to the research participants for the purposes of data collection. I then did some preliminary categorization of the data for the purposes of presentation to the CRC for further consideration, analysis, and direction.

Meno-Bimaadziwin Action Research helps to support the objectives of increased participation within education for native people as recommended within the National Indian Brotherhood's policy position titled *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) (1972). A blend of these methodologies helped to create a research project that was designed "by the people" and "for the people" in keeping with the vision of the *ICIE* policy and subsequent documents (AFN, 1988; RCAP, 1996). This approach to investigation and action runs parallel to the *ICIE* policy in the areas of increased community involvement and increased parental control over education. A review of the philosophy of education outlined within the *ICIE* policy with the CRC provided relevancy and strength to this research project:

> In Indian tradition each adult is personally responsible for each child, to see that he learns all he needs to know in order to live a good life [reference to Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin*]. As our fathers had a clear idea of what made a good man and a good life in their society, so we modern Indians, want our children to learn that happiness and satisfaction [that] come from pride in one's self, understanding one's fellowman, and,

> living in harmony with nature. These are lessons which are necessary for survival in this twentieth century.
>
> Pride encourages us to recognize and use our talents, as well as to master the skills needed to make a living. Understanding our fellowman will enable us to meet other Canadians on an equal footing, respecting cultural differences while pooling resources for the common good. Living in harmony with nature will ensure preservation of the balance between man and his environment which is necessary for the future of our planet, as well as for fostering the climate in which Indian Wisdom has always flourished.
>
> We want education to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 8)

Based upon culturally-supportive initiatives such as the *ICIE*, members of the CRC agreed that success in education was indeed a significant area of focus and would become the central focus of the project in efforts to identify further successes within First-Nation community education.

Data Collection and Participant Engagement

As outlined in my ethical review protocol and thesis proposal, data were collected using semi-structured interview procedures. Once I received consent from individuals, and from the parents of students who were minors, I proceeded to schedule individual interviews with research participants (teachers, education workers, administrators, leaders, parents, students and community members). All interviews with the principal, teachers, education workers and students occurred at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School at various times of the day in response to the teachers' and students' schedules and at times of minimal classroom interference. In one case, due to a scheduling conflict, a teacher who consented to participate in the research requested that I call her at home in the evening to complete a telephone interview.

To a large degree, interviews and meetings with administration and the members of the CRC occurred primarily after the students were dismissed from school for the day. Parents, community members, and members comprising formal leadership, e.g., members of the elected

Board of Education or elected Council members, completed interviews at their places of employment within the community. Some parents/guardians preferred to complete a telephone interview during school hours as this was the best time of day for them to give input without interruptions.

At the end of most interviews, I shared a brief overview of the emergent focus areas that were being considered with the CRC. I asked the participants to respond or share their thoughts on this theme-building or focus-area process and the feedback provided me with further justification that the categorization of focus areas was correct and the process of data collection, data organization, and data analysis effective.

In accordance with the aspirations associated with the employment of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, the research participants were fully engaged with the data and their analysis throughout the research processes on multiple levels which included the involvement of the CRC, the Board of Education, and various sub-committees, and research participants.

Participants' Involvement with Data Collection

After considering the many negative reports concerning low community participation rates of native people in education (Friedel, 1999; Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986; Butterfield & Pepper, 1992) and based upon initial information that I received from each of the three different focus groups (i.e., parents and students, teachers and education workers, and leaders and administrators), I decided that any community member who engaged within the research in any form could be considered a research participant.

If I consider how some Elders define community and membership (Kulchyski, McCaskill, & Newhouse, 1999), I needed to make available an opportunity for all community members to

contribute in a manner that meets their needs. According to Anishinabe ways of understanding (Morris, 2000; Solomon, 1990; Peacock & Wisuri, 2005), everybody has a unique place within society and therefore everybody has something special to contribute. Within the research, I needed to establish ways for all interested peoples to contribute to this research. This was especially apparent to me when I considered that many of the heads of families, who were influential matriarchs and patriarchs and survivors of residential school, could not help but see education from an oppressive and negative viewpoint (Miller, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988).

Acknowledging the importance and value of every individual is part of being Anishinabe. Yes, formal research requires processes, yet at the same time, formal research within each community can and is different. Research within First-Nation communities can be quite different from research with other groups due to several factors. In many native communities, research, and researchers are seen suspiciously, especially when research participants are required to provide signatures even when verbal consent has been provided.

I understand that formal research processes and formal agreements are important and can help to protect participants; however, researchers must be cognizant of that fact that many "formal agreements" that pertain to First Nation people have been broken (e.g., written and verbal agreements concerning treaties) and continue to be compromised and broken today. This reality impacts upon how many native people view entering into agreements, and how many perceive that information obtained under the guise of "research" will be used against them to further diminish treaty rights.

I experienced this hesitation of community members to participate formally in the research (e.g., signing consents to participate) on more than one occasion, but one in particular was especially telling of the difficulties associated with research with native people. This instance

occurred when I approached an Elder with an informed-consent request. Although I had tobacco as per Anishinabe protocol upon making a request to talk to him, the paper signing did not go over well. The Elder, at the Veteran's Day celebration, did not want me to trouble him with the paper. He wanted me to listen to him tell me a story. So I did. At the end of the visit when he was about to leave, I offered the consent paper again for him to take home to read and consider. I felt terribly conflicted in my spirit because I knew that this formal approach to obtaining consent, especially informed consent from native people, was akin to badgering and was not fitting with cultural protocol on acceptable ways to approach Elders. I knew immediately that I would have to rethink my approach to obtaining informed consent and follow something that would satisfy the community and the formal research process.

After my encounter with this Elder in particular, I came back to the Anishinabe-based realization that in every situation, and especially within research initiatives, every person plays a part in comprising the community and therefore has a formal or informal influence pertaining to education. I decided that I would use data obtained from research participants who provided informed consent, and would also allow the informal input from anonymous community members to help guide the research process. To explain further, I mean that by engaging formally and informally with members from the research community, I was able to understand community dynamics in a helpful way that guided further avenues of culturally acceptable interaction with community members. In general, I therefore determined, based upon my observations of community dynamics and interaction, that research participants within this project be defined as people who expressed interest in the project or issues of First-Nation education in the community.

Community members chose to participate formally in the research by providing informed consent and completing interviews and/or answering questions. Community members became part of the research, informally, when they chose to attend and participate in information sessions that I initiated in efforts to better introduce myself and the research. From these gatherings, I determined that there was, indeed, an interest in the process of research and a willingness to consider what educational success meant to the community. Although people did attend these information sessions, not many came forward with any questions or concerns immediately. Rather, I experienced parents providing me with individual feedback apart from larger group sessions.

Methods

Informal and unstructured interviews were identified as culturally appropriate methods to acquire insight into the educational perspectives/desires of the community research participants. Members of each stakeholder group (e.g., parents and students, teachers and education workers, and leaders and administrators) were provided with CRC created/ approved questions/focus areas that were appropriate for the participants (e.g., culturally appropriate, age appropriate, and appropriate for a variety of educational and social backgrounds) (See Appendix D). I interviewed people individually and in small groups to keep the research atmosphere personal and non-threatening. These approaches respected the intimate oral traditions followed within native communities, as taught by the Elders. The results of the interviews were brought back to the CRC for analysis, observation, reflection, and direction on next steps.

In consideration of culturally-appropriate methods, *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and Action Research allows for the use of numerous research methods in an effort to gain insight into complex social phenomena within the "...self-reflective spirals of cycles of planning, acting,

observing and reflecting" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). Methods used within these cycles are observation, listening, volunteering while observing and learning, and interviewing. Basically, however, when I found acceptable opportunities to engage with research participants to gain insight into First-Nation education in the community school, I used them.

The word that best describes my use of methods is "bricolage." Bricolage is a French metaphor that compares the use of various research methods to a handyman/woman or someone who uses whatever "tools" are available to "get the job done" (McLeod, 2000, p. 1). The usage of a variety of methods is believed to be beneficial in creating data necessary to "build up" a knowledge base. In particular, reliance upon one or two methods for data collection can be limiting when researching projects that are socially sensitive, controversial, and problematic – much like the situations and issues that surround First-Nation education. This is where the concept of bricolage becomes helpful in strengthening the knowledge base that exists within First-Nation communities but is difficult to access.

I was interested in bricolage because "some researchers set out with the intention of applying a named method then discover that it is inadequate to the task and bring in other methods in order to "keep the ship afloat." Other researchers realise at the planning stage that none of the named methods will be sufficient [alone], and design a methodological bricolage from the outset" (McLeod, 2000, p. 6). Bricolage allows the researcher to use different methods to achieve greater levels of understanding by building on what works by taking a piece from here and there.

There are some concerns with bricolage. McLeod (2000) asserts that:

> To overcome many of the concerns, researchers must bear a great deal of responsibility, which forces the researcher to take higher-level epistemological decisions and find appropriate ways of communicating their 'bricolage' in writing or through other media. But in many ways this creativity is one of the core characteristics of good qualitative research. It is very difficult to do good qualitative research, and those who do so achieve quality by

> drawing fully on their personal and cultural resources, rather than by following a set of laid-down procedures. The image and metaphor of the 'bricoleur' captures well the resourcefulness of the qualitative researcher. (p. 8)

Bricolage is related to the concept of triangulation. With the use of triangulation, researchers use multiple sources of data. Mills (2000) suggests that "in action research ....researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument" (p. 49). He goes on to emphasize that action researchers should complete a data-collection plan that identifies at least three or more methods for collecting data (p. 49). For the purposes of the research project, I anticipated using several research methods to assist with data collection. These methods include the following: documentary analysis, interviews, storytelling, surveys, participant observation, seminars, and workshops/ presentations.

Who Assisted in Data Collection?

There were several avenues available to me to assist with ongoing data analysis. Assistance came from the members of the CRC, individual members of the Board of Education, my thesis supervisor, and my own analysis as an Anishinabe parent, teacher, graduate student and educator with experience within native and non-native organizations. This process worked well and the methodology did incite the desired action in the form of increased participation and ownership surrounding community education amongst research participants. The more people were engaged or familiar with the research, the more they became aware of issues that pertain to education and therefore many became increasingly involved.

This method of research was quite effective as the community ultimately decided to participate in several community workshops that were action-oriented as they followed the action-research methodology of planning, acting, observing, and reflection (Herr and Anderson,

2005). In this research, the method and consciousness-raising approaches behind it (Said, 1979; Freire, 2002) together worked to help achieve numerous objectives and helped to define success in First-Nation education in the eyes of community stakeholders.

Data Analysis via Engagement with Research Participants

Following my research proposal and my ethical review protocol, I obtained consent from all participants who expressed interest in participating directly within the project. What ensued was an opportunity to meet with the participants to share more information about myself and the project. All data obtained from the three groups of participants were brought back to the CRC. I organized the data into preliminary categories that later became CRC-approved emergent focus area that could define, interpret, and further successes within the community school. After an overview of the project, I introduced the participants, at each consecutive cycle of inquiry, to the research focus or general topic of discussion established by the CRC (e.g., success, communication, parental engagement, community ownership in education, and planning for the future) and initiated discussions with open-ended, semi-structured interviews.

The CRC considered the data obtained from the research participants during each cycle and formulated a new research focus or topic of discussion for the next cycle based upon the "plan, act, observe and reflect" component of the action research methodology. I, as the lead researcher, then went out and obtained new information to drive the "plan, act, observe, and reflect" process. Recall that the CRC had representation from each of the three participant groups; however, there was no child (student) representative sitting on the CRC. The members of the CRC felt that frequent updates on the progress of the research and a sharing of the topic headings of focus areas served the interests of this particular population sufficiently, and there were no objections

from the other members of the CRC. My wish would have been to have a student sit as a representative on the CRC; however, I realize how demanding this requirement may have been for a child.

Engaging with Students

As outlined in my ethical review protocol, I required informed consent from the custodial parent / guardian, and the child, before interviewing a child. However, based upon observations in and around the school and from literature concerning the impact of research in native communities (Mihesuah, 1998; Deloria, 2001), I understood that, before I could progress to the informed consent stage, an initial positive trust relationship was needed between myself and the students (Hustler, Cassidy & Cuff, 1986). I discovered that this positive trust relationship would, because of the time that I spent volunteering with students in their classroom and school environment (e.g., from August to January - five months), progressively translate into positive trust relationships between the researcher and the student's family at home largely negotiated by students' communication with their parents (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993; Barman, Hebert & McKaskill, 1987; Kirkness, 1986). I observed that in almost all cases, a researcher-student trust relationship was largely dependent upon mutual respect, and was demonstrated by being consistently involved with school and community activities (Hollingsworth, 1997).

The data reveal that younger people were more willing to readily participate in the research than older people. When asked directly why they agreed to participate in the research, the majority of all respondents provided school improvement as an explanation. The following is a quote from a grade-four student in response to my question about her decision to participate in the research: "I want to talk to you about how to make the school a better place for everybody.

This is a good place and other kids should feel this way too" (Cat.1, ID.15, personal communication, April 16, 2006). (Note that an explanation of why research participants are identified by a number instead of initials or some other form of coding is available later in this chapter). This student's rationale for supporting this research likewise reflects the rationale of many other community research participants (e.g., children and adults) who provided similar responses. The willingness of community members to participate in the research for school improvement purposes was an exciting initial discovery that promised to help achieve the goal of the identification of successes within the community school.

Engaging Parents/Community Members through Students

After the completion of several interviews with students, I began to notice other children approaching me at school wanting to participate in the research because they heard about the opportunity to have their ideas considered. In response, I gave the children information letters to take home about the research and an informed consent permission form. I discovered afterwards, through parental interviews, that instead of calling me for additional information, parents obtained research-related information from other parents who had already provided consent. I have learned through this research, and validated this discovery based upon my own personal experiences with other parents from my own children's class at their First-Nation community school, that many parents tend to look to each other for support or advice on what programs at the school are helpful and worthy before they will contact the school directly.

Further questioning of parents revealed that many parents/ guardians discuss with each other, informally, different areas of education in the community because of an aversion to more formal forums such as parent committees modeled after mainstream non-native schools. This

finding has implications for improved interaction and communication strategies between home and school. The confidence that other parents have in each other for mutual support and guidance pertaining to education programs in the community school is a tremendous source of strength that can be better harnessed by the school. This finding reveals a need for a culturally-fitting forum where native parents are encouraged to share and feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns with the school. This forum must take into consideration the ability and desire of parents to participate at various levels of involvement and address reasons why parents have chosen to support each other largely outside of school sanctioned PTA models.

Data obtained from the literature (Haig-Brown, 1995; Battiste & Barman, 1995) and from research participant interviews revealed that many Anishinabe parents were skeptical about education and research largely based upon their own and familial negative experiences with research, education, or unsuccessful educational initiatives (Miller, 1996; Schissel, 2003; Whattam, 2003). One woman's initial response to my asking for her consent to participate in the research was: "We don't need anyone else coming 'round here and observing us and then telling us how to fix our problems. I've seen a lifetime of that and it doesn't work." In another case, one Elder questioned me directly asking how this proposed research would be different from other research done here by other people. The majority of all adults who approached me in response to the *Letter of Information* that I sent out to the community, and the responses of other adults whom I approached directly, would not consent to the research until I explained well how the research could be of benefit to them as it was designed to be people driven and community-based.

The methodology of action research seemed logical to many research participants especially when paired up with the Anishinabek concept of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*. A moment of

deep revelation happened for me, as mentioned briefly above already, during one conversation in particular with an Elder, who was raising a granddaughter enrolled at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang. I was explaining the proposed methodology of action research to her when she smiled and predicted success with the research because: "It's the way we do research around here anyway - but we call it '*Bimaadziwin*' – Walking a Good Life. As we live, we take time to look at our lives and see how well we are doing and make changes to make it better" (Cat.1-Id.01, personal communication, February 01, 2006). This was the confirmation that I needed that affirmed the ultimate appropriateness of the methodology and the ultimate importance of making learning culturally relevant at Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Further analysis revealed that I won the confidence of many parents through the positive trust relationships that I established with their children. Within my experience, relationships were best forged when children initiated a coming together of the researcher and the parent. I noted that students were eager to facilitate a parent-researcher meeting if they perceived the researcher to be trustworthy and the research outcome potentially beneficial to the school, community, and their immediate family. This was demonstrated repeatedly when students from every grade asked me what I was going to do with the information obtained from all students. I replied that I would be taking all feedback to the CRC for their consideration on how to help make the school a better place for everyone. Therefore, knowing the potential value of participating in the research encouraged many children to support a parent-researcher relationship.

Likewise, through my liaison work while volunteering at the school and while actively involved in the research, I encouraged teachers, students, and parents to grasp onto this relationship-based commitment to educational improvement as it had proven to be successful in working with the children. This strong bond observed in many instances between Anishinabe

parents and their children, and also between many children and their teachers was significant for the success of the research, and has significant implications for most forms of community education initiatives.

For an explanation of why some parents remained more distant and removed from the research and from community/ school involvement in general, I considered the impact of residential schooling on First-Nation communities. At least eighty percent of adult research participants within the research project revealed that they observed that the impact of residential schools and other forces of oppression were indeed problems for the community and the impact could still be detected today. What was significant was that these same informants went on to express a strong desire to move beyond the impact of residential school and its legacy of social ills and oppression (Clarke, 2002) and no longer hold it responsible for the present challenges confronting education in their community. This mindset is positive and indicative of a larger move amongst native people toward increased self-government (Monture-Angus, 1999; Boldt, 1993; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

The following quote comes from an Elder, a grandmother raising her granddaughter. Her words, based upon the frequency and variety of ways the same opinion was expressed in similar terms by other informants, represents the stance of the majority of research participants regarding the legacy of residential school within the community: "Concerning residential school, it is time to move on and let go of the devastation of yesterday. Today is a new day and we've left yesterday behind. This is the way we must think now. The school should be helping families understand that today is a new day and even more hope rests with tomorrow"(Cat. 1- Id.01, personal communication, May 29, 2006).

A significant number of the adults that I interviewed stated that it was time to move forward from residential school and refuse to play victim to it anymore. This desire to move forward is an indicator that the community has indeed managed to heal to a significant degree from the atrocities of residential school and is ready to move forward with more effective education initiatives (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2006). This widespread attitude provides strong incentives for further developments within First-Nations education that are empowering and relevant to community and cultural interests (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). In conclusion, the community knows that the time for action is now and many are willing to act now.

Engaging With Teachers/ Education Workers

It took five months, from August 2005 to January 2006, to begin to gain entry into the community participating as someone who could be seen as an insider and therefore more trustworthy than just any other researcher. During this time, I assisted in a professional volunteer capacity in all areas of the school. My activities included assisting classroom teachers in preparation of their classroom materials, marking assignments and tests, assisting with remedial supports with students in groups and on an individual basis, bulletin board maintenance, adjudicating at science fairs, and assisting with school-yard supervision. I had many occasions to interact with teachers and gain their trust and, therefore, their willingness to talk to me about their ideas concerning successes in the community school.

The research revealed that many education staff felt the negative impact of high teacher attrition rates; accordingly, I was likewise seen as someone who would be here for a while and then gone, too. Although it was true that I did not plan to work with the Chippewas of the

Thames Board of Education indefinitely, and I did communicate this to research participants, I reassured people that I understood and sympathized with all education stakeholders concerning the challenges associated with high rates of teacher turnover (Ballinger & Noonan, 2004). Therefore I reflected upon and shared my own personal and professional experiences, both positive and negative, concerning challenges that I experienced as a teacher and education worker due to high teacher turnover rates within First-Nation schools and communities. The more I got to know the teachers and they got to know me, the more there was a connection based upon our commonality of being teachers. It is noteworthy that I experienced similar connections with non-teacher research participants based upon other similarities of common connections. For example, parent to parent, student to student, community member to community member, and leader to leader. This research project has demonstrated that having positive connections of similarity with members of the research community greatly assists in establishing initial trust relationships. This relationship-based connection likewise carried over and underlined my relationship with members comprising educational leadership and administration.

Engaging With Members of the CRC

Largely, it was the responsibility of CRC to assist me in the data analysis. After receiving my report and then engaging in an assessment of the data, the CRC would engage in the cycles outlined in the action-research methodology description which are plan, act, observe, and reflect. Therefore collaboration, as endorsed strongly by the findings of Oakes, *et al.* (2003) in *Native Voices in Research* cited below, was essential amongst the members of the CRC:

> Collaboration implies that ... inquiry is a cooperative activity and a joint effort that depends on researchers and participants and the process of the research. Collaborative research methodology, as advocated by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) among others, implies that the participants are also co-researchers who contribute to the research at different levels, be it the design of the project, the collection of the data,

> or their interpretation. One of the main purposes of collaborative research is to acknowledge and represent different voices. (p. 206)

Accordingly, the members of the CRC were engaged with the data throughout the entire data-collection period. At first members of the CRC were hesitant to want to assume a leadership position in this work because they felt that it was my research project and I just needed them to accomplish my objectives. This thinking is understandable considering the history of the relationship of First-Nation people and positivist-based research approaches. For the CRC, I functioned as a meeting facilitator and, when asked, a resource person, while I sat at the CRC discussion table. It did take some time, however, but soon, the members of the CRC assumed leadership and ownership of the community-based project.

Upon obtaining data from the research participants, information was grouped into preliminary categories that I created until consensus amongst members of the CRC would change the heading titles. The CRC considered the information and engaged with the plan, act, observe, and reflect cycle of action research until a consensus was reached on how to respond to the data with a new research focus or resulting action.

Data were also analyzed via the assistance of the Board of Education. After a series of meetings with the CRC, I prepared a progress report for the members of the Board of Education. I was invited to review the progress of the project with them in detail. I provided an overview of the emergent focus areas that were becoming evident within a review of successes in the community school. Members of the Board of Education were pleased with the outcome of the research to date. Several questions were asked about the process of the research, and this provided me with the opportunity to explain the action-research approach and the benefits associated with it on a community scale. This opportunity to converse with the Board of Education provided me with insight as to how they would respond to any need for change.

Likewise, through my sharing, I provided members of the Board of Education with the encouragement necessary for a continuation and improvement in areas of need.

Summary: Engaging With Research Participants

Overall, the willingness of community stakeholders to support the community school through participation in this research demonstrates an optimistic change with the coming of a new generation of more hopeful Anishinabe people. In analysis of the degree of success experienced in my interaction with parents, I found that a sharing of my own experiences as an Anishinabe parent and my experiences of likewise having a family that experienced and survived the residential and day-school experience greatly assisted in removing many barriers that would have hindered the data collection. The overwhelming feedback in response to my personal sharing reveals that research participants tended to share more with a person whom they believed to be an "insider" and therefore someone who possesses common experiences and or connections. I concluded, based on literature in the field (Dabulkis-Hunter, 2002; McKinley-Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Espinosa-Dulanto, 2004) and data that I obtained from research participants, that researchers who were outsiders would experience a lengthier trust-establishing time period as they attempted to become accepted as a "conditional" insider.

I also noticed that the strength of this research is defined by its ability, through *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, to address issues of empowerment and improvement following in the democratic traditions of native peoples (Johansen, 1999). Following in the culture of the Anishinabe people, it is understood that all people have the capacity to learn. Within the Anishinabe culture, students are not led directly to answers to their questions, but, according to the teaching of Elders, are guided to seek out information to begin to assess situations critically

and to establish personal understandings/ answers that are relevant, culturally fitting, and appropriate (Solomon, 1990; Mosher in Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999; Skead in Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999; and Hilger, 1992).

