

Rec and Read:
Stories of an Aboriginal Youth Mentor Program

by

Amy Carpenter

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2009 by Amy Carpenter

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

Rec and Read:
Stories of an Aboriginal Youth Mentor Program

By

Amy Carpenter

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
Of**

Master of Arts

Amy Carpenter©2009

Permission has been granted to the University of Manitoba Libraries to lend a copy of this thesis/practicum, to Library and Archives Canada (LAC) to lend a copy of this thesis/practicum, and to LAC's agent (UMI/ProQuest) to microfilm, sell copies and to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.

This reproduction or copy of this thesis has been made available by authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research, and may only be reproduced and copied as permitted by copyright laws or with express written authorization from the copyright owner.

Abstract

The purpose of this community-based research study is to articulate a cultural approach to Aboriginal youth sport and recreation programming. Using narrative stories derived from my journal entries, I reflect on what I have learned through the research process as I worked alongside Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal community members and non-Aboriginal allies to develop and deliver the Rec & Read Aboriginal youth mentor program. The written analysis is guided by an Indigenous Perspective of Transformation informed by two traditional Indigenous teachings to illustrate how Aboriginal youth and Indigenous epistemologies have informed both the mentor program and the research process. In particular, I illustrate how the *Circle of Courage* (Brendtro, Brokenleg & van Bockern, 2002) and the *Four R's – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility* (Kirkness & Barnhart, 1991) can be used to understand culturally relevant recreation/education programming in urban, multi-cultural settings. The thesis discussion is designed to shine light on the capacity and strengths within Aboriginal youth and communities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge the extensive efforts, love, commitment and support of the many people who have ensured this thesis came together.

To the many mentors I have had from the early years schools where I have worked, to the high schools, to the university and broader communities, I am forever grateful. Although it is my name that is attached to this thesis, I know that it is all of our ideas, sweat, tears and laughter that have contributed to this thesis. It is the many images of us all working and growing together that fill my mind and heart. I carried those images with me through the tough times I have encountered while we have all worked to claim culturally relevant spaces. It was those images that offered me the strength to continue the journey.

Throughout graduate studies I have been fortunate to have a tremendous graduate advisor and committee. These strong women have supported and advocated for me. They have been extremely patient while pushing me along in a gentle but intentional manner. Jane Watkinson, Laara Fitznor and Nathalie Piquemal, you are strong women that are leading the way for other educators, researchers and women such as myself to admire and follow.

I would like to offer a particular thanks and a huge hug to my graduate advisor Joannie Halas. Joannie without your support and belief in me I do not know what I would have done. I know that working beyond the margins is difficult however, you do it with commitment and grace. I am honoured to have worked with you through this graduate studies process and to call you, my friend.

To my family, friends and colleagues who have continued to support and love me, even in the moments when I have not been so loveable over the past seven years, thank you. I know that at times my commitment to family and friends has been sacrificed. Yet, you have all let me know that your doors are always open, you are just a phone call away and that your arms are always ready to offer a hug. At times you are my sisters, my mothers, my friends and I hope that I offer you the same love and support.

To my Mom and brother Scott, you two have always been my biggest fans even in the moments when I drove you crazy. Scott you are patient, kind and one of the most loving men I know. I am so proud to call you my big brother. Mom, you are a strong woman that enwraps people with your kindness and love. You always showed Scott and I what it means to put others before yourself and how to be a good human being. I hope to one day be half the mother, friend and woman that you are.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment and biggest support of my husband Greg. For seventeen years you have been my best friend and hugest support. You push me to work harder, to believe in myself and to continuously work at setting a positive example. Between the stresses, the tears, and the many joys you are always there. I thank you for your support through this journey and the belief you hold in me.

I do not know how I got to this place in terms of community, family, friendship, education and love but I sure am grateful to be here.

I would like to acknowledge the financial support that I received from the Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environments (ACADRE) research grant. In addition, the SSHRC Aboriginal Research Grants offered financial assistance to support the development and delivery of the Rec & Read Aboriginal Youth Mentorship Program(s); for this I am very grateful.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: FINDING MY VOICE	1
Welcome ~ Please Come In	1
What Brought Me to This Place?	4
Monday Nights at the Drop-In	4
Intercultural Spaces: Aboriginal Children and Youth	6
in Urban Canadian Communities	6
Tuesday Morning at School	7
Culturally Relevant Programming	10
The Cultural Landscape	12
The Changing Canadian Demographics	16
Including the Perspectives of Our Diverse Student Populations	18
Moving Beyond the Margins in Our Intercultural Spaces	20
The Reflective Gaze to See New Horizons	22
 CHAPTER TWO: VOICING MY PROMISES	 24
Attempting to Keep the Promises to Myself	24
Sharing Who I Am	26
The Promises	28
“Please Tell Me About Yourself”: Building on Strengths	30
High Expectations Bring About High Results	31
“Please Come In. You Belong Here”: Creating a Sense of Belonging and Security	33
Respecting Multiple Views & Perspectives	34
Building Meaningful, Reciprocal Relationships	36
Discovering ‘the Promises’: The Ethical Principles that Guide	37
my Role as a Researcher	37
Situating Self in the Collective Whole – Discovering my Voice	39
Is the Work Relevant to the People and Community Involved?	41
Naming – Reclaiming the Tools of Power	42
 CHAPTER THREE: CLAIMING A PLACE IN THE CIRCLE	 45
Introduction	46
Methodologies and Research Paradigms	47
Worldviews and Perspectives	54
Worldviews Informing Methods	54
Research Activities	56
The Process of Gathering Data	57
Co-Participants ~ Co-Researchers	60

A Narrative Approach ~ Sharing Stories	61
Conflicting Paradigms	63
A “New” Theoretical Framework	64
Butterfly Teaching ~ Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning ~ Indigenous Perspective of Transformation	67
Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning	73
An Indigenous Perspective of Transformation	76
 CHAPTER FOUR:	 82
SEEDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT: INITIATING AN ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM	82
Abstract	83
Introduction	84
Youth Engagement	85
Aboriginal, Community-Based, Participatory Action Research	85
Research as Situated Response	89
Seeds of Encouragement: Initiating the Mentor Program	94
<i>The Spirit of Belonging:</i>	95
<i>The Spirit of Mastery</i>	97
<i>The Spirit of Independence</i>	100
<i>The Spirit of Generosity</i>	102
Mentors Teaching Mentors: Who is the Real Mentor Here?	104
<i>(Knowledges Shared/Gained)</i>	104
Amy	104
Alex	106
Joe	107
Joannie and Janice	108
Concluding Remarks	109
References	113
 CHAPTER FIVE: MENTOR MANUAL	 117
DEVELOPING ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS	125
A ‘HOW-TO’ GUIDE	125
Coming Together: Finding the Strength Within	126
Linking Theory & Practice	126
About Us	126
The REC & READ Program	127
OVERVIEW OF THE MANUAL	128
KEY COMPONENTS	128
A CIRCULAR WHOLISTIC WORLDVIEW	129

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	130
Summary of Principles	131
Respect in Action	132
Making the Initial Connections and Creating Space	133
Typical Schedule of Activities	137
A Sample Weekly Schedule	137
A Typical Planning Day	138
A Typical Activity Day	139
Programming Phase	140
Communal Mentoring	141
Who Participates?	142
RESPONSIBILITY	146
Budget	148
Food	148
Education Games	149
Gym Equipment	149
Salaries	149
Special Activity Costs	149
Estimated Total	149
SAMPLE GYM ACTIVITES	150
Gym Activities We Have Played	150
Tag Games	151
Aboriginal Games and Activities	152
Ball Manipulation Games	153
Additional Games and Activities	154
Educational Games & Activities	155
CONCLUSION	156
APPENDIX	158

CHAPTER SIX: LEARNING, CONVERSING AND WORKING TO UNDERSTAND	167
The Interplay of Respect and Belonging	168
<i>Respecting Our Shared Voices</i>	168
<i>"Perhaps What You See is What You Get"</i>	173
<i>Respecting Aboriginal Youth and All That They Have to Offer</i>	174
The Interplay of Relevance & Mastery	178
<i>"Are We Ready?"</i>	179
<i>Allowing Our Various Perspectives to Co-Create Relevant Programming</i>	180
<i>Our Time to Say Thanks</i>	184
The Interplay of Reciprocal Relationships & Independence	185
<i>Redefining 'Mentor' ~ Understanding Reciprocal Relationships</i>	186
The Interplay of Generosity & Responsibility	189
<i>The New Mentor Equation: You + Me = We</i>	189
<i>Making Connections and Feeling a Sense of Responsibility</i>	194

CHAPTER SEVEN: PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER	196
Introduction	196
Gathering the Pieces	197
Discovering Where I Fit	201
Discovering a Means to Sort the Pieces	202
To Look, Listen, Learn and ...	203
... Live	206
A New Promise to Myself	211
 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER EDUCATORS, RECREATION PROFESSIONALS, GRADUATE STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS	 213
 REFERENCES	 216

CHAPTER ONE: FINDING MY VOICE

Welcome ~ Please Come In

This thesis is a story of self-discovery. Over the past five years, I have worked as a part of the Rec & Read Aboriginal¹ youth mentor programs that were designed to collaboratively develop a cultural approach to Aboriginal youth recreation programming. During this time I have reflected on both the personal and professional lessons I have learned from the Aboriginal youth mentor program and the community-based research (CBR) process that has guided it. In my thesis, I intend to reflect on these experiences in an intentional and deliberate manner. This self-reflective analytic approach is guided by three key research questions: (1) how have Aboriginal epistemologies and Aboriginal youth guided the development of an Aboriginal youth mentorship program? (2) what have I, as a Métis² woman, public school educator, graduate student, and researcher, learned from this community-based research process that will inform both my own teaching and being in the world?, and (3) how can my research support educators and recreation professionals who are committed to working alongside Aboriginal youth in their schools and communities?

The intentions of this thesis are to share and acknowledge the capacity within Aboriginal youth and communities. In this thesis, I reflect on what has guided the successful implementation of an Aboriginal youth mentor program and what I have

¹ "Aboriginal people" is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution (*Constitution Act, 1982*) recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

² In referring to myself I identify as Métis. In the prairie regions First Nations and Métis people often refer to our peoples and communities as Aboriginal. This is particularly in reference to mixed groups of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who represent various linguistic groups, geographical areas, historical relations and cultural beliefs. However, many people prefer to self-identify with their particular nation and/or the region of their home community. In this case I am a Métis woman from the Red River Region.

learned from working alongside Aboriginal youth, other Aboriginal community members and non-Aboriginal allies³ in developing and implementing a culturally relevant, wholistic⁴ program. In this thesis, I will share stories of challenges, adversities and strengths. I use stories and personal reflections that I have collected in reflective journal recordings as a means to illustrate that, within our multicultural urban setting, where the mentor program started, there are other ways to see, other ways to be, that are not positioned in dominant worldviews with hierarchical relations.

With the understandings that knowledge is relational and that we view our social world based on our own perceptions, perceptions which contain opinions, pre-conceived notions and biases, the stories that I will share throughout this thesis are based on my ideas and understandings of realities. These stories are informed by my relations with others, but represent my interpretations of these shared spaces and lived experiences (Carter, 2003; Halas, 1998). I recognize that these events have been re-told through my view within our interconnected circles and from my own perception of reality.

As Eber Hampton (1995) so beautifully documented there are many ways to perceive the same situation based on each individual's perspective. Hampton shared how an elder once asked him to carry a box. Hampton felt a sense of honour to help and also

³ An ally is defined as a person in a position of privilege/power who uses his or her position to work in support of individuals in positions with less privilege/power. Examples include adults who support youth by interrupting adultism; males who support females by interrupting sexism; non-Aboriginal people who support Aboriginal people by interrupting racism, etc. Our interpretation of an 'ally' is drawn from the anti-oppression work of Anne Bishop.

⁴ Here, I purposefully employ the term wholistic as opposed to holistic. The word holistic has recently been problematized by some Aboriginal people because of the word's connection to "hole", where the Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2003) defines 'Hole' as "a) an opening through something. b) an area where something is missing". In comparison 'Whole' is defined as "a) having all its proper parts or components b) constituting the total sum or undiminished entirety". It is with this understanding of the significant difference between the definition of whole rather than hole that I feel confident in using the term wholistic.

curiosity why the elder had asked him to carry a box that was empty. That impression lasted until the elder presented Hampton with a series of questions:

His question came from behind the box, "How many sides do you see?"

"One," I said.

He pulled the box towards his chest and turned it so one corner faced me.

"Now how many do you see?"

"Now I see three sides."

He stepped back and extended the box, one corner towards him and one towards me. "You and I together can see six sides of this box," he told me.

(Hampton, 1995, p. 42)

What the elder revealed to Hampton is what I am aware of and what I am hoping to share with you; that is, the stories in this thesis are from my perspective. Yet, they are also informed by the voices of others, thus, expanding my view. I will share stories as a means to express my own reality and perceptions to offer an account of events that may not otherwise be heard. The stories that I re-tell and re-live will hopefully illustrate some of the perceived strengths, challenges, successes and adversities that I have experienced and/or observed within my multiple-roles as an Aboriginal community member, educator, researcher and recreation professional. I share these stories for others to better understand the experiences of Aboriginal people who are working to claim places and spaces within dominant settings, hoping that some Aboriginal people who feel marginalized will recognize they are not alone.

What Brought Me to This Place?

When I first entered the Faculty of Education and later enrolled in Graduate Studies I was driven by the same wondering. Having experience in a variety of recreation programs targeted at children and youth, I questioned how it was that many of the individuals that were lining up for recreation activities were the same ones who avoided or felt a sense of unease within the formal schooling process. As a result, I was in search for educational practices and philosophies that were similar to the successful recreation programs I had participated in and/or observed. It was when I worked in a Monday night recreation/education setting that I first wondered, "Could this model work within school settings?"

Monday Nights at the Drop-In

I loved working at the Monday night drop-in! It was one of those jobs where I'd say to myself in disbelief, "wow, they are paying me for this."

The same fall that I started in the Faculty of Education I was offered a part-time position with the city as a youth worker at a small community drop-in. This drop-in was quite a bit different than the school based drop-in centres that I had worked at in the past. Rather than being located in a large school gymnasium and "running" programs for the school community, this drop-in was based in a community gathering space. The room that doubled as a place for coffee and visiting during the day was our play space one evening a week. A well used couch, a wooden shelf filled with a variety of books, a large hi-fi stereo and cabinet, a small kitchenette and a few dining tables and chairs all

found a home in this space. On Monday evenings it was ours and the sound of music, lively conversations and laughter filled the air.

On paper, our target group was the youth in two proximally close housing units, one Aboriginal, the other multi-cultural. The target age group was 12 to 16 year olds. However, we quickly learned that drop-in participants would bring in both younger and older siblings and numerous other family and community members stopped in throughout the evening. In a short time, our participant age group expanded to include all age groups. We would have new born babies visiting and being loved up by older siblings and friends, as well as parents and grandparents who would regularly drop by to ensure all was safe, to pass on a message, or spend time with the group.

I remember this is how I first met Donavon.⁵ He must have been three, maybe four years old at the time. His mom would bring him around the drop-in every once in awhile. From the corner of the dining table they sat, nibbling on a light snack and visiting. It was actually Mary, Donavon's mom, doing most of the visiting, as Donavon sat by her side, enwrapped with her immense love. His big, dark eyes scanned the room to quietly observe his older brother, cousins and friends. Boy, how Donavon has grown over the years, in ways you will hear about a little later.

Somehow, this drop-in program and model that we, the community youth workers co-created alongside the drop-in participants, became the community-based educational model I had envisioned. On any given Monday evening at the drop-in you could find small groups of people cuddled up together around books as older siblings, cousins and friends would read to their younger admirers. A couple of friends would work together

⁵ Pseudonyms are used for the people in the stories that will be shared throughout this thesis.

preparing a light snack for the group and sneaking a little taste for themselves when they thought no one was looking. Huddled around a dining table or spread out across the floor you could discover small groups of young people working on a variety of artistic endeavours and crafts, colourful creations we used to adorn the walls of the drop-in. And there would often be another group running, playing, sweating, yelling and laughing outside in various games of tag, hide-and-go-seek, soccer or street hockey. The quiet hum that filled the room and carried from the outdoor spaces was joyous to hear.

At the drop-in, from week to week it seemed that no matter what idea was presented the children and youth were always eager to try it out, and/or add their own twist. Whether it was one of many games of tag, science experiments, playing in the snow, creating art projects, cooking together, or coming up with a four week master plan and decorating for the ultimate Halloween party, the group was full of enthusiasm.

I loved working here. I loved the way the culture of the community was welcomed and expressed in this community space. It was wonderful to be a part of the various multi-age groups that worked and learned together, in a cooperative and often joking manner. Set within the suburbs of Winnipeg, the drop-in was a place where Aboriginal community members continuously claimed and defined space. Unfortunately, this wasn't always the case for the children and youth when they moved through other spaces within the community, as I would eventually learn.

Intercultural Spaces: Aboriginal Children and Youth in Urban Canadian Communities

Experiencing the positive energy of the drop-in group I was puzzled. The same group that I saw every Monday evening would come in with stories of how they were not

attending school. “My alarm didn’t wake me up”, “my brother wasn’t going”, “I missed the school bus” or “I just didn’t want to go today” were some of the reasons offered for their absence from school. I could not understand how the same group of children and youth who enthusiastically ate up every new activity were resistant students when it came to the formal education system.

I was having trouble understanding the disconnect between the children and youth at the drop-in and their lack of interest in school and school related experiences. The challenges that other Aboriginal youth faced as they attempted to claim space within their cross-cultural schools (van Ingen & Halas, 2006) so closely mirrored the experiences of the kids at the Monday night drop-in. This helped me to recognize that their disconnect was not an uncommon experience. Through my reading and work as a research assistant on a project that investigated the physical education and school experiences of Aboriginal high school youth (Champagne & Halas, 2003; van Ingen & Halas, 2006) I learned that many Aboriginal youth were not having a positive experience in school.

As an assignment for university I decided to further explore this issue. I chose to spend a morning at the school where many of the drop-in participants were enrolled. While I had intentions of looking at the whole school to get a feel of the set up and learning climate, I hoped to focus particularly on Angela, one of the drop-in participants, and her experiences at the school.

Tuesday Morning at School

Angela was one of our drop-in regulars. Not a week went by without her presence. She would come as soon as she saw our cars arrive and left only after we

would lock up and walk her home. At home, within the community, and at the drop-in, Angela was referred to as Star. The name Star was perfectly suited for Angela, who seemed to light up a room, a group, or anywhere she was. She shined like a star! I would look forward to spending time with Star; her contagious laughter was framed within a perfect childhood smile, complete with a few missing teeth.

Angela was five years old and in her first year of school as a kindergarten student. Like many Aboriginal students, she was rarely attending school. I just couldn't figure it out.

As I entered Angela's classroom, the first thing I noticed was that many of the children were engaged in numerous small groups around the room, building, eating, creating, and socializing together. Angela however was working by herself on the computer. She was completely withdrawn from the rest of the group. It was hard to recognize her as the girl I saw each week, the one who would eagerly cruise through art supplies to see what kind of creations we could all come up with. The Angela at school appeared isolated and detached; she was definitely not the brilliant Star we came to know, the one who made fairy costumes with friends, including wands used to sprinkle fairy dust on everyone and in turn grant their every wish.

Angela's teacher seemed very nice, as did the class set up and school. Most of the children in the class appeared happy and engaged. Why was Angela, like other children at the drop-in, disengaged from this school setting? Again and again, the question, 'how can this place hide the light from a Star?' played out within me.

When thinking about Angela and many other kids at the drop-in, I had many questions. Could it be that the schooling system and community life are so disconnected

that it feels impossible to feel comfort in most inter-cultural school spaces? Or are Aboriginal children met with hostility and scrutinized the moment they walk through the large metal doors, to a place where they will spend most of their waking hours for an average of thirteen years of their life? It has been said that the ways in which adults within school buildings perceive a child that walks through the door affect the relationship between that child, the teacher, the class, and the school community (Leroy & Symes, 2001; Lloyd, 2001). Was there something at play within schools that I would not be able to see? These are some of the questions I asked in the Faculty of Education. Unfortunately, within the two year after-degree education program there was little time or space to address such questions as my classes were more about developing practicing teachers than thinking deeply about educational philosophies that are ingrained in those practices. So, off to graduate studies I went, wondering how programs such as the Monday night drop-in could be re-created in the classrooms where I would eventually work and in other school spaces where too many “Stars” are lacking their shine.

More than I wanted to understand what was not working in schools, I wanted to understand the possibilities of what could work. My observations at the Monday night drop-in reinforced my view that many of the children and youth who are lining up for recreation programs are the same ones avoiding educational institutions. The Monday night drop-in also encouraged my exploration of multi-age education because week after week the drop-in demonstrated the strength of cooperative, communal playing, learning, and teaching across ages.