Traditionally, Anishinabe peoples have approached problem solving with the belief that all people have a valid right to assert their concerns and help in solving problems, and therefore all points of view should be considered. This form of democracy necessitates that all people participate within problem solving to ensure community-based and culturally relevant outcomes.

Colonial governing/organizing practices have slowly moved native people away from this effective leadership and education model. Despite these challenges, democratic approaches to problem solving within native communities remain and continue to provide people with a participatory and action framework to work within that encourages dialogue, networking, transparency, and effective communication. This democratic framework provides education programs with support needed for community education initiatives to be effective (Apple & Beane, 1995).

How Methodology Influenced Data Analysis

According to Herr & Anderson (2005): "there are multiple levels to the data analysis process: the initial meaning making, including some decisions regarding directions for interventions or actions; and then a revisiting of the data for a more thorough, holistic understanding" (p. 81). Extensive collaboration at the data-analysis stage of action research is beneficial and can stimulate research participants' thinking about the data collected.

Within this action-research project, data analysis took place simultaneously throughout the data-gathering process and worked to inform the ongoing action. The ongoing participation of

the CRC was essential at all stages of the research process. To best assist the CRC with information in decision making, I followed Herr & Anderson's (2005) recommendation that research participants be provided with relevant reading materials or summaries of such materials to better inform their response to data. In fact, data analysis is nourished by frequent exposure to relevant literature, and the literature, according to Herr & Anderson, should be extended through the contributions of action-research projects (p. 84).

In keeping with this methodology, I provided relevant information to many research participants to better inform their decisions in areas where they felt their knowledge was incomplete. I did approach the CRC humbly with information from a variety of perspectives when they expressed a need for increased understanding in specific areas. The intention of this information was to help inform any decisions for ensuing action. Ideally "research participants should understand key findings and the relevance [of the research] is central" (Herr & Anderson, p. 95).

Data Analysis/ Coding Influenced by the Literature and Other Helpful Models of Inquiry and Action

The literature review helped me to understand, on a broad scale, how to approach issues that emerged from the research based upon the success attained and revealed in other inquiries. A thorough review of the literature provided me with numerous ideas about how to categorize preliminary data in preparation for presentation to the CRC. For example, as we came to understand the importance of the relationship between schools and communities, the literature offered several widely accepted themes that are known to foster the development and sustainment of healthy and successful schools. Based upon this proven information, I was

therefore able to deduce similar preliminary categories under which to sort data for presentation to the CRC at the start of the plan, act, observe, and reflect research processes.

This overall process helped me to code the data. Interview notes were analyzed and data were placed into preliminary categories for the purposes of presentation to the CRC. After the final categories had been identified by the CRC, I engaged in the coding process of breaking down the data into meaningful units. The meaningful units were then grouped with other like units until initial themes appeared.

In addition to this, the courses that I taught at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario while engaged in this research, *Teaching for Equity and Social Justice*, *Critical and Transformative Pedagogy*, *Teaching First Nation Student*s, and *Curriculum and School and Society* (for the First Nation Leadership M.Ed. Program) helped me identify areas of success in First Nation education from a critical perspective, and to work for ongoing improvements at the same time. The benefit of course preparations, course readings and literature reviews, and classroom discussions within and for these named courses helped me to organize all areas of the research in a way that strengthened understandings of First-Nation education from both native and non-native perspectives.

A consideration of Anishinabe research models (e.g., The Union of Ontario Indians Restoration of Jurisdiction Project) helped to reinforce the importance of relevant and culturally appropriate education for and from the perspective of Anishinabe people. The following are cultural standards identified within the Anishinabe nation to support an Anishinabe education system.

> Culturally-responsive educators incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work;

> Culturally-responsive educators follow a curriculum of the land and use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students;
>
> Culturally-responsive educators participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way;
>
> Culturally-responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school; and
>
> Culturally-responsive educators recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential.
>
> (Union of Ontario Indians, 2004, par. 5)

The literature and examples of other relevant research as referenced throughout this report have provided a sound framework that has provided helpful models of inquiry and action.

I experienced difficultly when it came time to use a coding method to organize the research participants for anonymous reference within this text. My initial plan was to identify research participants using their initials only to guarantee anonymity; however, in a closer analysis, I could see that within a small community, people could easily be identified through the use of their initials. What ensued was my decision to assign research participants a number to be used with a larger coding system. This was difficult for me as I recognized the hurt that many native people still carry today from when they were taken from their homes and issued numbers at residential school.

I decided to proceed with an organized coding system to refer to research participants. As there were three focus groups within this research project, I assigned each group to a category (e.g., category 1: students and parents; category 2: teachers and education workers; and category 3: leaders and administrators), then randomly assigned research participants within these categories with a two digit identification number. For example, Cat.1-ID.08, refers to a student or parent in category 1 with an identification number of 08.

Data Theorization

How data were analyzed and the role of the research participants within that data is central to the theorization that led to the identification of emergent focus areas within the research. In working collectively with the CRC and research participants, I encouraged all to be conscious of elements that influence the interpretation and understanding of data (e.g., insider/outsider notions about the researcher; how success is defined and interpreted; consideration of cultural, historical, social, and political factors; and the importance of the Anishinabe culture).

The following are focus areas that resulted from data analysis and theorization: These are 1) using a cultural lens to understand success, 2) developing relationships, and 3) securing adequate support. These three dominant areas are further supported by two important subthemes identified as 1) identifying notions of achievement and 2) establishing strong communication.

The Strength of the Research

The strength of this research is identified by its ability, through culturally appropriate research methodologies, to address issues of empowerment and improvement relating to education for native peoples following in the cultural traditions of the Anishinabek. In keeping with Anishinabe educational philosophy, it is accepted that all people have the capacity to learn. Within Anishinabe culture, students are not led directly to answers to their questions, but are guided to seek out information to begin to assess situations critically and to establish personal understandings or answers that are relevant, culturally fitting, and appropriate (Bopp, 1985; Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999).

Traditionally, Anishinabe peoples have approached problem solving with the belief that all people have a responsibility to assert their concerns and help in solving problems, and all points

of view are considered. This level of democracy necessitates that all people participate in problem solving to ensure community and culturally-relevant outcomes. Operating in this fashion has been hindered by the influence of mainstream governing and organizing practices that have slowly moved native people away from this effective leadership and education model. Despite these challenges, the potential to reinstate such participatory-based approaches to problem solving within native communities remains and with that potential, the reality of improvements to education for native people through dialogue, networking, transparency, and effective communication.

Challenge of the Research

A challenge associated with this research design is that action research, informed on a cultural level by *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, involves a tremendous amount of personal commitment and time for completion, more so than with most other approaches to research. Largely, this reality is due to the nature of the methodologies used. Much time has been invested into this project for coordinating and getting to know research participants in efforts to establish intimate trust relationships. It would have been easier to design a research project that simply analysed data and provided recommendations for persistent problems within the area of native education; however, native nations are still trying to recover from this type of quick fix and assimilation-oriented intervention. Many negative policies, especially federal education policy, have been destructive to Anishinabe culture and have negatively affected all areas of education, especially concerning informed and critical participation at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Therefore, time consuming approaches to facilitating improvements within native education

must be undertaken with care and commitment, and be culturally relevant, and instill ownership and empowerment within the participants themselves.

The Benefits of the Research

I foresaw numerous potential and anticipated benefits associated with community participation in this study, and many of these points were indeed actualized via research participants throughout the course of the research project. The following is a summation of six significant accomplishments attained through this research that were based upon culturally-relevant methodologies and engagement of education stakeholders at the community level.

The first accomplishment was increased networking within the community between individual community members and other community service departments. This occurred through participation at workshops that revisited the vision statement for education. Second was increased awareness of the common challenges experienced within education (e.g., through CRC discussions and community small group discussions at the vision workshop meeting) which, therefore, provided the impetus for the creation of a unified approach to solving problems. Thirdly, members of CRC demonstrated great skill in networking, communicating, and responding to the needs of the people within the community. This skill was evident in the generation of focus areas to be used within new cycles of inquiry (as per the act, observe, reflect, and plan cycle of the action research cycle) determined by the CRC in response to incoming data.

The fourth areas of success that is seen as benefits of the research are an increased opportunity for all community members to have their voice heard, via confidential instruments (e.g., surveys and semi-structured and open-ended interviews) and within public forums (e.g.,

workshops). A fifth area of success is the provision of a model for other First-Nation communities endeavouring to establish meaningful community-based research models and solutions. Lastly, the sixth area of benefit due to this research is the highlighting of the community of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation in a positive light and inspiring individuals within the community and outside to move forward in education for First-Nation people in a positive and healthy way.

CHAPTER 5

KENDAASWIN: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Kendaasawin means the breadth or scope of knowledge. Knowledge is generated internally, through reflection, and externally acquired through observation. Based upon this definition, understanding is based on a holistic process. Rheault (1998), as he understands *kendaasawin*, provides insight:

> ...It is said that knowledge comes and marks one, like a mark on a birch-bark scroll. Knowledge is itself composed of the 'Teaching received.' One unveils knowledge, mental attributes and abilities as the ideal Path of life [*Bimaadziwin*] is revealed, stage by stage, through one's active involvement in its actualization. A person also learns that truth is found within the self and not solely in the exterior world. The ability to recognize the answer is already part of a person's spirit; it is merely a process of learning to ask the right questions to unleash the potential of truth. However, learning to ask the right questions is directed by years of learning to balance emotions, listening and watching, reflection, and finally, doing [again, the process of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*]. (p. 75)

This chapter is about *Kendaasawin* the results, findings and understandings derived from the process of my research and data collected within it.

Several approaches emerged as directly supporting and sustaining success within the Chippewas of the Thames community school. These are 1) Using a cultural lens to understand success; 2) Developing relationships; and 3) Securing adequate support. These three dominant approaches are further supported by two important related strategies identified as 1) Identifying notions of achievement and 2) Establishing strong communication. The identification of these dominant approaches was helpful in promoting success with Chippewas of the Thames community school education initiatives. The themes identified and associated with success in the research community later became defining features of a new education vision document that is presently assisting the community as they move forward toward increased community success in education.

Using a Cultural Lens to Understand Success

It is important to acknowledge within this particular study that although Canada ranks high among the wealthiest nations in the world and is often regarded as one of the best places in the world to live, Canada's First-Nations communities live in "third-world" conditions. Some organizations, such as the Center for World Indigenous Studies, realize that the conditions of indigenous peoples are often worse than those possessing "third-world" status because they are largely invisible. Due to this reality, the term "fourth world" is used instead. This term gives reference to nations forcefully incorporated into states which maintain a distinct political culture but are internationally unrecognized" (Griggs, 1992, para.3).

I have been careful to recognize the less-than favorable socio-economic circumstances that confront many First Nation people (Connell, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2001; Marker, 2000; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006) and therefore acknowledge the different paradigms within which success must be defined. Likewise, Maden and Hillman (1996), in their study of effective schools in disadvantaged areas, assert the following in regards to defining success: "Of particular importance must be the meaning of "success" in situations where it is difficult and may even seem unrealistic to think in terms of challenges and opportunities rather than of dense and ostensibly insoluble problems" (p. 312). Maden and Hillman's points reinforce the importance of establishing clear and culturally-relevant definitions of success within the research community.

According to data obtained from the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, success has many different dimensions and, not surprisingly, is determined in many different ways. However, after considering the ideas from research participants on the many ways that educational success can be and is currently being defined within that community, three dominant

focus areas emerge. They are using a cultural lens to understand success, developing relationships, and securing adequate support.

Culture and Success

At the outset of a consideration of the importance of culturally relevant programs, it is important to consider how culture can be understood. The following plain language definition comes from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (2007) and helps to frame ideas about culture and how notions of it can influence community based education:

> Culture rules virtually every aspect of your life and like most people; you are completely unaware of this. If asked, you would likely define culture as music, literature, visual arts, architecture or language, and you wouldn't be wrong. But you wouldn't be entirely right either. In effect, the things produced by a culture which we perceive with our five senses are simply manifestations of the deeper meaning of culture - *what we do, think and feel.* Culture is taught and learned and shared - there is no culture of one. And yet, culture is not monolithic - individuals exist within a culture. Finally, culture is symbolic. Meaning is ascribed to behaviour, words and objects and this meaning is objectively arbitrary, subjectively logical and rational. For example, a "home", is a physical structure, a familial construct and a moral reference point - which is distinct from one culture to another. (para.1)

Canada's First Nation people see culture similarly in that culture is more than just one thing; it is a concept that permeates every area of life (McPherson, 1998).

Community Values Culture

Culture, as defined by the people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, is something valued. Community history reveals, and Anishinabe oral tradition concurs, that life for native peoples radically changed because of residential schools to the point that cultural patterns were severely altered (Miller, 1996). In moving forward from the devastation of residential school, many community members are reestablishing themselves through the creation of programs relevant to the culture of their nation that promote holistic healing and resurgence

for the entire person which is necessary for the overall healing and growth of the community and for the generations yet to come (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Importance of Community-based Culture Programs

Culturally-based programs work to re-teach and reinforce concepts that empower native people and help reinforce a strong cultural identity. Examples of culturally-based programs within Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School include Ojibwe language classes, dance troop and culture club, and the Ojibwe club and choir. Other programs within the community, especially through the community Health Center, also serve the needs of community members who do not access culturally-based programming through the school. A significant number of parents and grandparents indicated that they desired educational programming that was relevant to their lives. The following statement echoes this desire:

> I understand the need for programming for parents, but why can't that programming jive with how we [Anishinabe people] live and think. If we are asked to join a parent support program, let's remember the cultural role of the entire [extended] family in raising children. Let's remember how our grandparents taught us about discipline and how to behave. We can help more people in the community by matching programming with ...how we 'do business'. (Cat.1-ID.12, personal communication, April 3, 2006)

Based upon life experiences and many years of teaching within First-Nation schools, Eli Baxter, Ojibwe culture and language teacher at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, supports this view and asserts that active involvement of all community members in the Ojibwe language and culture is just as important at home as it is at school.

The desire for culturally based education programs for native peoples can be explained partly as a result of the reality that federal mandated approaches to education (e.g., residential school) have not proven successful for a majority of First Nation people (Bell, *et al.,* 2004; Fulford, *et al.,* 2007; Mackay & Miles, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Smith, 2000; Hookimaw-Witt, 1998).

Research participants who had positive experiences within mainstream school settings admitted that they did so at the expense of their cultural identity (Murch & McGahey, 2001). An assessment of the overall impact and legacy of native residential school is the most significant testimony of the limited degree of success experienced within an "educational" program that is devoid of native culture.

In efforts to counteract the attack on culture, First-Nation education programs re-emphasize native culture that supports Anishinabe notions of sovereignty and self-government initiatives although they are sorely pressed to do so given the lack of functional aggregation among First-Nation schools. This strategy is supported by the research of Nadeau (2006) who demonstrates how education must be decolonized to allow for the furthering of native self government. The importance of this can be seen by looking at the work of the Union of Ontario Indians on the Restoration of Jurisdiction for Education and Governance project which has been premised upon a firm cultural grounding.

All community research participants indicated that they support, in various forms, cultural relevancy in education and have suggested some ideas to help make the concept more of a reality within community education programs. The following are common ideas that people have suggested as ways to increase the influence of Ojibwe culture within the school. I recognize that these ideas are grandiose, especially within the current financial atmosphere in First-Nation schools; however, they reflect the desire of the people. One idea is to have a full Ojibwe language and cultural immersion program at the school. The Ojibwe language teacher and several other parents sincerely want to see a school that can economically sustain itself through the programming, curriculum, and output generated from it (e.g., crafts, literature, videos, curriculum, books, and lectures). Although this is an important idea for wanting to create and

sustain such important programming, the diseconomies of scale associated with running a school under current organizational arrangements hinders curriculum and aboriginal-language immersion program development.

Students at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang thought an Ojibwe immersion school was a good idea and an opportunity to expand their knowledge base and vocabulary. Such an immersion program would have to be strongly supported, especially in regards to financing, by the community and provide instruction for all community members to help expand the knowledge and application of Ojibwe language and culture beyond the parameters of the classroom walls (Leblanc, 2003; Wilkies, 2007; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2007). However, again, this level of programming would require resources that surpass present realities.

There are varying degrees of expressed desire within the community for the provision of Ojibwe language and cultural instruction. Many educators within the school revealed that they understood or assumed that cultural education, including various areas of spirituality, occurs at home and therefore culture comprises a limited focus at school. Part of this thinking amongst teachers is explained due to the fact that a majority are non-native and have limited or no background in Anishinabe culture upon their arrival at the school. Data obtained from parents participating in the research revealed that 60% of children were not receiving cultural education at home. Many indicated that they themselves failed to possess culturally based knowledge to a significant degree to provide this education effectively. One parent had the following to say about this problem:

> My parents were sent away to residential school and beaten for speaking the language. I don't blame them for not teaching me about who I am as a native person. I don't blame them for not teaching me the language. I got the strap all the time in [public] school – unfairly as I was Indian and most likely the guilty one. I learned early that I had to live white and act white to survive in white culture. But white clothes and attitudes couldn`t change the way I looked. On purpose, I let my culture slip away and now that I want it I have a hard time to find it. My children are in the same boat even though we live here on

> the reserve. I am happy when I see the school helping us reclaim our culture. (Cat.1-ID.02, personal communication, January 31, 2006)

One of the staff at the school, who has an opportunity to see the daily events the children participate in, commented,

> I know everything about what goes on in the school... I see lots of opportunities to teach things to kids in the way I was taught based upon traditional teachings. When kids are taught in these other different ways [out of cultural context] they don't seem to get it... I have stories to tell [and] examples from my life that would help the kids to understand better using examples that I know that they would be familiar with. (Cat.2-ID.01, personal communication, April, 14, 2006)

Conversely, information gathered from other parents and community members revealed that 40% of families do possess sufficient cultural background knowledge within the community and would consider coming into the school to share if there was a place for them within the system to do so. This insight into differing expectations of education stakeholders concerning the degree of cultural education instruction being attained with Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School reveals a need for a unified vision concerning culture and education at the community level. Hopefully, this vision will evolve to reflect and respond to the fact that the resources needed to actualize such a goal must be increased. Hopefully a vision for such a development would therefore lead to a re-strategizing of ways in how to aggregate functionally with other First Nations or how to interact with existing school systems thereby increasing access to resources.

Cultural Relevancy within the School and Classroom

A legacy of Anishinabe culture and heritage is strength and resiliency (Miller, 1996; Leblanc, 2003). It is for this reason that residential schools were not successful in annihilating Anishinabe and other native cultures. Students fared poorly in their academics within these schools. We know that, despite attention to academic skills, the curriculum was assimilation-oriented and therefore not culturally relevant to native students (Johnson, 1988; Miller, 1996).

Chubb & Loveless (2002), Aronson (2001), Gregory (2000), and Bempechat (1999) explain that when programming is not relevant to the lives of learners they fare poorly. Research done with minority students reveals that when education programs are not relevant, a large proportion of students fail to see connections or real-life applications and therefore involuntarily opt-out or fail (Comer, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 2004; Kronick & Hargis, 1998). The following quote from a member of the Chippewas of the Thames Board of Education helps to illustrate the importance of cultural relevance in the classroom:

> We have a great school here. We've got great Board members who are willing to do all that they can to help our kids know who they are and like who they are. Teachers are open minded and willing to learn more about our culture. We want to see a clear difference when we walk into any one of our classrooms in comparison to other schools. Students need cultural enrichment and the school is the best place for that to happen. I am sure that this is how we help families become stronger and how our communities get stronger too. This way we can be the people we want to be; not just people produced by the dominant society. (Cat.3-ID.01, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

Opting-out or failure of Anishinabe students may be explained to a considerable extent by the lack of Anishinabe values in schools. This unfortunate reality makes it easier for native learners to opt out of education that does not represent their core cultural values or beliefs (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). Parents sense their children's concerns in the matter and when the demand for change is not heeded, many choose not to support the education system as a form of covert resistance. One mother had this to report:

> I've had my kids in a few schools in London [closest urban centre] and it was the same experience everywhere because these schools didn't respect my children's heritage. First priority was non-native culture, then the other groups of immigrants, and maybe some reference to native people from a historical viewpoint. My children suffered because of this and were taught their place in society – last. There were no culture based programs for my children. The only place to get this is here on the reserve. Living on-reserve may not be as convenient as city-living, but it's worth it to have my children in a school where they are respected for who they are. (Cat.1-ID.03, personal communication, February 01, 2006)

Another parent had a different concern to share. This concern helps to explain a common pattern of withdrawal when parents and students do not feel they are listened to or treated fairly. This

insight is helpful as it may explain why parental participation within the community school has been low:

> I have [several] boys who don't get along well with the principal and [their] teachers. And because my boys get in trouble way too much, I suspect that things aren't being fairly handled because how could it be possible for just the same boys to always be in trouble? I talked to the principal and he has his own ideas on how a school and classroom should be run – 'a tight ship'. But 'a tight ship' isn't the way we live at home. The Elders lived a 'tight ship' at residential school. I wasn't listened to and haven't been back. The boys still go, but it's not the same. I feel like the whole school and staff are against my family because we spoke up about changes we wanted to see that better reflected our [cultural] interests. It's hard to move past a hurt like this. I know the boys are troubled about this too. (Cat.1-ID.03, personal communication, February 01, 2006)

In these examples, there is reference to possible cultural-disconnects contributing to communication breakdowns between school personnel and community stakeholders. In response to these examples, I wonder if the implementation of culturally acceptable forums, such as sharing circles or restorative justice practices, would have helped to give these education community members (e.g., students, parents) a voice for consideration.

Although improvements within the public system are evolving gradually, native communities are endeavouring, through culturally-based education programs, to assist Anishinabe children to succeed within any environment through student preparedness and transferable skills. Ball and Pence (2006), in reflection on the topic of indigenous learning, assert that "by truly grounding learning in the heart of communities, [and I interpret this as meaning full and meaningful participation of all community education stakeholders within all aspects of education for First Nation people], we may be able to foster the transformation of human services that has been called for now for several decades" (p. 77).

The following quote from a staff member at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School provided support for efforts to empower families through pride in the culture:

> People need to believe in themselves. The best way to do this is to make ways for students and their families to be successful. One way we do this here at Wiiji is to reward the students who have really applied themselves with a trip. Rewards aren't for the best marks;

> rewards come because the student tries [and tries again and succeeds]. When the student tries and succeeds, this instills pride in the student and the family moves a little closer to partnering with the school because of the good being done for their child and the community. (Cat.2-ID.02, personal communication, April, 16, 2006)

Another staff member advocates strongly for the connection of children with their culture:

> A lot of the times, a common connection to culture is all I have to use when I try to connect with difficult kids. When they see that we are the same based upon cultural connections - something happens. They know we are the same. They know we are on the same team. It is a lot easier to work with kids who know that I can relate on a cultural or personal level. The other 'in' that I use is sports. (Cat.2-ID.03, personal communication, February, 13, 2006)

Incorporating a culturally relevant approach to education that is inclusive of language, values, and the diverse spiritual traditions of First Nation communities not only makes education relevant to Anishinabe people, but also provides a framework for improving academic achievement and socialization (Burgstrom, Cleary, and Peacock, 2003).

Preparedness and the Acquisition of Transferable Skills

All education stakeholders want students to possess a strong cultural identity upon which to develop and build skills that can carry them into any area, trade or profession they choose. This means that success within the community school is largely dependent upon the level of negotiation and partnerships that occurs regarding support for a shared notion of success between native and non-native society.

In an interview with a member of the leader and administrator category, this goal of equipping students with transferable skills that allows movement between societies is important.

> Chief and Council see the importance of preparing students to be successful wherever they choose to live. Firstly, they are going to be successful if they know who they are first and take the confidence that comes from identity and pursue new knowledge. (Cat.3-ID.02, personal communication, January, 31, 2006)

Another community member from this category agreed with the summary provided by his colleague but added practical examples of how he sees culture as an essential component for

learning and therefore the ability to negotiate well inside and outside of the First-Nation community.

> Our children have demonstrated an ability to do well here at school and in town [London, Ontario] when they come from a strong cultural background. When kids know who they are and what they are up against, they're more likely to do well wherever they choose to go from there. For some kids, fighting against a discriminatory system drives them on. For other kids, unfairness causes them to stumble but they get back up again when they return to the truth of who they are and carry on. This is why the family is so important for its purpose to strengthen identity. (Cat.3-ID.03, personal communication, April, 04, 2006)

I conclude from this research that First-Nation education must prepare students for a variety of vocational options either within native communities or within mainstream society or both. This objective is one that is also emphasized by other educational institutions that have witnessed student success (First Nations Technical Institute, 2005). Representatives from each of the three target groups within this research project (i.e., parents and students, teachers and education workers, and leaders and administrators) indicated a desire to have students possess skills necessary to be able to successfully navigate any area of life. For example, a parent who works for Chippewas of the Thames First Nation had this to say:

> The most important thing that I wish for my daughter is that she be provided with the options and skills to live anywhere she wants and do anything she wants. I don't want to see her limited in anyway. This means that I need the school to prepare her how to function here [on-reserve] and anywhere else. (Cat.1-ID.04, personal communication, February, 09, 2006)

This parent expresses one of the reasons why it is recommended that Anishinabe students, along with their parents, be strongly encouraged to be a part of career and personal guidance starting as early as possible, and that they consider as broad a span of career options as possible (McCormic & Honori, 1995; Ministry of Education, 2005). For many Anishinabe people, the First Nation land base exists within rural or isolated localities and this geographical reality limits exposure to a variety of career options. In addition, parents may not be aware of new market trends that regulate the need for people in new or future industries. The Assembly of First Nation's *Action*

Education Plan (2005) actually identifies Canada's native population as a potential solution to skilled labour shortages predicted here in the coming years provided that native people begin to acquire transferable skills now in increasing levels. To assist in the attainment of increasingly well-rounded students, research participants expressed a desire for increased interaction with other schools and communities.

Interaction with a wider range of schools was also desired for other reasons. One child in the junior division at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School told me that he wanted to have intramural sports with other schools because he wanted to meet new kids.

> I've known all these guys [pointing to other students in the next room] since kindergarten. I know who is faster than me and who can shoot ringers and good hoops, but it gets boring always playing with the same kids when I know there are teams we could form and other schools we could play. (Cat.1-ID.05, personal communication, May, 10, 2006)

Numerous parents reiterate this child's desire for increased interaction. One parent in particular has this to say:

> I don't want my child to experience isolation here at the school. Sometimes I think we isolate our children to protect them from the harsh world out there. Parents tend to do this to protect their children when they remember the abuse they put up with off-reserve. But I try to help her [child] see past the ignorance of others so she can make friends and experience relationships that she wouldn't here. (Cat.1-ID.04, personal communication, February, 09, 2006)

A member of the leadership and administration group acted upon this expressed desire by attending networking sessions with other school leaders/administrators in efforts to cultivate contacts with teachers and students in other school systems. His insight and response to a desire for increased interaction with other communities is important and may help avoid the tendency of small or rural-based schools to experience 'centripetalism' which can be defined as being overly inward focused (Bryant & Grady, 1990). Miller (1995) asserts that rural schools need to become "broad-based" (p. 167) thereby expanding the knowledge of other professions and career possibilities. Research participants want exposure to new ideas that could broaden perspectives

and provide for the extension and application of culturally-based ideas. Community members want opportunities through education programs to meet new people and forge new relationships while maintaining their cultural integrity.

The desire for increased interaction with other students is positive news as the people from the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community have much to contribute through reciprocal relationships with mainstream society. For example, a lesson in resiliency in the face of oppression provides a global lesson on what not to do again, and how to encourage others in the face of challenge.

Resiliency within All Areas of Life

> The resiliency of First Nations communities is reflected in their abilities to retain their cultural knowledge and their determination to utilize that very knowledge to thrive in the modern world. (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2006, p. 2)

Anishinabe people attribute resiliency to being grounded in the culture (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Kulchyski, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999; Miller, 1996). Resiliency also comes from having role models and adequate community-based cultural support structures and resources such as Elders (E. Baxter, personal communication, October 18, 2007; Kulchyski, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999). A historical review of native and non-native relationships demonstrates that native people have managed to survive as a nation despite significant odds, even to the point of returning to difficult places and addressing persistent problems using culturally-based interpretations and solutions (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003).

Many parents, grandparents, and other extended family members I interviewed had painful stories that they shared with me to help me understand the role of culture in perseverance and resilience. One grandmother's story was particularly revealing of how the family as social force comprised the basis of resilience within the community.

> I grew up in a time when we had to work hard. I had to help my mother by looking after the kids and then getting a job myself when I was quite young. It wasn't easy being a native in the city. Racism was normal to see but hard to live with. We were very poor. And now that my husband is passed on, the kids aren't doing so well and split up and I have their children. They miss their parents, but they can't take care of them right now so I have to – but this is what family does… and I get my strength by being with my people and coming together for support as Anishinabe. (Cat.1-ID.01, personal communication, February, 29, 2006)

While this particular example illustrates the resilient tendencies of people in the community by their connection to each other and the support they provide each other through large extended family relationships, it also raises the matter of the potential hazards of centripitalism. Although commitment to family is culturally-based and a central component of Anishinabe life, people should also be encouraged to explore additional options for support that exist outside of their immediate circle of family influence as such relationship building could lead to increased cultural exchanges needed to help people bridge ideological distances.

There are numerous barriers to equity in education for many of Canada's First Nation people and hence the need for a resilient generation of Anishinabe people. For generations, native people have been asserting that education must be on par with mainstream society in every way; however, this equalization has yet to be fully realized. A significant reason preventing this from happening is the reality of limited access to operating dollars. Changing political dynamics on all levels frequently shifts the national agenda concerning Canada's First Nation people from bad to worse. This fragmentation and diseconomies of scale have made it difficult for native people to gain finances and jurisdiction needed for improvements for education.

As a result, First-Nation people have learned to be resilient amidst political instability and oppressive socio-economic conditions which complicate educational and social successes. Rather than be devastated with every major cut-back in funding and programming, many native people

have gone back to indigenous forms of knowledge to seek out solutions that can work at the community level and that are not overly dependent on finances. This is not the best way to experience success, especially when treaty rights promise adequate funding and support for education; however, it is an example of the resiliency of First Nation people.

Resiliency can also be seen through the resourcefulness employed by Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School. One teacher reflects:

> Apparently, we don't have a ton of money here, so we do what we can. And this has turned out to be a very good thing as we bring in the Elders and other community resources to infuse culture into the school. We can meet the objectives of the Ontario science curriculum by using native content. To me, this is very exciting as I am a learner in all of this too ... The only problem is that there is a matter of challenging mindsets because some parents seem to believe that the white way is the right way. (Cat.2-ID.04, personal communication, May, 23, 2006)

Although this quote reveals the resourcefulness of this First-Nation community schools, it also reveals a need for critical pedagogy within the community to address indoctrinated notions of white supremacy.

It is the desire of the community to help raise children who are strong in their identity so they can withstand and address forces that threaten their educational attainment and success. In this context, one measure of success would be the degree to which the entire community assumes its fair share of responsibility for the present and future success of education through increased community involvement and participation in the school.

Relationships

The data derived from this research supports other related research (Bell, *et al.* 2004; Fulford, *et al.*, 2007) indicating that positive relationships, in their various forms, contribute significantly to success in First-Nation education. The important of positive interpersonal relationships can be demonstrated within my interaction with members of the three focus groups

and members of the Community Research Committee (CRC). It can also be looked at in four important categories: leadership, governance, instruction, and personnel. The relationships that education stakeholders possess with each other and with people outside of the community are essential for high levels of personal and educational success.

As Jules (1999) indicates, relationships need to be constructive and all roles need to be clearly defined. People within all relationships, whether that be at the school or in the community, must possess a clear and common understanding of roles and the expectations held of them (Ottmann, 2005). At Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, people try to respect each other and their roles and responsibilities because the children learn from all relationships modeled here. School is where students learn how to interact with each other in equality and respect in preparation for the rest of their lives.

The importance of healthy and positive interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships is common to popular notions of democratic and leadership patterns shared by many indigenous groups on North America (Johansen, 1996). My research demonstrates that relationships within the Chippewas-of-the-Thames-First-Nation community school are essential and play a significant role in the successes experienced by community members.

Engaging with Teachers and Education Workers

Overall, through my discussions with research participants, I discovered a need for teachers and administrators of education programs for First-Nation people to have increased professional interaction with other teachers and administrators for support, ideas, and encouragement. Teachers attested that their professional-development sessions were organized in-house by their own school administration and a local second level service organization known as the Indigenous

Education Coalition, of which their First-Nation community was a member. These opportunities for professional and cultural exchange help build positive relationships with other teachers/ administrators of First Nation schools.

Openness to diversity was strongly encouraged by all native and non-native teachers and most research participants in general. Teachers were expected to support Anishinabe culture plus broaden the exposure of students and the community to other cultures in an effort to bridge cultures to help heal the effects of ignorance, racism, and discrimination. Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School does an excellent job of providing opportunities for people of different cultures to come in and learn from the Anishinabe culture, thereby providing the basis of an interactive positive learning relationship based upon trust and respect. The best example of this is demonstrated through the annual Children's Pow Wow where each year a different mainstream public school is invited to attend and celebrate at the Pow Wow with the First Nation school community. This celebration time affords visitors with the opportunity to enjoy Anishinabe culture and make new friendships that can be further nurtured through increased positive cultural exchanges. This opportunity is also beneficial in helping both native and non-native students prepare for the transition of native students from on-reserve elementary school to public secondary school.

A closer look at all teaching positions within the school reveal that the role of the Resource and Social Worker (RSW) is of paramount importance. RSWs are placed within each division. RSW positions are filled by qualified community members. Because of their intimate knowledge possessed about the various issues within the community and their familiarity with culturally based learning styles and approaches, these individuals support students and families, to a large extent, in a cultural capacity that surpasses the influence of many non-native classroom teachers. This extraordinary level of culturally-based proficiency through education is observable through

the following example. When students in the primary division engaged in an integrated unit on strawberries, the classroom teacher delivered basic instruction and RSWs extended basic science and technology and social studies curriculum expectations to meaningful application within the community by sharing medicinal and ceremonial knowledge of uses of "the heart berry" (strawberry). The CRC also confirmed that RSWs were often an academic and social link between home and school, therefore positively contributing to success within First Nation community-based education.

In addition to supports between home and school, many research participants viewed RSWs essentially as cultural literacy supports for teaching staff unfamiliar with the community and Anishinabe culture. RSWs were able to help classroom teachers understand the importance of cultural relevancy. On another level, RSWs are in a great position, based upon their own life and educational experiences, to assist students in understanding mainstream concepts or resources from Anishinabe perspectives. Within First-Nation education programs, RSWs are an essential support aiding in social and academic success.

Many research participants, including teachers themselves, explained the role of teachers within First-Nation education programs using more contemporary and visionary educational philosophy. Although parents want to instill academic values within their children, they want teachers to use culturally relevant strategies that empower the learner. Parents want teachers to use more hands-on approaches to instruction and less reliance on textbooks. One parent summarized this desire for increased hands-on instruction:

> Teachers need to teach differently and get away from just relying on textbooks. I see my son come home with pages and pages of textbook work with instructions I don't even really understand. I don't care for such heavy reliance on textbooks. This is not the way I was taught. My teachers explained concepts with lots of hand-on approaches and I want this for my son too as he needs the hands-on teaching that textbooks don't offer. (Cat.1-ID.02, personal communication, January 31, 2006)

In general, many research participants indicated that they wanted additional support in the classroom for a variety of reasons; however, realistically this underutilized help already exists in the form of RSWs. Although the CRC has acknowledged the value of RSWs within the education program, a perception persists amongst some community members concerning the validity of the credentials of people certified through native teacher education programs (NTEP). When questioned about the rationale behind this thinking, research participants assumed that this belief evolved from residual mindsets left over from colonial education practices where native people were made, through policy and legislation (such as the *Indian Act),* to see themselves as and to be subservient to non-native people and non-native education systems when in actuality they possessed equal skills and knowledge (Miller, 1996; Hawley, 1990).

Through the critical inquiry processes of action research, this unfounded and harmful mindset was discovered to negatively impact upon attitudes held by some community members concerning native teachers/staff. In response to this discovery, community members applauded the value of critical consciousness and its power to help address oppressive mindsets. As people walk a "good life" they should be reflecting upon hurtful and wrong mindsets such as this one and work for change according to the principles *of Meno-Bimaadziwin.*

Engaging with Leaders/ Administrators

> In every deliberation we must consider the impact on the seventh generation ... even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine.
>
> -The Great Law (Iroquois)

It was a genuine pleasure to work with educational administrators at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation because of the commitment to addressing persistent issues in a new way. All of the members of the Board of Education possessed personal interests within the school.

Some members had children and/ or grandchildren attending the school, and all members were from the community and were dedicated to the success of every member through education.

One of the key factors identified by almost all trustees as key to the ongoing success experienced within the community school is a commitment to preparing for the future by acting today. Community leaders are visionaries and are planning now for later. It is due to this motivation and future-oriented thinking that the Board of Education supported this research project along with other positive incentives such as the "Revisiting the Vision Workshop" that would later evolve in response to this project. Part of this forward focus stems from a commitment to following an Anishinabe principle wherein, when we plan, we are conscious of the effects of our decisions of today on those who will live seven generations into the future (e.g. Anishinabe Seven Generations Teaching). The notion of educational sustainability is an indigenous concept that is likewise found in other nations, such as the "The Great Law" of the Iroquois.

Relationship-wise, the principal, the education director, and school board members work closely together, yet attend to separate areas outlined within established mandates. The clear communication of established lines of authority assists all community education members in understanding roles, responsibilities and expectations. Yet, there is a willingness amongst educational leadership to address and improve any areas within school and community governance should difficulties arise. Ongoing communication of this commitment to education community members would work well in helping improve home-school relationships.

All research progress reports delivered to the Board of Education via the CRC or myself were received favorably and ultimately helped to re-orient present and future projects and incentives to fall more in line with community and cultural aspirations. It was not long after

having shared some interpretations of data generated from this community-based research that the Board of Education decided to revisit the education vision statement. This decision reflects the benefits of using *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research as more people became increasingly connected to each other through education.

Governance

Within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, the elected Board of Education falls under the authority of the elected Chief and Council. Chief and Council are ultimately responsible for all programs and initiatives within the community. This is a significant responsibility as the community-based elected council must oversee all elements of the community's programming and infrastructure to lead effectively. To best ensure sufficient expertise in leadership for education, the Chief and Council have decentralized their authority to an elected Board of Education that establishes and sustains the governing structure of all community education programs.

According to Freire (2002), the decentralization of power within a community historically challenged by external and internal oppression, is unusual and remarkable because the tendency of oppressed groups is to internalize oppression, thereby creating over the generations, cycles of unending abuse and mistreatment within already oppressed communities. The fact that Chippewas of the Thames First Nation has decentralized education through the establishment of an elected Board of Education implies that Anishinabe notions of community responsibility and accountability have become important again through a return to a shared leadership and governance approach customary within traditional Anishinabe notions of democracy (Leblanc, 2003).

In response to these realities concerning governance at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, a member of the Board of Education reflects upon the improvements that this decentralization has made.

> Having a Board that has the authority to make needed changes has been a great source of our success. The Board is comprised of people who have an education background. These people are community members who have a heart for the children in our community, and these are also the people who make decisions on how to help children and families be successful in life - whatever that may be. (Cat.3-ID.04, personal communication, April 10, 2006)

Using this rational approach to governance, the Board of Education, advised by the Education Director and school administrator, has initiated the creation of culturally relevant policies and procedures for all community education programs. The Board of Education, and Chief and Council are governing bodies that recognize the importance of having effective policies and procedures in place that are culturally relevant to assist in furthering meaningful success for all community members. One member of the elected Council had this to say regarding governance for the education programs:

> Policies and procedure are written down on paper. What is important however is that what is written down is what is lived out and believed in by the people. Policies and procedures won't do a bit of good if they don't reflect our way of conducting business. (Cat.3-ID.03, personal communication, May 16, 2006)

A member of the Board of Education echoed this sentiment:

> ...the management of community-based organizations must mirror the traditions of the community therefore the school must be willing to embrace a culturally appropriate way of managing operations and thinking. (Cat.3-ID.05, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

The community benefits from putting in place governing personnel who possess diverse backgrounds and a wide variety of experiences. Members of the Board of Education and Chief and Council come from diverse backgrounds and experiences and this insight works to further the objectives of the school and community, through the political support of local government, for celebrating and recognizing diversity while retaining Anishinabe culture. An appreciation for

diversity is part of the Anishinabe way. According to oral tradition, traditionally Anishinabe people were set in place in their society, on purpose, within many different areas to ensure a well rounded and balanced community (Leblanc, 2003; E. Baxter, personal communication, October 18, 2007). This was essential for survival. In my opinion, since the influence of leaders is so important within the community, so is the need to provide them with appropriate and ongoing training opportunities and activities that help keep them intimately and critically connected to the school.

Leadership

> By maintaining their Native Indian ways, Native Indian people have resisted and continue to resist assimilation into non-Native Indian culture ... In view of progress it is suggested that a better understanding of Native Indian leadership gained from existing literature and Native Indian leader's views on leadership can improve leadership in band-controlled schools. (Jules, 1999, p. 53)

There is flexibility in how leadership in general can be approached; however, for mutual success within First-Nation communities, this approach must be one that falls in line with culturally accepted governance structures that support Anishinabe values, culture, and beliefs. Such an approach is one described by Alfred (1999) wherein all stakeholders are treated with respect and dignity (p. 89).

In reflecting upon leadership observed at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, a person from the leadership and administrator group had this to say:

> ...it is very evident to me that the leadership within the community reflects the native culture. This is clear when I look at the policies, attitudes, and priorities within this school. It is refreshing to see how the people themselves come first in efforts to build up the community. (Cat.2-ID.05, personal communication, April 14, 2006)

This model of leadership within the school is one that is hoped would be modeled outside of school and into the home and society, thereby creating a common basis of relationship grounded in respect for each other as equals.

Understandably, dissension threatens when leadership does not correspond appropriately to the culture of the community. Within the education program in the community school, dissension due to inappropriateness and irrelevancy can manifest in parents withdrawing their support from schools and students becoming disillusioned. This point is explained in the comments from a parent:

> We've had teachers and principals whose heart was not here. They came. They punched in. And they were out-a-here when the bell rang! That kind of leadership did nothing for the school or the kids. I think these people knew that they didn't fit in here and didn't care to try to fit in either. So I'm not surprised when they left the next year – some left part way into the year. (Cat.1-ID.06, personal communication, January 31, 2006)

The data from this research project reveal that culturally relevant leadership is a strong and important determinant of success within community education programs for First Nation people. This is evident through an assessment of common answers in response to CRC generated focus areas provided by all three focus groups (administrators and leaders, teachers and education workers, and parents/guardians and students) in response to question/ areas of focus (see Appendix D) about the characteristics of leadership required within the community school. The following is summary of desirable common characteristics of leadership generated from the responses of research participants:

- leading to enable all community members to participate in some meaningful way;
- leading the people forward to achieve community goals and aspirations;
- accountability (listening, reflecting and responding to the interests of the people);
- leadership by the people and for the people;
- democracy; and
- leadership by consensus.

In general, the data reveal that community members, parents and students desire leadership that is empowering and future-oriented for all education stakeholders. Community members want a system of school and community leadership inclusive of more traditional Anishinabe models; this is especially true when one consider the benefits of following a reflection-based system guided by notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*. These data imply that any person assuming a leadership role within the community be aware of Anishinabe cultural expectations and community values. This finding necessitates the need for intense and ongoing cultural orientation and support for all non-community members endeavoring to work within First-Nation education programs.

All three focus groups expressed a need for the provision of orientation programs for people not familiar with the Anishinabe culture. One teacher new to the school expressed significant apprehension in not knowing enough about the community:

> ...I am afraid to do something wrong or to say the wrong thing. I can't teach the way I want to when I feel so inhibited. I am sure the students and their parents pick up on this. I have latched onto [name deleted] ... because she's been here longer than me and knows what's ok and what's not. PD in this area is really needed for non-First Nation teachers. (Cat.2-ID.06, personal communication, April 16, 2006)

Having all education stakeholders feel they are part of the school intimately is needed for its success. Bell, *et al.*'s (2004) research reports on a wide range of leadership styles from highly participative to highly directive, but each had a central focus of encouraging community members to participate in meaningful ways. These findings support the leadership demonstrated at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School which utilizes culturally-based leadership styles that fit within the range identified by Bell, *et al.* in efforts to enable all community education stakeholders within the community to participate. It is anticipated that leadership styles used with the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation will encourage people within the community to consider exploring new

relationships, based upon mutual respect, with other First Nation communities, through aggregation, and or established education systems.

Likewise, teachers and education workers desire leadership that provides a model and incentive for community-directed improvements in the school. Leadership must support Anishinabe culture, values, and aspirations while helping orient everyone towards preparedness for success in both present and future endeavours. From an administrative perspective, leaders (e.g., principals), must view success on a broad plane, perhaps based upon their relationship with other school boards and mainstream communities. The principal at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School understands the importance of this and follows through with his commitment to broadening the school's perspectives by attending networking sessions with area public-school principals, and ensuring that students have the opportunity to participate in events outside of the community (e.g., special events for First Nation students to engage in sports activities with other students at the University of Western Ontario).

Styles of leadership are an important consideration contributing to success experienced within First-Nation community-based education programs. The notion of team leadership within a school can be effective when clearly communicated and enacted. Facilitative leadership enables community members to participate within meaningful areas of the school's operation at a high level of involvement without interfering with the day-to-day operations of the school (Blase, 1995).

Preparing community education stakeholders for increased responsibility for school leadership and direction (e.g. parent committees or elected office) is something that will need to be implemented gradually over time through a change in indoctrinated colonial mindsets. As a member of the administrator and leaders group explained, some parents actually shunned the

opportunity to participate as leaders, according to traditional Anishinabe practices, because they did not feel that it was their place or responsibility:

> ...[parents were encouraged] to get more ... involved in leadership but they weren't ready. I think many are accustomed from their own experiences in education to being told how things will be and therefore don't know how to respond when given opportunity. They wanted me to do all the planning and the work, and when I didn't because I wanted them to give it a try, I am sure that many thought I was slacking off. People need more confidence in themselves first. Maybe after this project, the community will have more confidence in themselves and be ready for this type of traditionally-based leadership. (Cat.3-ID.06, personal communication, February 10, 2006)

The notion of effective and culturally relevant leadership within the school alludes strongly to the importance of vision within an organization. The importance of a clear vision reflects Anishinabe philosophy within *Meno-Bimaadziwin* where people aim to walk a good life as life-long learners (Keeper, 2007) and this is accomplished via reflection, reflexive action, and visioning for the future (E. Baxter, personal communication, October 10, 2007). Bell, *et al.'s* (2004) findings have likewise revealed that a "culture of success" is linked to visions and long term strategic planning (p. 312).