For some time, I thought that those ponderings would inform the bulk of my thesis research. I envisioned that I would review literature and prior research to find

conclusions to my questions regarding the perceived disconnect between Aboriginal children and their schools. I searched for information about educational programs that are working in schools for young people, particularly Aboriginal young people. However, there were other plans for me. The invitation to work alongside the *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity* research team allowed me to learn by doing. I had the opportunity to address these questions in concrete ways as our research team sought ways to co-create culturally relevant education/recreation programming. As the research project unfolded, many of the elements that were present in the community drop-in recreation model were adapted/became part of the principles and foundations that guide the Rec & Read mentorship programs today.

Culturally Relevant Programming

As a member of the *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity* university team (Forsyth, Heine & Halas, 2007), I was able to be a part of a collaborative group that saw professors and university students working side by side. After spending parts of 2004 and 2005 building relationships as a university research team, we further expanded our dynamic group by connecting with high school students at two school sites, and engaging with Aboriginal youth to envision the possibilities for programming in our urban communities. As a group, we developed the mentor program which was built on communal mentoring right from the start.

Together as diverse and interconnected Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal allies we shared who we were and co-created what we believed to be a cultural approach to urban Aboriginal youth recreation programming. In this approach we built on our

understandings of culturally relevant education (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995, 2000) and applied this knowledge to our recreational/physical activity settings. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994, 1995, 2001) initially introduced “culturally relevant teaching” in her discussions of teachers/educators who continually achieve academic success with African American and other children who are often situated on the margins of academic institutions. Ladson-Billings (1994) states that culturally relevant teaching respects the dual worlds of students’ home community and that of the white school community that students often operate within; builds on the knowledge and skills that students bring to the situation (i.e., developing a community of learners); and works to empower students. Howard (2003) added to the discussion in stating that culturally relevant educators build on the ‘cultural capital’ that diverse students bring to the classroom. An educator who recognizes and builds on students’ cultural capital recognizes the significance in valuing students’ home culture, including their knowledge, worldviews, and cultivated experiences as assets (Lacourt, 1997).

In the mentor program, from the start, our approach has been to share our unique perspectives and understandings of the world to inform what it means to live and operate within a culturally relevant urban Aboriginal “community of learners/educators.” Our mentor programming was and continues to be led by the culture(s) that we live within and bring to the program. Early on in the program our research team recognized what Fitznor (2002) stressed when stating that culturally relevant education and programming does not have an Aboriginal focus just because Aboriginal students are in the program. Rather, programming that is culturally relevant should be informed by Aboriginal worldviews and the cultures that the Aboriginal people(s) bring to the program.

From the onset of the research project and throughout the development of the mentor program a number of non-Aboriginal people have walked with Aboriginal peoples as allies; this has included non-Aboriginal allies in the roles of youth mentors. I look to the work of Bishop (1994) and Champagne (2006) to offer explanations of the roles of allies, where an ally works in solidarity with Aboriginal peoples (youth) and/or other oppressed groups to end the oppression and privilege that act as divides between groups. Joannie Halas, a lead researcher of the mentor project (and my thesis advisor), has been and continues to be a non-Aboriginal ally who has acknowledged and utilized her privileged positions as a white, university scholar by creating space in the academic world for the voices and stories of marginalized communities, including Aboriginal graduate students and Aboriginal youth.

Throughout the mentor program research project we deliberately positioned ourselves as allies. This is a political act where we worked to recognize the power and privilege that is granted by our race, colour, class, gender, age and structural positions. As a function of culturally relevant education, whereby educators address socio-political inequalities with their students (Halas, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994), we purposefully focused on the challenges Aboriginal youth face in schools and society. Within our roles as allies and community members we have laboured to call attention to the ever present oppressive practices that drastically impact the cultural landscape of Aboriginal peoples, and particularly in the case of the mentor program, Aboriginal youth.

The Cultural Landscape

The urban community where the mentor program began is a place where Aboriginal children and youth face a complex and multi-faceted cultural landscape. Our

Aboriginal young people are continually stereotyped as defiant, deficient⁶ or as a threat. They are gang members, school failures that grow up in broken homes, and live in economic disparity. They are perceived as deficits to society and in need of saving. The content and rhetoric of mass media and educational institutions constantly position Aboriginal peoples on the margins of Canadian society. This is particularly so for Aboriginal youth.

In Halas' (2006) discussion of the daily challenges faced by Aboriginal youth she offers a picture of the cultural landscape that many Aboriginal youth face, which includes a race and class dynamic that can be highly discriminatory. She states:

Even today, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples might be called derogatory names as they walk down the street, followed indiscriminately while shopping, stopped by police for random checks, or refused respectful service in restaurants. Such encounters can be more frequent for young people, because adultism⁷ intersects with race... (p. 159-160).

The cultural landscape that Halas discusses demonstrates the hierarchical power, oppression and racial realities that Aboriginal youth face on a day-to-day basis. Halas' description coupled with the stories of youth from the Aboriginal mentor program, allows one to develop a better understanding of the complexities of life for many of today's urban young Aboriginal peoples.

In the mentor program, some of the youth shared stories of relocation from their home communities. Many of the Aboriginal youth mentors found themselves living apart

⁶ The Encarta World English Dictionary (1999) defines deficient as: 1. lacking in a particular quality, element, or ingredient, especially one that is expected or necessary 2. inadequate or not good enough (p. 473)

⁷ Adultism is discrimination against youth.

from their immediate families and adjusting to life in large urban communities. The youth were often forced to relocate to urban centres due to the lack of secondary education opportunities in their smaller rural and First Nations or Métis home communities. Other narratives that were shared were stories of family responsibilities to both younger family members and older relatives, especially those that are ill. For some youth participants their commitment to family responsibilities sometimes involved working various jobs to support the family household income which limited the youth's involvement in the mentor program and/or school attendance.

Despite the obstacles that the youth were faced with they often found a way to remain in the mentor program, getting there as often as they could. The efforts to attend the program increased substantially when the younger children became involved in the program. Throughout this thesis I hope to share stories that demonstrate the youths' commitment and sense of responsibility to what soon became their 'younger buddies'. It is my hope to make evident that many Aboriginal youth are working hard to remain strong and hold their heads high despite what may seem like enormous obstacles and responsibilities. It is by calling attention to the multi-faceted cultural landscape and sharing stories of the mentor program that I am attempting to step up to the relational responsibility that I feel to my community. As a graduate student, I have the opportunity to share stories, where I can interject another voice and reality into academia. I feel a sense of responsibility to share these stories of the enormous strengths and capacity within our young Aboriginal people and communities, in the hope that the oppressive realities that Aboriginal peoples face on a day-to-day basis will change.

The physical context in which the Aboriginal youth mentor program was initially envisioned, developed and delivered was and continues to be the urban school community that I work in, the community where I was a part of the Monday night drop-in, and where I have been a public school educator for seven years. The Aboriginal community and Aboriginal youth community that I refer to throughout this thesis are part of the larger urban Winnipeg Aboriginal community. It is the place in which I position myself as a community member. This is the same urban Aboriginal community that I have lived in all of my life, which is the Red River Region where my Métis family stories⁸ come from. The youth community participants are Aboriginal youth from various First Nations⁹ and Métis communities, who live in and/or attend the schools in Winnipeg.

Working and living within a culturally diverse urban Aboriginal setting I connect with Lavallée when she writes,

The present research did not involve a single nation; rather, as it took place in a Canadian urban centre, it included many nations. Consequently, the research

⁸ The family stories that I was told were of our family genealogy and the extensive links that we had to the Red River region. These stories were often presented in humorous ways that shared the extensive interconnections that our family had to this region, including the establishment and quick trickery relating to land scripts, stories of hardships and triumphs. Our family stories included a sense of pride and a need to fight against the words of 'half-breed' that hurt to the core. These stories of history and genealogy were shared so I would not forget who we are or where we came from. I still remember the pride my grandma felt when the stories of Métis people that I was hearing at the university were the same stories that she had long told me. In four generations, from my great grandmother to myself, we lost three languages including Michif, Cree and French, leaving us as monolingual English speakers; we are only now beginning to reclaim our pride as Métis people. In our conversations my grandma and I shared a belief that perhaps schools were now including another understanding of history in present context.

⁹ The term First Nations came into common usage in the early 1980s to replace the term 'band' or 'Indian'. Many people prefer to be called First Nations or First Nations People instead of Indians or Aboriginal. The term should not be a synonym for Aboriginal Peoples because it does not include Inuit or Métis. The term First Nations People generally applies to both Status and Non-Status Indians (Information Centre on Aboriginal Health, 2009).

had to respect (and be relevant to) a wide range of people with similar and differing customs. (2009, p. 25)

For example, in the mentor program the term Aboriginal is used respectfully as a means to convey how the youth in the program most often identified as a group. In conversations and discussions with students participating in the mentor program, the youth have identified themselves as Saulteaux, Oji-Cree, Cree, Anishinaabe, Ojibway, Native, Métis, First Nations, White, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and “I’m not sure”. Many of the students in this urban center collectively refer to themselves and the group as Aboriginal.

The Changing Canadian Demographics

According to Statistics Canada’s 2006 census data, the Aboriginal population in Canada is growing faster than the non-Aboriginal population (2008a). The statistics that were released in January, 2008 confirmed a number of details regarding the Canadian Aboriginal population. In 2006, when the census data was collected, 54% of Aboriginal peoples lived in urban centres. Of all the urban centres in Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba had the highest percentage of urban Aboriginal peoples. At that time Aboriginal peoples accounted for approximately 11% of the total population in Winnipeg.

The Aboriginal population is young, in fact it is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2008b). The young and growing Aboriginal population has been noticed in schools, day cares, hospitals, families and public spaces. Children and youth under the age of 24 make up half of the Aboriginal population. In 2006, in the city of Winnipeg, 63,745 people self-identified as Aboriginal (Statistics

Canada, 2007). Given that approximately 50 percent of the Winnipeg Aboriginal population is comprised of children and youth, there is a real opportunity to service the needs and wants of an approximately 30,000 strong and growing population of Aboriginal young people.

The growing Aboriginal population has brought a number of changes to the Canadian context. The young age of the Aboriginal population has created an influx of Aboriginal students into educational institutions and recreation centres, particularly in urban areas. With these changes, many Aboriginal peoples who have been repeatedly marginalized from mainstream political and educational discussions are discovering the strength of a growing communal voice and are working to reclaim their place in the Canadian decision making process. Aboriginal peoples are expecting schools to be accountable in teaching a well-rounded curriculum that includes the contributions and visions of the First Peoples¹⁰ of Canada (Fitznor, 2002).

With the changing demographics in student populations, many schools and communities are challenged to address educational success rates. In Mackay and Myles' (1995) discussion of Aboriginal student retention and dropout rates within the Canadian education system, it is stated that "the importance of the graduation diploma cannot be overestimated in Canada" (p. 157). With high absenteeism, lower than average high school graduation rates and a visible disconnect between many Aboriginal students and current mainstream educational practices, schools continually pose the question "what can 'we' do to increase the success of Aboriginal students?"

¹⁰ The term First Peoples is another collective term used to describe the original peoples of Canada and their descendants (Information Centre on Aboriginal Health, 2009).

Whether approached from the perspective of accountability and respect to ensure that the contributions, aspirations and visions of Aboriginal peoples are part of the foundation of the mainstream education system, or approached from the perspective of the need to increase success and graduation rates for Aboriginal students, there is agreement in the need for change. There needs to be change in the way Aboriginal children and youth are welcomed into school spaces. There needs to be change in how Aboriginal peoples are portrayed, viewed, and discussed in the mainstream education system. And there needs to be change in how power is distributed and shared within classrooms, schools, and educational institutions.

Including the Perspectives of Our Diverse Student Populations

For the most part, the schools that I have worked within and/or alongside of have student populations that are reflective of the changing multi-ethnic demographic common to many urban schools across Canada. With an increasing Aboriginal student population, schools are being held accountable for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the school culture. Feeling this pressure, educators in suburban schools are beginning to ask themselves “what are we doing to ensure Aboriginal peoples are reflected in our school community?”

Despite the rapidly changing student populations¹¹ in Manitoba, educators (which I recognize as everyone who is involved in the staff of schools) do not reflect the diverse student and community populations. In Kailin’s (1999) case study of how White teachers’ perceived racism in their schools, it was stated that the teaching force in the

¹¹ In addition to an increasing Aboriginal population, Canada has an ever increasing immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2008b).

United States was approximately 90% White. Urban Canadian schools reflect similar representations of white, middle class educational staff (Piquemal & Nickels, 2005; Silver, Mallet, Greene, & Simard, 2002). Across educational institutions from public schools to university faculties, positions of power are held by individuals who are reflective of the Canadian 'White' majority (Bedard, 2000). The positions of power, from decision makers to educators, are not reflective of our student populations (Delpit, 2006). Although the place and space of Aboriginal peoples as one of the three pillars of Canadian society (Ralstan Saul, 2008) should have long been created in educational institutions, the stories of 'who we are as Canadians' that have been repeatedly shared in our schools have been guided by racially biased epistemologies. Scheurich and Young have stated that "all of the epistemologies currently legitimated in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race" (1997, p. 8).

Every day, Aboriginal people are told who they are and who they are not. My own experiences are that of a pale-skinned, brown-haired, blue-eyed Métis woman living in an urban city where I do not fit the role of the stereotypical, mythical Aboriginal person.¹² By sharing the story of another without any form of consultation or guidance, the school creates a patriarchal voice (Battiste, 2000a) that once again states, "we know what is best for you." If we hope to move beyond the point of cultural assimilation, appropriation, stereotypes and ignorance of one another, then we need to listen. We need to sit within the circle of life and share our multiple stories.

¹² See Thomas King's 2003 book *The Truth about Stories*, chapter 2, *You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind* for a description of the on-going search for the mythical Aboriginal person.

In this research we purposefully attempt to provide an alternative/original story¹³ to that of assimilationist practices. We deliberately look to the cultures and values of Aboriginal peoples and youth to inform the development and delivery of the Rec & Read mentor program.

Moving Beyond the Margins in Our Intercultural Spaces

In Hookimaw-Witt's (1998) discussion of the current Canadian school context she shares that for real changes to take place within our schools, schools cannot continue to deliver curriculum that is based on western culture and just include some Aboriginal cultural teachings, in an altogether non-Aboriginal educational system. As Hookimaw-Witt stresses, "the importance is the foundation on which the education system is based" (p. 164); foundations that should be reflective of the Indigenous land we all call home. Educational institutions of today in many respects are reflective of early contact and interactions between settler societies and Aboriginal peoples where the processes of attempted colonization (Laenui, 2000) and cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2000b) are systematic processes that need to be addressed, understood and changed.

Often what is communicated within mainstream education settings is guided by dominant epistemologies, taught by people that share a similar white-centric worldview¹⁴ which they believe to be universal (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002; Fitznor, 2002). As Hampton (1995) shared, "the contemporary North American school is a political, social, and cultural institution that embodies and transmits values,

¹³ The contrasts between original and counter stories is discussed in chapter two of this thesis. To further understand this contrast see (King 1997) and (Hingangaroa Smith 2000).

¹⁴ An individual's and/or group's worldview is comprised of their beliefs about life and the universe (Suzuki, 2002). One's worldview is influenced by the combination of language, traditions, culture, spirituality, history, one's community and more (Duran & Duran, 1995).

knowledge, and behaviours of white culture” (p. 37). These education and political processes continue to breed ignorance, as well as systemic and cultural racism¹⁵ (Roy, December 2008). Unfortunately, for many Canadians who have been educated and socialized in dominant Western society, their understandings of Aboriginal peoples are limited.¹⁶ In 2002, the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS) prepared a report for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation which stated,

The failure of many Canadian schools to incorporate valid, appropriate Aboriginal perspectives, histories, and cultural content across the mandated curriculum is, however, not uniquely detrimental to Aboriginal students.

Respectful, accurate and appropriate cross-cultural education will help create a strong, balanced Canada. (p. 17)

Situated within two school settings (i.e., early years¹⁷ and high schools), the mentor program provides a cultural tale of how Aboriginal epistemologies can be the foundation of a school experience.

¹⁵ According to Roy’s (n.d) report that was prepared for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation fact sheet “Acknowledging Racism”; individual racism manifests itself in individual’s attitudes and behaviours, and is the easiest type to identify. Systemic racism consists of the policies and practices of organizations, which directly or indirectly operate to sustain the advantages of peoples of certain “social races”. This type of racism is more difficult to address because it is implicit in the policies of organizations and often unconscious. Cultural racism is the basis of both other forms of racism, as it is the value system which is embedded in society which supports and allows discriminatory actions based on perceptions of racial difference, cultural superiority and inferiority” (¶ 6).

¹⁶ Often what is presented in many classrooms today is a mix and match of customs from which has stemmed the creation of the hybrid “Classroom Indian” as discussed by the CAAS: “We all know this man (for the “Classroom Indian” is almost always a “man” in conventional Canadian curricula). He sits on a horse in the sunset with a Plains Chief head-dress of many feathers. On one side is his Totem Pole, on the other is his Tipi. His Snowshoes (an “Indian” invention) lean against the side of the Tipi. His corn (one of the many “gifts” the Indians “gave” to the European pioneers) is growing in the background. Behind him, to the north, is his requisite Igloo, and his friend the Eskimo – now usually called the Inuit as to be more respectful” (2002, p. 75).

¹⁷ In Manitoba, where the mentor program is situated most school divisions have moved to an early, middle and senior years model. Early years schools include kindergarten through to grade five, middle years

The Reflective Gaze to See New Horizons

Might the disconnect that I observed at the Monday night drop-in rifting between Aboriginal students and the dominant educational systems be attributed to the students not seeing themselves and their communities in school settings? Could the inclusion and infusion of Aboriginal epistemologies change the cultural landscape within schools to be more inclusive of non-Western ways?

Perhaps as the youth mentors of today become the school educators of tomorrow then we may see change. Imagine the possibilities of having school education staff matching the diverse student population. For example, in Manitoba the school staff would be fifteen percent Aboriginal and that population of Aboriginal educators would continue to grow in order to reflect the increasing Aboriginal student population. These are some of the issues that the *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity* research team has imagined. We saw the possibilities of the Aboriginal high school mentors considering careers as school educators. Given that the mentor programs are open to students who are non-Aboriginal it is conceivable to imagine that participants in the mentor program develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the historical story of Turtle Island¹⁸ and Aboriginal epistemologies. As more Aboriginal young people step into the roles of school educators and work alongside non-Aboriginal allies that recognize and highlight the strengths in our Aboriginal communities we may

schools include grades six to eight and senior years involve grades nine to twelve. This model has replaced the elementary, junior high and high school model that many people are familiar with.

¹⁸ Turtle Island is a term often used to refer to the geographical area of North America. At times, Turtle Island is used in reference to all of the Americas. The name Turtle Island is linked to Indigenous creation stories, where the life and land that we call home, balances on the back of a great turtle (Bruchac, 1991; King, 2003).

discover a variety of educational institutions where Aboriginal peoples are welcomed, respected and in turn, claim space in ways that they see relevant.

By sharing the strengths and capacity within our Aboriginal youth community I hope that the mentor programs may grow and that new possibilities can be imagined. I believe that this thesis will highlight how, from the very inception of the mentor programs, their foundation was guided by Indigenous epistemologies and steered by Aboriginal youth.

I entered the field of education because I saw a need: a need for children and youth to feel loved, cherished and recognized for all of the gifts that they have to offer. It is through this thesis process that I hope to accept the responsibility of sharing the capacity, strengths and power in our urban Aboriginal youth community. As I have attempted to do in this chapter and throughout the remainder of this thesis, I hope to challenge the preconceived roles of hierarchy and power that play out in recreational, educational and research settings (Delpit, 2006; Halas, 2006), sharing that there are other ways to see, other ways to be.

CHAPTER TWO: VOICING MY PROMISES

Attempting to Keep the Promises to Myself

According to King (2003) and Ralston Saul (2008), Aboriginal peoples are most often discussed from one of two perspectives: a cultural deficit perspective and/or a missionary gaze. A cultural deficit perspective views Aboriginal peoples as being less capable, less evolved and culturally deprived compared to people in the dominant euro-centric majority. The missionary perspective regards Aboriginal people from a position of moral superiority; this perspective is rife with emotive appeals to empathy, sympathy and pity. The similarity between these two perspectives is they both present the stories of Aboriginal youth and communities as ‘crisis stories’.

Examples of such perspectives can be found in the education as well as leisure theory and practice literature.¹⁹ Literature that pertains to Indigenous populations globally often discusses Indigenous peoples²⁰ within a discourse of naming the ‘Other’. Sweeping generalizations of Indigenous peoples are made that tie together poverty, racist stereotypes, and the need for “culturally appropriate” activities that have been put forward by euro-centric educators and researchers who claim themselves to be ‘experts’ on Aboriginal peoples (Deloria 1991; Gramann & Allison, 1999; Hermes, 1998).

¹⁹ In this thesis, recreation is connected to the study of leisure in that recreation activities are often pursued in one’s leisure time.

²⁰ The term Indigenous signifies the origins of people to a geographical place. Similar to the term Aboriginal that associates people as the original people in a particular region, Indigenous indicates a group’s connection and historical belonging to a particular geographical region of the world (United Nations, 2004). Often the term Aboriginal is used in a Canadian context and Indigenous is used in global discussions. In this thesis, both the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal will be incorporated, to signify the original peoples of a particular area or region of the world. The ‘s’ at the end of ‘peoples’ in reference to ‘Indigenous peoples’ and ‘Aboriginal peoples’ is to show the diversity of peoples and communities within these terms, rather than ‘Indigenous people’ which works to collectivize distinct peoples and societies (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Our young people are full of gifts, strengths, promise and capacity. As educators, researchers and recreation professionals it should be our job to tap into these capacities rather than make continual attempts to assimilate young Aboriginal people into what is a perceived norm of dominant culture. Rarely are Aboriginal youth offered the time and space to share their own stories and to claim their own dreams.

In this thesis I interrupt 'crisis stories' of the other by sharing the stories and teachings I learned from my participation and roles within the mentor program and community-based research (CBR) process. The stories are built and come to life because of the strength within our peoples and communities. These are stories of success, success as determined by the people involved within the mentor program. Our Aboriginal youth and communities are strong and have tremendous capacity to share their strengths - provided researchers engage in respectful research processes and listen with humility and culturally sensitive hearts and minds. Within this thesis I hope to portray a small part of who we are, the Aboriginal people and allies who breathe life into the mentor program, and the strengths that Aboriginal people(s) contain. These stories need to be told. They are needed by Aboriginal people who have internalized their oppression and believe preconceived stereotypes that they are weaker, they are less than and they should be pitied (Champagne, 2006). They are also needed by non-Aboriginal allies who genuinely seek respectful ways to work and walk together.

The story of the mentor program is not a postcolonial response (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) or an alternative story that is told as an effort to redefine ourselves as Aboriginal peoples in response to stories of the oppressed. The stories of the mentor program are rooted in child-rearing philosophies and communal mentoring relations that have been

practiced within Aboriginal communities prior to contact between Aboriginal peoples and European settlers (Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern, 2002; CAAS, 2002).

While the story of the mentor program might be viewed as a counter story²¹; in fact it is an original story, a story all of its own (Hingangaroa Smith, 2000; King, 1997). It's an original story that accounts for traditional communal approaches that have existed within Aboriginal communities since pre-contact and pre-colonization and continue to exist in Aboriginal communities today.

Sharing Who I Am

In undertaking the reflective analysis of the mentor program, I am aware of the multiplicity of roles and worldviews in which I find myself. Here I connect with Mary Hermes (1998) and her involvement in community-based research, where she had multiple roles as an educator, researcher, and community member. As Hermes states, she had various roles but “never clearly fit into any one particular category” (1998, p. 161).

My name is Amy Carpenter. I live multiple interconnected roles that influence every part of my being and the positionality I find I exist within. I am a learner, teacher, researcher, student, mentor, community member, family member, friend, and colleague. To sum it all up, I am me.

With this narrative introduction I write my subjective place within this research study and the interpretations of the mentor program. I celebrate the notion that my positionality is dynamic and ever changing. I recognize that one's positionality is

²¹ There are similarities between this research and research that is done by critical race theorists. However, the difference lies in the type of story that is being told. In critical race theory, counter stories are often the stories told by marginalized people or groups. In counter stories, people are naming and expressing their own reality, rather than accepting the story that is told through the (often unquestioned) lens of the dominant researcher (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

determined by colour, class, gender and culture (Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000), each of which bring about certain power and privilege. It is here, within these pages, that I attempt "...to escape definition [of the other], to be complicated, to develop and change, and to be regarded as fully human" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 86). I am only one part of the mentor program, one part of our interconnected world. It is from one always shifting place, that of my own perspective and interpretations, that I will reflect on the mentor program.

How our group who co-created the mentor program all got here together is something that I still look at retrospectively and look ahead with amazement and wonder. Simultaneously, with my first year of teaching, Drs. Janice Forsyth, Joannie Halas and Michael Heine submitted a grant proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Aboriginal Research: Research Grants program for a three-year research project that would investigate a *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity*.²² The research was proposed as a participatory action research (PAR) project informed by theories of youth development. I viewed my involvement and role within the research group as a collaborator.

From the start there were two school sites that were involved in the research project. Due to my involvement as a graduate student, and my proximity to one of the study sites, I was hired as a research assistant on the project. As the initial mentor program was established, I quickly found myself in the interconnected roles of a leader, mentor, learner and researcher. In the mentor program we all took on numerous and

²² See Forsyth, Heine, & Halas (2007). *A Cultural approach to Aboriginal youth sport and recreation: Observations from Year 1*, for further discussion regarding the larger SSHRC research project that the mentor program is affiliated with.

varied roles. Often I found myself in a leadership role within the group when it came to organization and coordination of people from the numerous groups involved including high school mentors, community members, early years participants and university mentors.

The decision by the university research team to use participant action research and community-based research methods meant that the research process was often guided and/or dictated by the identified interests and needs of the numerous people involved in the Aboriginal mentor program. As an example, Aboriginal youth have been involved in every stage of the research process. This has included the genesis of the notion of a mentor program (which I/we discuss in chapter 4), the development and implementation of the program, presentations that promote and discuss the program, and the continual re-evaluation of the ongoing project. My involvement in this larger research project and, more specifically, my experiences as a mentor program member expanded and enhanced my understandings of community-based research. As a result of these experiences, I view community-based research as working to establish collaborative relationships and partnerships, creating awareness regarding the purpose of the project, building on community expertise, ensuring that the methods used are relevant to the culture and community (Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR), 2007) and, as Hermes (1998) states, ensuring that the research serves specific interests or needs of the community within which it is situated.

The Promises

Prior to engaging in any research work as a graduate student, I reflected on what I hoped to achieve. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to share the strength and

capacity that I have observed in our Aboriginal children and youth. Despite knowing in my heart what I hoped to attain through the graduate study process, it took time and the help of other Aboriginal researchers, educators and non-Aboriginal allies to help me further understand and articulate the promises that I felt within my heart. When the mentor program was first being discussed and envisioned I felt that it met the promises that I made to myself in regards to my involvement in research, educational, community and recreational practices. While the promises originate from my understanding of Indigenous research practices some are more aligned with my own educational and life philosophy; these have been informed by Indigenous teachings and practices.

Now after five and a half years of being involved in the mentor program I see that it has met the promises that I made to myself some years ago. Therefore, I feel honoured to share our collaborative vision and implementation of the Aboriginal youth mentor program. I feel that in sharing stories of the strengths within our urban Aboriginal youth and communities, I am stepping up to my own perception of being responsible to my interconnected relations. Here I will attempt to articulate these promises. The promises to myself include:

1. that community norms and practices are viewed from a strengths based approach;
2. that there are high expectations of everyone involved;
3. that a sense of belonging and security is created;
4. that respecting multiple views and perspectives is imperative;
5. that there needs to be time to build meaningful, reciprocal relationships;

6. that any research that I am involved in is respectful to the community and people(s) involved, this includes the assurance that my voice is just one voice in the collective whole;
7. that it is imperative that the work is relevant to the people and community involved;
8. and that the research recognizes and names Aboriginal worldviews and epistemologies.

Within the text of this thesis what I refer to as promises have been eloquently discussed by Indigenous researchers (CIHR, 2007; Hermes, 1998; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1993; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), who have shared many of these promises as ethics and/or guiding principles. It was with the support and guidance of Indigenous scholars and community groups that I have been able to articulate in written text the promises I had made to myself in feelings. Below I will elaborate on the first five promises as they connect to how I interact in all of my roles. I will then discuss ‘the promises’ numbered six to eight, as they particularly relate to how I situate myself in the role of researcher who is first a member of the Aboriginal community.

“Please Tell Me About Yourself”: Building on Strengths

In 1992, Dennis Saleebey introduced the concept of *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. Saleebey’s work discusses a strengths approach to the interpersonal relationships between social workers and their clients. Saleebey encourages social workers to look at people and relationships from a strengths-based approach rather than a problem-based approach.

The *strengths perspective* has been discussed within a social work context quite extensively. However, it has received little attention in the recreation and education literature. Baikie (2003) was one of the first to adapt the strength's based perspective to the recreation setting. In a paper written for the 2002 North American Indigenous Games, Baikie (2003) discusses how, as a *strengths* based researcher, he first entered the community of Nain, Labrador as a volunteer and observer. Prior to engaging in any research Baikie wanted to understand the assets already present within the community and then build from there. In Baikie's discussion of this approach he shares:

When utilizing strengths theory in community capacity building you are not starting from scratch. Just imagine going into a South American, or an African community and attempting to teach the people of that community hockey. It wouldn't make sense. You would start by doing more of what they are good at. Or at least that is what I would do. You start from a very successful base and build from there. (2003, p. 76)

The foundation that Baikie uses to *build from* parallels my experiences in the mentor program. In my case, I first immerse myself in the community as an observer and participant. I then work to form respectful, reciprocal relationships with the people that I am working with, as we identify the existing strengths we all bring to our group.

High Expectations Bring About High Results

Robert Merton (1957) introduced the notion of the *self-fulfilling prophecy*. Merton's research stated that an individual or group's beliefs about a potential outcome could impact the actions of the individual or group, in turn causing the initial prediction to be validated or turn out to be true.

Later in the 20th century, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) further added to this conversation. In their work, Rosenthal and Jacobson stated that the teacher's prior beliefs in regard to a particular student or group of students' success influenced the performance of the student(s). Rosenthal and Jacobson discuss how these pre-conceived expectations of students can have either beneficial or detrimental effects dependent upon the teacher's opinions. This has been referred to as the Pygmalion effect or the 'Rosenthal effect'.

I am uncertain as to why, perhaps it was the way I was raised but for some reason or another I have always made the effort to view all children and youth as capable, successful and full of knowledge. I now reflectively wonder if these views of young people have helped to ensure positive outcomes in our relationships. Over the past five and a half years in the mentor program, six and a half years as an educator, and sixteen years as a community member and recreation leader, I have watched young people repeatedly accept the responsibility of being role models within their schools and communities. Aboriginal youth have demonstrated this sense of responsibility through their positive interactions with people in the shared spaces of schools and community centers, by advocating for themselves and their communities, and by working to challenge and/or change perceptions (stereotypes) of who they are. Have these relationships and the sense of responsibility that the young people carry been influenced by the Pygmalion effect or are these intrinsic, learned, or cultural gifts within young people and it is just a matter of tapping into them? Where Brendtro et al. (2002) state that, "young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow - they have great untapped potential for responsible leadership today" (p. 118), I could not agree more.

“Please Come In. You Belong Here”: Creating a Sense of Belonging and Security

I remember doing an activity when I was in the Faculty of Education where we had to draw a big picture of a child. Within that picture we had to write or draw all of the things that we saw as significant for a child’s development and success. Within my drawing, in large writing, I wrote that for anyone to be open, able to learn and share, they had to feel a sense of comfort and security.

I believe that prior to participants becoming involved in an educational setting and/or a community-based research study, where people allow themselves to open up, to be vulnerable, it is essential that a sense of belonging and security is established. In Beck and Malley’s (1998) description of a pedagogy of belonging they state that, “most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills, but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process” (p. 133). Beck and Malley go on to discuss the importance of ensuring students feel connected to the teacher, the classroom community, and the larger school community. This pedagogical approach suggests that within a classroom setting, caring and cooperation need to be encouraged.

Furthering the discussion on the importance of creating a sense of belonging is the work of Halas and Watkinson (1999). In their research with youth at an adolescent treatment center, Halas and Watkinson shared how recreation opportunities often draw children and youth to school. Their research highlights the importance of creating a non-competitive, inclusive environment. They found that by creating an inviting environment positive relationships were formed between students, many of whom had significant emotional and behavioural difficulties, and staff. A daily physical activity program for

students that offered time to play and a place to burn pent up energy acted as a bridge for students to discover a sense of belonging and security within the school space.

In Ellis, Harts, and Small-McGinley's (1998) work related to students' sense of belonging within their school classroom, the researchers found that young people needed to feel respected and connected to the teacher. The three authors share that "a teacher who respects students is respected in return" (pg. 143). Ellis et al. state that a sense of belonging within a classroom space is created when students feel that they have contributed to the operation and well-being of the classroom.

The importance of creating a sense of belonging within school and community spaces is evident by the work of the researchers cited above. With a sense of belonging established, we increase opportunities for reciprocal, respectful relationships to be formed between peers, as well as between researcher(s), community member(s), recreation staff and/or educators and participants.

Respecting Multiple Views & Perspectives

A promise I have made to myself is to ensure that I am respectful of everyone's choice, opinion, and voice. Throughout history, people have taken it on as their personal (or sometimes their professional or parental) responsibility to inform Aboriginal peoples who they are, what their story is, and where they belong as "colonized Canadian" citizens. Since post-contact, relations between Aboriginal peoples and settler societies have often been based on paternalistic laws and euro-centric societal rules of dominance (Battiste, 2000b; RCAP, 1996). These disrespectful, paternalistic encounters have included the Indian Agent, the Residential School System, as well as the many non-Aboriginal authors, researchers and countless educators who have taken it on as their

responsibility to define who Aboriginal peoples are and should be. In his thought provoking book, *What is the Indian 'Problem': Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration*, Noel Dyck (1996) states:

Quite simply, the only way to rectify the ravages that Indian bands have suffered is to stop looking for 'experts' and 'masterplans' and to refuse to accept the presumption that Indians do not know what is in their best interests. Although the difficulties that Indians, like all human beings, suffer are many and various, the 'problem' that has dictated their lives for so long and with such sad consequences has resulted from the usually well-intentioned but, nonetheless, coercive and arbitrary tutelage to which they have been subjected. (p. 182)

Laws and relations of dominance have had a significant impact on all minority groups of Turtle Island. As Deloria (1991) explains "the evolutionary framework we presently have does not represent human experiences of the past and present, but simply Western doctrinal arrangements of selected bits of evidence of those experiences" (p. 47). In other words, the dominant western worldviews that shaped societal inequities need to be interrupted.

As a researcher and community member I am responsible to the community in which I serve. It is my belief that relationships should be built on respect and reciprocity. Deloria (1991) discusses how many research practices center the researcher as the expert of a situation and knowledge, giving little if any credit to the many people who have informed the gathering of knowledge. Aboriginal peoples and communities, who have suffered at the hands of researchers looking for personal credit and success, have become

less tolerant of this lack of respect. Guidelines for ethical research with Aboriginal peoples identify respect as an essential aspect of all research, where respect includes collaborative decision making and recognition of the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal people(s) (CIHR, 2007; RCAP, 1993). Respectful relationships bring people together as co-researchers, as co-participants, for the benefit of all involved in the process.

Building Meaningful, Reciprocal Relationships

Within my multiple roles I continually remind myself that there are multiple ways in which to see and understand the world. I work hard to listen to the views, opinions, wonderings, and visions of others. Whether it is family, friends, colleagues, co-participants, or co-mentors, I have learned relationship building takes time.

A struggle that I have faced as an educator involves the often conflicting expectations of educational institutions and my responsibilities to the community. As an educator I have continuously faced the challenge of developing meaningful, reciprocal relationships with the students and families that I work with, and learn alongside of, and the demands of the established norms of our dominant educational system. It is a system that often puts curricula before children. As a means of addressing these tensions between the curricular outcomes and ensuring that time is offered for reciprocal relationship building, I transitioned to a multi-age, multi-grade classroom community. I see many correlations between traditional Aboriginal philosophies on child-development and multi-age classroom philosophies. Multi-age classrooms intentionally group students across grade levels. They operate similar to a family and encourage longer relationships where students stay within the same learning community for two to three years. Multi-age

classrooms encourage diversity, base the learning process on developmental abilities, are child-centered, and encourage mentoring and culturally relevant education (Karsten & Lolli, 1998; Politano & Davies, 1994).

Similarly, the parameters of research institutions often do not permit enough time for students/researchers to form authentic relationships and engage in community-based research (Schnarch, 2004). Schnarch discusses how research institutions often place considerable pressure on students and researchers to complete work in a timely manner, to publish extensively, and to not incur high expenses throughout the research process. From my own personal experiences, I agree when Schnarch states that the demands of the university are often “at cross-purposes with the requirements of ethical research” (2004, p. 12). Implications of conflicting expectations that I have had to deal with as a graduate student relate to the time it takes to develop community trust and relevant reciprocal relationships and the demands of time limits for graduate students to get in, gather the data, get out, analyze, publish and complete the program. The expectations of the university are not realistic when it comes to research that is situated in, informed by, and relevant to community members.

Discovering ‘the Promises’: The Ethical Principles that Guide my Role as a Researcher

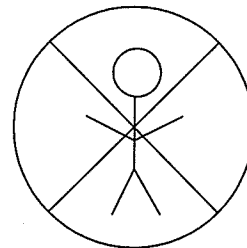
Here I will discuss the promises six through eight that I previously mentioned. The promises that I discuss are more directly related to situating myself as a community-based researcher. They include:

- that any research within which I am involved be respectful to the community and people(s) involved, this includes the assurance that my voice is just one voice in the collective whole;
- that it is imperative that the work is relevant to the people and community involved;
- and that the research recognizes and names Aboriginal worldviews and epistemologies.

When I approach any life experience, I view it through the paradigm within which I position myself. I use the term paradigm to mean the worldview through which the world around us is interpreted (Kuhn, 1962). Consciously or unconsciously, worldviews impact the questions asked, as well as the interactions and relationships that one is a part of.

Journal Excerpt:

Within my various notes and drawings where I was attempting to make sense of these foreign terms (paradigm, perspective, methodology, methods), I drew pictures which I continue to re-visit and reflect on. For me the pictures brought life to these terms. One drawing is a circle separated into quadrants. Within that circle is a stick person that is supposed to be me.



The circle represents an Indigenous paradigm and the person within the circle represents my positioning within this paradigm.

My positioning myself in an Indigenous paradigm goes beyond research methodologies of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, to the fundamental beliefs and assumptions that inform an Indigenous paradigm (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). The paradigm includes worldviews that see all things as interrelated; that there is diversity within those interrelations; that all things change; and that we need to work collaboratively to inform a better understanding of the world.

Situating Self in the Collective Whole – Discovering my Voice

The only story I know and can tell is my own. The question is, ‘can a researcher ever truly understand another’s position?’ I believe that individuals can only truly tell/share one’s own story. We each possess our own interpretations of the world that continue to emerge and change. As Piquemal (2001) and Swisher (1998) have put forward, participant observation and relationships give people direct access to each other; however, it is illusory to think that this offers them complete access and understanding of another’s way of seeing the world. No matter how interconnected we are, we still see others’ stories and worlds through our own knowings.

As part of the mentor program, I have been exposed to and have learned from the numerous big²³ and small participants. In the mentor program, everyone has shared significantly with everyone else, and with this sharing we have grown and changed in ways that we may never know. Personally, I have struggled with writing this research work as “my” thesis and research study. While I claim authorship, the knowledge and experiences that this work shares does not belong to me alone, rather it has been subjected to all of our involvement. Similar to Fitznor’s (2002) work where she shares the

²³ Here I refer to *big and small participants* to distinguish the high school – big, and early years – small participants.

narrative stories of the Aboriginal educators that were involved in her research, my own thesis research is based on the collaborative knowledge that was/is shared from the many participants and voices that informed the research project. We have all worked as co-researchers, sharing our strengths and enhancing our collective knowledge. In this way, I believe our approach resonates with Indigenous worldviews and paradigms. As Wilson (2001) says:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. (p. 177)

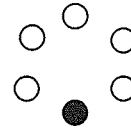
From the start we have built-on, restated, and shared together; to borrow a term from Ladson-Billings (2001), we joined together as interdependent “co-constructors of knowledge.”

When researchers are a part of the community or recognize their interconnected relationships they are more accountable to the community in which they serve. In this way researchers position themselves as collaborators, erasing many of the built in power structures of research. As researchers recognize their place as part of the circle rather than as an insider or outsider, reciprocal relationships replace relationships of exploitation (Hermes 1998). Sharing and collaborating for research expands that circle of wisdom and best informs process and vision. Essentially, “collective wisdom is arrived at by a process of ‘putting our minds together’” (Brant Castellano, 2000, p. 26). As stories, visions and knowledge are shared it is essential to position the self as just one member of the circle that is connected to all others.

Journal Excerpt:

Another drawing I have is of a circle of people: within the circle one person is

coloured out to represent my place within the larger circle. The colouring is to represent the perspective and voice that I bring to that circle. I recognize that within that circle, as within all circles our views of what is happening, our interpretations of what is said, our actions and interactions, are based on our positions and what we bring to that circle.



A ‘uniquely correct’ interpretation is not possible since perception is interpretation and each person perceives from a different vantage point and history. As Ellis (1998) states, “what one can see at any given time is limited by one's vantage point...” (p. 8). As we share our many voices it is important to remember that there are numerous worldviews. I personally work to bring light to worldviews that embrace social justice and respect diversity.

Is the Work Relevant to the People and Community Involved?