Instruction

> Indian teachers are critical to the realization of quality education for the Indian population for a number of reasons, despite a lack of reports of investigations of their effectiveness. Native Indian teachers would, it is argued, be effective not only in teaching such concepts as Indian identity, traditions, language, and psychology, but also in teaching all subjects at all levels. In addition, it appears likely that home-school communication and parental or community involvement in the schools would increase if Native Indian staff were a significant presence in the educational system. (Kirkness, 1999, p. 57)

Instructional approaches used by teachers can be seen as essential strategies that work to further nation and community-building initiatives. The issue of instructional style has emerged from the data as a significant force that has helped and continues to help negotiate success. Instructional approaches, as noted by Kirkness (1999) in the quote above, are a significant component of pedagogy and can have a positive effect upon a school and community (McNally,

2005) and can ultimately assist in improving participation rates amongst community members. Likewise, the use of ineffective instructional approaches, approaches that are not culturally relevant to the student, can harm and hinder student achievement, as seen by the legacy of residential schools (Miller, 1996; Johnson, 1988; Chrisjohn, 2006; Haig-Brown, 1988; Milloy, 1999; Ward, 2004; Whattam, 2003).

The data from this research illustrate that instructional strategies are a significant factor in determining student success or failure at school. This can be demonstrated by considering some thoughts about instructional styles from community members. A student in the junior division at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School believes that:

> ...school is boring. We do the same thing every day. Come in the morning. Do journal. Do spelling. Do math. I write and read all morning with nothing fun to do. I miss grade two when we used to build stuff and invent things at centers instead of being stuck in a book all day. (Cat.1-ID.07, personal communication, May 10, 2006)

Although this child's perspective of classroom instruction does not summarize the position of all students from all classrooms, she does provide reason to pay attention to the instructional approaches that are utilized.

A concerned grandparent had this to say:

> I want for my grandkids the kind of teacher that I had. She sat with us. Showed us how to sew and cook. Drilled math facts into our head so I still know them today. She taught us the basics of everything we needed to know. Sometime I think my grandkids need better instruction. They have a lot of textbook homework that they do all by themselves 'cause its work that I don't know and can't help with. Homework causes lots of frustration around here after school. (Cat.1-ID.01, personal communication, May 29, 2006)

Despite comments like these, teachers are aware of the issue and do try to utilize instructional strategies to which the students will respond. One primary teacher commented on the fact that "how" and "what" we teach is not just for the students but for the parents, too. The teacher explains:

> ...I roll up my sleeves and get dirty hands playing with the kids because that's what they love and respond to. Parents appreciate it when they see me engaging with their children

> this way. It seems to help bridge any differences that may exist between cultures. (Cat.02-ID.07, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

These experiences within the classroom are ultimately responsible for a positive or negative trickle effect back to the home and into the community. Either way, how instruction is delivered influences student outcomes, which in turn plays a significant role in the attitudes that parents and other adults have regarding education in general.

A Constructivist Classroom: Using Helpful Instructional Approaches

Ideal and culturally relevant classroom instruction modeled at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School can be described as constructivist. This approach is comparable to the idea of facilitative leadership which compares closely with the focus of Anishinabe educational philosophy (Union of Ontario Indians, 2004) to help produce efficient, effective, and democratic classrooms. In a constructivist classroom, the teacher and classroom "exhibit a number of discernable qualities markedly different from a traditional or direct instruction classroom .... the environment is democratic, the activities are interactive and student centered, and the students are empowered by a teacher who operates as a facilitator/consultant" (Gray, 1997, para. 27).

Constructivist classrooms can be helpful in preparing present and future generations of Anishinabe students to become defenders of the integrity of the Anishinabe nation as they would be equipped with skills needed to address, question, and challenge barriers established by traditional mainstream notions of education reinforced through hegemonic power and practices. I recognize that many constructivist classrooms are democratic and student-centered and this does not necessarily mean students automatically become critical citizens, but I have observed that it does increase instances of such success.

A teacher explains the functioning of his constructivist-based approaches in the following terms.

> In the classroom, we make the rules together. It is a group effort and students help each other to understand that everyone needs to help for success to occur. Our saying is 'Nobody gets left behind… or forgotten' – you know – from the kid's movie '*Stitch*.' My instruction is holistic and I try to bring much of what I cover through the curriculum back to the culture in trying to make it relevant. (Cat.2-ID.04, personal communication, April 16, 2006)

First-Nation schools are remarkable places within which to incorporate student-centered and holistic instructional approaches because many First-Nation schools are committed to making education for native peoples culturally relevant (Chippewas of the Thames, 2007; Chiefs of Ontario, 2004; Bell, *et al.,* 2004; Fulford, *et al.,* 2007). Within Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, efforts to adopt culturally relevant instructional approaches, characteristic of collaborative classrooms, were evident within most classrooms and programs. Observations, testimonies, and stories collected from research participants regarding the classrooms reveal that learners are engaged with activities that assist them in learning the curriculum while making personal connections between that knowledge and their life experiences.

A great example of this is how the Elders and veterans are brought in on Remembrance Day. Yes, there is a curriculum to cover, but the students did not know what the war really meant on a personal level until the veterans came in and explained it in relation to the impact of the war at home in terms that the children could understand. Parents approve of this use of oral tradition as it follows cultural protocol and is a familiar instructional strategy.

Gray's (1997) research indicates that within a constructivist classroom "learners are immersed in experiences within which they may engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and personal reflection" (para. 28). For teachers to be able to assist learners in culturally relevant meaning making, they must possess a working familiarity with the indigenous culture (Klung & Whitfield, 2003); hence the great

importance of utilizing teachers within education programs who possess an understanding and appreciation of Anishinabe culture.

The philosophy behind instruction at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School respects the Anishinabe notion of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* wherein people endeavour to walk a good life as life-long learners, accomplishing this through positive relationships with educators and all community stakeholders. *Meno-Bimaadziwin* enables educators and community members to approach education as critical and transformative pedagogues and social change agents who enable and endorse Anishinabe interpretations of knowledge, thus making learning relevant to students and their families. Anishinabe interpretations of knowledge do not necessarily incorporate one particular way of understanding. What I mean by reference to "interpretations of knowledge" is a willingness to contemplate information through a lens informed by Anishinabe traditional teachings and culture. While not everyone within the school community functions yet within these parameters, this is something that I would like to see people move closer to for reasons previously discussed.

Within environments based upon facilitative leadership, collaborative classrooms, and strong, culturally-based philosophies encapsulated within *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, teachers are seen as fellow learners sharing their experiences with other learners to make sense of, according to their own unique life experiences. This approach to learning is not only culturally-based and endorsed by the Elders (Cat.1-Id.01, personal communication, February 01, 2006; Kulchyski, McCaskill, Newhouse, 1999) but also provides students with an incredible opportunity for the ultimate development of their individuality within a cultural framework (Skead in Kulchyski, McCaskill, Newhouse, 1999, p. 196). Gray (1997) reinforces this position by affirming that, within a constructivist classroom, the "teacher and the student share responsibility and decision

making and demonstrate mutual respect" (para. 30). In general, this positive action within the classroom and school translates into positive experiences for parents. This purposeful instructional approach empowers students as unique individuals and autonomous learners within creation.

Data from this research reveal that constructivist methodologies, used within this community school, are successful in empowering students and their families. A great example of this is the annual art show and the science fair at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School. In these events parents and students come together to support each other and to celebrate the talent within the community. Students play active roles in facilitating the sessions and deciding what work should be recognized for what reason. This collaboration improves community stakeholder engagement.

Teachers are excited to report that increased parental and community participation is achieved when they can "piggy-back" on the successful experiences achieved by their children. One teacher described "piggy-backed" success this way:

> This is a small community and everyone tends to hear everyone else's business. Folks want to save face around here so when a student has problems and the school makes a big deal about it – it upsets the family. And families here are large and extended so a negative relationship with the school can have a really big impact in that family and within the entire community. Some parents get to a point where they reach a dead end with the school and just deny the problem or refuse to support the school anymore. There is no quick fix when this happens and it's hard to fix that damaged relationship. It's better to celebrate the success of the student - no matter how small – to maintain a positive relationship that is necessary to be able to work out areas of difficulty without losing the support of the home. (Cat. 2-ID.08, personal communication, January 30, 2006)

It is apparent from observations and testimonies that students are a natural link between home and school. When students become excited about school, it naturally grabs the attention of family members. Attitudes from home about school have a lot to do with the resulting atmosphere of school. And, in many cases, attitudes are a response to instructional approaches used.

One challenge for the community is to foster increased communication about the positive, culturally-based mandate and objectives of the school. Many Anishinabe families consist of large extended families which can include members from as many as four or five generations collectively. In many cases, older family members recall the mandate and attitude of oppressive residential schools from their time and therefore, without the benefit of effective community education communication systems, still associate pain with any form of education. As a result, intentionally or unintentionally, these influential Elders, as heads of families, influence attitudes about education based upon their own personal experiences. This discovery is significant as awareness and action to stop the perpetuation of outdated mindsets is necessary for unity, community success, and academic and social achievement.

Maintaining a positive attitude and atmosphere for achievement in education is especially important for native people as virtually all families have been adversely impacted due to oppressive education policy and resulting institutions. Data obtained from stakeholders indicate that parents likewise view student success as their passage way to non-judgmental and enjoyable participation within the school. All groups of stakeholders within this research revealed that Anishinabe children do not respond well to strong and authoritative approaches used for guidance and discipline. Rigidity, especially within instructional approaches is inconsistent with Anishinabe ways of child rearing at home (Hilger, 1992) and therefore inappropriate and ineffective at school.

A Crisis of Culture Addressed by Instructional Approaches

> The Aboriginal people adapted, thrived, and flourished for thousands of years before European occupation of North America. This overall success was largely a result of the interconnectedness of their social, personality, and cultural systems, which were notably indigenous in both spirit and character. Thereafter, these systems, including institutions comprising the social system as in the case of kinship, spirituality, political, economic,

> education, and political structures, have undergone the eroding effects of colliding Western world views and Indigenous world views, the former being steeped in the hegemonic aspirations and expectations of Eurocentricity. (Burns, 1998, p. 53)

Despite significant strength in local leadership combined with having a community school on the First Nation governed largely by competent locally elected members of the Board of Education and elected Chief and Council, data obtained from community-research participants reveal a belief amongst some community members that all schools must mirror mainstream approaches of education for schools to be "legitimate" and students successful. Some may argue this based upon having negative experiences in residential school and its subsequent legacy. The following statement from one parent helps to shed light on this problem:

> I turned out ok in public school. I never heard too much about my own culture but I'm learning now. I can't help but have some problems with Wiiji because I went to school off-reserve because my father wanted me to be successful out there. I'm not too sure how it's going to work out for our school because I am not as involved because of how I've been schooled to think about native programs and their quality. (Cat.1-ID.08, personal communication May 23, 2006)

Critical consciousness through an action research and reflective approach challenges such notions thereby inciting and empowering people to investigate the truth using indigenous knowledge as the basis of validity. Freire (2002) asserts that this challenge to mindsets can be accomplished through revolutionary praxis. According to Freire:

> revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical. Revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders' decisions – a dichotomy reflecting the prescribed methods of the dominant elites. Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possessions. (p. 126)

Although many community stakeholders support distinctive First-Nations education as an effective alternative to mainstream educational approaches, some members of the community remain significantly affected by the devastation and legacy of oppressive education policy and therefore do not feel that community schooling is an option. Several of these particular individuals emphasized that they want their child to blend into a mainstream mosaic to avoid any

targeted racialized mistreatment believed to occur as a result of being schooled in programs for "native" peoples. A concerned parent had this to share with me:

> I don't want my [child] to suffer the way I did for being Indian therefore I want [child's name] to blend in public school in London for [his/her] own safety and well being. So we'll probably move next year. My husband wants [him/her] to stay at Chippewa though. We have a divided house on this matter right now. (Cat.1-ID.04, personal communication, February 9, 2006)

It is an unfortunate but true telling of the legacy and hurt of residential school when parents believe that they must continue to sacrifice their culture and identity for the perceived benefit of safety through assimilation into mainstream society. While immersion into mainstream society may camouflage the native child, it does little for the psychological wellbeing of the Anishinabe child and nation.

The attempt of parents to avoid racial or social injustice by conceding to the culture of the dominant power is understandable if these parents/ families have been victims of racism for generations themselves; however, the old cliché of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" comes to mind. Parents justify wanting their children fully integrated with mainstream society for protection against racism by stating that they want their students to be exposed to mainstream society and therefore well prepared for any scholarly or occupational opportunity within the First-Nation community or within mainstream society.

There are two fundamental problems with this rationale. Firstly, this thinking does not consider the fact that many First-Nation schools provide exposure to many elements of the dominant culture. In fact, the Ontario Curriculum and resources used to support it provide significant exposure to non-native culture. The second problem with this rationale is that it is erroneous to think that any form of "true" success can be attained at the cost of something as important as identity and culture. This attempt at escapism is not effective; nor is it healthy, psychologically, to compromise one's identity for the purposes of being acceptable to another

(Nagel, 1997). This mindset is also injurious to the sovereignty objectives of the Anishinabe nation.

Conversely, many native parents have affirmed a desire to have education be more representative of Anishinabe culture. This sentiment, shared by many within the research community, is expressed well through the reflections of one mother:

> If I wanted my kids to be educated like those in white society I'd have moved to town and enrolled them in public school...but that isn't the answer. It wasn't the answer for me when I was a kid and it's not the answer now. Teaching a child to pretend to be someone they're not is never the answer. Just look at what this thinking did to my mom over at Mushhole [Mount Elgin Residential School]. Look at what it's done to the community – people are all confused and mixed up when they should be strong people like the ancestors. (Cat.1-ID.07, personal communication, May 10, 2006)

Within the research community, stakeholders have indicated that they are aware of the potential for First Nation schools to move cultural identity forward through educational programming and culturally relevant teaching that is reflective of Anishinabe educational values.

Helping People Challenge Old Mindsets

Freire (2002) asserts that education through dialogue awakens people from notions of false consciousness which go unchallenged due to unequal power relationships. Carr & Kemmis (1986) also assert that becoming critical can happen through action research. A critical approach to looking at pedagogy and power/ knowledge relations as described by Foucault (1980) can not only help reclaim the value of indigenous knowledge and pedagogical approaches, but can also help bring notions of equity and social justice into consideration and action. This research supports Freire's (2002) view that when people "come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation[s] in which they find themselves, [they] often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force" (p. 29).

My action-research project has encouraged people to talk to one another about these sorts of problems. This was clear from the discussions of CRC members at our update meetings, and also clear from the discussions held at the community vision workshops, that people needed the opportunity to sort through their beliefs about First-Nation schooling and mainstream schooling within an informed context and perspective. People needed to look at their beliefs critically to better understand the "tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, and 'deferred' dreams that are part and parcel of living a borrowed and colonized cultural existence" (Freire, 2002, p. 11).

Reasserting the value of indigenous knowledge and negotiating a way for that knowledge to be recognized as valid within other cultures requires fortitude, unity, and the commitment of individual First Nations and of First Nations collectively. It is important that students be as prepared as possible for a productive life within the First-Nation community and mainstream society, but that does not mean that students have to compromise their identity to attain success. A key attribute of First-Nation schools is to help restore cultural identity in all education stakeholders while maintaining standards that are equal to or exceed provincial standards (Bell, *et al*, 2004; and Fulford, *et al.*, 2007). Deleary (2007), a native educator known locally to the people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, concurs that when students know who they are intrinsically, they are equipped with a framework to ground everything else upon.

Culturally-Based Instructional Style

There have been numerous studies that have proven effective in using empowering and culturally relevant leadership approaches such as facilitative leadership. Facilitative leadership is observed to be making a successful impact within on-reserve Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs. Child-centered approaches focus upon the whole child, using notions of facilitative

leadership to address issues of nutrition, education, social support, health promotion, culture and language, and parental support (Sones, 2002). AHS is mentioned within this context as many on-reserve AHS programs prepare children and families for entry into elementary schools within First Nation communities. From age 0 to 6, children and families, through AHS programs, engage with each other within child-centered approaches. This overall philosophy is titled the "High Scope Learning Approach" where teachers and parents are facilitators of the child's learning. Due to the significant level of success associated with the employment of the High Scope Learning Approach, it has become a provincial initiative of the National Aboriginal Head Start Office:

> The program encourages the development of locally controlled projects in First Nation communities that strive to instill a sense of pride and a desire to learn; provide parenting skills and improving family relationships; foster[ing] emotional and social development and increase[d] confidence. It is also designed to assist parents enhance their skills which contribute to their child's healthy development. (First Nations and Inuit Health - Health Canada, 2006, para. 4)

It is very probable that the High Scope philosophy used within the AHS program is successful because it complements numerous aspects of indigenous philosophy, namely Anishinabe educational philosophy within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, which returns stakeholders back to a more traditional approach to education that emphasizes parental and community involvement.

The following are excerpts from relevant literature in the field that support the use of culturally appropriate instructional styles. Cleary and Peacock (1998) provide the following observations in support of relevant and appropriate instruction that meets the needs of learners:

> When it comes to learning styles, there is a general consensus of the importance of knowing individual student's learning styles and adapting instruction to address each individual. This is particularly true with minority students. [Cleary and Peacock highlight research that] recognized that the learning, cultural, and motivational styles of many minority students, including American Indians, differs from the teaching styles most frequently used in [mainstream] schools. (p. 154)

The results of the data from the research community support Cleary and Peacock's assertion of the need for appropriate culturally-based instruction. Teachers can effectively assist student learning by employing basic approaches such as teaching to a variety of learning styles; recognizing the influence of culture on learning (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997); providing opportunities that lead to student competency (Swisher, 1990); employment of cooperative rather than competitive learning environments (Cleary and Peacock, 1998); use of a variety of instructional approaches such as visual learning, oral learning, holistic approaches; and the use of longer wait times (Cleary and Peacock, 1998).

Research from Bell, *et al.* (2004) on the topic of culturally relevant instructional approaches reveals that "each student will achieve and be successful when teachers receive [or earn] parental trust and support and they employ a wide variety of instructional strategies and curriculum resources that match the cultural and learning needs of each student" (p. 159). The use of culturally relevant instructional approaches such as story telling (Desmoulins, 2006) can help First-Nation students succeed within the community and beyond.

Stakeholder Relationships

> We are all teachers and learners; acknowledging those who hold the knowledge and the language as the educators of our people. (Union of Ontario Indians, 2004)

Jody T. Gaskin's (2006) hit single, *Part of Being Anishinabe,* is accurate in its broadly interpreted assertion that relationships based upon respect, trust, and honour are part of being Anishinabe. Due to the size and dynamics of many smaller First-Nation communities, positive and reciprocal relationships are, understandably, essential for success. The need for positive relationships with others, e.g., established school boards, is especially true within stand-alone community schools and therefore raises the question of ability of the community to support the

broad-scoped education needed to move communities forward. Research participants from all three focus groups identified positive relationships as an area of significant importance for everybody within the school and community.

Positive relationships are dependent upon clear goals, communication, and supportiveness. Many different kinds of relationships can be found within the school. The key to making these various kinds of relationships work for the school is to provide supports and opportunities for effective communication for all stakeholders at various levels (Bagin, 2008). There needs to be opportunities for all stakeholders to have a say and to share ideas with other people within the school community.

Teachers

> As the capabilities, dedication, and work ethics of good teachers transcend cultural boundaries, likewise, personal qualities such as the ability to show friendliness, acceptance, respect, and fairness seem to be particularly desirable traits for educators who are working effectively with Aboriginal students. It is these same qualities that enable teachers to foster and develop the trust relationships with parents that create effective educational partnerships between home and school and build enhanced student success. (Bell, *et al.*, 2004, p. 308)

According to research done with other First-Nation schools in Canada, Bell, *et al.* (2004) have identified some common characteristics of effective teachers within First Nation schools. These are:

- The ability to create a warm, accepting, and supportive learning environment that is relaxed and comfortable while maintaining focus on educational goals;
- A commitment to student success that includes the belief that each student can learn, the flexibility to adapt and experiment to find optimal educational programs and methods for each student;
- A commitment to performance-based education and the willingness to use appropriate assessment tools to monitor student learning success and program effectiveness;
- An attitude of solving problems rather than assigning blame, and the willingness to tutor, coach, cajole, and encourage students towards their best personal achievement;

- An understanding of and respect for local culture combined with the willingness to show that it is valued by its inclusion in curriculum;
- Involvement of parents in learning partnerships through frequent and effective communication" (p. 308).

These traits may not be any different from good teaching that should be occurring in all schools; however, many of these traits listed above have been absent from education for First-Nation people. Acknowledging characteristics of effective teachers is an important part of working for improvements at the community level.

The data from this research project reveal that many teachers who are not of native background experienced higher levels of difficulty navigating through cultural and community expectations within the school. Many of these expectations are largely unspoken and assumed making it difficult for outsiders to gain the trust necessary to form solid relationships with parents and students.

An additional area of challenge pertaining to relationship-building for teachers is isolation. Bell, *et al.* (2004) concludes that teacher isolation with the school and within the community is a "major factor in the high turnover of teaching staff" (p. 318). Additional reasons for high teacher attrition rates are because "...band operated schools are not governed by a district or by provincial collective agreements [and therefore] teachers may not have [the] job security, salary, and employment benefits [enjoyed by their counterparts teaching within public schools, especially the option to join or remain in the Teachers' Pension Fund]" (p. 318). Not only this, within smaller schools, teachers rarely have the same grade teacher to talk with or to share and or exchange ideas with on a regular basis.

In an emotionally charged interview, a teacher at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School explained how lonely life for teachers can be without the benefit of solid relationships.

> When I came here I thought I would be able to adjust quickly, but see here it's now April and there are many parents who I just cannot connect with the way I want to. These kids are off to high school [soon] and there is so much that I want to teach them but they act like they still don't know me and tell me that I can't relate to their world. (Cat.2-ID.06, personal communication, April 16, 2006)

From this insight, I conclude that relationship building and communication amongst all education stakeholders within First Nation schools are just as important, if not more so, than academic achievement alone.

In another interview one teacher who had been at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School for many years affirmed the importance of relationships:

> I've been here a long time... I've been here long enough that the kids know me and their parents know me. They know that I am not going anywhere and that I'll be here next year too. This makes a big difference because in fairness to the parents, all they see is teachers coming for a year or two and then they're gone. It's hard to trust someone with your baby when you don't know their story. I know that I wouldn't. (Cat.2-ID.09, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

Students

The data from the research indicate that students would benefit from a student council wherein students could take their ideas forward for formal consideration. Students need to experience ownership within their school. Therefore, they need to have their ideas considered at all levels. Students need the opportunity to begin to know how to prepare themselves for future areas of leadership and responsibility. It is great when parents can advocate for their child in areas of need; however, student peer advocacy for fellow students reinforces Anishinabe principles of caring, sharing, and community (Solomon, 1990; Mosher in Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999; Skead in Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, 1999).

The following quote is representative of a common interest amongst the older students at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School:

> ...if kids could say what they want and get it, we'll really like coming here because it would be our school and not just a place where we are sent and made to go where all our decisions are already made for us. It would be good to have a kind of respectful

> relationship with teacher and the principal so we could tell them just what we want and need and they could tell us what they want (Cat.1-ID.10, personal communication, May 10, 2006)

Within effective, efficient, and appropriate First-Nations education, Anishinabe-oriented skills of communication, partnering, and social interaction initiated at school are transferable into other areas of society. These skills can help enrich and reinforce positive relationships outside of school and into mainstream society. In many cases, students will be able to share ideas between home and school that can be a positive influence overall. This positive connection between home and school is especially important as the research to date within the community has revealed some aversion amongst native parents and community members to educational institutions because of a lack of information needed to form essential relationships, and vice versa.

Community Involvement and Parental Participation

According to the literature, the dominant stereotypical view of native parents in relation to supporting their children at school is negative. Deyhle and Swisher (1997) challenge the stereotype of "apathetic parents" and argue that the phenomenon should be more accurately understood as "resistant parents" (p. 123). A cultural misinterpretation about lower degrees of tangible native parental engagement within schools in general implies that native parents do not care about their children's education; however, this is far from the truth.

When questioned about the degree of parental support that they give to their own children, virtually all parents and guardians involved within the research project provided a wealth of examples of how they help their own children. At the same time, many of these parents shared examples of support given to help other children within the community to be successful in other areas of their life.

The following provides three different positions that affirm the inherent commitment of Anishinabe parents to their children.

> I always make time for the kids - usually after supper. We eat together and share the good parts of our day. (Cat.1-ID.11, personal communication, February 28, 2006)

Another parent revealed:

> I do my best, but I know that other parents struggle to support their kids because they have a hard time trusting the school. Parents love their kids – whether they're any good at school or not – so your question's kind of strange – but you need find some way for those parents to feel comfortable in working with the school. (Cat.1-ID.03, personal communication, February 1, 2006)

One more parent argued:

> The school should come up with some other way for parents to support their children other than through homework. Even I get tired of doing questions of the math textbook. Still, we get the work done and sometimes even help the kid next door with his projects. (Cat.1-ID.12, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

Anishinabe parents within the research community experienced difficulty in separating general concerns about their own children from other children within the community. It is noteworthy that parents addressed this questioning about support for their children in a collective manner, implying that responsibility for a child's success was not exclusively limited to individual parents, but was part of a larger responsibility to be undertaken by the community.

Within Anishinabe contexts, success is not limited to academics, but inclusive of all areas of social and cultural significance. Parents support their children, according to Anishinabe educational philosophy (Chiefs of Ontario, 2004; Chippewas of the Thames, 2007) and tradition, and expect all other community members to do likewise. Largely, this concern for the collective wellbeing of everyone superseded concerns for the individual. Such unity and commitment to each other is a remarkable force that has undoubtedly helped to sustain the Anishinabe nation through times of devastation and despair.

Despite the successes and positive aspects of active and ongoing parental involvement, problems do arise. Common areas of concern within the research community involved parental disillusionment concerning education and therefore disengagement. This is a concern shared by members of all three focus groups. One elected council member explained to me this was a concern that goes back a long way:

> Parents are trying to overcome problems created from when their parents went to residential school. This takes time and Council knows we need to support parents. We need to know more about why some parents don't support the school. They don't tell us, so we don't know how to fix the problem. (Cat.2-ID.02, personal communication, May 16, 2006)

Representatives from all three focus groups, except the students, indicated that there is a need for education programs to help uncover and move past oppressive forces such as debilitating notions of victimization, learned helplessness, and dependency. Although the notion of increased community involvement is culturally desirable, it is not always attainable due to influences such as disillusionment, lack of adequate resources, and unchallenged mindsets regarding the validity of indigenous knowledge in relation to mainstream canons.

Other forces that may contribute to lower parental input can be attributed to low self esteem, culture shock and misconceptions (Hyslop, 2000). In 1986, Richardson and Richardson affirmed that, for the most part, parental involvement within First-Nation education programs in Canada has been minimal. Unfortunately not much has changed over the past 22 years. Reasons for this may be because the opportunities for native parents to become involved in meaningful ways outside of community-school (e.g., in public secondary schools or colleges or universities) have been minimal and culturally irrelevant. One parent reported the following:

> My mom took good care of us. We had everything we needed. School was something that seemed like it wasn't her job or responsibility. She was sent away to [residential] school when she was young … and when we were young, we were sent to school, and now I send my kids to school and I expect the school to make sure my children receive all they need there. I haven't been looking to get involved in school because that hasn't been an area where I've seen a need. (Cat.1-ID.13, personal communication, April 16, 2006)

These comments help to demonstrate that some attitudes about the school held by some parents are intergenerational. Many respondents to this research believe that, as matters stand within the community today, too many families suffer from the impact of residential schooling, even as second or third generation survivors who have never been inside a residential school.

In response to the negative residential-school legacy within the community, there is a strong desire nationally (Gillis, 1992) to help make parents feel more comfortable in participating within the school by re-empowering people through culture to help improve attitudes and self-esteem. This objective is also sought at the community level. A member of the administrator and leader group reflects upon a possible solution:

> ...the school has to be a mirror of the cultural life experienced at home so parents and students feel comfortable. This means all teachers need to be educated and equipped with knowledge to do this. The greatest challenge is to get parents here. I think we can keep them here if we can just get them here and what better way to do this than by making the school a familiar and non-threatening place. (Cat.3-ID.06, personal communication, February 10, 2006)

Part of getting native parents to participate within the school community is commitment on the part of community leadership (Gregory, 2000; Comer, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 2004) to help individuals overcome oppressive forces that have kept native people from enjoying all areas of education (Sydney, 1986; Friedel, 1999). This approach entails widespread education and response to direct and indirect forces of oppression and controversy (Elijah, Elijah, & George in Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Awareness-raising through *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research is needed and has proven useful in helping people understand entrenched oppression that may have gone undetected because it was always lived out as a normal and unchallenged experience (Freire, 2002).

The Board of Education realizes the benefits of increased awareness and participation and therefore wants to ensure that everyone in the community can participate in community-based

education in a meaningful way. Therefore members identified the vision statement as a way that can help increase quality community participation within educational endeavours.

The results of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research employed consistently throughout this research have revealed the need for culturally relevant action in education amongst many stakeholders. The research methodology employed throughout this project has provided a vehicle for that change. Through participation in the research, stakeholders have identified ways to increase parental participation and community awareness. These ideas have come about through analyzing the data, seeing dominant and emergent themes, and identifying culturally-based ideas known and proven to be helpful in getting more stakeholders involved. Therefore, in response to needs revealed, stakeholders concluded that it was important to:

- Extend meaningful roles and responsibilities concerning education to the community as many feel disconnected and therefore unqualified to participate;
- Provide ongoing educational opportunities and support, such as space, training, technology and tools, for community education stakeholders so they will see how the Anishinabek principle of lifelong learning is manifest within community based education;
- Nurture all parent relationships, academic and non-academic, with all education stakeholders by promoting positive interaction amongst all community education stakeholders through methods such as establishing discussion forums, and providing personal capacity development workshops and make participation within these forums enjoyable, accommodating, and family-friendly, e.g., offer supper, child care for younger children, transportation;
- Share reports and updates in an effective manner, e.g., accommodating a diverse variety of unique learners that explains the progress of community-oriented education programs.

Relevancy of education is another significant factor that impacts upon parental and community involvement within the school. This research supports the need for First-Nations education to be relevant to stakeholders; however, determining what is relevant needs to be critically examined. A parent asserted the need for relevancy in education in the following statement:

> Schooling has to make sense to the student. If they can see how something that they learn is useful outside of school, then they start to value school. Who wants to spend all day learning about something you'll never use? (Cat.1-ID.14, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

This claim is problematic because it asserts that all knowledge must be useful for it to have value. This mindset poses limits to student development as knowledge outside of their experience could be construed as irrelevant. This way of thinking amongst parents could likely be a lasting result of residential school. The *Indian Control of Indian Education policy* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) likewise sees the need for relevancy in education but wants to have every child prepared to engage with the world, equipped in every way, even with information that does not seem immediately useful to the learner. This enlightened perspective of the *ICIE* as similar to the AFN's *Action Education Plan* (2005) reflects an indigenous approach to learning wherein the education of today attempts to address anticipated needs to the "seventh generation."

Anishinabe parents should have a say in determining what knowledge is valuable within education for First-Nation people, but this process should be a critical one wherein parents are challenged to understand why they think and value the things they do. Indigenous knowledge can assist with this as traditional teachings encourage us to walk our understanding back to creation to better understand them. What "walking our understanding back to creation" means is reflecting upon the series of events that occurred within the formation of a nation of people, or a particular generation, to help understand, critically, and appreciate the results of those events upon people who experienced them and their descendants.

Within Anishinabe society, it is true that it takes an entire community to raise a child. This means that, despite the atrocities that happened in the past with regards to education, community members can be unified by positive commonalities, such as a common ancestry, common goals, and common notions of sovereignty. This commonality is necessary to help rebuild and sustain

Anishinabe society where everyone in the community is encouraged to become involved for success on a community-wide scale (Epstein, 2002; Chabot, 2004). The strong element of commonality within First-Nations education should be capitalized on and bring communities together in a positive and meaningful way. These sentiments were communicated clearly by stakeholders from all three focus groups. The quotations below, first from a student and then a parent, reinforce this notion.

> At school we are all the same. We are all like one big family because mostly everyone in my class is a cousin or relative and mom says you're supposed to help family. (Cat.1-ID.15, personal communication, April 16, 2006)

> I know everyone in the school. No one is a stranger. Sometimes, I end up knowing more about someone or their family than I wanted to, but I have to use that to support people in a positive way. We are all together and have a lot in common. (Cat.1-ID.02, personal communication, January 31, 2006)

This research, then, concludes that culturally-based education programs are helpful in building relationships. This is good news for people suffering from the impact of negative education and other forms of oppression. There is much potential within First-Nation education to heal the trouble of the past and make a better way for the future when people are encouraged to become involved at the grassroots level.

Parent Committees

Kavanagh (2002) affirms the need for parents to have increased input in the school. Native parental involvement on parent councils, organized using mainstream examples, have not been overwhelmingly successful. Demanding positions on parent committees, such chair, secretary, and treasurer are necessary for effective organization; however, without sufficient support such as childcare and committee training these roles can become overwhelming. A better system is needed that takes into account the reality of life experienced by Anishinabe parents, and parents everywhere for that matter. This is especially true of working or single parents, who have limited

resources and time, yet want to be involved in the education of their children. The comments of two parents on this matter illustrate the challenges.

> I want to help out more and be involved in the school, but I can't because of work and the younger children. (Cat.1-ID.16, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

> The school should change the way they expect the parents to get involved. Usually by the time parents are consulted about something important, they are all upset and the meeting doesn't go well because everyone there has their own agenda for that night. (Cat.1-ID.03, personal communication, February 01, 2006)

Parents have recommended the formation of an *ad hoc* parent committee that can be put in place temporarily until a better one evolves. As a suggestion, several parents have recommended that for the interim, the school can recruit one parent representative per grade, with the option of "switching off" every month or so. In other words, parents can take turns throughout the year being a class representative. Each parent would be provided with some in-house training and assistance, either by more experienced parents or by supportive staff at the school, in understanding the responsibilities of the committee. This approach would give more parents direct exposure to the school in a positive and proactive manner.

When parents have a say in how they can be involved with the school, such as the development of parent or interest committees, they can assume genuine ownership within the education process and therefore have a greater stake in the education of their child. When this becomes a reality, parents are more likely to support the school through increased levels of participation. This research has demonstrated that increased awareness of the challenges and success within the community school, in general, has led to increased involvement of stakeholders with the school.

Summary

When considering relationships, one needs to note that when students succeed, they bring their families along with them (Henderson & Map, 2002; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Brod, 1990) and therefore families bring others forward in accordance with the notion of "extended family" within Anishinabe culture. This is true and reflected within the sentiments of one Elder who is a guardian of a child at the school:

> Indian people are social people. If anything happens, everybody automatically comes together at the place of trouble to be a support. This is more true when it's a good happening. We get stronger when we come together, and since we are together anyway, we always bring food. Food means that we can stay together longer and celebrate and be with each other longer. It has been this way for as long as I can remember. (Cat.1-ID.01, personal communication February 01, 2006)

The data from this research affirm that the best way of reaching the community is to focus on student success, as success radiates outward within a student-centered and holistic oriented community.

In general, there are positive effects from increased parental involvement in the school. The presence of parents in the school can help decrease the student-adult ratio in classrooms. This is a favorable notion especially in the primary and junior division where Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School is presently strengthening their approach to literacy. Primary and junior division teachers are grateful for the parent/ grandparent volunteers who help in the classrooms in all capacities. Teachers notice a difference when community members, and especially Elders, are in the schools. The presence of happy parents in the school has a significantly positive impact upon students. Most teachers within the school reported that the presence of happy parents within the classroom produced a calming and reassuring effect on the students. When parents are aware of and support what is happening within the school, the community at large is more likely to be similarly supportive of the school.

Research participants have acknowledged that close and positive involvement with the school influenced them in positive ways. Some parents who become involved within community education programs were actually motivated to go back to school in pursuit of further career development. One parent revealed the following:

> I've been working closely with my daughter ... here at the school and I'm inspired to go back and finish my high school. If I want what's best for my daughter, I've got to set an example. I like what I see happening in this classroom. I could do work like this. I mean, I take care of my child ... and I do it well and I like it. I should look into what program I need to become an assistant here. (Cat.1-ID.17, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

Ultimately, having parents committed to their own personal educational and or career development as contributing members of Anishinabe and mainstream society goes a long way to furthering the reality of self-government and national Aboriginal sovereignty.

Adequacy of Support

Data from the research community revealed a need for consistent and adequate supports such as quality resources, programs, curriculum, and funding to assist with success in community education for First Nation people.

Programming

> All Canadian Royal Commissions on education agree that environmental and early childhood experiences strongly influence a child's intellectual development. The Sullivan Report (1988, p. 208) states, 'Unless the health, social, and economical conditions of Native lives are generally improved, the problems of language development and lower-than-average educational attainment levels will regrettably remain a part of the Native experience at school.' Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003, p. 1) notes: 'The seeds for success in learning are planted well before children come to school. Children need a healthy and nurturing start in life, early detection of problems that could affect their learning, and a chance to address those problems before they start school.' (Bell, *et al.* 2004, p. 36)

The quote above emphasizes the tremendous potential benefit in providing relevant programming that specifically addresses the needs of a community. Programming is an area

where success can be attained through planning. A significant area of success within educational programming at the community-level is in the area of Early Childhood Education. The Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community is a participant in the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program. This program is described as follows:

> [AHS is] designed to prepare young First Nations children for their school years, by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. This initiative encourages the development of projects that are comprised of the following program components: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support and parental involvement. (First Nations and Inuit Health - Health Canada, 2006, para. 2)

An interview with an administrator at the AHS program at Chippewas of the Thames First Nation revealed success in programming designed to get more parents involved in all areas of their children's development. This parental connection with school as a partner in their child's education, initiated through the AHS program, is continued into the kindergarten program at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School. Success, meaning student achievement and parental involvement, has been observable within the AHS program and extended into the primary division of Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School; however, when these same children approach grade three, levels of parental involvement start to fall off.

Based upon the feedback from parents and teachers, I can chart a sharp decline in parental participation within Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School around grade three. A parent explained this is because in grade three the classroom work becomes increasingly academic. Many parents, due to pre-established mindsets, view the teacher as an academic authority and therefore gradually back away from the school. This point is clearly illustrated in the quote from a parent below.

> I've been inseparable from [name of child deleted] since he was born. I even spent a lot of time with him when he went to Headstart daycare and kindergarten. Back then it was easier to have a reason to stick around the school because he was small and every kid needs his mom when they are small. But in grades 2 and 3, I see that parents aren't as involved as before. There is less work that is family-based and more work on behaving in class and paying attention to the teacher's lesson. I felt like me being there was distracting my son's

> attention away from the teacher. I felt I wasn't needed there anymore because the teacher was the expert on making kids behave and part of learning how to behave meant learning how to do that without me around. I don't seem to have a place or purpose in the school anymore. It's like I'm just needed to get him there on time and they will do the rest. (Cat.1-ID.16, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

This tension between parents and "experts" needs to be addressed at the community level. Communication, or a lack of it, appears to be at the root of this problem as many teachers that I interviewed said the opposite of what this parent has expressed in that they want more parents to become involved in the education of their children. Access to information from both sides of this problem has afforded research participants with the opportunity to see how parents and teachers are talking past each other and really not hearing what each other has to say. It is the child in the middle that is left with the responsibility of negotiating a better understanding and relationship between home and school and this is an unfair and unneeded burden to place on any child.

This information supports a need for programming that gets and keeps parents involved. Increased effort to retain the involvement of parents is essential within the school (Kronick & Hargis, 1998) as students need to understand that parents approve of and accept the school. This research then calls for development of programming that sustains parental involvement throughout all grades at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School and beyond.

Goddard's (2002) research demonstrates that culturally relevant programming is essential to support the cultural development of native students. His research is particularly relevant when considering a disturbing mindset within the research community. The data reveal that there is a tendency amongst parents and students and some teachers to undervalue the importance of native culture and language and replace it with a focus on more academic subjects in preparation for meeting mainstream expectations for secondary school. Within these instances, some community members are compelled to believe that success is solely defined through the non-native Ontario

Curriculum and therefore native culture and identity receive less attention. These sentiments are observable in the comments of one parent:

> I want my child to be ready for high school. I can't see how learning about our culture will help them do that. No one cares if you speak Ojibwa or know the traditional teachings at hiring time. (Cat.1-ID.14, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

In response to my general sharing of such sentiments, a teacher at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School responded:

> ...what parents don't understand is that the skills acquired through learning cultural content are comparable to other schools everywhere – we just use content that makes sense. Other schools should be preparing non-native students to work with native people by familiarizing them with native content. They should meet native people half way rather than native people having to go the extra distance alone. (Cat.2-ID.08, personal communication, January 30, 2006)

Many students and parents measure educational programs according to their ability to prepare students for entry in to the mainstream workforce or post-secondary institutions. Although this is important, skills development and knowledge acquisition in preparation for the workforce or continued education should be done in a manner that protects and celebrates Anishinabe culture. Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald (1997) affirm my findings in that:

> ...effective programming for Aboriginal students must attempt to reach the whole child. That is, schools must be aware of and respond to needs that include not only the intellectual and academic, but also the physical and sociological needs that may be present due to isolation, poverty, or dysfunctional families. (p. 305)

The effective use of guidance and school counsellors has been a positive force within the community school. The counsellor functions best as a liaison on many different levels between home and school. Anishinabe students and parents benefit from the advice of a school counsellor who is aware of the issues of culturally relevant programming raised by Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald (1997) and Goddart (2002). To do this job effectively, the school counsellor must be well informed on issues that have impact on First-Nation people both within

and outside of the community and must be able to assist students and parents in making choices that best reflect their goals as Anishinabe people.

The school counsellor for Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School and secondary school programs does an excellent job of liaising between home and school and possesses great insight that he regularly shares with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. He helps to ensure that parents and all education stakeholders know that children coming out of Wiiji Nimbawiyaang possess a culturally-enriched education in comparison to other schools. This is something to celebrate and expand upon for the opportunity that it affords community members with, such as developing increasing levels of critical awareness of the benefits of community-oriented education.

Curriculum

> Curricula should be fitted to children, not children to curriculum. (Cat.2-ID.11, personal communication, April 4, 2006)

Curriculum is powerful. It can be a helpful nation-building tool, or it can be a destructive force that can cripple a nation. On one hand, curriculum shapes the way schools are organized and instruction is delivered. On the other hand, curriculum is the guiding force of the entire institution and community. Kronick and Hargis (1998) reinforce the great importance of curriculum.

> One may think of curriculum as a benign list of educational objectives or skills that make up a course of study. However, the scope and sequence of items that make up the typical K-12 curriculum make up a matrix into which students must be fitted [whether the fit is culturally relevant or not]. It is in this fitting that the damage occurs, and students drop out or are forced out. Rather than being dropouts, these students are actually better characterized as casualties. The injury inflicted on students in the attempts at fitting them to rigid curricular structures makes them curriculum casualties. (p. 10)

Curriculum can be privileging and schooling is deeply implicated in cultural politics (McLaren in Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 74). Within school and communities, some groups have power to declare dominant forms of knowledge, values, and histories - e.g., canonical knowledge - while others are marginalized even within their own community. This effect occurs in part because of "hidden curriculum" which results in "unintended outcomes of the schooling process" (McLaren in Darner, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 86). What this means is that curriculum is powerful and if it is not representative or relevant to all stakeholders, some are disempowered and this contributes to disillusionment and discouragement within the community.

Within this research, participants have described themselves as "curricular casualties" when the curriculum fails to make connections to them culturally. Therefore, some community members have expressed a desire for Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School to establish more effective and culture-based methodologies.

Kronick and Hargis (1998) have demonstrated through their research that utilizing learner-centered curriculum has proven successful for learners as evidenced by higher graduation rates (p. 17). Considering this finding, First-Nation schools should adopt learner-centered approaches that possess relevant curriculum content. As a suggestion, the Ontario Curriculum can be used as a guide only for creating curriculum for Anishinabe learners that will ensure their success within both native society and mainstream society. An example of such curriculum is the *Circle of Life* curriculum series of the Indigenous Education Coalition.

Despite some of the challenges experienced with curriculum, part of what makes First-Nation schools successful, when they are, is the fact that they provide an alternative to what is not working well for native students in mainstream schools (Maina, 1997; Chippewas of the

Thames, 2005). Improvements to instructional delivery are accommodated when educators understand, appreciate, and apply the fundamentals of the culture within the school on a daily basis. A great example of how this is accomplished at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School is through a look at a culturally-based strawberry curriculum developed by teacher in consultation with community volunteers and Elders.

> Students responded well to the strawberry curriculum that we developed with the input of parent and grandparent volunteers. Students were proud when they could make connections to their own culture through family stories and ceremonies that involve strawberries. They like planting and then enjoyed making fruit roll-ups. The curriculum was covered using native content. (Cat.2-ID.05, personal communication, April 14, 2006)

Eli Baxter, the culture and language teacher, revealed his success in employing culturally relevant curriculum.

> Students love it when I take them into the woods for an outdoor lesson. It seems that everyone can connect to nature and their ancestral roots while outdoors. There is greater respect for learning too when kids know that Elders respect such knowledge. This reverence for learning is rarely seen in the classroom. (personal communication, April 03, 2006)

According to Anishinabe educational philosophy (Ignas, 2004; Union of Ontario Indians, 2004), learning is a unique process for everyone; therefore, students should have the opportunity to progress at their own pace with content that is relevant to their lives (Chiefs of Ontario, 2004).

The finding of this research that pertains to the importance of curriculum concludes that curriculum possesses the power to change lives and attitudes. First-Nation schools have the ability to control that influence by working together with all participants to create a curriculum that best suits the needs of the people in order to provide an education that is comparable to and ultimately better than provincial or private schools.