Aboriginal community-based research goes beyond the notion of diversity of understandings; it is based on what is purposeful, meaningful research from the community's perspective. Interestingly, three Aboriginal scholars, Deloria (1991), Hermes (1998), and Weber-Pilliwx (2001) offer similar guidance as to how research should be conducted. Here I refer to Deloria: “...we need to eliminate useless or repetitive research and focus on actual community needs; it is both unethical and wasteful to plough familiar ground continually” (1991, p. 467). Hermes (1998) stresses that

ethical research “serves the specific purpose or need of the community within which it is situated” (p. 158). And Weber-Pilliwax (2001) urges others to ensure that research serves the community. I felt deeply connected to Weber-Pilliwax when she stated:

If my research as an Indigenous scholar cannot or does not lead to action, it is useless to me or anyone else. I cannot be involved in research and scholarly discourse unless I know that such work will lead to some change *out* there in that community, in my community. This is the most important aspect of research to me, and I don't waste my time on anything that doesn't go there for me (2001, p. 169).

Through the Aboriginal mentor program, I feel our collaborative research has been based on the Aboriginal youth communities' identified needs, the strengths of Aboriginal community members, and has led to some significant action in our community (i.e., continuation of the mentor programs) and therefore meets the promises that I made to myself. I now know that as with all relationships, I needed time (Bocarro & Witt, 2003) to be within the community, to listen, to observe, to reflect, to co-create meaningful research that would be done ethically and collaboratively (Battiste, 2000a; Bishop, 1998; CIHR, 2007; Piquemal, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005). As I entered the circle of research I took Hermes' advice to “be in the community as a member first and a researcher second” (1998, p. 166).

Naming – Reclaiming the Tools of Power

Research within, for, and informed by Aboriginal people(s) should communicate our collective understandings. For that reason I have opted to call the research that I am involved in community-based research, the paradigm as *an* Aboriginal worldview, and

the perspective, *an* Indigenous Perspective of Transformation. Where '*an*' is italicised to recognize that Aboriginal peoples have multiple worldviews (Battiste, 2000a) and that mine is only one way to see and understand the world. Aboriginal peoples are not a homogenous group with the same histories, beliefs, cultures, and more importantly needs (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002). There is vast diversity among Indigenous languages, cultures, and histories; however, there are some common worldviews that Indigenous peoples may share based on geographical and cultural boundaries (Fitznor, 2002).

It is in naming this project an Aboriginal Mentor Program and the research, Indigenous community-based research that I am working to interrupt pre-set ways of thinking and offer new routes for possible action. I look to Irwin's (1992) work to support this discussion where she states that, "we don't need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools – it always has. The power is ours" (p. 5). As Tuhiwai Smith (2005) shares,

Research, like schooling, once a tool of colonization and oppression, is very gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim languages, histories, and knowledge, to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to an alternative way of knowing and being. (p. 91)

It is in naming the research process and project as belonging to the Aboriginal community that I am attempting to reclaim the tools of power.

As researchers, we can continually try and fit Indigenous perspectives into non-Indigenous paradigms or we can move to a full Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, 2001). If

Western methodologies, practices and the confines of dominant worldviews are not challenged, how can we expect different outcomes when all that we see and experience is the same? If we are working towards a transformation of situation there needs to be a transformation of practice.

It is with respect and humility that I share this work. I am tremendously thankful to everyone and everything that provided me with support and direction. I know that this thesis is not just my work but a compilation of many people and powers that have guided the development of the mentor program. This thesis is a story of self-discovery where I share what I have learned along the way, alongside community. As I share my voice as a community and family member, as a learner, teacher and researcher, I feel that I am stepping up to the challenge that Swisher (1998) puts out to Aboriginal peoples to “be less complacent and more aggressive when it comes to defining our field” (p. 198).

This thesis is a story; a story of an Aboriginal mentor program, my connections to it, my interpreted understandings of the program, and the self-discovery of the multiple roles that come together in my being. And so the story continues...

CHAPTER THREE: CLAIMING A PLACE IN THE CIRCLE

Walking in Multiple Roles ~ Trying to Claim a Seat in the Circle

As I walk up to the doors, they seem larger and heavier than I could have imagined. I adjust my clothes, my hair and I look down at my feet. It is my feet that will have to carry me into this room; it is my feet that will remember to walk gently but firm as I embark on this terrifying experience. I didn't sleep a wink last night, in anticipation of today. Today, is a day that I look admiringly to all of the strong people who have come before me, today is a day I quietly thank (and question) all of those that have put me in this place, and today is a day that I look at all of the generations to come, the little ones and think this is my responsibility to them. As I open the enormous doors, I muster up every piece of courage within me to get past the eyes that are staring at me with curiosity. I pull a chair into the circle of unfamiliar faces and I begin to share my perspective, my thoughts, feelings and dreams.

The next challenge will be, to stick around once the deliberation is done. To remain a part of the circle despite the current tensions and the journey of uncertainty that lies ahead.

As I discover others in this circle, who were here before me or who have claimed their own space in the circle, others who think and feel like me, I grab onto them, I hold on tight and together we hold our breath, hoping that good things will happen. Together we work to navigate how we can all work together in this circle yet remain true to ourselves and to our communities (Personal Reflections related to my multiple roles rather than one specific event).

Introduction

Indigenous research focuses and situates the broader indigenous agenda in the research domain. This domain is dominated by a history, by institutional practices, and by particular paradigms and approaches to research held by academic communities and disciplines...Negotiating and transforming institutional practices and research frameworks is as significant as the carrying out of actual research programs (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 91).

It has taken me five years to discover a sense of comfort in sharing the stories that I hope to honor, that I hold so dear. For four years I engaged in community-based research (CBR), where activities seemed to flow naturally. However, I struggled to find a means to articulate in written form the numerous and interconnected events that impacted the successes and challenges of developing an Aboriginal youth mentorship program in an urban cross-cultural community.

In this thesis process I draw upon data that was collected over the three year development of the mentor program. The data has been analyzed using Indigenous methodologies, from an Indigenous perspective. These methodologies are informed by my own interpretations of the teachings that have been shared with me; the guidance that the Aboriginal community, including my family, has given me; and work by other Indigenous educators and researchers that I have had the chance to hear, read and converse about.

In this chapter, I will introduce the people that participated in this study, including those that are described in the narrative stories. As well, I will discuss the methods used to collect data throughout the mentor program and how that data will be analyzed. In my

discussion of analyzing data I will share the decisions that I have made to construct/write narrative stories and to tell these stories from my own perspective.

Here, I use an *Indigenous Perspective of Transformation* as a means to discuss what can be observed, heard and learned from the mentor program. The Indigenous theoretical framework of transformation, which will be further developed in this chapter, is informed by two Aboriginal traditional teachings. One is the Butterfly Teaching and the other is Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning. In conversing about the use of traditional teachings to analyze my experiences in the mentor program, I will show how this framework will act as a lens to interpret the mentor program. In doing this I am working to maintain a circular worldview; a view that is often not recognized in dominant Western research discussions and institutions, where a linear worldview is most often the accepted norm.

Methodologies and Research Paradigms

As was mentioned in chapters one and two, the Aboriginal youth mentorship program was developed as part of the *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity*. In the consent form of ethics protocol # E2003:076, it was stated that:

The purpose of this research study is to involve Aboriginal students in developing a leadership training program as part of the physical education program at their school. Interested students and teachers will meet with members of the research team to discuss ways that they can take leadership over their own health and wellness through physical education. As a leadership group, they will develop meaningful and relevant program ideas that will

improve physical activity and health opportunities for Aboriginal students.

Students will identify goals and objectives for the program and develop a program of activities that they will engage in at school.

The study, referred to above, involved Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal researchers, educators and community-members, and non-Aboriginal allies that collaboratively worked together to inform the genesis of the Aboriginal youth mentor program. Over the course of three years,²⁴ three Aboriginal youth mentor programs were developed and delivered in early years schools. The programs involved three different groups of high school mentors and five groups of early years students. Although the early years students acted as co-participants and co-mentors within the programs, the formal data collection process, including the de-briefing conversations, interviews, notes and journal entries, focused on the high school and university mentors. My own journal entries include a variety of observations, actions, interactions, and reflections that informed my involvement in the mentor program.

The Aboriginal mentorship research project utilized a qualitative research approach. In Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) discussion of qualitative research they state that qualitative research utilizes multi-methods to study people or phenomena in their natural setting. They recognize qualitative research as interpretive and utilized by multiple theoretical paradigms. Denzin and Lincoln state that the qualitative researcher, "crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter" (2000, p. 1). L. T. Smith (2005) affirms the importance of qualitative research as a tool for Indigenous communities due

²⁴ The mentor program was established in conjunction with the *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity*, which was a three year research study. After two years of programming, the mentor program continued as a community based project with funding from a variety of small grants. The data that was collected and will be referred to in this thesis is based on the initial three years of the mentor program.

to the variety of methods, flexibility of methods, the recognition of stories and the voice that qualitative research can offer individuals and groups who have long been marginalized or silenced.

I understand qualitative research as involving everyone in the project as co-researchers and co-participants, where everyone is a subjective part of the developmental process. This differs from other quantitative and/or qualitative research studies where the researcher attempts to remain a neutral observer. As shared by Bishop (1998), “much qualitative research has also maintained a colonizing discourse of the “other” by seeking to hide the researcher/writer under a veil of neutrality or of objectivity, a situation where the interests, concerns, and power of the researcher to determine the outcome of the research remain hidden in the text” (p. 208). By writing my interconnected position in the Aboriginal youth mentor project, I acknowledge my place within the written text. As I share this research it is important to recognize that I will be sharing my voice, thoughts, visions, and beliefs in the research discussion, intermingling my voice with that of others. Even if I attempted to stay objective, this would be impossible because my actions, inactions, beliefs and biases are a part of everything that I do (Delpit, 2006). Lavallée (2009) would add that we are all connected to all other living things and through this connectivity we cannot remain completely objective or unbiased. Through this thesis process my intentions are both to understand and share what I have learned from my involvement in culturally relevant recreational programming and research.

The epistemology that I bring to this discussion is recognition that there are multiple realities and no one can know all things. This emphasizes why there is a need to share, respect and include all voices as equal. Sharing, as I understand it, is not with the

intentions of domination but genuine interest in coming together as equals. Here, I will attempt to interpret the mentor program from my own perspective as a Métis woman and community-based researcher that views the mentor program from a lens that is positioned in an Indigenous paradigm. I recognize that there is not an insider/outsider status rather the work is done within one's own community, my community, for our children, for our future generations, for my children, for my family.

An Indigenous paradigm of wholism shares similarities with other research paradigms including constructivist, interpretivist, deconstructivist, critical theorist (as was discussed in chapter one) and post modernist. However, despite similarities it remains distinctly unique and does not have to fit within the confines of Western dominant categories (Kovach, 2005). In Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) discussion of qualitative researchers, where I previously positioned myself and the Aboriginal youth mentor research project, they state that paradigms cannot be easily mingled or synthesized. Denzin and Lincoln go on to discuss how paradigms are often informed by researchers' philosophical, ontological and epistemological views, views that are representative of an individual's or group's belief systems and worldviews.

Constructivism acts as both a research paradigm and educational philosophy. A similarity between an Indigenous paradigm and a constructivist paradigm is that both paradigms recognize that knowledge is constructed by the learners and/or research participants, where "humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences" (Wikipedia, ¶1, January 2009). Where an Indigenous paradigm differs from constructivism is that there are not hierarchies of researcher and participants, teachers and learners; rather researchers and participants work and learn alongside one another as co-

researchers and co-participants. Interestingly, Kenny, Faries, Fiske and Voyageur (2004) pointed out that most Aboriginal researchers consider participants to be co-researchers throughout the research process and co-owners of the research results.

An interpretivist research paradigm looks at how individuals experience, relate and interpret the world. In this paradigm the researcher becomes a part of the research process (Ellis, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). While similar, where an Indigenous paradigm differs from an interpretivist paradigm is one of the ways I distinguish between participant-action research (PAR) and community-based research (CBR): rather than the researcher studying the lived experiences of people, inserting, or becoming a part of the research process and research community, they are already a part of the community. In the mentor program I was an urban Métis community member first and it was from this position that I entered the research project. The larger Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation research project, identified above, initially adopted a participant action research approach. However, from my interpretations and understandings as an Aboriginal community member, I viewed the Aboriginal mentor program as community-based research. In recognizing the multiple roles that Aboriginal community members employ as community-based researchers, the Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation research project built on the strengths and visions of Aboriginal community members that were hired as researchers. In my roles as a graduate student and research assistant I experienced the advantages of a research team that both supported and promoted my thesis ideas, and offered me power (resources) to initiate our shared vision for a mentor program.

As Aboriginal researchers our roles and responsibilities are numerous. Doing research within our Aboriginal communities we are subject to a sense of accountability to our families, our friends, essentially our communities. We travel a path of respect, humility and responsibility. As researchers in our own communities, we cannot leave when the research project is complete nor can we disconnect ourselves if we are disrespectful or let the community down. Our Aboriginal communities are extremely interconnected and the best way I can articulate this is “everybody knows everybody”.

A deconstructivist paradigm attempts to de-construct or reveal weaknesses in other research paradigms (Crichlow & Penner, 1997). From an Indigenous paradigm I am not attempting to reveal weaknesses in other paradigms; rather, I am stating that there are other ways of sharing research that do not always have to fit within existing or well known paradigms that are commonly discussed and referenced in dominant academia. Stating that research does not always fit within well established paradigms could be considered as revealing weaknesses in the other paradigms. However, this is not about deconstruction of paradigms, as much as it is stating that many paradigms connect with this work but not completely, and that an Indigenous paradigm fits best.

In Ralston Saul’s (2008) recent discussion about reimagining, relearning about our place and space as Canadians, he discusses how Canadians can and should recognize the inherent nature that Aboriginal worldviews and practices have and continue to have on Canadian societal practices. However, he states that one of the greatest disconnects or denials of Aboriginal worldviews is in our educational institutions and practices, which “deny the importance of oral” stories and traditions, instead recognizing “narrow, exclusionary versions of truth, tightly tied to a world of people footnoting one another”

(p. 36). Ralston Saul further states that “the intellectual class exists to deny any particular Canadian approach toward culture” (p. 36). It is naming an Indigenous paradigm and community-based research by Indigenous people that I am attempting to imagine, to learn, and to claim our place as Aboriginal peoples. Here I ask, “do we need to reference dominant worldviews, in essence re-travel the path of dominance and colonization, to be considered fully human or, fully legitimate in the scientific world?”

In my view, the greatest similarities can be found between a post-modernist paradigm and an Indigenous paradigm. The similarities between the two include the questioning of the modern world, particularly presumptions of *a* modern, universal worldview that is predominantly based on Western anglicized visions (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Post-modernism is two-fold in that it problematizes modern worldviews and often encourages returning to traditions (Popkewitz, Fuller & Browne, 1997). The similarities to/with an Indigenous paradigm relates to traditions. The difference between a post-modernist and Indigenous paradigm is that an Indigenous paradigm is not about returning to traditions; it is about claiming traditions that were always there. However, as will be discussed further in this chapter, in Aboriginal worldviews there are understandings of adaptability, ever-changing insights, flux and fluidity. A claiming of traditions is claiming worldviews that are circular, interdependent, fluid, and multi-dimensional and not fixated in time and space (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Kenny et al. 2004; Kovach, 2005). Yes, an Indigenous paradigm may have been pushed to the margins or silenced in dominant settings; however, it has always been present within our communities and intrinsically linked to our worldviews.

Worldviews and Perspectives

To the research process, to the data, and to all of my interactions, I bring an Indigenous perspective or position from which I view and interpret the world. This perspective is based on my own positionality (as discussed in chapters one and two) in our interconnected circles. Sharing this perspective, I again highlight that “there is no single, unified Aboriginal perspective, history or culture just as there is no one history or culture among European Peoples” (CAAS, 2002, p. 75).

The perspective/view that I enter the world with is circular. Similar to a wheel, this circular worldview is made of many inter-related pieces where each piece is supportive and reliant on the others (CAAS, 2002; Lane, Bopp, Bopp & Brown, 2003). The wheel is circular, with no definitive starting or end point. Many of the teachings from nature follow a circular path, from seasonal patterns, to animal lifecycles, to the cycle of day to night. These are some of the teachings that inform circular worldviews. In an interconnected circular worldview, there is a space and place for all peoples, all animals, all spirits, all perspectives.

Worldviews Informing Methods

In Little Bear’s (2000) discussion of the collision between Aboriginal and Euro-centric worldviews, he shares that Aboriginal perspectives of ‘wholeness’ recognize our interdependence upon each other. “The value of wholeness speaks to the totality of creation, the group as opposed to the individual, the forest as opposed to the individual trees” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79). All paradigms, communities, peoples, plants, animals, rivers, trees, the cosmos...all of creation co-exists and are interconnected on varying levels. The interconnectedness and interdependence between all beings and things are

Aboriginal philosophical worldviews and to look at knowledge as an individual entity would be inconsistent with these philosophies (Fitznor, 1998; Lavallée, 2009; Kenny et al., 2004; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2001).

A specific intention that grounded our work in the mentor program from the start was that worldviews of interconnectedness would impact every aspect of the mentor relationships. These impacts would include how relationships were formed, cross-age, cross-cultural, cross-gender, cross-power and cross-privilege, as we worked towards everyone taking on the roles of mentors and mentees. From the start we worked to ensure that the roles of teacher and learner were constantly intermixed, and that we collaboratively worked together as co-researchers, co-participants and co-community members.

Interconnectedness is linked to another worldview that guided us through this process. That worldview is collaboration. We worked collaboratively to establish a more inclusive picture of reality. To ensure inter-relations and research go beyond a Euro-centric understanding of reality, numerous Indigenous scholars and protocols established by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples call for collaboration between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples (Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin, & Gover, 2008; Hermes, 1998; Kenny et al, 2004; McDonald & McAvoy, 1997; RCAP, 1993). In the mentor program there has been collaboration between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal allies from the very beginning. The geniuses of the mentor program and the collaborative approach that informed program development will be further discussed in chapter four.

Research Activities

As the mentor program began, research activities were guided by those outlined in the larger participant action research study *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity*. In the accordance with the ethics protocol # E2003:076 research activities included:

...a number of data collection methods, including 1) student meetings that are audio-taped, 2) researcher field notes that are hand-written observations of the meetings, 3) a researcher journal, 4) thirty minute to one-hour individual interviews with students and teachers that will help determine the meanings and experiences of leadership, physical activity, health and well-being in their school and day to day life, and 5) observations of the Student Leadership Project that is developed by the students (Forsyth, Halas & Heine, 2003).

Forsyth, Halas and Heine each had previous experience in community research projects. It was the knowledge, experience and understandings of qualitative research that they each brought to the research proposal that allowed them to anticipate using a variety of research practices. As suggested by other researchers, it is best to work alongside the community itself to determine the choice of research methods to ensure that the methods are both culturally and community relevant (Kenny et al., 2004; Spielmann, 1992; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). The research methods, as outlined above, allowed the mentor research team to work alongside the Aboriginal youth community to collaboratively discover which research methods and data collection practices would best capture our shared interpretations related to the development and implementation of the mentor program.

The Process of Gathering Data

In the after-school mentor program, in addition to the development of research skills for the university mentor group (myself included), the high school participants engaged in a variety of responsibilities that have prepared them for work related duties in multiple careers. The planning and delivery of the program, focus group discussions, group interviews led by participants and interpretation of data are some of the responsibilities that offered numerous work-related experiences that high school students might not otherwise have had. By mentoring with university students and staff, Aboriginal high school youth were exposed to discussions and opportunities that will encourage them to consider the many possibilities for study and work, post high school.

The gathering of data in the mentor program took a collaborative approach. Our student meetings which were to be audio taped took the form of debriefing discussions, which at most times were facilitated within a circle.²⁵ The use of facilitated circle discussions encouraged our team of high school, university and community mentors, to recognize the importance of working together as equals, in a respectful and reciprocal manner. The circle discussions would often open with “how did everyone feel about today?” This type of opening allowed individuals to discuss and reflect on their involvement and wonderings to that particular day of the mentor program. In circle formation we would all sit at the same physical level, all have the chance to speak honestly from the heart, and know that other people in the circle were listening for our contributions to the discussion. These circles helped us to reflect on the week-to-week

²⁵ See Hart (2002) and Graveline (1998) for discussions of Circle Teachings.

successes and challenges of the mentor program, and plan accordingly for future programming.

In this research process we borrowed a form of communicating, Sharing Circles²⁶, which many of us in the program were familiar with. The difference here was that unlike traditional Sharing Circles where the information that is shared in the circle remains in that space, our discussions were recorded and later transcribed.²⁷ Debriefing and circle discussions were initially modeled and facilitated by the university mentors, myself included, and were later led by community members and high school mentors who were involved in the program. In addition, emergent and semi-structured interviews, which often took the form of reflective discussions and conversations, were recorded and later transcribed.

My involvement in the interview process included constructing interview questions that were relevant to our shared experiences in the mentor program, initiating the interview process and conducting interviews. Included in the collection of data were documented observations. Interestingly, this data included notes written by the university and high school mentors, program planning notes and various forms of communication that were required and relevant to program development, planning and implementation.²⁸

In addition to these forms of data collection, the university mentors were asked to record in reflective journals. The group discussions, debriefing, sharing circles and interviews that I have been involved in, have all informed my interpretations and

²⁶ Similarity, Fitznor (2002) used Sharing Circles as a way to facilitate the gathering of data for her doctoral research.

²⁷ This is a piece that I continue to struggle with and am working to understand. How much can our traditional practices inform research processes yet remain grounded in Indigenous traditional practices? As shared by Kovach (2005), this work is complex and difficult.

²⁸ Examples of this documentation include projects that the youth mentors worked on to prepare for the early years participants; notes that were recorded to plan for future programming; and communication forms between school staff, the families of participants, and the mentor group.

discussion of the mentor program. However, the primary data sources that I will be referring to throughout this thesis are my reflective journal entries, notes and recordings based on my observations. These entries will be used to highlight significant events and stories that I continue to reflect on, learn from and will share through this thesis process.

Throughout the research project I have had the opportunity to transcribe and group data into thematic categories. As a graduate student I feel that I have had extensive opportunities to be involved in the collection and interpretation of data. I feel confident with these research skills and over the past five years, I have employed them in other research activities,²⁹ some of which include sharing them with my own Aboriginal community.

The opportunities that the mentor program and the larger *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity* research project have offered me connects with the research funder's goal of mentoring Aboriginal graduate students (SSHRC Aboriginal Research Grant, Call for Proposals, 2004). My involvement meets a recommendation by the RCAP where it is stated that, "whenever possible research should support the transfer of skills to individuals and increase the capacity of the community to manage its own research" (1993, p. 40).

Mentoring in cross-age relationships has been central to this research. Throughout this research project relationships between early years children from diverse cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal high school students, families, school staff, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal university research assistants and community allies have co-constructed and co-implemented the research project. From this experience I related to

²⁹ Here, I refer to a research project that I engaged in with Elma Arthurson and Sherri Denysuik. In this project I was able to share with Sherri and Elma many of the research skills I had learned from my involvement in the research processes and activities related to the mentor program.

Ben Brabson (as cited in Mills, Jennings, Donnelly, & Mueller, 2001) when he stated; “We find our most productive efforts are always collaborative. We stimulate in each other thoughts that don’t occur to ourselves. It is always less satisfactory to work alone. You have an extended mind when you have the benefit of everyone’s wisdom” (p. 22).

Co-Participants ~ Co-Researchers

Related to an Indigenous worldview of interconnectedness, I recognize that there is diversity of thoughts and behaviours, and all things change. The world we know is in constant flux based on a “spider web” of relationships (Battiste, 2000a; Little Bear 2000). Research, like life processes, is wholistic and cannot be experienced in isolation. As was mentioned earlier, my first responsibility as a researcher was and continues to be to the Aboriginal community that has shared in the development of the research (Hermes, 1998). As I attempt to communicate why this research is needed, how the program works and how the program helps, I will continue to invite and reflectively discuss the research findings and reports with the study participants, their families and the school educators involved in the project.

As discussed by Piquemal (2003), ethical research with Aboriginal peoples is not based on isolated events of getting consent, doing interviews and writing up a report. It is a process of collaboratively working together. In developing the trust and respect of the community one serves, it is essential that we continue to regularly *go back* to ensure what to write and not to write. Going back and forth furthers our shared understandings, and helps to ensure that the research remains meaningful and beneficial to the community involved.

Throughout the research process, conversations between various co-participants, including, the early years, high school, university, and community mentors have offered constant feedback, where voices were heard and the process remained *fluid*. I believe that the strengths, needs and desires of the community were involved. In the Status of Women document that discusses wholistic methods for doing research with Aboriginal peoples, it is stated that “the direct input of the people is crucial in designing and implementing policies that work, because the expression of these policies in funding and services are usually the responsibility of grass-roots Aboriginal workers in the communities” (Kenny et al, 2004, p. 19). By continuing to be involved in the Aboriginal mentor programs and by maintaining established relationships with previous mentors, I get on-going feedback from the mentors who have and continue to deliver these programs from the grass-roots levels in our communities. This feedback continues to inform my multiple roles as a researcher, educator, mentor and community member.

A Narrative Approach ~ Sharing Stories

After three years of mentor programming and the involvement of just over 200 participants, the data that had been collected was extensive. With such extensive data I needed to decide two things; one being what data would I focus on for this thesis process, and two, what means would I use to analyze and interpret the data?

As I discussed and reflected on the mentor program and research process, it became evident to me that the story I felt greatest security in relaying was my own. For that reason I have chosen to focus my data analysis on the journal entries that I made in correlation with the program, the audio recordings I made to myself as I orally reflected on my experiences, and my own dreams that I have looked to for guidance and re-

assurance. The data that I use will inform narrative stories that I share throughout the body of the thesis.

Richardson (1990) suggests that narratives allow individuals to both interpret the world and tell about the world. The stories are used to draw the reader in, emphasizing the power of the relationships. In Thomas' (2005) discussion of storytelling as a methodology that values the Indigenous oral tradition, she states that storytellers may tell spiritual stories that share of their culture(s) and tradition(s), they may tell emotional stories about how an event made them feel, they may also tell how things physically looked or physically made them feel and/or they may tell mental stories that impacted their thoughts and ways of knowing. As the storyteller, it is my hope that the narrative stories I share help the reader to connect with the complexities of creating space for an Aboriginal youth mentorship program in urban multi-cultural settings. In Brant Castellano's (2000) discussion on narratives, she shares:

Traditionally, stories were the primary medium used to convey aboriginal knowledge. Stories inform and entertain; they hold up models of behaviour; and they sound warnings. Recounted in ceremonial settings and confirmed through many repetitions, they record the history of a people. They teach without being intrusive, because the listener can ignore the oblique instruction or apply it to the degree he or she is ready to accept, without offence. Stories or personal experience can be understood either as reminiscences or as metaphors to guide moral choice and self-examination. (p. 31)

Our lived stories are numerous, continual and inter-related. Brant Castellano states, "Aboriginal knowledge is rooted in personal experience and lays no claim to

universality” (2000, p. 25). I hope to write the stories I share in a respectful and humble manner. In the words of Thomas King (2003) “the truth about stories, is that’s all we are” (p. 2).

Conflicting Paradigms

In addition to the plethora of data available, a second challenge I faced was what means would I use to analyze and interpret the data? Something that became evident throughout my graduate studies process is that as I have attempted to bridge the divide between my own Aboriginal paradigm, as a Métis woman, and that of the Euro-centric dominant educational paradigm in which many of my roles operate, I have continually faced the challenge of reconciling these conflicting paradigms. In an attempt to understand how the mentor program exists within structures of Euro-centric dominance, while attempting to remain culturally relevant, I needed a theoretical framework to understand the divides. As Hemingway and Parr (2000) have discussed, a perspective is a framework to construct relationships among paradigms, where the “conflicts across paradigms are not removed but are instead mediated by a perspective” (p. 141). Hemingway and Parr’s suggestion of employing a perspective to understand conflicting paradigms made sense and led me on a journey of discovery. Due to my use of the term perspective to converse the Indigenous perspective from which I see the world, I have chosen here to focus on the term ‘theoretical framework’ to mediate conflicting paradigms. *Within my notes and drawings I have another drawing of a large eye, to reflect the Indigenous perspective (view) that I have and continue to bring to this*

experience. In front of the eye is a lens, the lens represents the theoretical framework



that I will look through to interpret the research data.

A “New” Theoretical Framework

Within this thesis, I have incorporated a perspective that is rooted in two traditional Aboriginal teachings. The first, the Butterfly Teaching, was told to me at Red Willow Lodge which is located in the south eastern quadrant of Manitoba, by Elders Jules and Margaret Lavallee (personal communication, 2001). Prior to entering the Faculty of Education I completed an Arts Degree with a major in Native Studies.³⁰ As part of my course work in the Faculty of Native Studies, I took the course Aboriginal Spirituality. It was in this course that I had the opportunity to meet, listen to, and learn from the knowledge and wisdom that Jules and Margaret shared. It was at Red Willow Lodge that I first heard the Butterfly Teaching.

The second teaching, Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning, was shared by my friend, sister and colleague Sherri Denysuik (personal communication, 2008). Sherri had heard the teaching of Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning from Elder Myra Laramée.

In the 2007-2008 school year, I took a journey with two Aboriginal teaching colleagues, Elma Arthurson and Sherri Denysuik, where the three of us researched how educators are incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into their educational practices. As

³⁰ My Arts degree was actually a double major in Native Studies and General Sciences. At the time Native Studies was not recognized as a major teachable, therefore it was only recognized as a minor teachable that was applicable to the Faculty of Education. Since my admission into the Faculty of Education in 2000, Native Studies became a recognizable major in 2003. As of 2008, the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba requires all students to take an Aboriginal education course in order to graduate from the faculty.

Elma, Sherri and I worked to organize the findings and articulate our journey we discovered that together, the Butterfly Teaching and the Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning provided us the framework that we were searching for. Throughout many discussions, these two teachings came together to inform what we identified as ‘an Indigenous Perspective of Transformation’. By constructing our own understandings we moved away from the problematic position that many Indigenous researchers find themselves faced with. As Battiste & Youngblood Henderson (2000) discuss, “typically, rather than attempting to understand Indigenous knowledge as a distinct knowledge system, researchers have tried to make Indigenous knowledge match the existing academic categories of Eurocentric knowledge” (p. 39). By using Indigenous teachings to guide our understandings we felt that we were looking to and honouring the wisdom within our Indigenous communities.

Within Indigenous communities, as within human societies around the world, knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the next in the form of stories. Many Indigenous beliefs are based on traditional oral teachings. Traditional teachings that share Indigenous knowledge and wisdom have been informed by empirical observations, and revelations; these stories are personal, wholistic and often use narrative or metaphorical language (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Brant Castellano, 2000; Pidgeon & Hardy-Cox, 2002; Thomas, 2005). Deloria explains that, “the non-Western, tribal equivalent of science is the oral tradition...The oral tradition is a loosely held collection of anecdotal material that, taken together, explains the nature of the physical world as people have experienced it and the important events of their historical journey” (1997, p. 36). For many Indigenous peoples the oral tradition offers an

explanation of who they are, how they came to be, and a means to connect to, and understand their interconnected worlds.

The Story of the Butterfly is one story. It is an oral story that has been passed from one teller to another. Over the past year or so, I have been and continue to be reluctant as to whether now is the time and/or the place to share this oral story in written format. My particular reluctance has me asking, “is this my place?” I am reluctant to share an oral story as a means to understand this research process, yet recognize the relevance of oral traditions in remaining grounded in a wholistic worldview. As shared by Kovach (2005), in her discussion of Indigenous research that is *Emerging from the Margins*, this work is complex, political, and it is a difficult task to criss-cross epistemologies. By referring to the story of the Butterfly now, I feel that I am attempting to share our knowledge and teachings as a means to interpret our own affairs. I am attempting to find new ways to communicate. As Hubbard (2008) shares,

...Indigenous academics are finding new ways to communicate the knowledge of their elders in a potentially inhospitable atmosphere: “we may be all too aware of how people establish (or refute) authority to speak in the academy. Some of us will need to find a ‘space in between’ where both the knowledge of our elders and the knowledge of our colleagues or professors may enter, live, and be voiced (Holmes, 2000, p. 50). How that space is negotiated depends on the writing of Indigenous writers, but also on readers and academics who read and respond to Indigenous ideas and ways of knowing (p. 149).

Brendtro et al., (2002); Ermine, (1995); Fitznor, (1998); Hampton, (1995); Lane, Bopp, Bopp & Brown, (2003); and the RCAP, (1996) have all offered insights into

Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives. I look to them and others who have communicated Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives in written print for guidance in this complex endeavour. Thomas King's on-going work offers support and direction where he interfuses oral traditions in Indigenous literature to offer new understandings (Hubbard, 2008). I hope that as I share my very personal reflections in an open context that all interconnected things recognize that I am only offering this from my current understandings. I thank all those who have shared with me to inform my place and space as a learner/teacher who views life as interconnected experiences.

Butterfly Teaching ~ Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning ~ Indigenous Perspective of Transformation

As Sherri and I shared the teachings that will soon be discussed, we began to see how they inform and support one another, and importantly, how they could offer a framework for our analysis of research data. It was within our shared discussion that we came to understand an *Indigenous Perspective of Transformation*. It is by discussing this shared experience that I acknowledge that this perspective does not belong to me, in that it cannot be owned. Forms of Traditional Knowledge belong to all³¹ individuals who have collaboratively shared their understandings, and their teachings, which allow it to develop (Young-Ing, 2008). I agree with Wilson who states, "because this relationship is shared and mutual, ideas or knowledge cannot be owned or discovered" (2001, p. 177). In

³¹ Related to the discussion of Euro-centric dominance in academic institutions, I must mention here that the Fifth Edition Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001) does not address nor provide guidelines for ways to cite oral or traditional teachings. Within Indigenous cultures and communities there are traditional protocols that are followed as teachings are shared/offered. For a discussion of some of these traditions see the University of Manitoba's (2008) discussion of Elder's protocol.

addition, it belongs to all people that wish to use it as a means to understand their experiences. It is in this offering that I share all that has been gifted to me.

In Western educational practices, citing authors is the academically understood practice of how knowledge is acknowledged and built on, creating 'new' theoretical understandings. Within an Indigenous perspective, I acknowledge the numerous teachers and teachings that have been shared with me to help me to now share with you³². I pass this teaching on with caution, in that I do not want to lose the importance of what has been given to me. I share this with you, not as an expert but from my interpretations; in sharing this I offer it as a means for others to inform their current understandings. It is with respect and humility that I share these stories. I offer thanks to all my teachers who have so generously shared with me. Meegwetch!

The Story of the Butterfly

Many, many years ago, or maybe even this year, this spring, there was a young male caterpillar who was very happy and he loved life. This caterpillar would spend his days exploring the forest, eating and sleeping. Oh yes, he did have a wonderful life.

As good as this may sound, soon the caterpillar found himself bored with his usual routine. He found himself searching for something more. More you may ask, what more could this young male caterpillar want? Well you guessed it....

One day while out and about the male caterpillar stumbled upon a beautiful female caterpillar. His many feet were trembling, his heart started to thump, his eyes grew wide and it was L-O-V-E, love at first sight.

³² Laara Fitznor (1998 & 2002) has expressed similar sentiments of respect and thanks in her work.

What was once one, now became two. The two caterpillars were inseparable. Together they spent their days exploring the forest, eating and sleeping. Oh yes, they did have a wonderful life.

But once again something seemed to be missing. What, oh what could it be? Together the caterpillars searched for something more. Until one day they came across a great wooden pillar. This pillar was enormous. Up the wooden pillar climbed thousands of caterpillars. The male and female caterpillar were fascinated by this and had to know what was going on. So they asked one of the caterpillars who was beginning her voyage up the pillar, "what is this? Why are all of these caterpillars climbing up this wooden pillar?" The caterpillar obviously in a rush to begin the ascent told them, "there is magic and power on the top of this pillar. Whoever reaches the top can have that magic and power!"

Knowing that this may be what they were searching for, the male and female caterpillar joined the thousands of other caterpillars as they journeyed to the top. The competition to get to the top was fierce and many a time the caterpillars found themselves being pushed and shoved around. The female caterpillar decided that this was not for her. So she slowly climbed down the pillar and decided to take her search elsewhere.

Her male companion, the love of her life, decided to continue to climb the pillar and work towards the magic and power that was promised at the top. As she left her heart was broken. In tears she left the love of her life behind to find her destiny.

While walking in the forest she came across a very old caterpillar. "What are you doing?" she asked. His response to her was, "you should watch and you will see." She watched with fascination as the old caterpillar patiently and peacefully spun a

cocoon. The old caterpillar entered the cocoon and after sometime passed he came out as a beautiful butterfly.

The female caterpillar could not believe her eyes. She knew that this is what she had been searching for. She began her cocoon, she patiently spun it and she found herself at peace with the world. After some time passed she too was transformed into a beautiful butterfly. Again her world was filled with great joy and excitement.

So amazing was her discovery that she longed to share it with the love of her life. As quick as she could she flew over to the pillar. It was here that she discovered her love once again. He was almost at the top. Before they had the chance to exchange words, to exchange looks, to exchange anything, he was pushed...and plummeted to his death. She couldn't believe what had happened. How could this happen?

She had to discover what he had died for. She flew to the top of the pillar as fast as her wings could carry her. It wasn't till she was at the top that she discovered the awful truth. THE TOP HAD NOTHING TO OFFER.

This oral story, the Story of the Butterfly, was taught to me many years ago by Elders Margaret and Jules Lavallee. This is a story that I carry close and continue to learn from today. Along with this story, the Butterfly teaching was shared. I have looked to this teaching many times in life, to understand life's transitions and transformations. As I have encountered new experiences, I have looked to the teaching for guidance to understand these new experiences. I view new experiences as a process; a new cycle that interconnects with the rest of my development.

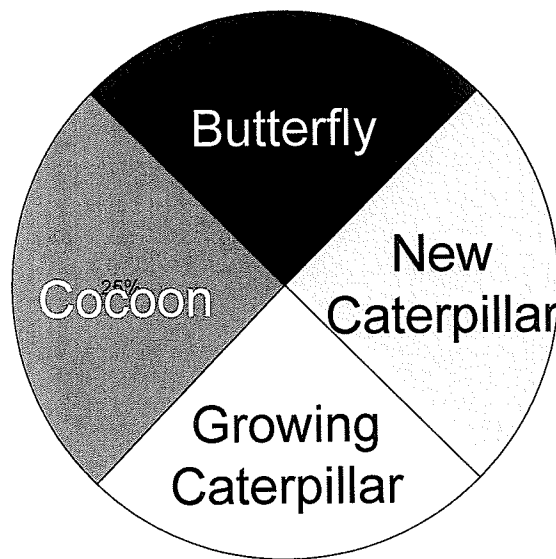
There are four quadrants to the butterfly teaching. In the east we discover a baby caterpillar or new larva. The larva finds itself in a new place, stage and experience. As

the larva grows into a caterpillar it moves to the south. Within the south quadrant the caterpillar grows and grows, as it takes in everything it can from its surroundings. After the caterpillar has grown to its maximum capacity and recognizes that it can't nor does it want to take in anymore it moves into a deep stage of reflection and introspection. It is within this stage that the caterpillar finds itself spinning into a cocoon in the western quadrant. After taking as much time as needed for self-analysis and retrospective thought the cocoon opens to allow a butterfly to emerge. The butterfly emerges filled with the knowledge and wisdom of the experiences it had in the various other directional quadrants. Informed by these experiences the butterfly flies.

As we move into the northern quadrant we witness the caterpillar transformed into a beautiful butterfly. The butterfly may have stayed in the caterpillar quadrant forever; however by knowing one-self and reflecting on all of its experiences, what once was a caterpillar is now a beautiful butterfly that is free to spread its wings and fly. The butterfly continues to fly until another cycle is required, where the circle starts over again in a cyclical manner of change and transformation.

As the caterpillar transitions into the western quadrant the time has come to reflect. It slowly spins its' cocoon, finds its' place of solitude and reflects on what it has taken in and eaten up. It is within the western quadrant the caterpillar must transform, reflecting on all of its' wonderings and experiences.

Butterfly Teaching



The butterfly teaching begins in the eastern quadrant of the circle, where the sun rises. As a new caterpillar that has just emerged from the egg, the caterpillar takes in all that is new and wonderful in the world around it. The caterpillar brings to this place, its' history, culture, family, and new sense of space. In awe, it takes it all in.

In this part of the cycle, the caterpillar moves into the southern quadrant of the circle. Here the caterpillar is fully immersed in its' new setting. The caterpillar is plumping itself up as it eats everything it possibly can. In this part of the circle, the caterpillar moves from taking everything in to eating everything up.

Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the second teaching that informs the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation - Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning³³ (Laramee, 2008) was shared by Sherri Denysuik. Sherri had heard this teaching from Elder Myra Laramee, and later shared it with me.

From my interpretations the Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning can be used in any setting, by an individual and/or group as a means to learn about and understand something new. The example that I will offer here is that of a child entering a new classroom. The individual can be a child entering an early years classroom or it can be an adult entering a post-secondary classroom; the student can be any age.

Look:

When children first enter the classroom they look around, they are a keen observer searching for what things look like in this new situation. The student looks around, discovering the people in this new space, the set up of the space, what is on the walls, what is on the shelves, who and what is portrayed in this space. The child looks around in wonder as he or she asks “which students are sitting together?”, “where are the friendship groups?”, “who is sitting in the hall receiving extra support?”, “who is being sent to the office?”, “who is being rewarded for good behaviour and what does that reward look like?”, “how much of this space is dictated by the ‘teacher’ and how much is selected by everyone else who makes up the classroom community?”, “where are the

³³ Each of the circles that are displayed here show the four colours, to represent the diversity of all peoples. The four colours come together to make up the whole circle, which demonstrates the need to all work together to ensure a clearer understanding of reality. The teaching of the four colours coming together to make the whole are part of the Medicine Wheel teachings, as are the four times of the day: morning, day, evening and night, as well as many other teachings. For further discussion of the Medicine Wheel teachings see Brant Castellano (2000), Lane, Bopp, Bopp & Brown (1984, 2003), and Lavallée (2007) all of whom have discussed the Medicine Wheel in written text.

students that look like me and where do they fit in this classroom space?"; and "where do I want to fit in?"