There is great potential for community members to come together to have input within curriculum development especially when the community endorses traditional notions of Anishinabe participation through a high degree of awareness and action through community

involvement. For this to happen, within financial and other resource terms especially, the community would strongly benefit from being a part of an overall aggregated and integrated First Nation education system to establish and support effectively the expectations identified within a culturally-based curriculum. What goes on in the classroom should be influenced by the healthy culture of the community. This input into curriculum development can be therapeutic for many people who have been hurt by previous experiences within educational institutions. As Haig-Brown (1995) suggests, "taking control of their lives, taking control of their education, First Nation people are continuing the processes of redefining, restructuring, and revitalizing their dynamic cultures" (p. 229). Although efforts to realize this need for extensive curricular intervention is essential for ongoing success in education for First-Nation people, close attention to the issue of adequate funding for such ventures is imperative.

Sufficiency of Funding

> A lack of funding is responsible for a high teacher turnover rate that affects consistency in the community's education. Many First Nation teachers are not paid according to a fixed pay grid and they are often lured away from the First Nation communities for more lucrative positions in the public sector. In order to keep teachers in First Nation communities there needs to be a more standardized pay scale, comparable to that of the public sector teachers, as well as incentives for them to stay in the community [e.g., pensions, benefits]. (Bird and McKinnon, 2004, p 14)

A significant part of the argument for increased jurisdiction for First Nations over education includes increasing financial resources that are "flexible and responsive … which will help further capacity building initiatives and more access to human and financial resources, which in turn facilitate the exercise of jurisdiction"(Morgan, 2002, p. 59). There is always a need for increased resources, especially within band schools. It is a fact that INAC's funding formula for native children in native schools provides less money per-capita than non-native students attending publically funded schools (VanEvery-Albert in Chiefs of Ontario, 2004). This reality

begs for action because, as mentioned earlier, increased access to resources sufficient to support a school equal to schools existing within established boards might only happen with aggregation perhaps within the proposed Union of Ontario Indian's (UOI) Restoration of Jurisdiction (ROJ) initiative.

The ROJ project of the UOI is attempting to pursue aggregation wherein all communities that are part of the UOI will aggregate resources to the administration for one large body known as the *Kinomaadzwin Education Body* to support the delivery of education programs and services (Union of Ontario Indians, 2007b, p. 9). For the time being, this idea of managing a collection of many independent community schools as a single unit may be more palatable to First Nation people than an agreement with mainstream public school boards in light of the unfortunate relationships between native and non-native society to date.

One elected councillor of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation explained the problem of the lack of equality in funding in this way:

> This is not a new problem. The Canadian government has been trying to get rid of the First Nation people all along. Assimilation is the goal and it's been obvious over the generations. About unequal finding in education – this is part of a larger political scheme to lure First Nation students away from the community here - a significant source of strength - to schools where there are better resources, but at the expense of their culture. (Cat.3-ID.03, personal communication, April 06, 2006)

This is an interesting observation as blame is not put onto residential schools but onto another strategy for extinguishing language and culture. If anything, the proposed development of the *Kinomaadzwin Education Body* is a move in a new direction, with regards to taking action, for education for First Nation people.

Despite this alleged financial inequality, community members are looking towards increased development of community resources to help offset areas of financial shortfall. This strategy has its benefits as community members have been looking inward for resources and

have rediscovered people whose knowledge and wisdom have gone largely unnoticed and underutilized. This inward focus of seeking out existing resources within the community has rekindled a desire for culturally-based indigenous knowledge, resources, and people.

Within the community-based school, it is a great privilege to have the Elders, many of them decorated veterans, come into Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School on Remembrance Day and share their experiences not just about their contributions to the wars, but also their reflections about what was happening at home within the First Nation communities while they were gone. The success achieved by drawing upon the wisdom and oral story traditions of the Elders is seen in this quote:

> I come [to Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School] because I am invited each year. I like to see the kids and they listen to my stories. They see me in the community and they are less likely to be shy. I'm glad because I've helped them to see how native warriors help to keep [them] free. (Cat.1-ID.18, personal communication, November 10, 2005)

Many may think it ironic that native people, who were treated so badly by Canada, would enlist in national war efforts in high proportional numbers in comparison to other groups in Canada. However, it should be noted that many native veterans report that they were not necessarily fighting exclusively for Canada, but also against further threats to Aboriginal lands and rights.

On other occasions, Elders are invited into the school to share with the children, hands-on, about culture, hunting, medicine, crafts, stories, and legends as it pertains to their interests. These experiences are priceless; however, they can only help, to a limited degree, the huge problem of access to sufficient and appropriate resources.

Despite the reality of the impact of insufficient funding, many people became encouraged at the potential that exists within the community through the harnessing of community knowledge and skills. Critical awareness of the underutilization of community resources, largely through the methodology of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research wherein community members

are encouraged to rediscover areas of self sufficiency, but not at the expense of diminishing inherent rights, is a significant success uncovered by this research. Although First-Nation communities may be able to become increasingly self-sufficient in finances for education, it cannot be forgotten that it is the responsibility of Canada to honour its treaties, which includes the provision of education for Aboriginal people (legally defined as Indian, Métis, and Inuit) who possess such rights.

Concerning the preservation of inherent and treaty rights, the Anishinabe are pushing for a more equitable funding system to support education for First-Nation people that will provide for a level playing field with the provincial system. In the meantime, many community members recognize that members of younger generations must be informed about their treaty rights in order to be able to protect those rights when older community members are gone. A staff member of Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School understood the importance of providing children with an education that informs the knowledge of their inherent rights:

> The school needs to teach these kids about who they and what their rights are so they can defend themselves when they need to. I have a niece in the school and I want the school to repeat what I've already told her [about treaty rights]. Public school can't do this and won't do this! This school and what is taught here is part of the survival of the next generation. (Cat. 2-ID.01, personal communication, April 14, 2006)

Seventy-two percent of research participants are in agreement that Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, a First Nation community school, can be much more than simply a place to learn the 3 R's; this school and schools like it are cultural institutions where students are equipped with pride, knowledge, identity, and skills necessary for the preservation and flourishing of the Anishinabe nation.

Subthemes

Within the data, subthemes have emerged from the dominant themes. They are 1) Identifying Notions of Achievement, and 2) Establishing Strong Communication.

Identifying Notions of Achievement

Within the research community, ideas about achievement are culturally-based, culturally-defined, and different for various groups. At Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School, success is determined through application of Anishinabe culturally-based and relevant curriculum and forms of assessment and evaluation that incorporate a cyclical process of action, assessment, reflection, and adaptation, quite like the action-research method employed within this research. Within Anishinabe culture, this familiar and time-honoured process is known as *Meno-Bimaadziwin*.

In reflection upon the successes experienced with community education, research participants considered how achievement is perceived within the culture of the community. Of the total number of parents, teachers and education workers, and leaders and administrators who responded to my question as directed by the CRC about assessment, eighty-five percent of people responded with an answer supporting Anishinabe culture as a framework, to varying degrees, that could be used in helping to determine success within education at the community level. A culture-based framework rests heavily upon relationships. Successes within social and academic circles have been demonstrated repeatedly at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School when instruction and programming are culturally-based and informed by Anishinabe pedagogical insights and traditions.

A teacher had encouraging words to share with me on assessment as he reflected upon the awareness levels of parents with regards to assessment:

> I see when parents see the connection to the culture and approve of the units and topic the students begin to apply themselves. I think students have picked up on their parents' apprehension of school and have become mistrustful too. Learned behavior is powerful.

> Therefore when parents and students see a connection of their [student's] work to the culture, there is a huge attitude shift for the better. Culture seems to be a seal of approval. (Cat.2-ID.04, personal communication, April 06, 2006)

For the Anishinabe, success is a deeply personal journey. Therefore success can be attained in a variety of ways. Within mainstream society, success for native students is more of a challenging notion. Essentially, students within the public school system must largely conform to set curriculum and the teachers' or school's philosophy and teaching styles to attain success. For a minority student, this conformity is not easy to achieve without personal sacrifice of cultural integrity (Chubb & Loveless, 2002; Aronson, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Gregory, 2000).

In addition to this reality, there exists a widespread notion or expectation of native failure within mainstream schools. It has been established by research participants that this mindset or expectation of underachievement or failure of native students is readily and widely accepted without critical debate amongst native and non-native peoples. As a result of this reality, Kronick and Hargis (1998) explain that the "notion of actualized failure manifests [within native society] due to erroneous ideas perpetuated by the dominant power-holding society" (p. 7).

From the era of residential schools and onward, and perhaps from even prior to this time, the notion of native underachievement within mainstream public education systems has been largely accepted without critical contemplation. When I asked parents about their various degrees of success in mainstream institutions, several responded that academic failure was true for them personally:

> I think I did poorly because I lacked a strong personal identity. I had nothing to fall back on. It was easy to accept failure when I knew I was missing something big in my life – my culture. (Cat.1-ID.11, personal communication, February 28, 2006)

Unfortunately many native students who encountered negative experiences with school later become parents who unavoidably retained and, unconsciously or consciously, perpetuated

negative attitudes toward the school with their own children, thereby creating a cyclical circle of defeat.

Another risk for disengagement from education on the part of native students is expressed through recurring and ongoing failure. Kronick and Hargis' (1998) research demonstrates that "it is a common characteristic of students who will drop out to have failed and repeated one or more grades" (p. 7). Consider the story of one parent below:

> I failed a grade and never got over it. The label of failure stayed my entire life. Teachers saw me as a kid who failed the year before. Same as kids. Same for my brothers and sisters – and probably mom and dad. I started to see myself the way everyone else did and lived up to it. (Cat.1-ID.11, personal communication, February 1, 2006)

Other Anishinabe parents possessed different experiences. Some research participants revealed that, although failure had negative connotations, as long as that failure occurred within the context of mainstream or non-native education, it did not hold significant implications within the First Nation community. Since many people do not feel connected to the mainstream education system, considering it basically a foreign and imposed system irrelevant to Anishinabe life, failure within that system is typical and expected. Within the constructs of this particular thinking, failure has no associated shame. One parent had this to say about failure:

> There is no shame in [academic] failure for kids in public school because out there is a foreign system anyway – made with non-native people in mind. My son and his friends are Indian and if they fail at learning how to be a white-man, oh-well. It's not much of a loss. It's funny because kids feel more successful at home as 'failures' where they are accepted and understood than being 'successful' in nothing worthwhile anyway. (Cat.1-ID.12, personal communication, April 11, 2006)

This revelation is important because it illustrates a very different understanding of success and failure amongst the Anishinabe at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Students realize that education systems devoid of cultural relevance disrespect them. Since it has already been established that respectful and reciprocal quality relationships are central to success in education

for First Nation students, it is understandable how many community members minimize failure within mainstream systems knowing that it is a flawed system to begin with.

A member of the Board of Education echoed this observation in her comments as well:

> For the most part academic failure is not associated with shame in our community. Part of this is because there is little faith in the public school system to respect the culture of our children anyway. The other part for this is because success is a personal accomplishment – we all succeed at different rates and at different times in our lives – so who can be the judge about someone's failure when learning is such a personal journey. (Cat.3-ID.02, personal communication, January 31, 2006)

These comments from the research participants alert the research community for the need to advocate strongly for the implementation of programs, literature, and other resources within public schools, and community-based schools, to better support and respect the Anishinabe culture, especially if there is to be a move toward an aggregated or integrated education system such as the proposed UOI initiative or other systems. At the same time, one may argue that the community must formulate and endorse a new strategy of accepted resistance to such oppression other than simply dropping out of school. Anishinabe students need to be unified and empowered through knowledge, via critical awareness, that motivates and encourages them to action.

Encouraged by the examples of resistance and success of the Maori (Smith, 2000), the Aborigines (Exley & Bliss, 2004), and the Navajo (Manuelito, 2005), I assert that parents, teachers, and all other education stakeholders, likewise, need to participate in the formulation of a strategy wherein no Anishinabe individual has to struggle alone. First Nation people may also be encouraged with the growing number of First-Nation thinkers and writers to the point that they would begin to see the importance of education differently (Dyck, 2006; Turner, 2006).

When results were shared with the Community Research Committee (CRC) about dangerous patterns of thinking emerging from the data, many were alarmed and commented that they did not realize that such thinking was so widespread within the community and therefore

affecting the mindset of each new generation adversely. In response discussions occurred about the need for improvements to the community school program, including mainstream education systems, to enhance respect for Anishinabe people and culture. This strong assertion came with recurring reference to the obligation of treaties and Canada's ultimate responsibility for the provision of a quality education for First Nation people; however, if one believes in the importance of meaningful jurisdiction and control, the responsibility for high-quality First Nation education can only rest with First-Nations people.

A closer look at an unfortunate tendency of First-Nation schools in Ontario reveals that many have, by financial necessity and also by policy, become at least nominal replicas of mainstream public schools. In part, this replication may have occurred because First-Nation schools are significantly underfunded and have defaulted by necessity, despite internal resourcing, to schools that resort to the exclusive use of non-native curriculum and non-native resources. An insufficiency of funding and resources makes it virtually impossible to create a culturally relevant curriculum and therefore culturally relevant schools. It is for this reason that underfunded schools tend to operate based upon established and well-funded mainstream educational models for the purposes of survival despite philosophical and cultural incongruencies.

By following mainstream models, we tend to copy mainstream forms of assessment and evaluation. This can be problematic as people can become too focused on looking for problems with the student instead of considering the possibility of problems with the system. Within traditional Anishinabe culture, students always succeed – if not the parent /community tries another approach until success is obtained. Fundamentally, then, and philosophically,

mainstream approaches to education are a significant departure from traditional and culturally relevant Anishinabe forms of education (Hilger, 1992; Union of Ontario Indians, 2004).

In addition to an increased level of critical consciousness and ensuing general commitment to assisting children and families to succeed in education, there is a desire amongst research participants to make improvements for the whole child. From a psychological point of view, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs explains that success will be limited for students until basic needs are met. The hierarchy demonstrates that self-actualization through education can be attained only after basic needs and safety is achieved. It has been determined through case studies involving native and/ or minority students (Bell, *et al.*, 2004; National Commission on Education, 1996) that basic needs must be met before success in education or other domains of life is possible. Findings like these can be construed as obvious; however, the majority of First-Nation communities remain underfunded and therefore not as able to achieve the needed higher order functioning, as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy, to achieve success in areas such as self-actualization.

Teachers at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School concur that attention to the physiological needs of students is a factor that affects social and academic outcome and cannot be ignored.

> We see firsthand that kids can't concentrate when they are hungry. We all see this. Lots of kids here need the assistance of meal programs. They need that hot meal at lunch. The impact of going without nourishment can scar a child for their entire life. Growing bodies and brains need good food and kids are bringing in twinkies and cola. Other kids don't bring in anything. Is this their fault? Do we have a responsibility to these students if parents don't have needed parenting skills? (Cat. 2-ID.12, personal communication, April 14, 2006)

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs scale and the results of Bell, *et al.'s* (2004) extensive research within ten "excellent" high-aboriginal-enrollment schools in Canada, students cannot attain social and academic success "until their deficiency needs have been satisfied" (Bell, *et al.*, p. 247). In interpreting Maslow's hierarchy of needs within the context of native achievement,

the "rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." This truism can be helpful in explaining how learning, premised upon access to something as simple as good food is dependent on economics.

Spirituality (i.e., social needs or a sense of belonging), for Anishinabe people, falls within basic and rudimentary levels of importance within Maslow's hierarchy. Social needs or a sense of belonging (e.g., love and acceptance) are part of how Anishinabe people define spirituality. Spirituality is an all encompassing force that impacts on all basic and higher order levels of human functioning or aspects of being. The findings of Chan and Osthimer in Deyhle and Swisher (1997) support my findings in that a strong and established sense of spirituality is a positive and helpful force that native students associate with experienced success as long as it does not evolve into religious factionalism between traditionalists and Christians as it has in many parts of Canada.

In a case study involving twenty-four Navajo adolescents, Chan and Osthimer demonstrated that students from less traditional/ spiritual homes dropped out at higher rates then compared to students who reported their families as "moderate," meaning they observed spiritual traditions while having certain Anglo conveniences. Students who practiced spiritually were more likely to be college bound (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997, p. 30).

This pattern is also observable at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School. An education worker, also known as a Resource/ Social Worker (RSW), reported that success is observable outside of the classroom as an extension of culture based groups, such as the dance troop, that meets after school.

> Kids come to dance because everyone is accepted here. No one is better than anybody else. We don't have 'level 4' dancers. We don't have 'level 1' dancers. We have children who are all special and are accepted just as they are. Here everybody is a winner. Kids grasp a hold very hard to this philosophy and don't let go. For many, dance is the only place where they fit in and aren't compared to someone else. Plus, it's fun! Never do I have to remind the kids how important dances and songs are – there is a natural reverence for things that

> are cultural and spiritual, even amongst kids who don't have traditional teachings. (Cat.2-ID.13, personal communication, April 03, 2006)

Like spirituality, attendance, is also an area of considerable importance. Attendance is a key area that impacts on student achievement (Berger, Epp, & Moller, 2006). According to Langille (personal communication, February 13, 2007), Executive Director of the N'Amerind (Urban) Friendship Center in London, Ontario, First-Nation people have a high incidence of transiency and this does impact on a student's overall academic performance. Kronick and Hargis (1998) also affirm that "students who come from families who are transient ... miss school frequently enough to pose a serious learning problem. Absence is the cause of the learning difficulty not the result of it ....subsequent failure causes the student to avoid [school] still more" (p. 24).

One wonders if the lack of personal relevancy and lack of culture could be an important cause of student and parental struggles with attendance issues. If this is the case, as many believe, much can be done to right this wrong such as creating and or providing access to students of curriculum that is culturally relevant. This chapter has already explored many reasons that can help explain the problem of poor attendance within First Nation schools. Some of these reasons are due to erroneous and unchallenged mindsets of community members and ineffective methods of resistance (e.g., such as withdrawn parental support from the school or not viewing academic failure as problematic). Another reason that can help to explain poor attendance is the lack of value for education in general due to persistent disillusionment stemming from the experience of residential schools and other oppressive policies such as the *Indian Act*. Whatever reasons can be formulated to explain reasons for poor attendance, a critical response from the community and all education stakeholders is needed as part of the solution.

Establishing Strong Communication

> Effective communication is the key to success. (Kirkness, 1999, p. 57)

The creation and communication of healthy mindsets, attitudes, and expectations ultimately impacts upon the climate, vision, and degrees of "ownership" in the school. Communication is a key area that ensures and sustains success within educational organizations (Fiordo, 1990; Cooper, 2007; Kirkness, 1999). Essentially, healthy relationships with others are essential for communication and maintaining balance within Anishinabe society. The notion of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* is based upon effective communication in that people are encouraged to reflect and share about their lives in efforts to make it better for everyone and everything (Rheault, 1998; Bell, 2006). The concept of communication is important as we are all connected in the circle of life. It is expected, in keeping with the notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*, that if there is an area of difficulty in life, a person would seek counsel in efforts to bring about improvements to better aid in the goal of "walking a good path" to attain a "good life."

Education is a lifelong and natural progression within traditional Anishinabe thinking (Bressette, 2000). To help overcome the legacy left behind from oppressive and foreign approaches to education, Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School must clearly communicate positive goals to help break down mindsets and barriers, and follow through with plans for action. This is an idea endorsed by the Chippewas of the Thames Board of Education via the provision of annual student planners (organizers) complete with important school information and policies inside. These planners are passed back and forth from home to the community school daily as teachers and parents communicate with each other.

It is not enough to send home letters periodically. Effective communication at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School is largely dependent upon daily communication with all stakeholders. A

staff member recounts effective methods of communication employed with teachers, parents, and students:

> I communicate daily with parents using positive phone calls and visits to the home. I am an advocate of the family and the importance of education. Communication is the most important factor in bringing people together to understand issues. A lot of the time, problems arise because people don't know the whole story. (Cat.2-ID.02, personal communication, April 06, 2006)

Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School uses weekly and monthly newsletters to communicate with parents and the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community. Regular access to information about the successes attained at the school, according to insight from research participants, helps establish more positive thinking about the school and education in general.

A single parent revealed that Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School newsletters helped him to communicate better with his daughter because he knew what was going on at the school.

> My daughter is going to high school [soon]. She is in that 'almost grown up' phase where she knows everything. It's hard to talk with kids when they're going through this. When I get the newsletter from the school or papers from her teacher, this helps me to understand what she's going through and what she's learning. Sometimes I can help. Sometimes she has a lot to say when I ask the right questions because I have an idea of what's going on at the school. (Cat.1-ID.14, personal communication, February 13, 2006)

Friedel (1999) agrees that higher levels of success can be achieved if students and parents are provided with the opportunity to be informed of and play a significant role in communicating information.

The action-research methodology (Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research) used in this study has naturally facilitated increased communication amongst all community research participants, and research participants have, in turn, assisted in furthering the notion of the importance of communication to other community members. This increased awareness and involvement widens the opportunity for other community stakeholders to participate likewise in community school programs in meaningful ways. In response to community disillusionment

regarding the school, research participants, and especially administrators and leaders, want to encourage community members to rethink the role of the school and instead view the school as a potential change agent for a better future.

This renewed view of the school and education is more conducive to Anishinabe culture as First-Nations schools endeavour to provide a healthy fusion where all members, young, old, and in-between, can come together to celebrate and draw strength from each other. There are many positive examples of success within the school and these need to be communicated to the community louder than "areas of concern." For *Meno-Bimaadziwin* to permeate the boundaries of the school and community, stakeholders must reconnect and reestablish positive relationships and live a good life with each other in the community, and especially within the school. Increased communication via this action-research project has led to increased community involvement and this is demonstrated through the creation of a new vision statement for education in response to heightened levels of awareness and desires for increased participation at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School.

CHAPTER 6

THE NEXT CYCLE

A New Vision Statement: A Community Response to the Research

> In the beginning, the Creator had a vision. And the Creator brought forth the vision by creating the universe with all of the galaxies, stars, planets, and moons. The Creator then made our beautiful Earth and filled it with oceans, lakes, rivers, and streams. The Creator then made all the kinds of plants and animals of the earth. Finally, the Creator made humankind in all shapes, sizes, colors, languages, and ways of living.
>
> And the Creator gave humans the ability to have visions, to find their purpose or reasons for being here, knowing all along that people sometimes lose their way. Humans are imperfect beings. We all stray from the Good Path [*Meno-Bimaadziwin*]. Then we dream of better times and of a better life, for ourselves and for all who are important to us. (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002, p. 120)

For the Anishinabek, the quote above is about the benefits of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and how visions can help us ensure that we live the best possible life as life-long learners. Within the contexts of this project, the culminating outcome resulting from increased community participation and awareness was a better understanding of the overall impact of education in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and a strong desire to make further improvements for everyone in the present and future. In keeping with notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* and all of the good will and plans for increased success amongst all individuals within the community, the Anishinabek nation (Union of Ontario Indians, 2007), and mainstream society, it became logical for the research-community stakeholders to, as a step toward achieving increased critical consciousness and transformative action through *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, revisit the existing vision statement.

In general, native people understand the value of visions. Visions are an important part of spirituality (Irwin, 2000). A good example of the importance of visions for native people is the vision shared by the Squamish Chief Seattle to settlers in treaty talks in 1851 wherein he

questioned the legitimacy of anyone's claim to owning the earth. He is alleged to have asked the following critical questions:

> How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man. (Chief Seattle, 1851, para. 2)

The sharing of this vision about the interconnectedness of mankind helps all readers better understand the native notions of conservation, responsibility for the earth and for each other, and therefore the importance of education in furthering these notions.

Within the research community, research participants understand the importance of vision and therefore visions and vision works are important and central to continued success in education for First-Nation people. Creating a vision can orient direction, evaluate present direction, and chart a direction for the future. Vision gives potentiality to a personal or cultural goal that is important and helpful within community-building as a vision helps to remind stakeholders of the accountability that we have to each other through education in Anishinabe society while "advancing our goal of nationhood" (Union of Ontario Indians, 2007, para.1).

Likewise, the educational vision of the Assembly of First Nations (1988) is equally important as a model based upon a collective vision. In, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future - A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education*, the AFN affirms the value and importance of education to native peoples.

> First Nations maintain that mainstream education programs and curricula are largely irrelevant to the values, philosophies and needs of their people, families and communities. To obtain the best possible education for First Nations children, a comprehensive restructuring of education is needed. A new system must be designed to meet the needs of First Nations people, rather than forcing them into an alien system which does not meet their needs...The success of the school system depends on the quality of the curriculum. It should promote the contributions that First Nations have made within their own territories, to Canada and to the world. It should be value-based, contain a spiritual

> dimension, develop the cultural identity of the student and promote parental participation. The goals of First Nations education should prepare children to gain the necessary skills for successful living and contribute to the community; reinforce students' cultural identify; provide students with a balanced capacity to function successfully in both the traditional value-based First Nations lifestyle and the mainstream of Canadian society. (Chief of Ontario, 2005, p. 5)

This document asserts that cultural relevancy is essential in all areas of education for it to be meaningful and effective. This report focuses upon four aspects of First-Nations education: jurisdiction, quality, management, and financing. What will ensue is a reporting on the revision of the community education vision statement at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation which focused upon these named areas.

Understanding a Need for a New Vision

Within the research community, after sharing update reports that hinted at the existence of some emergent themes underlying success experienced in community school, the Board of Education decided to capitalize on stakeholder interest and involvement and provide an opportunity for community action. Their initial action plan was twofold.

First, the board decided by consensus in response to data emergent from this research project that various sub-committees of the Board of Education would pursue further development in specific areas. Accordingly, further analysis of data and response to the perceptions and desires of the community would occur later within the specialized sub-group committees under the Board of Education (e.g., Community Relationships Committee, Early Years Committee, Secondary School Committee, Post Secondary Committee, Human Resource Committee, and Curriculum Committee).

Second, due to the reporting of CRC members to the Board of Education, it was decided that, in order for success to be furthered and representative of the desires of the community, the existing education vision statement would be revisited.

At the time in question, the vision statement guiding education for the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation was six years old. Most research participants indicated that they knew that the community had a vision statement for education, but were unfamiliar with its content and wondered just whose vision it was. Meanwhile, data from the research continued to influence the Board of Education via the CRC on an intermittent basis. Perhaps influenced by a variety of reasons, such as the expressed desire of community education stakeholders to have increased ownership, input, and control in education in the community school, the Board of Education decided to revisit the community education vision statement.

One initial idea was to have the Board of Education perform this review internally; however, the success attained through the use of an action-research methodology, involving the input of as many education stakeholders as possible, may have been a deciding influence to have this process undertaken on a broader community level. A community-based response to the interests and needs of the community is admirable and reinforces the successes in education that already exist within the First Nation.

About the Process of Revisiting the Vision

"Why," "Who," and "How" were key areas of focus to consider within preparations for the revisiting the vision workshop. This is explained below.

Why

It became evident throughout the research process that community research participants wanted to become more involved in community education programs; however, it was unclear what that involvement would look like without a clear vision and subsequent plan that reflected the desires of the community and needs/ issues within education. The creation of a new vision statement was approached from multiple angles that would address as many concerns of community education stakeholders as possible.

Within the initial planning for this event, I learned that some Board of Education members wanted the document reviewed by a few individuals with suggestions for basic improvements. The majority of Board members, however, who were more involved with the overall action-research project, thought it was best to involve as many people as possible within the decision making processes.

At the Canadian Association of University Teachers forum (2008) for Aboriginal faculty, Atleo explained how indigenous decision making is different from more mainstream methods. He asserts that there are three parts and rights associated with the process of decision making in native culture. First is the right to be able to speak or communicate one's ideas. Second is the right to be heard. Unfortunately, it is ignoring this second right, Atleo claims, that causes common decision making processes used today to break down. The third part of effective decision making is the right to be understood, which involves respect and communication. The majority of research participants/ members of the Board of Education wanted to respect each other and traditional decision making processes so it was decided to pursue the revisiting of the vision statement by including as many community members as possible within that process.

Review of the data obtained from community members made it clear that the research community possessed a significant desire to make culturally appropriate improvements to

education programs to address areas of deficiencies, to enhance outcomes within areas of proven success, and to connect positively with all education stakeholders in making education a community-centered, community-supported, and community-owned initiative.

Who

The Board of Education assumed responsibility for making this community-based re-evaluation of the vision statement occur in a manner that respected the wishes of the education stakeholders to participate. Based upon previous experience, the Board decided that although community meetings were positive and constructive, it would be essential to keep the meetings on track and focused as stakeholders would most likely be tempted to use meeting time designated for the vision work to discuss other important issues. Much thought went into the decision of who should facilitate the vision workshop. Knowing the community intimately, and based upon previous experiences in working directly and successfully with stakeholders, the Board of Education thought it best to seek out individuals for facilitation purposes who were not immediately connected to community issues, politics, and business to keep discussions focused and vision oriented.

When provided with an opportunity to share my thoughts on the overall process and the role of a facilitator, I reminded community members of their admirable accomplishments recently attained through the action-research process which involved as many participants as possible. Later, I was presented with an opportunity to facilitate a series of community meetings (workshops) intended to revisit the vision statement. I was especially honoured to be asked by a group of professional and community-based people such as the elected Board of Education, to facilitate these sessions.

I agreed to the request and committed to following the action-research methodology as part of the process used and in keeping with methodology used throughout the overall research project as it had been successful in raising awareness and participation levels amongst research participants. I believe that the Board of Education foresaw the need for a facilitator to help keep discussions focused amidst increased levels of participation of community members as many people expressed a desire through the research to talk, share, question, and contribute. Therefore a facilitator, who possessed both outsider and insider status and knowledge of the research community and relevant issues pertaining to the community and to First Nation education, would be helpful in keeping people focused and ensuring equitable contributions from all stakeholders, while also recognizing and respecting the unique status of all community members.

I believe, based upon the skills and leadership strengths observable within the community of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation that this role of facilitator could have likewise been effectively done by members from the community (i.e., an insider) with careful attention to personal biases.

How

It was clear right from the start that revisiting the vision statement of education would be a process controlled directly by the community itself. An important first and critical question about the current vision statement begged to be asked: "Whose vision is this?" The initial answers to this question would help determine how to proceed. This level of challenging was best done by me, an outsider who could and would be expected to pose such questions in a non-accusational manner without compromising essential community-based relationships. Reviewing a document

as essential as a vision statement was challenging and required focus that recognized people's concerns on all levels.

I greeted all workshop participants, reintroduced myself, and provided them with a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed, in general, what a vision statement was and emphasized how a clear vision is essential in helping a community and organization move forward collectively. I emphasized the importance of everyone having an opportunity to contribute within the process, in keeping with the methodology of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research. I identified my role within the process as a facilitator whose responsibility was to keep the process on track and provide everybody with equitable opportunities to participate.

After the presentation and some large-group discussion, the next step was to establish small groups. To each small group was assigned a member of the elected Board of Education, a trustee. These small groups were assigned a special discussion room equipped with some initial questions that I had provided to stimulate discussion (See Appendix E). It was anticipated that the trustees would be available to the community members to answer any questions, and also be in a better position to bring concerns and ideas back to the Board table for further discussion. The trustees also acted as small-group facilitators keeping the group meetings on track using a template of thought-provoking questions that I provided for them based upon the data obtained from the research participants and literature that I had reviewed in preparation for the workshop and analysis of data afterward (Landsberg, 1990; Lin, 2006; Bell and Harrison, 1995).

As I circulated from group to group ensuring that all discussions proceeded with the focus as planned, I noticed that many participants within these groups, as anticipated by members of the Board of Education, wanted to use the time to address wide areas of issues that pertained to education in a broader sense. I saw that it was a difficult job for trustees to keep small-groups

discussions completely on-track without appearing un-sympathetic to concerns of the electorate. This reality leads me to conclude that the formation of some regular forum for public discussion and input would be beneficial for the community and education department of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation as many participants within the workshop meeting had much to share of relevance and great importance.

The *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research methodology supported the decision to have trustees facilitate the small groups sessions. This approach to leadership worked to help provide a familiar avenue for community members to come and share. It also provided them with an example of a facilitative culturally-based leadership model to emulate elsewhere in the community as facilitative leadership follows in the traditions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*. According to how I interpret and define facilitative leadership in response to the literature (Straus, 2002; Conley and Goldman, 1994) and with respect to application with Anishinabe communities, everyone is encouraged to participate, and the leader is the facilitator of discussions where each participant's contributions have equal opportunity to influence. This leadership style provides a fair process where all positions are considered equally. Culturally based leadership empowers community members and provides a role model that reinforces the Anishinabe approach to effective leadership.

After the small-group session, there was a short break and then everyone reassembled for a recapitulation. In the tradition of facilitative leadership, I asked for a representative, in advance, from each group to share her or his findings based on her or his group's discussion. This sharing went very well and many people appeared to be very comfortable with this form of sharing. It was apparent that people enjoyed hearing the views of others, especially comments that demonstrated or identified the various forms of success experienced within the community

school. At the closing of the meeting, the Board of Education committed to reviewing the data obtained from the community and drafting up a revised vision statement using feedback obtained from this meeting to be presented to the community for final approval.

Observations

Many individuals came out to participate in the vision workshop. The feedback obtained from the small-and-large-group discussions revealed information that confirmed the community's desire to explore community defined success in education. Comments from the community regarding the need for a renewed vision were abundant and stemmed from a desire to investigate success and the concept of success experienced within the school. For example, one person asked if the school was really the hub of the community. Many others responded that if it was not, then it should be. Data reveal that many research participants want education to be the hub, culturally speaking, as it is a logical and central choice; however, it was discovered that many well-intentioned departments within the community, in efforts to bring about positive improvements, work in isolation from other departments. As a result, there are overlaps and duplication of community-based services because there is no unified vision for education. In response, a vision for education in the community was viewed as a way to help bring community members back to a culturally balanced focus that meets the needs of the community effectively.

Outcome

The workshop participants were pleased with the work accomplished that evening. There was a sense of easiness in the meeting room as I believed, based upon what research participants

had revealed to me directly, that people felt satisfied to have their ideas expressed amidst one another and within earshot of the members of the Board of Education.

On reflection, the Board of Education, in general, does a fair job in seeking out the ideas and interests of all stakeholders. For example in previous years, parents have been polled to get their input on issues pertaining to education. In the spring of 2005, secondary students were provided with the opportunity to state what additional supports they believed they required to remain successful while attending secondary school away from the reserve within a public board (Chippewas of the Thames, 2005). The Board of Education retained these data and regularly referred to them when it was time to plan or decision make. I attribute a significant amount of capacity development and community building at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to the willingness of stakeholders, such as the members of the Board of Education, school leaders and administrators, school staff, and parents and students, to make life better for everyone through education.

Finalizing the Document

The Board of Education kept its commitment to rework the vision statement using the input from community stakeholders. At a regular Board of Education meeting, I was invited to assist in helping pull key points from the data obtained from the vision workshop to help create a renewed document. After an opportunity to review all of the data, I shared with the Board of Education, emergent themes that I detected. These suggested themes, along with themes that they had already identified themselves, were pulled together and formed the core belief statements within the document. Efforts proceeded to the formation of a clear and succinct vision statement that encapsulated the focus of Anishinabe education at Chippewas of the Thames First Nation

supported by six core belief statements. The revised plan was presented to the community. It was accepted by the community and is now formally in place.

Reflection on the Process of Revisiting the Vision Statement

From a critical perspective, I believe that the overall process involved in revisiting the vision statement was successful because the community operated in synchronization with Anishinabe philosophy and methodology (based upon respect and notions of *Meno-Bimaadziwin*). With the employment of a reliable and consistent culturally-based methodology, community members knew what kind of behaviour to expect from each other even within work that was somewhat unfamiliar to them. There was respect demonstrated for all participants. Everybody's comments were considered. No person's position was elevated higher than that of another due to office or community standing.

In addition to this work on the vision statement, I believe that the previous work accomplished through this research's initiatives set the stage for the community to respond favorably. By this I mean that many of the people with whom I had already established a positive relationship felt comfortable in attending the vision workshop. Information about the workshop was publicized broadly and I was named as the facilitator who would be present to assist in this initiative. I believe that trust, based upon my insider and outsider status, reinforced through my research initiative, was a factor in having many research participants and other community members come out and freely share. I conclude that "relationship" and "process" made the difference.

In reflection upon the overall research project and the vision workshops, I observe that a strength of the community stems from an interest to see children of the present and future

supported in an education program that is careful to address their social and academic needs while accommodating the Anishinabe culture. Many research participants have shared with me via personal interviews that they see the vital importance of supporting children, and the children still to come ahead in the seventh generation. It is this commitment to the preservation of a "good life" as life-long learners through adherence to *Meno-Bimaadziwin* that brings community members together to support and create culturally-based success within First-Nation education in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. The Board of Education's commitment to the community via fair representation is a significant component contributing to the educational success within the community.

Overview

The new vision helps to better ground the community in the Anishinabe culture and language. Communicating the need and desire for change as a result of increased awareness and action has proven effective within the community. This is evidenced through regular inquiry and participation in this research by community members who wanted to help make a positive difference. The community has many good ideas for improvements based upon revelations obtained from participating within the research and therefore increased awareness. The process of action research has provided a forum for community members to have their ideas heard, considered, and responded to. More importantly this methodology has provided community members with the confidence and skills necessary to initiate and complete inquiries on their own, as a collective entity for other areas of interest and concern within the community.

There were issues that affected how the community readdressed the education vision statement. As part of a commitment to the people of the future, Anishinabek people are committed to looking ahead. Therefore, a future-oriented frame of reference is used to keep

projects and ideas accountable to future generations, as far ahead as the seventh generation and beyond. Accountability to future generations is important to the Anishinabek and has helped to strengthen the nation (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002; Union of Ontario Indians, 2004). Therefore accountability to the future generations is commonly reflected within organizational vision statements. As Alfred (1999) asserts, in native communities, people are beginning to look "beyond the present to envision a post-colonial future" (p. 2). Kilian (1995) also asserts that we must prepare for the future by reevaluating our vision (p. 6). This research has accomplished just what Alfred and Kilian suggest and has established a way for the community to revive the important Anishinabe principle of *Meno-Bimaadziwin.*

The research community engaged in redefining the vision by including input from as many sources as possible. This methodology of inclusion is similar to that used by the Chiefs of Ontario in their work completed for the *Education Manifesto* (Chiefs of Ontario, 2004). Within the manifesto, members from many different nations came together with direction, beliefs, and values from their communities to help forge a collective vision for native education on a broad scale.

Participation

The Board of Education and administration remain keen on enlisting the participation and guidance of community members in redefining educational needs and therefore education programs. One way this was evidenced throughout the school year was through feasts, ceremonies, barbeques, socials, and give-aways. Most of these celebrations are marked by Anishinabe protocol and tradition. They could also be interpreted as efforts to support as many community members as possible.

Within Anishinabek society, "give-aways" are frequent. Give-aways are ceremonies wherein people symbolically purge themselves of their material excesses in life by giving away material items to other community members. Traditionally, within Anishinabek society, the people who had the least were also the people deemed the "wealthiest" within society as they had given the most away (G. George, personal communication, February 25, 2008). It is important to explain the concept of "give-aways" within the context of this chapter as it helps readers to understand the culturally-based rationale behind the work of the Board of Education.

In efforts to find ways to support the various education needs of the community, and in honour of Anishinabe tradition, the Board of Education decided to use the opportunity at the gathering of community members for the vision work to provide a feast and "give-away" two laptop computers. The feast was well received and everybody partook together. Items for the give-away could have been anything; however, in consideration of the increasing need for access to technology to support learning, laptops were given away. The Board of Education endeavours to support community members in as many ways as possible. The feast and the give-away speak to the commitment that they have to the community in helping to provide the education needed for success.

After the give-away, people continued to participate readily throughout the vision workshop activities as planned. I mention this in the event that mainstream readers are inclined to think that the workshop attendance was favorable only on account of the possibility of receiving a gift.

Overall Conclusion

The methodology of Anishinabe *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, through the cyclical method of plan, act, observe, and reflect, assisted research participants in coming together with a common objective of helping to create awareness and facilitate improvements within all education programs impacting upon the community. Participants' efforts resulted in the renewal of a vision statement as an essential part of a plan for moving the entire community forward. This research project ultimately resulted in the creation of a renewed vision statement intended to bring Anishinabe people forward beyond the oppression of the past and present.

This research has effectively challenged many research participants to begin to initiate greater measures of decolonization, change, and empowerment concerning education within their community such as wanting to evaluate the effectiveness of other community programs in departments such as health, social services, and economic development. Research participants acknowledge that there exists negative reactionary energy concerning education and therefore want to re-channel this into restoring culture and traditions back into the education system. Mihesuah and Wilson's (2004) research supports this desire in that a "reaffirmation of indigenous epistemological and ontological foundations ... in contemporary times offers a central form of resistance to the colonial forces that have consistently and methodically denigrated and silenced [native people]" (p. 71).

In reflection upon the desire to have a positive change in education, it is apparent that the research community is more than capable of undertaking improvements to community education. These improvements include the decolonization of ingrained mindsets and attitudes with the employment of more culturally-based educational programs to effect meaningful change and further initiatives already underway within the Anishinabek nation. It is anticipated that the people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation will be highly motivated to observe the

successes attained within this particular community-based research project and likewise initiate similar research to generate data which the community can act upon. Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) reveal that "a large part of decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of oppression, the distortion of history … and the degrees to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices. Decolonization requires auto-criticism, self-reflection, and a rejection of victimage" (p. 71). These very objectives are what the research community has committed itself to through the creation of a vision statement that may support further successes in community education for First-Nation people.

The New Vision Statement

Vision Statement

> Embracing success through education by building strong identities as Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (Deshkan Ziibi) members by living our traditions and by empowering student excellence. (Chippewas of the Thames, 2007)

The new vision statement of 2007 (see Appendix C) clearly demonstrates that success is a primary focus of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. This implies that there will be a commitment on the part of the school community to define what success is and work to obtain and sustain that. Likewise, there is an increased commitment to culture as the community resolves to be mindful of preserving, sustaining, and advancing the Anishinabe nation into the seventh generation and beyond.

Core Belief Statements

In response to data that reveal troubling mindsets about education amongst many research participants, there is a commitment to providing an environment of safety and respect for all community members: "Our educational community is a safe, happy, and welcoming learning

environment where we embrace diversity, respect ourselves, others, and the environment" (Chippewas of the Thames, 2007, para. 3). It is anticipated that through greater efforts of relationship-building and communication that the community will come to embrace Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School and education in general with a renewed intensity and passion.

The following are core belief statements excerpted from the new document that support the new vision statement. These belief statements were created in direct response to needs identified by the workshop participants, and strongly echo the findings within my research.

> We recognize the sacrifices made by the generations before us along with our obligations to the seven generations to come. Our Educational Community is a safe, happy, and welcoming learning environment where we embrace diversity, respect ourselves, others, and the environment. [The Education Community is one]:
>
> 1) that is a caring and stimulating environment wherein every individual is cared for spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally;
>
> 2) that fosters and supports lifelong learning in schools, in the workplace, in the community, and within families;
>
> 3) that supports culturally relevant knowledge and academics as a foundation for social and economic well-being. Culturally relevant knowledge and wisdom are major assets of individuals and community members;
>
> 4) that supports collaboration with all community departments, e.g. political, economic, cultural, to enhance learning and make it our central focus and integrate it with life and meaningful work;
>
> 5) that is supported by an ongoing commitment of the community to provide resources to sustain the learning community;
>
> 6) and where learning is valued and education is understood as an investment in all people. (Chippewas of the Thames, 2007, par.3)

In comparison with the previous vision statement of 1998 (See Appendix C), the new document strongly reflect a greater propensity for action to define and maintain culturally-approved terms of success in education based upon an increase in critical awareness and response to issues that pertain to education for First Nation people.

Recommendations

This chapter is titled "The Next Cycle" because I see the start of a new community-based cycle of research to monitor the implementation of the new vision statement in the community. Patterns in life are cyclical; learning is cyclical; and in this case, research is cyclical, too. As the people of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation contemplate how to support and sustain the community-derived vision for success in their community school, they can have the confidence of knowing that if they did it before (e.g., cycles of research to determine a path forward via a renewed vision statement for education), then they can do it again.

Recommendations are alluded to and can be drawn from the information, data, and findings throughout this research. However, I have provided some specific recommendations here in the conclusion to assist the community to attain and maintain further success in the community school.

Relationships, Communication, and Capacity Development

Relationship building is a central focus of need revealed by research participants. Healthier relationships among all education stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, teachers, education workers, leaders, and administration, both inside the community and outside) will be further supported through improved systems of communication among all education stakeholders that can help to address old mindsets plaguing the notion of school and education. It is for these reasons that I propose the following:

Recommendation 1
That the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation endeavour to improve active and effective communication among all community members.

Recommendation 2
That there be new and more effective methods of frequent communication (e.g., home visits, student led conferences, information packages, communication through technology) and inter-communication between the school and the community at large.

Relationship building also includes improving parent relationships with the school. Parents need to have a meeting forum where they feel comfortable and can participate in a meaningful way in all areas of the school and community development. Parental support for education can be modeled and nurtured by helpers at school and by Elders from within the community. A positive home-school relationship can provide sufficient encouragement and motivation for parents in furthering their own personal development and education. Parents want to participate and enhance the culture of the school within a space and place that is safe, non-threatening, and is highly supportive. A designated place within the main foyer of the school for a parent/ community information bulletin board and a complimentary coffee/tea station would be a great start. Therefore I propose the following:

Recommendation 3
A strong commitment to increase positive relationships between all parents (guardians) and the school take priority through the development of some culturally appropriate forum where parents and other education stakeholders can freely and frequently exchange information and ideas with members of the school staff, leadership, and administration, and vice versa.

Teachers, especially those from outside of the community, need support within the community to better understand, appreciate, and endorse the Anishinabe culture. This is a need disclosed by each of the three focus groups.

Recommendation 4
That the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation provide mandatory and ongoing professional development for all community staff, especially education staff, in the form of cultural orientation to the Anishinabe nation with specific reference to the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community.

Culture is central to the successes identified within this research. There is a desire to put more culture in the school and have that culture manifested outward into society to allow

opportunity for everyday and meaningful practical application. There needs to be a unified vision concerning cultural education at the community level. Therefore I propose:

Recommendation 5:
That all stakeholders be actively involved in deciding how to implement increased levels of Anishinabe culture within Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School and the surrounding community.

What I Have Learned and Where this Research Leaves Me

My concluding thoughts about where this research has led me are encouraging and can be explained using the framework of the Seven Teachings.