Listen:

Then that child begins to listen. They listen to the tone of the classroom space, who talks, who doesn't, whose voices and opinions belong and are welcomed in this space. The child listens to large and small classroom discussions. The child listens for the conversations that they are welcomed to be a part of, the relationships that they are open to build on, as well as the ones that they aren't. As a keen observer the child is listening to all of the aspects that come into play in that classroom space and how the culture of that space is constructed, including how they are spoken to, when they are spoken to and for what purposes.

Learn:

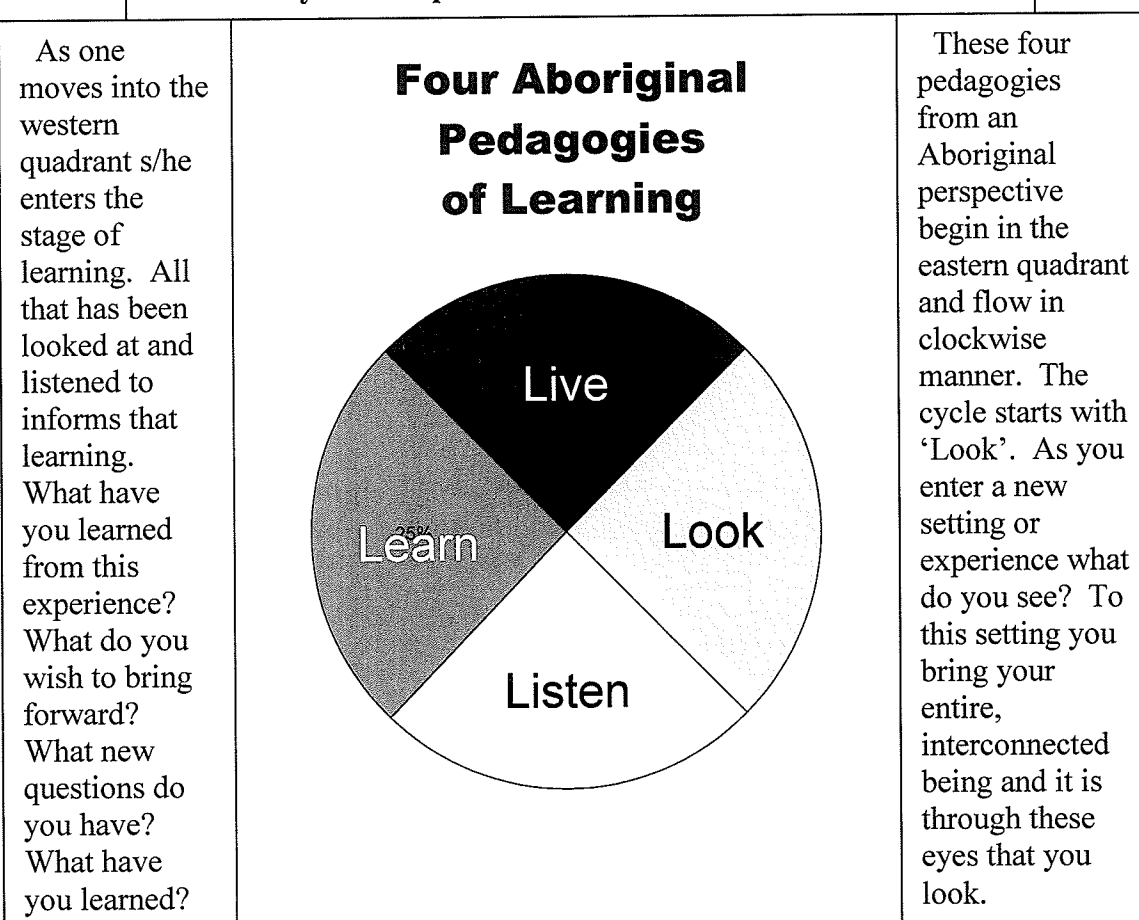
Initially, the child may feel somewhat excited and overwhelmed with everything that they have looked at and listened to. The child works to make sense of this new reality. Here, the child is moving from the observer to a member of this classroom space and community. The child has both looked and listened quite intently. Now they are reflecting on all that they have taken in, and asking themselves, "what have I learned from my observations and interactions?", "what have I learned about existing within this new place?", "how should I act?", "what is expected of me?"; and "where do I belong?"

Live:

After many answered and unanswered questions the child begins to live in this space based on their previous experiences, worldviews and perceptions of what is expected. How one lives in this space is based on how they are welcomed, how they are

reflected in the space, where they perceive they fit in, what they have heard and/or not heard in relation to themselves, and how they have interpreted their positionality in this new space. Here the child may continue to flow between the quadrants of look, listen, learn, live as they try on different roles, have different experiences and attempt to make sense of this new ever-changing, interconnected reality.

As one moves into the northern quadrant of the circle s/he has reflected on what s/he has looked at, listened to, and learned. From there s/he **must decide what it means to live in a good way, as informed by these experiences.**



As you move into the southern quadrant, you listen. What is it that you hear? What questions do you ask and what answers do you seek as you listen? You bring with you all that you have looked at, and...you listen. It is important to recognize that this cycle goes in a fluid, clockwise direction however, **there is not a rigid structure. One can flow between quadrants as needed.**

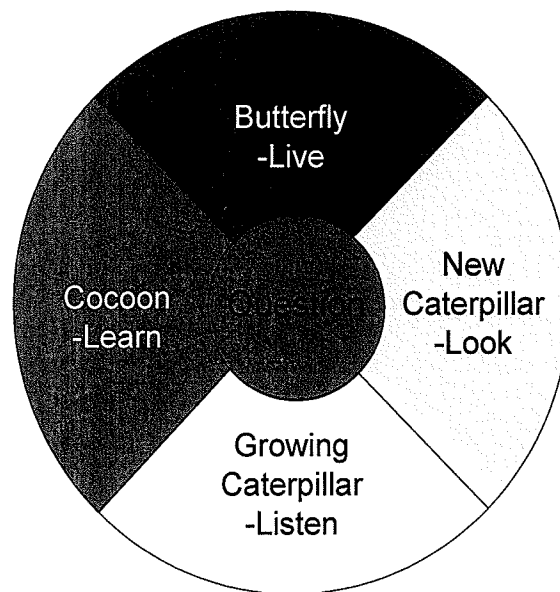
An Indigenous Perspective of Transformation

An Indigenous Perspective of Transformation, as shown on the following page brings together the Butterfly Teaching and Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning to create a theoretical framework. In this theoretical framework the question is at the centre of the circle to show how the quadrants work together to look at, listen to, learn from, and reflect on how to live based on the interconnected experiences, all of which are tied to the question in the center.

The time has come to live; to share about the experience; to thoughtfully share what was looked at, listened to and learned. It is now up to that butterfly to live by the guidance that has been offered to it from this journey, their cycle. That is, till new questions are asked, new experiences are presented, or a new cycle is required. It is in this manner that the butterfly continues to change, reproduce and live.

The caterpillar slowly moves out of the southern quadrant into the western quadrant. Through reflection the caterpillar goes back to what it has seen and heard and works to learn from these experiences. The caterpillar forms a cocoon as it makes connections, finding security in this safe place. Prior to transforming and emerging as a butterfly, within this chrysalis the individual has many questions to answer.

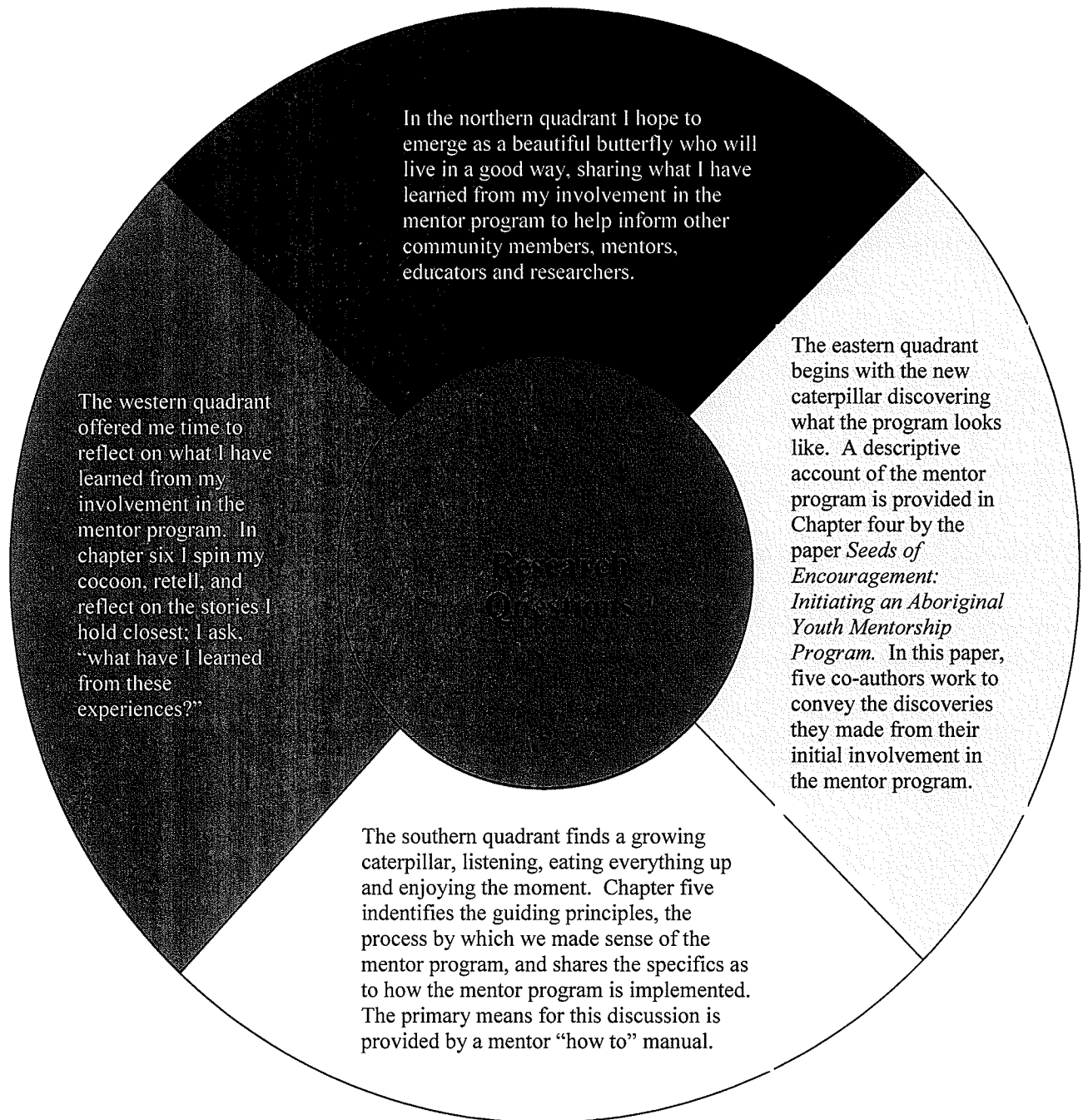
Indigenous Perspective of Transformation



This circle begins in the eastern quadrant, as informed by the butterfly teaching, the pedagogical interpretation, and as connected to numerous Indigenous teachings from the prairies. It is within this quadrant that a new caterpillar emerges from an egg. This caterpillar brings with it worldviews that are used to understand the world around them. The new caterpillar looks, absorbs and analyzes this new space, and asks many questions.

As the new caterpillar matures it moves into the southern quadrant where it immerses itself in the new experience. It listens to everything it can, absorbing as much information as it can. It is within this space that the caterpillar searches, asks and eats up everything it can. The caterpillar has to be careful not to get stuck within this quadrant where it may never take the time to fully reflect, learn and eventually live from this transformative experience.

Now, more than ever before I recognize the need for diversity of voices, paradigms, perspectives, and theories to inform the world that we all share. I feel that I have found what I have been searching for and that is a paradigm that is based on Indigenous perspectives (Hubbard, 2008), Indigenous strengths. What I have learned and shared I have been learning all of my life (Wilson, 2001). My intentions are to employ the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation as a theoretical framework to interpret data that is associated with the mentor program. Here you will discover my layout for this reflective thesis discussion:



I hope that despite the external attempts of assimilation, I will, as shared by Kovach (2005), remember to honour relationships, honour the guidance that I have been provided with and value the journey as much as the destination. However, I proceed with caution because of the challenges that this form of analysis and presentation may face in the Western academic discourse, challenges which I have already experienced when I presented this framework in a graduate studies class. The Western academic discourse is often built on critique and one's ability to disprove or improve on another's ideas. In Lavallée's (2009) work she recognizes the challenges that Indigenous students face as they struggle to be heard and have their methodologies legitimized in academies that have long established research paradigms which are judged as the trustworthy methodologies. As stated by Kovach (2005), "carving space for emancipatory research in the academy, particularly for "new" methodologies, like Indigenous research, is exhausting. Questioning established views about what counts as meaning, knowledge, and truth provokes defensiveness" (p. 21).

In sharing stories from my own interpretations, my perspective, is it really fair for another to disagree? If we respect various views of the world, and trust that individuals are offering their best account of reality (Little Bear, 2000), is it then fair to disagree, discredit or attempt to prove invalid? I believe that there is room for dialogue where we all learn together but I have difficulty understanding the notion of debate, the notion of right and wrong, winners and losers, pass or fail. My hopes for this thesis are that it may create room for dialogue, 'reflective discussion' (Hampton, 1995) and recognition that there are multiple realities and that no one can know all things.

To my ancestors, my friends, my teachers, my mentors, my multi-age co-researchers, my co-participants and on-going advisors I am humbled and forever grateful.

Thank you!

CHAPTER FOUR:

SEEDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT: INITIATING AN ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

This chapter is comprised of the article *Seeds of Encouragement: Initiating an Aboriginal Youth Mentorship Program* (2008). The article is published in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (CJNE) and it is reprinted here with permission.³⁴ *Seeds of Encouragement* is a co-authored paper, the authors being myself (Amy Carpenter), Alex Rothney, Joseph Mosseau, Joannie Halas and Janice Forsyth. An earlier draft of this paper was presented by Joseph, Alex, Joannie and I at the 2006 North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) conference. In this chapter, the *Seeds of Encouragement* article will describe the genesis of the Aboriginal youth mentorship program that is the focal point of this research.

This chapter begins as we enter the eastern quadrant of the framework, an Indigenous Perspective of Transformation. Here we emerge as new caterpillars to look at the mentor program from our multiple roles as mentors, participants, researchers and community members. Through our voices as co-authors we share our new immersion into the Aboriginal youth mentorship program. To this new experience we each brought our own positionality, which is informed by our gender, race and class. Our positionality and experiences inform the worldview that we each independently and inter-connectedly brought to the mentor program. In this paper we share our voices both independently and collectively to support our interpretations after the first year of the mentor program.

³⁴ The paper in this chapter is presented as it was published in Carpenter, A., Rothney, A., Mousseau, J., Halas, J., & Forsyth, J. (2008). *Seeds of encouragement: Initiating an Aboriginal youth mentorship program*. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(2), 51-69. Therefore, there may be some repetition of terms from earlier chapters.

As was mentioned in previous chapters the mentor program has moved into its' fifth year of inter-school relationship building and the celebration of the strengths in our Aboriginal youth community. Four years ago, we began to write *Seeds of Encouragement* as a means to share what were our very recent experiences and reflect on what we had learned from that first year as co-participants, co-researchers and co-mentors. It was in our reflections and discussions regarding our new experiences with the mentor program that we recognized the connection between the Aboriginal youth mentorship program and the *Circle of Courage*³⁵ model (Brendtro et al, 2002). The *Circle of Courage* model provided and continues to provide us a means to recognize, organize and articulate the mentor program.

The notion of a co-authored paper as a chapter in this thesis highlights the foundations of the mentor program being based on multiple perspectives, as well as being the collection and celebration of everyone's involvement.

Abstract

In this article, the authors, a multi-age, cross-cultural team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal co-researchers, present the preliminary findings of a youth mentoring program designed to involve Aboriginal high school youth in designing and delivering an after school physical activity/nutrition/education program for children at an elementary school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The mentoring program that is discussed was organized as a qualitative, community-based, participatory action research study. Through weekly after-school mentoring sessions, a group of 12 high school Aboriginal youth developed and delivered a program of low organized games, snacks and educational activities for

³⁵ The *Circle of Courage* has been extensively discussed by Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern. For further information see the Reclaiming Youth website at: <http://reclaiming.com/>.

approximately 25 elementary students. The study design incorporated holistic models of youth engagement informed by Brendtro, Brokenleg and van Bockern's (1998) *Circle of Courage* and other Aboriginal education practices.

Introduction

This article describes the genesis of an Aboriginal³⁶ youth mentorship program. The mentoring program invited Aboriginal high school youth at a large, multicultural suburban school to work collaboratively with a team of university researchers to develop and deliver an after school physical activity/nutrition/education program for children at a neighbouring elementary school. As a team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal co-researchers involving a graduate student, undergraduate student, high school community member and two professors, we wanted to ensure that the qualitative, community-based research project recognized the necessity for Aboriginal peoples to define themselves (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000), ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives and epistemologies were validated (Bishop, 1998). The mentoring program incorporated our research team's shared understandings of youth engagement, Participatory Action Research, and Aboriginal community-based research; each of these research approaches directed us to develop respectful relationships with the Aboriginal youth that we (the authors) worked in collaboration with to design the program. Throughout the research project we have worked to ensure that the research was connected to and serves the community (Deloria, 1991; Weber-Pilliwax, 2001). It was imperative that the research was conducted within and alongside the urban Aboriginal youth community.

³⁶ Aboriginal refers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples as referenced in the Canadian Constitution, 1982 in sections 25 and 35 respectively. Within the discussion, when referencing other people's work, we use the identifying terms provided in the original source (e.g., Indigenous, Native American).

Youth Engagement

Numerous organizations in both Canada and the United States have employed different forms of engagement in an effort to better service the dreams and needs of youth. This has led to a range of ideas about what “youth engagement” is and how it should look in a real setting. The Laidlaw Foundation (2001), an organization dedicated to improving outcomes related to the well being of children and youth, define youth engagement as a process of meaningful, voluntary participation of youth 12 - 24 years in the decision making and governance of organizations and programs. Effective youth engagement programs are seen to produce results such as "an impact or contribution toward change; an increase in youth's understanding of what impacts them; shared power between youth and adults; youth opinions, perspectives are valued; and, youth building their vocabulary of experiences" (Laidlaw Foundation, p. 1).

Aboriginal, Community-Based, Participatory Action Research

The mentoring program was part of a larger Participatory Action Research (PAR) study (see Forsyth, Heine & Halas, 2007) that investigated how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples can work together to create healthier and more supportive environments for urban Aboriginal youth in sport and recreation. In Brant Castellano's, 2004 article *Ethics of Aboriginal Research* she discusses how PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH “has received a positive reception in Aboriginal communities and has gained acceptance in some quarters of the research community” (p. 106). Similarly Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin, & Gover (2008) suggest PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH as a research approach that can be used within Aboriginal communities where researchers are looking to respect Indigenous ways of

knowing. The PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH approach offered us a framework to become directly involved as co-researchers/program developers with our Aboriginal youth participants to investigate a ‘problem of practice’ (Sumara & Carson, 1997), which was an identified need for more physical activity opportunities within their school community.

In terms of specific research activities, our data collection involved audiotaped recordings of our mentor team planning and programming meetings, including a weekly de-briefing session with the high school mentors and our university team. Other research activities included individual interviews with high-school participants and school staff, as well as documentation of program planning ideas. In addition, the university mentor team kept field journals where they recorded their own experiences in the program; it is these experiences that we draw upon for this article.

In a description of Kaupapa Maori research or Maori-centred research, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) shares with us the guideline “Titiro, whakarongo...korero (Look, listen...speak)” (p. 120) as one of the codes of conduct for researchers to follow. In our efforts to initiate the mentor program alongside the youth, we sought to follow the principle of non-interference by adopting a ‘look, listen, speak’ approach. Brant Castellano (2004) speaks of Clare Brant’s conception of non-interference, and writes: “while non-interfering behaviour may be perceived as passive and irresponsible, Brant points out that it is consistent with teaching based on non-intrusive modelling rather than direct instruction that attempts to shape the behaviour of the learner” (p. 100). For us, as we chose to look, listen...then speak, in our interactions with the youth participants, we

hoped that all of our strengths and ideas would emerge, and that our youth would engage in the project in ways that they defined.

Aboriginal youth have already demonstrated their willingness to work to improve their social environment. They have formed their own national assemblies to meet, discuss, and strategize on key issues that affect their everyday lives. They are also connecting to one another through memberships with national political organizations such as the National Association of Friendship Centers, Métis Council of Canada, Native Women's Association of Canada, Inuit Tapirisat Kanatami, and the Assembly of First Nations in order to address issues that are important to them. They have utilized the power of the media to engage other Aboriginal youth on critical issues like land claims, substance abuse, violence, education, sovereignty, and self-determination. They have created the Aboriginal Youth Network website, SAY Magazine, and the award winning youth-driven television program Seven Generations.

Clearly, Aboriginal youth have shown a deep interest and commitment to talking about the future of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Aboriginal youth in our communities have confirmed our inherent belief that youth hold the capacity and want opportunities to be engaged and serve our communities (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). It is this commitment to a better future that we tried to energize through the mentor program.

In accordance with initiatives recommended by the Working Group for the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy (1999), whereby young people are encouraged to participate in sports, recreation and active living "at the community level to help Aboriginal youth develop leadership and other skills" (p. 26), we worked in collaboration

with an urban school district, its teachers, administrators, staff and students. Within the urban school district where the mentorship program was initiated, the Aboriginal student population is approximately 10 percent of the total district's student population. This number is reflective of Winnipeg's self-identified Aboriginal population as according to Statistics Canada, 2006 Census data (Statistics Canada, 2007). The number of Aboriginal staff within the school district, though undocumented, is estimated to represent less than six percent of the educational staff.³⁷ Notably, one of the goals of the Aboriginal youth mentorship program is to encourage Aboriginal high school students to consider teaching as a possible career.

Foundational to our work, we adhered to a principle recommendation for working with and responding to youth, that is, we recognized the "strength, abilities, talent and energy of young people" (Health Canada, 1999) who were part of the mentor program. To focus on strengths, not on perceived weaknesses, opens up opportunities for youth to make positive changes in their lives (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001) and to break down negative perceptions between adults and youth (Laidlaw Foundation, 2001). As Saleebey (1997) states with regard to the concept of "strengths" within a social work context, there are many untapped and unsolicited resources in any setting. We believe this is particularly true for Aboriginal youth in schools.

Furthermore, in building our relationships, we acknowledged how cultural differences can shape how youth engage with community. As Dominiguez, Fielding, and

³⁷ A recent survey by the Aboriginal Education Directorate (Government of Manitoba, 2006) reports that 6.1% of the Manitoba teaching population self-identifies as Aboriginal. The participating school division appears to have fewer Aboriginal teachers than the provincial estimate, and has developed a community post-secondary teacher education program with the intent of increasing the number of Aboriginal educators it employs.

Perrault (2001) found in a Winnipeg study on youth engagement, for young Aboriginal men and women, youth engagement means working with respected members of their communities who can help build their self-esteem, encourage them to become more culturally active, and show them how to become more involved in their local settings. In our case, we recognized the cultural capital of numerous urban Aboriginal youth leaders that made up our university research team and community allies. To further strengthen our research team we looked to the students and leaders within the high school settings. As a commitment to hiring community members within the research project, we immediately identified Joe³⁸ (third author of this paper) as a respected member of his youth community. Joe demonstrated cultural awareness, leadership, dedication, and excellent inter-personal skills, all of which are consistent with a cultural approach to youth engagement (Dominiguez et al., 2001). As the project unfolded, we continually looked to Joe for guidance as a key member of our research/mentor team. In this action, we disrupted the customary, hierarchical power relations by immediately creating (paid) space for a youth leader within the research project.

Research as Situated Response

In an article that describes "research methods as situated response", Hermes (1998) writes retrospectively about her experiences as a researcher in a First Nations community. Hermes calls for the use of methods that are particular and context dependent, rooted in relationships of reciprocity and respect.

³⁸ A decision was made by the authors of this article to use our given names rather than pseudonyms. Our given names help to share parts of who we are and how we are related to the mentorship program. Pseudonyms are used for all of our youth participants.

I define a "community-based" research project as one that revolves around the perceived needs of the community rather than one that is dictated by academic protocols or traditions. I understand the idea of community-based research as a way of devoting time, attention, thought, and sometimes actions to areas that are defined as problematic to the community itself. (Mary Hermes, 1998, p. 164)

Similarly, within two overlapping research studies at the same school site, the need for opportunities to be more physically active emerged as a concern for many youth.

Specifically, the idea for a mentoring program evolved out of an earlier research study that investigated the experience of physical education for Aboriginal youth (Champagne & Halas, 2003; van Ingen, & Halas, 2004). In focus groups and individual interviews with Aboriginal youth, a number of issues arose related to the young peoples' access to physical activity opportunities within urban school contexts. Although public high schools provide multiple extracurricular sport opportunities for youth, many Aboriginal youth were not participating in these programs. Importantly, a number of youth believed they were not given a fair chance to try out for their school's teams (Champagne & Halas, 2003). These students wanted to be more involved, and in response, Joannie (fourth author) used the resources of an initial PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH project to initiate an after school physical activity/leadership program at a large, suburban high school. Initially, the successes were small; with limited access to physical activity space only a few youth showed up for the twice-weekly program.

It was in discussing the roadblocks to activity space that the idea of designing games for children surfaced. Amy (a graduate student and first author of this paper) was teaching at an elementary school nearby, and invited the Aboriginal youth, by this time a semi-regular group of mostly boys in grades 10 and 11, to help her organize lunch hour games for her grade 2 students. Amy booked the elementary gym allowing our leadership group to meet one day after school. Joannie taught the youth low organized games that they could then teach to Amy's grade 2 students. Thus began the genesis of an idea of a mentor program that would be built in community with youth, addressing issues of importance to youth.

Schools are important sites for interacting with young people (Health Canada, 1999). Thus, when the current larger research project was conceptualized, we intentionally worked to continue the relationships developed in the previous research study. With an enhanced focus on cultural approaches to Aboriginal youth sport and recreation (Forsyth, Heine, & Halas, 2007), we once again partnered with the high school from the previous study to further explore the possibility of developing a mentoring program that incorporated physical activity, leadership training, Aboriginal youth engagement, and perceived community needs.

Rather than prescribing a set of pre-determined research methods (that are conceived without community input), Hermes (1998) describes a process "that cannot be replicated but that is situated within the particular relationships among myself and the community members" (p. 165). Similarly, our community-based research design focused on the development of respectful relationships (with the youth and school officials) and applied a flexible data collection protocol, where documents used in the training of

mentors (e.g., university mentor journals, activity binders, planning notes) were compiled and conversations held in planning and de-briefing sessions were recorded for later analysis. Amy, who had "multiple roles" (Hermes, 1998) as a teacher/researcher in the project, provided a vision of the program delivery model, which included a necessary pre-program training period before the high school mentors would begin activity programs for the children in grades three to five. We booked gym space at the elementary school for two days after school each week, and once the elementary children joined the program, we used one day for planning and training with the high school mentors, and a second day for program delivery.

While Aboriginal high school students were targeted as mentors, a collaborative decision was made to include students from all cultural backgrounds as activity participants at the elementary school. The focus on Aboriginal high school youth was consistent with our research goals of incorporating cultural approaches to urban Aboriginal physical activity, and we felt there would be multiple benefits in working cross-culturally with younger students. Given our concern that many Aboriginal youth were not experiencing affirmations within their high schools and/or communities (e.g., see van Ingen & Halas, 2006), we valued the opportunity to feature these young people as positive role models for the younger, multicultural cohort of students.

Further solidifying the cross-cultural nature of our project, our university mentor team included Amy, who is Métis; Alex, a non-Aboriginal university student who was completing an Education degree and had plans to teach physical education (second author); and Joe, an Ojibwa student who was completing his grade 12 requirements at an inner city high school. Working with university researchers who were both Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal (including Janice, a fifth author, and Joannie), Amy, Alex and Joe were responsible for facilitating the process of youth engagement during the weekly mentor meetings. Beyond working to involve the youth in meaningful ways that would bring out their strengths and perspectives regarding how the program should unfold, Amy, Alex and Joe also inserted a variety of Aboriginal educational practices that Amy regularly incorporates as a Métis educator. These included Sharing Circles (Hart, 1996) where all participants had an opportunity to voice their opinions; balancing physical, social, emotional and intellectual activities that demonstrate a more holistic approach to educational programming (Calliou, 1995); the physical set up of the room (e.g., arranging tables and chairs in a circle to encourage collective dialogue); and including traditional Aboriginal games and activities.

In the end, a group of 10 to 12 Aboriginal high school students³⁹ from diverse cultural backgrounds met regularly with our university research/mentor team to develop and design the weekly program of gym games, nutritional snacks,⁴⁰ and educational activities for up to 25 children. As children, youth and adults, we were a cross-cultural, multi-age cohort of co-researchers, each mentoring the other in multiple ways as we collaboratively explored the development of our own mentorship model. For the remainder of this article, we draw upon the theoretical model of the *Circle of Courage* (Brendtro, Brokenleg & van Bockern, 1998) to inform our analysis of how the values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity shaped the students' engagement in the

³⁹ Of the 1200 plus students at the high school, approximately 10% were Aboriginal.

⁴⁰ As an ethic of our research team's accountability to the local Aboriginal community, all of our food was purchased from an inner city Aboriginal-owned co-operative, thus ensuring that this aspect of the research budget was used to support the employment of Aboriginal peoples in the area.

mentorship program, thus providing an orientation toward youth engagement that was informed by Aboriginal perspectives.

Seeds of Encouragement: Initiating the Mentor Program

The *Circle of Courage* is informed by Native American knowledge and epistemologies that incorporate traditional Native American teachings on interdependent relationships. According to Brendtro, Brokenleg and van Bockern (1998), traditional Native American worldviews carried the wisdom that every child is a sacred gift and that it is our collective responsibility to nurture and develop that gift. The *Circle of Courage* begins in the east, where the sun rises and moves in a clockwise direction, with each direction providing a teaching related to healthy child development. Described as seeds of encouragement, the *Circle of Courage* model addresses four constructs related to developing a sense of *belonging, mastery, independence and generosity*. While other Aboriginal worldviews were used to inform the program development, it is the *Circle of Courage* model that enabled us to frame and understand the following question: “How can we support and empower children and youth who are often pushed out of schooling institutions to recognize the leadership qualities that they each carry?” Believing in the intelligence and talents of Aboriginal youth, we worked with the young people in our study to encourage them to be physically active in their communities, to utilize their strengths to foster community development and to empower each individual to recognize the strengths that he or she has to share.

In the next section, four members of the research team share their stories related to each of the four *Circle of Courage* teachings. Written as first person narratives, the

university mentor team discuss their own roles within the research, and how they interpreted their experiences within the first few weeks of the mentor program.

The Spirit of Belonging:

The universal longing for human bonds is nurtured by relationships of trust so the child can say, “I am loved.” (Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2003, p. 23)

Amy's story:

As an educator who has the opportunity to work alongside young children every day, I have often reflected on how much easier it is for everyone to live and learn together when each individual knows that they are loved, cherished, celebrated and that everyone belongs. Just as it is imperative that young children feel that sense of belonging, people of all ages need to know that they belong. And so, we began the mentor program with the knowledge that everyone, including our university mentors, needed to develop a sense of belonging within our school space and amongst one another before we would be able to meaningfully engage with each other.

As an initial step, our mentor group claimed a meeting place to call our own at the elementary school. On our first mentoring day, we met the high school students and university mentor team in the elementary school office, then quickly moved to the waiting multi-purpose room (MPR), which was a simple space with tables, chairs, a fridge and enough room to just hang out. It was here that the high school mentors and our university team awkwardly met those first few weeks, where we shared shy conversations. Week by week, as we taped up photos on the walls, stored supplies in the cupboards, left games on side tables, took over the fridge with our food, and filled the

MPR with our laughter, the room transformed into "our" space. In contrast to examples of Aboriginal students struggling to claim an affirming space in their larger, cross-cultural schools (van Ingen & Halas, 2006), the elementary school became a transforming space, where Aboriginal youth were viewed as collaborative partners, working alongside school staff, university mentors and elementary school students.

Over a short period of time, they became respected members of the elementary school community, and having this identifiable, welcoming space proved to be a crucial first step for programming. From the first week to the second, our claimed space assured the new comers of their place within our school community. The differences in our group's sense of belonging from that first week to the next were palpable. So much so, that a few teaching colleagues commented on the changed body language of the mentors from their initial visit to the school, when they walked in hesitantly, to their purposeful arrival each subsequent week.

A second enabling factor in the program was "food." With nutritious snacks built into our program delivery budget, we immediately learned how food provided not only an attraction, but also a social function. We all looked forward (as all kids do) to an after-school snack, often making requests for the next day's healthy treat. We would gather around the table and informally catch up on life, share stories and laugh as we slowly built genuine reciprocal relationships of respect. The food also served as an important, yet unintentional, invitation for school staff who would often come to the MPR to grab a bite and visit with the high school students. These adult-student interactions were relaxed and respectful, and helped break down the schism that often exists between teachers/students, adults/youth (a goal of youth engagement). Furthermore, the formation of positive cross-

cultural relations between the Aboriginal youth and the mostly non-Aboriginal teaching staff was significant, given the racial tensions that often lead to negative perceptions being held by both groups toward the other (Barnhardt, 2005).

Eventually the confidence we shared in the meeting space spread throughout the rest of the school. The gym was ours everyday from 3:45 P.M. till 6:00 P.M. The equipment room was left wide open for us with a clear, trusting expectation that we would take care of the equipment and clean up after ourselves, which we always did. The computer lab became our space to create and save resumé's. At one point or another, the library, staff room and common areas all belonged to us. The students strolled through the hallways with respect for themselves, others and the school facility. This sense of belonging provided the foundation for all our efforts to purposefully engage the youth, and extends our own understanding of the process of Aboriginal youth engagement in cross-cultural environments. Given the marginalized positions of Aboriginal youth within the larger, non-Aboriginal Canadian society (Burstein, 2005), strategies to recognize and celebrate Aboriginal youth within the physical and social spaces of the school program rather than striving towards conformity are imperative to empowerment and success (Cajete, 1994).

The Spirit of Mastery

The child's inborn thirst for learning is nurtured; learning to cope with the world the child can say, "I can succeed." (Brokenleg et al., 2003, p. 23)

Alex's story:

Initially, the high school students did not recognize the impact that they could have on others and within their community. Over time, they came to feel that their program was necessary for the elementary school, just as they, as people, were needed in the lives of the younger students. Based on the successes that they experienced, the high school students involved in the mentorship program demonstrated an increase in self-confidence and sense of pride.

As mentioned by Amy, it took some time for all of us to feel as though we belonged. Just as I had uncertainties about my role among the university mentors, the high school mentors seemed unsure of what they were expected to do and how they fit in to the group. The high school mentors didn't all know each other prior to our program and many of them appeared to be very shy in the beginning. This led to a reluctance to share ideas and opinions about planning. It was also a chore, at times, to get everyone to participate in some of the low organized games that may not have been very "age-appropriate" or "cool" for high school students.

Nevertheless, as the high school mentors' sense of belonging seemed to increase, so did their willingness to contribute and participate actively in the program planning. In retrospect, this gradual improvement was quite obvious. However, at the time I must admit that I was worried about how the program would turn out once the elementary students started coming. I was afraid that the hesitancy to participate on the part of the high school mentors would lead to difficulties when they would step forward to lead the activity program. My perception changed dramatically one Thursday a few weeks into the training sessions. On that particular Thursday, we were pleased to see that most of the

high school mentors were in attendance. The day before only three had shown up. Not knowing exactly what to do with so few, we decided to have them plan out a day of programming. The next day, the three that had attended would act as the high school mentors and the rest of the group would play the role of the younger students. We thought it would be a good simulation that might highlight areas in which we needed to improve before we were ready for the “real” youngers.⁴¹ While I consciously demonstrated full confidence in the three mentors, I was secretly afraid that the others might not listen to them or wouldn’t want to participate in the planned activities. After all, I had experienced difficulties in that respect myself and had yet to “master” the art of communicating with these older students.

After one of the three leaders for the day had prepared and shared the snack with the rest of the group, we headed to the gym where Brodie⁴² was set to lead the low organized games. This would be the first time that a high school mentor peer taught a gym game to the group. Just as he was starting to explain the game, Joannie appeared at the entrance to the gym. As I walked over to greet her, I watched Brodie step forward to start his lesson. Wearing a hooded sweatshirt that draped over his body from head to low hanging, baggy jeans, he shouted out instructions to the group. Despite the fact they weren’t giving him their full attention, when he said, “Go”, the game was underway. Everyone played and the game ran smoothly.

Joannie’s face lit up with astonishment as I met her at the gym door. This was her first visit to Nearby Elementary School to meet the mentors, and she greeted me saying,

⁴¹ ‘Youngers’ is a term for youngsters that Amy shared from her multi-age classroom setting, which parallels the term ‘olders’.

⁴² This and subsequent names and/or identifying characteristics for all youth mentors are pseudonyms.

“Wow, this is great!” Given past efforts to organize after school programs at the high school, she explained how thrilled she was with the turnout. I remember her telling me that she didn’t mean to interrupt and that I could go back to the group. Looking on, we both realized that everything was completely under control without me.

Before Joannie had walked in, I was looking at Brodie’s delivery in a fairly critical way. As I watched him, I was looking for issues to bring up later that we could all learn from in our de-briefing session. My high expectations for the high school mentors had made me fairly hard to please. But, at that moment, as I saw the mentors through Joannie’s eyes, I was taken aback. Brodie, who happened to be the youngest of the mentors, was leading his peers and doing as good of a job of keeping their attention and getting them to participate as I ever had. I realized how far we had come as a group and particularly how the high school mentors were becoming masters of their own program. There were no doubt many incremental successes happening each day, as the mentors began to express their opinions, take on responsibility for new tasks, and just show up willing to see how things would unfold. As they worked to develop new skills in communicating and teaching, I realized how each student did want to learn, despite how shy and reluctant they appeared to me. Mastery takes time and happens in ways that aren’t always evident, particularly for Aboriginal youth whose choice to observe first can be interpreted (especially by non-Aboriginal teachers) as an unwillingness to learn. In this regard, I’ve learned to see mastery differently.

The Spirit of Independence

The child’s free will is nurtured by increased responsibility so that the child can say, “I have power to make decisions.” (Brokenleg et al., 2003, p. 23)

Joe's story:

When we first began the mentor program, I would go to the high school to meet the students at 3:30 P.M., often running into one another in the hallways. At first, I would have to chase them down and ask them, "Hey there, where are you going to?" and the student would say, "ummm, no where ... I'm just going to get my jacket, I'll be right there." From the hallway, I would head towards the school office, where I would wait for them and hope that they would come back. I went to the high school to meet the students for a couple of weeks. After a few weeks my role changed from chasing the students down to welcoming them at the elementary school, since they started to walk to the school on their own, often arriving early to prepare for the day.

I still remember that first day that Alex and I went to meet the high school students. Alex and I walked with the students from the high school over to the elementary school, which is about three city blocks away. Shortly after leaving the high school, the students asked if they could smoke. In response, Alex and I just looked at each other and said, "We don't see anything" and I just suggested that they butt out their smokes before we got to the school, which they did.

After awhile, when the high school students were coming on their own they mentioned to me that they were butting out their smokes way before they got close to the elementary school because they were concerned that the students would see them smoking. I thought it was pretty cool for the mentors to make that decision to "butt out" on their own, without us telling them what to do. The mentors demonstrated their own independence among themselves. Had we told them to butt out, I wonder if we would have had the same response, particularly as we were just getting to know them? I know

that many people working with youth and sharing research related to youth promote the need for youth to make their own decisions. However, I wonder if a young person's independence would be fully respected in all cases, such as smoking, which is seen as a real health hazard.

How I responded to the youth was based on my own experiences as an Aboriginal person and youth. My responses to many of the interactions with the mentor group was what came natural and how I would like people to respectfully interact with me. From what other people on the research team, the mentors and observers shared, it was these respectful interactions that showed the high school mentors that we believe they are strong individuals that are more than capable of making decisions that are right for them. In the *Circle of Courage* model, youth choices are fully respected, and I think that's important, particularly for Aboriginal youth.

The Spirit of Generosity

The child's character is nurtured by concern for others so that the child can say, "I have a purpose for my life." (Brokenleg et al., 2003, p. 23)

Joannie's story:

Two years prior to the start of this mentor program, I had tried to organize an after school physical activity leadership program for Aboriginal youth at the high school. As mentioned earlier, it was challenging to get students to participate because we couldn't access any physical activity space in the school. We played broomball (a common winter sport in Canada and the northern USA), collected information on Aboriginal youth leadership programs from the web, and planned a trip to the University. Like Joe, I

waited each day wondering which students would show up. When a group of four to five young men started to come out more regularly, I sometimes wondered how successful we'd be. Like Alex, I found the students to be very quiet and hesitant in putting forward their ideas. Then, one day, Amy dropped by the program. As the group of four Aboriginal young men, Amy, and I chatted over banana bread and juice, we wondered aloud whether the young men would be interested in helping run a lunch hour of low organized games for Amy's grade 2 students. The frigid temperatures of a Manitoba winter were causing a number of indoor lunch hours, and Amy's younger elementary students looked forward to opportunities to play and exert energy. In making the connection between the elementary students' desires to be active and the coinciding lunch hour of the young men that were regularly involved, we appealed to the youths' sense of leadership and altruism.