Love

This has been a journey of love and understanding. Through retracing the steps of pain and anguish of many Anishinabe who have been hurt by oppressive education and policy, I have seen resiliency in efforts to help make education meaningful and relevant to the lives of the people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Through sharing stories, experiences, tears, and smiles, I have learned that people do not have to be, or want to be, tied to their past and can chart a new future as they rediscover self through a return to identity largely based on cultural teachings.

Courage

I have caught a glimpse of audacious courage possessed by Anishinabe people in efforts to simply survive within school and society. This was demonstrated by students and parents who were scared but fought hard anyway to protect themselves and each other from dangers that, sometimes, they did not quite understand completely (e.g., institutional racism and internal oppression). Elders taught me that sometimes it is "ok" not to have an answer for everything and

that some answers can be found only when I am ready to see them. Courage is found in teachers and education workers, parents, grandparents, leaders and administrators who stand up for what is fair and just in efforts to support the Anishinabe family and further the Anishinabek nation.

Wisdom

Wisdom is something that takes a lifetime to attain. Life should not be slave to the pursuit of knowledge, but rather a response to it as we endeavour to walk a "good road." A large part of wisdom comes from reflection. When people purposefully review and reflect upon issues and "walk them back to creation" (e.g., critical reflection on issues that led to the current state of affairs within aboriginal education in Canada, or a particular nation, for that matter) in efforts to understand root causes, greater enlightenment and more appropriate responses avail themselves. Sometimes wisdom will tell us things that we do not want to hear because it challenges the paradigm within which we have consciously or unconsciously chosen to live. I have learned that wisdom can sometimes be painful and liberating at the same time and it is frequently facilitated through increased critical consciousness but only helpful when that knowledge is acted upon.

Truth

Truth can be something defined differently for everyone. I have discovered that without critical reflection, truth can become whatever a person wants or needs it to be to privilege or protect certain ideologies and ways of thinking and being. This reality was evident within my research of both native and non-native people. Yet despite such a broad application and varying interpretations, "truth" is a force that draws many people together. The courage to pursue and

define truth through increased critical consciousness and critical introspection was greater when accompanied by the support of others.

Respect

To show real respect is to share and give of yourself for the benefit of all life. Respect is at the core of being an Anishinabe and I observed this to be true repeatedly within the research project in working with research participants. I have learned that respect does not mean putting up with abuse for the sake of congeniality. In fact respect for the self and for others means to confront. This program of study has taken six intensive years to complete. This has been six years of my life, my family's lives, and the lives of the people at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nations, wherein we have given of ourselves so completely only to discover the seemingly endless capacity of human beings to still give more for the purpose of helping others rediscover respect and self.

Honesty

When we commit to honesty, no matter how painful the reality of our experiences, for the purposes of healing and rediscovery, we are one step in the right direction for change. Anishinabe people can gather strength from one another in unity needed to critically respond to issues in our lives revealed by honest introspection. It was challenging for me at times to be honest about the anxiety I had concerning my own identity issues. This research initiative has helped me to realize that I must live in the spirit of how I was created and not bow to pressures of academia or society in general to be someone I am not.

Humility

Having powerful revelations in the areas of love, courage, wisdom, truth, respect, and honesty has helped me better understand humility. To know humility is to understand that you are not more or less important than anyone else. The reality of our common mortality is a testament to this fact. Humility is the driving force behind Anishinabe notions of self-determination, and culturally-relevant First-Nation education is what will ground this pursuit. Humility continues to be a motivating force in my desire to see Anishinabe people treated with the same respect and opportunity afforded by other non-native students in mainstream schools.

Summary

At the closing of this project, I am encouraged and my heart has hope. I know that as a facilitator of this project I have encouraged and challenged community members to consider, or start to consider with increased frequency, new and critical ways of thinking, living, and being. I have already passed the torch to the people of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation early on within this research, in keeping with the methodology of *Meno-Bimaadziwin* Action Research, and observed how they have readily assumed ownership of efforts to lead the community forward for improvement's sake.

My future plans for research will be to investigate how indigenous knowledge and education can likewise assist First-Nations in the pursuit and realization of self-government. In efforts to understand and respect the complexities of realities that contribute to peaceful human co-existence, I wish to further informed and grounded dialogue, discussion, and research that provide recognition of First-Nation people and their efforts to help heal the world.

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APPENDIX A

ETHICAL REVIEW PROTOCAL/

PERMISSION

Western

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Number: #0511-1
Applicant: Christy Bressette
Supervisor: Dr. Coulter
Title: *Success in community-based First Nation education*
Duration: November 2005 to September 2006
Type: PhD thesis
Received: November 8/05
Status: Approved November 15/05

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Ethical Review Committee, which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Ethical Review Committee any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Committee for approval.

[redacted]
Dr. Anne Cummings (Chair)

2005-2006 Faculty of Education Ethical Review Committee

Dr. Anne Cummings	**Faculty (Chair)**
Dr. Alan Edmunds	**Faculty**
Dr. Ellen Singleton	**Faculty**
Dr. Margaret McNay	**Faculty**
Dr. Jacqueline Specht	**Faculty**
Dr. Carol Beynon	**Chair of Graduate Education (*ex officio*)**
Dr. Jerry Paquette	**University Ethical Review Board (*ex officio*)**

The Faculty of Education
1137 Western Rd.
London, ON N6G 1G7

Patricia Allison, Institutional Research Officer
Room 2031 Faculty of Education Building
[redacted]

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION

(Volunteer Community Research Committee)

Christy R. Bressette
The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Education
1137 Western Road
London, ON
N6G 1G7

January 12, 2006

Dear Community Members:

My name is Christy Bressette of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation where I live at home with my family. I am presently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Western Ontario and my research area is First Nation education.

I am inviting you to participate in a community–based education research project within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. The Chief and Council and the Board of Education have approved this project as of Nov. 14, 2005. Specifically, I am inviting five or six parents, guardians, education workers, teachers, education administration and community leadership members to participate on the volunteer Community Research Committee (CRC). The CRC will function like a steering committee and will work closely with the researcher to provide direction to orient the study.

Recommended Criteria:
Members of the CRC may be active in education and should be:
-committed to education;
-willing to commit to voluntary monthly meetings;
-willing and able to provide direction for the steering of the research project;
-willing and able to help analyze and interpret data and make recommendations;
-able to draw upon previous experience in education and/ or community development;
-willing to invest time to further the educational successes of the community.

Informed consent:
Should you consent to participate in this research, please be aware that you have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, should you wish to do so, or to decline to answer any specific questions you would prefer not to answer.

Nature of Research:
Following the Restoration of Jurisdiction Project of the Union of Ontario Indians, my research will focus upon how to facilitate culturally relevant and meaningful improvements to elementary

education for First Nation people at the local community level at a Band-operated school, using an action research method that is "inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them" (p. 3).

Number of participants in total:
I estimate that this study will involve representation from 20% of all parents and students. All members of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community will be welcome to participate within this research initiative.

Location of the research:
All meetings/interviews/ surveys will take place on the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Benefits & Risks:
There are no known risks to participating within this research. Participants may experience a number of benefits including increased networking within the community; increased awareness of the common challenges experienced within education; increased opportunity to network with First Nation communities and other organizations or agencies; and increased opportunity to have their voice heard. Some research participants may experience emotional anxiety when recalling the legacy of Indian residential school, or Indian Federal Day schools (on-reserve), or other federal education policies.

Anonymity:
Every effort will be made to protect the identity of all research participants.

Contact information:
If you have any questions about this research, or any comments to make now or at a later date, please contact myself, Christy Bressette at (###) ###-#### or Dr. Rebecca Coulter, my research supervisor at UWO at (###) ###-#### ext. #####. You may also leave a message for me at Wijii School at (###) ###-####.

Migwech,

Christy R. Bressette
Ph.D. Candidate, UWO.

Consent Form

Success in Community Based First Nation Education

I have read the Letter of Information relating to the above titled project and all of my questions have been answered.

I consent to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION
(General Community Participation)

Christy R. Bressette
The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Education
1137 Western Road
London, ON
N6G 1G7

December 2005

Dear Community Members:

My name is Christy R. Bressette of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation where I live at home with my family. I am presently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Western Ontario and my research area is First Nation education.

I am inviting you to participate in a community–based education research project within the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. The Chief and Council and the Board of Education have approved this project as of (date). Specifically, I am inviting students, parents, guardians, education workers, teachers, education administration and community leadership members to participate in interviews approved of by the Community Research Committee (CRC).

Recommended Criteria:
Members interested in participating within this research may be actively involved in education and should be:
-actively involved and committed to education;
-willing to participate and complete interviews relating to education;
-able to draw upon previous experience in education and/ or community development;
-willing to invest time to further the educational successes of the community.

Informed consent:
Should you consent to participate in this research, please be aware that you have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, should you wish to do so, or to decline to answer any specific questions you would prefer not to answer.

Nature of Research:
Following the Restoration of Jurisdiction Project (ROJ) of the Union of Ontario Indians (UOI), my research will facilitate and evaluate culturally relevant and meaningful improvements to elementary education for First Nation people at the local community level at a Band-operated school, using an action research method.

About the Research Design:
I am seeking community members to sit on a volunteer community research committee (CRC) to oversee this project and provide direction. This committee will steer the project according to the interests of the community

Number of participants in total:
I estimate that this study will involve representation of approximately 20% of all parents /students. Other representation will come from the teachers & educational workers, and educational administration and community leadership.

Participant inclusions and exclusion criteria:
All members of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community will be welcome to participate within this research initiative.

Location of the research:
All meetings/interviews/ surveys will take place on the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Benefits & Risks:
There are no known risks to participating in this research. Participants may experience a number of benefits from participation including: increased networking within the community; increased awareness of the common challenges experienced within education; skill development; increased opportunity to network with First Nation communities and other organizations or agencies; and increased opportunity to have their voice heard.

Some research participants may experience emotional anxiety when recalling the legacy of Indian residential school, or Indian Federal Day schools (on-reserve), or other federal education policies.

Anonymity:
Every effort possible will be made to protect the identity of all research participants.

Contact information:
If you have any questions about this research, or any comments to make now or at a later date, please contact myself, Christy Bressette at (###) ###-#### or Dr. Rebecca Coulter, my research supervisor at UWO at (###) ###-#### ext. #####. You may also leave a message for me at Wijii School at (###) ###-####.

Migwech,

Christy R. Bressette
Ph.D. Candidate, UWO

Consent Form

Success in Community Based First Nation Education

I have read the Letter of Information relating to the above-titled project and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION
(For Children ages 6-9)

Christy R. Bressette
The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Education
1137 Western Road
London, ON
N6G 1G7

October 2005

Script to be read to children between ages 6-9.

"Dear Student:

My name is Christy Bressette and I live in Kettle Point. This is a First Nation community quite a bit like yours. I am a student at a big school in London called the University of Western Ontario. I am interested in your ideas.

Your community leaders, Chief & Council, have told me that this work I want to do with you is ok, so I am asking you if you want to help by answering some questions. You may decide not to answer the questions if you don't want to without getting into any trouble. I promise. All of our work will be done right here in your school.

There are many good reasons for wanting to answer some questions because this may help to make First Nations schools even better. I don't think that answering any questions will cause any problems. Remember that you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. I will not use your name in anything you say to me.

Do you have any questions that you want me to answer? If you still have questions, ask your mom or dad, or somebody you trust to call me. Thank You."

Christy R. Bressette
Student, UWO

Child Assent (ages 6-9) to Participate Within the Research: Success in Community Based First Nation Education.

All my questions about this study have been answered. I agree to take part.
Name of child (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION
(For Children ages 10-14)

Christy R. Bressette
The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Education
1137 Western Road
London, ON
N6G 1G7

October 2005

Dear Students:

My name is Christy Bressette. I live in Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. I am a student. I am a student in London at the University of Western Ontario. I am studying education in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Chief and Council, and the Board of Education have approved this research. I am inviting you to help by answering some questions.

I will be asking you some questions about your ideas on education. I will ask all of the questions here at the school. I will not use your name in anything that you say to me.

You may chose not to answer any questions, and may decide to stop working with me at any time without getting into any trouble.

There are many good reasons why you may want to help with this research such as working to become more active in the community, and working to improve your communication skills. There are no known risks or problems linked to your decision to answer some questions about your ideas of education.

If you have any questions about this research, you may ask me, or have your parent/ guardian give me a call. Thank you.

Christy Bressette
Student, UWO

Child Assent (ages 10-14) to Participate Within the Research: Success in Community Based First Nation Education.

I have read the Letter of Information relating to the above-titled project, and my questions have been answered.

I consent to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Parental Consent for a Minor to Participate within the Research: Success in Community Based First Nation Education.

By participating in this study my child will be asked questions regarding his or her opinions and ideas concerning various issues within education. My child will be informed of his or her right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty, should he or she wish to do so, or to decline to answer any specific questions that she or he would prefer not to answer.

I give my permission for my child(ren) _____ to
(print child's name)
participate within the research.

Name of parent (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Confidentiality Agreement

I acknowledge that my participation within this research project may provide the researcher and the volunteer community research committee (CRC) with access to general information that may be of a sensitive nature. All information shared with the researcher in confidence will remain confidential. However, the results of data collection will be separated from the identity of individual research participants, and may be discussed within the established CRC forum. This information shall only be discussed within the established forum of the CRC with the researcher present. No information shall be shared with anyone outside of the established CRC forum. All information will be treated with confidentiality and respect.

I agree to respect the confidentiality of personal information collected during the study.

Name (please print):_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

CHIPPEWAS OF THE THAMES FIRST NATION BOARD OF EDUCATION (2007)

VISION STATEMENT

Embracing success through education by building strong identities as Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (Deshkan Ziibi) members by living our traditions and by empowering student excellence.

CORE BELIEF STATEMENTS

We recognize the sacrifices made by the generations before us along with our obligations to the seven generations to come:

Our Educational Community is a safe, happy, and welcoming learning environment where we embrace diversity, respect ourselves, others, and the environment;

1. That is a caring and stimulating environment wherein every individual is cared for spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally;

2. That fosters and supports lifelong learning in schools, in the workplace, in the community, and within families;

3. That supports culturally relevant knowledge and academics as a foundation for social and economic well-being. Culturally relevant knowledge and wisdom are major assets of individuals and community members;

4. That supports collaboration with all community departments, e.g. political, economic, cultural, to enhance learning and make it our central focus and integrate it with life and meaningful work;

5. That is supported by an ongoing commitment of the community to provide resources to sustain the learning community;

6. And where learning is valued and education is understood as an investment in all people.

1998

CHIPPEWAS OF THE THAMES FIRST NATION BOARD OF EDUCATION

VISION STATEMENT

The Chippewas of the Thames Board of Education will fulfill our moral, social, and financial responsibility to protect and provide for the children of our Nation. As a community, we have an obligation to provide a balanced experiential and academic program that will teach the children necessary skills to become lifelong learners. The Board of Education's overall goals are to prepare each generation of our First Nation's children to assume a creative productive role in society to respect responsibilities and rights they will enjoy as adults and parents of future generations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- All children are created equal, having the inherent right to life, to enter the world loved, nurtured and in good health;
- All children have a right to live free of physical or mental abuse, including exploitation, neglect, discrimination, or distinctions of any kind;
- All our children shall be entitled to learn about and enjoy our Nation's history; culture; language; religion and spiritual traditions or philosophy in school;
- Parents have the primary responsibility for their children by providing adequate child care; health care; food; shelter; education; safety; mental and emotional nurturing;
- Children shall be dedicated and cared for in a way that promotes their sense of dignity, worth, and well-being;
- The Chippewas of the Thames Board of Education promotes the development of high quality, culturally relevant education programs. The Board of Education; Parents, Elders, and caregivers shall be encouraged to work together in the planning; development and ongoing operations. [1]

[1] Accepted April 1998

APPENDIX D

Research Cycle Questions/ Focus Area

The following are open ended focus areas which were asked of each research participant at the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. There were five research cycles within this research project all together. After emergent-theme responses to the initial focus question areas were considered by the members of the Community Research Committee (CRC), I examined raw and confidential data and created a list of emergent themes for the CRC to consider, a new question or focus area was determined by the CRC and a new responsive cycle of inquiry began. This research approach was in keeping with the "plan, act, observe, and reflect" research methodology of action research as explained in chapter four.

The research cycle questions, as per the direction of the members of the CRC, were purposely posed in broad terms to encourage research participants to share as openly as possible. Research participants were asked to respond to all focus areas/questions initially from an education perspective and then as broadly as desired thereafter.

Questions/ Focus Areas

Initial research cycle focus: What is "success"?

Second research cycle focus: How is communication successful?

Third research cycle focus: What are the successes within notions of parental engagement?

Fourth research cycle focus: What are the successes observed within notions of community ownership?

Fifth research cycle focus: How are we planning for success in the future?

APPENDIX E
Agenda and questions used for small and large group sessions at the vision workshop meeting held at Wiiji Nimbawiyaang School.

Revisiting the Education Vision Statement:
Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
Community Meeting
Wiiji School
4:30 – 8:00pm

Monday, February 5, 2007

Agenda

4:30 – 5:30
Dinner and Socializing

5:30 – 6:00 –

- **Welcome**

-Open with Prayer
-Welcoming Address
-Chairperson, Chippewas of the Thames Board of Education
-Education Portfolio
-Principal
-Parent Representative
-Christy Bressette – meeting facilitator

- **Icebreaker and warm-up activities**

- **Power Point Presentation**

6:00-7:00	-Small focus group discussions in break-out rooms
7:00 – 7:15	-Break
7:15 – 8:00	-Large group discussion
8:00 -	-Closing Prayer

Small Group Discussion - 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

*Please appoint a person to record responses shared by the group.

*Please designate a group spokesperson to highlight the main areas of discussion within the large group discussion session.

Questions

1a) Our beliefs are important! If education permeates every area of our social fabric, reflect on our beliefs concerning each of the following:

-Wellness
-Learning
-Family
-Community
-Leadership
-Our Nation

1b) How can our beliefs guide our vision for education?

2. Visioning for Education

2a) How will an 'ideal' future look for our:
-Community?
-School?
-Parents/Caregivers?
-Children/Students?
-Leadership?

2b) What are our priorities? List all ideas about what you want for the future.
-Community?
-School?
-Parents/Caregiver?
-Children/Students?
-Leadership?

2c) Think about what we can do now to prepare for the 'ideal' tomorrow. List key ideas.
-Community?
-School?
-Parents/Caregivers?
-Children/Students?
-Leadership?

3. Reread the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation Board of Education Vision Statement (1998)

*This should be read aloud. Perhaps everybody can take a turn reading one sentence or point at a time. Read this document all the way through and answer the questions.

3a) Whose vision is this?

3b) How can we include all stakeholder voices?
(E.g. Parents/Caregivers, Children/ Students, Community, School, Leadership)

3c) Who has what responsibilities?
-Parents/Caregivers
-Children/ Students
-Community
-School
-Leadership

3d) Has the vision become reality? Identify areas of success and challenges.

-Areas of Successes (include reasons for such successes)
-Areas of Challenges (include reasons for such challenges)

4. General Statement: Everyone working together

List key ideas outlining how we can/will work collaboratively to achieve the "ideal" tomorrow through education.

-Community?
-School?
-Parents/Caregivers?
-Children/Students?
-Leadership?

Thank you very much for playing an essential role in the building of a better tomorrow, today.

Gi-Chi-Migwech!

Large group discussion: Review answers from each group

Strategy:
-Each group give highlights from one category
-Ask a recorder to fill in chart paper to record everyone's ideas
-ask that all answer sheets be submitted

Questions

1. Our beliefs are important! If education permeates every area of our social fabric, reflect on our beliefs concerning each of the following:
-Wellness, Learning, Family, Community, Leadership, Our Nation

1a) **How can our beliefs guide our vision for education?**
-ask reps from all groups to offer their ideas

2. Visioning for Education
2a) How will an 'ideal' future look for our:
Community? School? Parents/Caregivers? Children/Students? Leadership?

2b) **What are our priorities? List all ideas about what you want for the future.**
Community? School? Parents/Caregiver? Children/Students? Leadership?

2c) **Think about what we can do now to prepare for the 'ideal' tomorrow. List key ideas.**
Community? School? Parents/Caregivers? Children/Students? Leadership?

3. Reread the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation Board of Education Vision Statement (1998)

3a)Whose vision is this?

3b) How can we include all stakeholder voices?
(Eg. Parents/Caregivers, Children/ Students, Community, School, Leadership)

3c)Who has what responsibilities?
Parents/Caregivers, Children/ Students, Community, School, Leadership

3d) Has the vision become reality? Identify areas of success and challenges.

-Areas of Successes (include reasons for such successes)

-Areas of Challenges (include reasons for such challenges)

4. General Statement: Everyone working together

List key ideas outlining how we can/will work collaboratively to achieve the "ideal" tomorrow through education.
Community? School? Parents/Caregivers? Children/Students? Leadership?

Planning For Action

1. Identify next steps

-suggest that a committee of people volunteer to pull this info together. Maybe a rep. from each small group.

2. Prioritize options

3. Assign responsibilities

4. Plans for implementation

Concluding Questions:

How did people enjoy this discussion?

What could make this process easier?

Closing

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 1991-1995 B.A. Honors History
	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 1995-1996 B.Ed.
	University of British Columbia Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada 1997-2000 M.Ed.
	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2001-in progress Ph. D.

Honours and Awards:

2008	Casino Rama's Awards for Excellence Graduate Student Scholarship
2006/2005	University Students' Council - USC Teaching Honour Roll Award for Excellence in teaching in Pre-Service Education.
2006	Rose Nolan Memorial Scholarship
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2005	Casino Rama's Awards for Excellence Graduate Student Scholarship
2005/2004	University Students' Council - USC Teaching Honour Roll Award for Excellence in teaching in Pre-Service Education.
2004	Aboriginal Veterans Scholarship Trust National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation - NAAF
2004-06	SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship
2004	Graduate Recognition Tuition Scholarship

2003	Southern First Nations Secretariat Award
2003	Foundation for the Advancement of Aboriginal Youth
2003	Jeanette Corbière-Lavall and Mary Two Axe Early Scholarship Native Women's Association of Canada
2002	Ontario Graduate Scholarship

Curriculum Development:

2008	Circle of light: An indigenous perspective of social studies and history Project Coordinator and Chief Writer Indigenous Education Coalition, Muncey, Ontario
2007	Teaching Aboriginal Students Course Writer Continuing Teacher Education Program, Faculty of Education, UWO
2007	Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society, Grade 11, Workplace Preparation Course Writer e-Learning Ontario Ministry of Education
2006/7	Circle of life: An indigenous science perspective Writer Indigenous Education Coalition, Muncey, Ontario
2006	Our treaty history: Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation Treaty Researcher and Curriculum Writer - Treaties in the Classroom Indigenous Education Coalition, Muncey, Ontario

Publications:

Bressette, Christy R. (2008). *Circle of Life: An indigenous perspective of social studies and history*. Munsee, ON: Indigenous Education Coalition.

Bressette, Christy R. for Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *Native beliefs, values and aspirations –NBV 3E: Native Studies.* Grade 11 – Workplace Preparation- eLearning course.

Bressette, Christy R., White-Eye, Leslee, and Henry, Joann. (2005). *Education in Canadian Aboriginal communities today: Reclaiming community learning*. In Proceedings of the World Indigenous Peoples Education Conference (WIPCE), Hamilton, New Zealand, Nov. 28 – Dec. 1 2005, www.wipce2005.co.nz/horizons.htm.