Over the next few weeks, these young men walked over to Amy's school at lunchtime and played simple low-organized games with her class. With Amy's help, they laughed as they led activities for the children, who looked up to them with the enthusiasm I used to feel when, as a little sister, my big brother would play with me. I remember Amy's joy when telling me how one of her grade 2 students had seen one of the high school students walk by her house and yelled out, "there's my teacher." Amy recounted the feelings of pride that the high school students shared with her about their relationships with the children in her class. Amy shared stories of how the high school students would show up to talk to her when they were having trouble in school or at home, how she kept in touch with them through their siblings or cousins who attended her school, and how they would often pop into the classroom to spend time with their new younger friends. What began as a minimalist intervention appeared to produce powerful results, all from

playing a few games with younger children. For me, I learned how purposeful an appeal to one's sense of service can be, even when the generosity of time and energy is limited to a few lunch hours playing games. In this case, small seeds of encouragement blossomed into the current project, where the young peoples' spirit of generosity produces multiple outcomes, with multiple benefits for the mentors, the elementary school children, our research team and the two school communities.

Mentors Teaching Mentors: Who is the Real Mentor Here?

(Knowledges Shared/Gained)

In their evaluation model for youth engagement programs, the Laidlaw Foundation (2001) describes "learning circles" where success stories are shared and challenges of engaging youth are discussed. Borrowing on this model, the authors conclude this article by presenting key learning outcomes that we each experienced from our respective roles within the research program.

Amy

The question of "who is the real mentor here?" is compelling. From a hierarchical perspective that shapes many educational settings, one would typically think that Joannie should be mentoring me, I should be mentoring Alex, Alex mentoring Joe and so on. Yet, in my own role as a mentor, I believe I have learned far more than I could have ever shared, and the learning came from all directions. Each week, I would walk away with new teachings and insights that continue to inform my relationships today. One of the greatest gifts was how much wisdom the youth shared. They were continually the leaders

for all of us. This was true throughout the study but it was most obvious when the elementary school children joined the program.

On that first day of program implementation, 40 people squished into the MPR, and the nervousness that we all felt was overwhelming. Somehow, Abigail led the way for us. She charismatically went up to both of her assigned younger partners and said, “Hi, I’m Abigail. What are your names?” Her confidence and self-assurance in what we were doing allowed us all to breathe a little easier. Another mentor for all of us was Chris who was constantly optimistic about how ‘cool’ his younger buddies were. Whenever our group was feeling discouraged by the actions of some of the elementary school children, Chris was always there to re-assure us how great the group was and remind us how much fun we were having. One day, the mentors went far beyond even our very high expectations, thanks, in part, to a series of miscommunications. Contrary to what actually happened, Joe, Alex and I each thought the other would be available one Thursday to start the day's activity and have the food prepared on time.

With barely a notice that we weren't there, the high school students stepped forward and got everything ready, preparing the juice and food in anticipation of the 25 younger students who would excitedly pile in after the school bell rang. It wasn't until I walked into the room about ten minutes into everything that I realized just how much we needed each of them, and how they were constantly the mentors for all of us.

Throughout the program we worked to recognize and celebrate the strengths and gifts that each individual brought to our interconnected circle (Couture, 1991). We respected each individual to share their strengths and gifts with the larger group. We collaboratively worked towards non-interference, choosing to teach by example, in

respectful ways (Ross, 1992, 1996). As Joe and Alex demonstrated in their initial interactions with the youth and their questions surrounding smoking, as Joannie and Janice had demonstrated in their trust of our abilities as co-researchers, and as we have all attempted to demonstrate in our interactions as co-researchers (inclusive of our multi-age, multi-institutional research team of youth mentors, early years students, university staff, university students and allies) it is up to each of us to share our gifts and respect one another enough to recognize that they will share theirs. It was with this sense of respect for individuals and recognition of the strength within the larger group that our first year of mentor programming flourished.

Alex

As an education student, I am looking forward to becoming an elementary physical education teacher. I've always enjoyed teaching others, particularly young people, and look forward to the challenges of being a teacher. I, like many other teachers, am entering the teaching profession because I want to make a positive impact on the lives of the students I work with. One of the valuable lessons I've learned throughout the course of this mentoring program is that teachers need to realize the importance of the relationships they build with their students. This became clear to me as I took the high school mentors on a tour of the University of Manitoba shortly after the conclusion of the mentoring program.

On the bus ride to the University, I overheard the conversation of a few girls behind me. "I would never want to be a teacher." one of them said. I interrupted and asked her why she felt that way. "Because of kids like us. We hate teachers. I don't want to get hated on."

When I asked them if they hated all of their teachers, they said “yes” until one of them mentioned Mrs. Smith. The others agreed and talked about how nice that teacher was. They told stories about how she would treat them with respect and even give them bannock on occasion. Those comments stuck with me for a long time and I still think about them often. If my assumptions about teachers wanting to help young people are accurate, then how could these students feel as though only one among dozens of their teachers is a true ally?

I found it interesting that when the high school mentors spoke of teachers, they didn’t include Amy, who they all knew was a teacher, or myself or Joe for that matter. Perhaps, they didn’t think of us as teachers because we didn’t fit the traditional model of ‘teacher’ that they were used to. I believe that there were strong positive relationships between all of the university mentors and the high school mentors. I also know that the high school mentors exceeded all expectations in our program. Therefore, I have learned that when I start teaching, following provincial curriculum, marking tests and even sharing information, these activities will all never be as important as being a good mentor for my students.

Joe

Throughout this article we have discussed youth participation and engagement. It was through my involvement as a youth participant that I became connected to this research project. I started off some years ago as a research participant at an inner city high school that I was attending. I regularly played in the after school “drop in” physical activity program and took part in a focus group interview about my experiences in physical education. When I left that school for a year, I was offered a research position as

a supervisor in the after school program at my former high school. I had moved from being a regular participant in that program to becoming a leader in terms of organizing the overall program. Then this past year, I was offered a new position with this mentor group that was connected to a suburban high school and an elementary school. At the time, I had returned to my former high school to complete my grade 12 studies. As I worked towards graduating, I worked with the mentor program and participated in the after school program, which was still offered as part of the larger research project.

At first, I was not too sure about the mentor job and what I was supposed to do with the mentorship program. I felt shy but I did want to be involved, so I started by observing and helping out where I could. When I met Amy, Alex and the high school mentors I observed each of them to see how they became involved in the program, each in their own unique way. One thing I learned about myself is how, when people say, “it’s hard to build relationships with students” I don’t find it hard at all. As the program went on, I discovered more about the mentorship job and I found it really awesome. I was surprised by how the students relied upon me, and would look to me for support in different and unexpected ways. Because of my work in this program, I was recently offered a job as an educational assistant/youth worker at the suburban high school, and I hope to become a teacher one day. In terms of lessons learned, I realize that it’s important to trust your instincts (observe before acting), that way you can learn from everyone and grow from your experiences.

Joannie and Janice

The lesson we’ve learned relates to the process of conducting community-based research, particularly when the community we speak of is a diverse group of Aboriginal

youth within an urban, multicultural school setting. As academics with multiple teaching, research and professional responsibilities, we often wonder if we would ever have adequate time to truly engage in "community" in meaningful ways. What we have learned by listening to the stories shared by Joe, Alex and Amy, which in turn, are stories lived by the high school mentors and elementary school participants, is that we can learn from others' lived experiences. As qualitative researchers, we should know this because good research methods will produce the anticipated results. Yet, we still inherently wonder how, if we weren't "there" for each day of the mentor program, we can know it. As we reflectively write this article, we are learning how, as educators and researchers, we have gained tremendous insights regarding ways we can support youth to actively engage in physical activity programs. We've learned that giving up control, delegating full responsibility for a project to others, and stepping deep into the background, can produce important and often unexpected results. In undertaking this mentor project, we have learned multiple lessons, not the least of which is the value of working in community, with community, to build community, even as we stand on the periphery of that community.

Concluding Remarks

Strengths theorists do not believe that the world is the best possible world. We believe that building on strengths and positives is the best way to make the world, individually and collectively, a better place to live" (Baikie, 2003, p. 75).

In a discussion that compares the *Circle of Courage* model to research on resilience, positive youth development and self-esteem, Brokenleg and van Bockern

(2003) present strong evidence of how the *Circle of Courage* values apply across time and cultures. They call for schools to honour the voices of youth by involving them in meaningful ways: “By enlisting youth in improving their schools, we create a climate of mutual respect. This requires valuing the strengths and potentials of all students, even those with broken Circles of Courage” (p. 25). Our research affirms the power of the *Circle of Courage* model, as we have learned the important roles that belonging, mastery, independence and generosity played in our efforts to meaningfully engage the youth participants. We believe these values extend our understanding of mainstream youth engagement processes. Once belongingness is developed, efforts to master skills can take place within a context that respects the full independence of all youth participants and builds upon their willingness to give of themselves.

As a first, exploratory attempt to design and deliver an Aboriginal youth mentorship program that encouraged young people to "play together" in supportive ways, we believe we've achieved benefits for our youth participants and their school communities. We have also learned how traditional Aboriginal values such as non-interference and observation were key components of effective youth mentoring and can inform mainstream models of youth engagement. For us, these traditional values were instructive.

As youth exit the program, they have developed new skills, friendships and educational relationships with adults in a neighbouring school that has, in many respects, become their own school. While we have more work to do in supporting Aboriginal youth as they seek ways to be engaged in more holistic educational experiences at their high school, we feel we are making progress. Crucially, the youth, as mentors for us as

educators, have provided many lessons on how to engage young children. We look forward to repeating the program based on the wisdom gleaned from the youth in this round of the mentoring program, showing how Aboriginal youth are providing the way for a healthy future for all children.

Authors' Notes:

1. This study was part of a larger research project that investigated "A Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity" and was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Aboriginal Research: Research Grants program.
2. This paper was constructed based on the experiences of our mentor research team following our first year of programming. Since the writing of this paper the mentorship program was expanded to include two high school mentor groups, four early years schools and four interconnected/overlapping mentor research teams that supported the programs. In the summer of 2008, a "Summer Rec and Read" program was initiated in the same school division (as reported in this article), and Aboriginal high school and university mentors have been hired to run a summer camp based on the Aboriginal youth mentor model. As a means to sustain the mentor program, the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Studies at the University of Manitoba now offers a three credit hour "Diverse Populations Mentorship" experiential learning course for undergraduate students who are interested in working with Aboriginal high school students in the mentor programs. Finally, five members of our university undergraduate student research team (two Aboriginal, two non-Aboriginal allies and one racialized minority) have been hired as teachers within the school divisions where mentorship programs have been offered.

References

- Baikie, S. (2003). The 'Bright Side of the Road:' The strengths perspective in Nain, Labrador. In Paraschak, V. & Forsyth, J. (Eds.) *North American Indigenous Games Research Symposium: Proceedings*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 70-76.
- Barnhardt, R. (2005). *Teaching / learning across cultures: Strategies for success*. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. Accessed on January, 2007 at www.ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/RayBarnhardt/TLAC.html
- Battiste, M. & Youngblood Henderson, J. (2000). What is Indigenous knowledge? In Battiste, M. & Youngblood Henderson, J. (Eds.) *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon: Purich Press, 35-48.
- Bishop, R. (1998). Freeing ourselves from neo-colonial domination in research: A Maori approach to creating knowledge. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11, 2, 199-219.
- Brant Castellano, M. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, January, 98-114.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S. (2002). *Reclaiming youth at risk. Our hope for the future. Revised Edition* Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S. (2003). The science of raising courageous kids. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 12(1), 22-27.
- Burstein, M. (2005). Combatting the social exclusion of at-risk groups research report. *PRI Project: New Approaches for Addressing Poverty and Exclusion*. Canada: Policy Research Initiative - Canadian Government

- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education*. Durango, Colorado: Kivakf Press.
- Calliou, S. (1995). Peacekeeping actions at home: A medicine wheel model for a peacekeeping pedagogy in Battiste, M. & Barman, J. (Eds.) *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 47-72.
- Canadian Council on Social Development. (2001). *Recreation and children and youth living in poverty. Summary Report*. Ottawa: Canadian Parks and Recreation Association.
- Champagne, L. & Halas, J. (2003). "I quit!" Aboriginal students negotiate the "contact zone" in physical education. In V. Parashak & J. Forsyth, (Eds.), *North American Indigenous Games Research Symposium: Proceedings*. Winnipeg: Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute, 55-64.
- Cochran, P., Marshall, C., Garcia-Downing, C., Kendall, E., Cook, D., McCubbin, L. & Gover, M. (2008). Indigenous ways of knowing: Implications for participatory research and community. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(1), 8-13.
- Couture, J. (1991): Explorations in Native knowing: *The cultural maze: Complex questions on Native destiny in western Canada*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd. 53-73.
- Deloria, V. Jr. (1991). Commentary: Research, redskins, and reality. *American Indian Quarterly*, 15(4), 457-469.
- Dominiguez, M., Fielding, V., and Perrault, M., (2001) *Findings of the youth engagement program: Youth views on community partnerships*, Prepared for the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

Government of Manitoba. (2006). *Aboriginal teachers' Questionnaire report 2006*.

Retrieved June 11th, 2008 from

http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/aborig_teachers.pdf

Forsyth, J., Heine, M., & Halas, J. (2007). A cultural approach to Aboriginal youth sport and recreation: Observations from Year 1. In Jerry P. White, Susan Wingert, Dan Beavon, & Paul Simon, (Eds.), *Aboriginal policy research. Moving forward, making a difference. Volume IV*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc, 93-100.

Hart, M. A. (1996). Sharing circles: Utilizing traditional practise methods for teaching, helping and supporting in Sylvia O'Meara and Douglas A. West (Eds.) *From our eyes: Learning from Indigenous peoples*. Toronto, ON: Garamond Press, 59-72.

Health Canada. (1999). *Hearing the voices of youth: A review of research and consultation documents*. Ottawa: Author.

Hermes, M. (1998). Research methods as a situated response: towards a First Nations' methodology. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11, (1), 155-168.

Human Resources Development Canada. (2002) *Aboriginal people in Manitoba* Winnipeg. Author.

Laidlaw Foundation. (2001) *Youth as decision-makers: Strategies for youth engagement in governance and decision-making in recreation*. Laidlaw Foundation.

Ross, R. (1992). *Dancing with a ghost : Exploring Indian reality*. Markham, ON: Octopus Publication Group

Ross, R. (1996). *Returning to the teachings: Exploring Aboriginal justice*.

- Saskatchewan, Canada: Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.
- Saleebey, D. (1997). *The strengths perspective in social work practice*. New: Longman.
- Statistics Canada. 2007. *Winnipeg, Manitoba (table). 2006 Community Profiles*.
2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa.
Released March 13, 2007. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed July 14, 2008).
- Sumara, D. & Carson, T. (1997). Reconceptualizing action research as a living practice.
In, Terrance R. Carson & Dennis Sumara (Eds.), *Action research as living practice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, xiii-xxxv.
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press.
- van Ingen, C. & Halas, J. (2006). Claiming space: Aboriginal students within school landscapes. *Children's Geographies*, (4), 3, 379-398.
- van Ingen, C. & Halas, J. (2004). What works? Lessons learned from the experiences of Aboriginal youth in high school physical education classes. *Manitoba Association of School Superintendents Journal*, 4(1), 26-28.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2001). "What is Indigenous research?" *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2): 166-174.
- Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy. (1999). *National Aboriginal Youth Strategy*. Ottawa: Author.

CHAPTER FIVE: MENTOR MANUAL

As we move into the southern quadrant of the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation, we are listening. We are listening to both the logistics of how the mentor program is developed and delivered, as well as the guiding principles for working together to co-create a program that is respectful and relevant to everyone involved. Similar to chapter four, the commentary for chapter five is provided by a compilation of voices. In chapter four, five co-authors documented the genesis of the mentor program and the initial discoveries. Here, in chapter five a number of contributors share the “how to” of the mentor program. In the initial pages of this chapter I provide the commentary of how we came to write a “how to” manual. I will also discuss why I have intentionally kept the “how to” manual in its complete form as a chapter in my thesis dissertation.

I found myself as a young caterpillar, familiar and somewhat comfortable in my roles in the mentor program, as a graduate student and as a school educator. Without a second thought I found myself transitioning into the southern quadrant, where I fully immersed myself in each of these exciting roles. Similar to a caterpillar that plumps itself up on the goodness that nature has to offer, I was eating up and enjoying every new experience that I was offered. I now step back to reflectively examine that transition.

Journal Reflection: As Jessica, a high school mentor and I walk down the early years hall way chatting, she slows down and says, “This is a really good program”, I agree with her and my wheels of wonder are spinning. I am now once again looking and listening to what makes this a “really good program.” Jessica provides a unique perspective because she is not only a high school mentor in the program, she is also a big sister who has returned to the mentor program for a second year. Last year, Jessica’s

younger brother and sister were both involved as early years participants/mentors. This year, as a new mentor group discussed the possibility of having some of the younger mentors return for a second year, Jessica strongly advocated to ensure her younger brother and sister were once again in the program. At this time, Jessica and I didn't discuss what it was that makes this a "good program". But her comment did make me listen more, observe and interact as much as I could with everyone in the program, in an attempt to understand what was making the mentor program work.

For me the early years of the mentor program were a whirlwind of excitement. Everything was new and I felt a constant enthusiasm in anticipating where the whirlwind may take me next. As was mentioned in chapter four, the mentor program was initially piloted in one urban school community. In the first year, a team of university and high school mentors worked alongside two separate groups of early years students. The following year, the program continued in the initial pilot community and expanded to a second research site. At that location, a second team of high school and university mentors worked together to establish a mentor program in their community. By the end of the second year of the Aboriginal youth mentor program, two high school sites were committed to programming, the university research team expanded as needed for these new demands, and four early years schools acted as partners in our endeavours.

As the mentor program and in turn our mentor team moved into the second and third years of the programming we began to recognize similarities in what was working at the various mentor sites. We also recognized pieces that became unique to the different groups and communities. For many of us, the mentor programs offered places and spaces to belong, to recognize our interdependence, to further develop our leadership skills, and

to generously share of ourselves in ways that strengthened our interconnected communities. Over the course of the three years our research team participated in numerous discussion groups, conducted interviews with various co-participants and co-researchers, and some people on the research team kept field journals. Through our experiences in the mentor program, our ever-expanding team of mentors felt that we had found ways to offer interconnected recreational and educational programs that were culturally relevant. Beyond experiencing our own sense of accomplishment at each program site, we needed a means to communicate our shared successes and some of our discoveries with a larger audience, including potential funders. Sustainability is a big issue in all youth programming, and our goal was to develop a sustainable model of Aboriginal youth physical activity and recreation.

In order to highlight and share the strengths of Aboriginal youth and the successes of the mentor programs, our mentor team presented our research findings to various audiences. Collectively, we have taken part in recreation, education, and/or research symposiums. In preparing for these presentations, our large mentor team actively reflected on what works, what we wished to share, what we believed was important for people to know, and what discoveries we have made and are continuing to make through our involvement in the program. I personally have seen the opportunity to present as a three-fold experience for our mentor team. The first is getting the word out about a great program. The second is having our team actively reflect on the importance of the work that we are doing, particularly as we seek funding for future programming and expansion. And the third is the opportunity for the university and high school mentors to further

develop our leadership and community skills while building connections with teachers, researchers and other professionals.

The presentations have most often been facilitated through a team approach, which highlights the notion of communal strength and reciprocity upon which the program is based. Most often, the presentations involved the re-creation of a sample day in the program; this is followed by a discussion of the discoveries we have made along the way and why we have intentionally chosen to develop and deliver the mentor programs in the manner that we have. Through these presentations, a number of community workers, school educators, and/or recreation professionals have asked for guidance in how they too can establish a mentor program in their own communities. These requests spurred the development of the Aboriginal youth mentor 'how to' manual.

It is this manual, derived from our research results, that will provide the discussion for this chapter. In the manual, one will discover the guiding principles for the mentor program, the logistics of space, recruitment and who to involve. Additionally, one will find a detailed budget of potential expenses for the program, a large list of suggested games and activities, as well as suggestions as to how to ensure the mentor program remains informed by and relevant to the youth community in which it is being established. What we have worked to share in the 'how to' manual is that each program is unique, and our suggestions are meant to be flexibly interpreted. It is our hope that people and groups see the mentor program as a developmental process of making it their own.

Most of the requests from community, recreation and education professionals asked us: how do we run this program? However, as we collectively wrote the 'how to'

manual something seemed to be missing and that was the ‘why’. The questions and answers related to the ‘why do we do what we do’, are crucial foundations for the mentor program. Although we knew in our spirits why we did what we did, as this was informed by our beliefs, our community practices and our knowledge of the importance of respectful, reciprocal relationships, this was difficult to articulate in written form.

In answering the “why”, we turned to Kirkness and Barnhardt’s *Four R’s*. In Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) discussion of First Nations students and higher education, they identified some strong disconnects between First Nations students and educational institutions, disconnects that have contributed to a historical under-representation of Aboriginal people at post-secondary institutions. The recognized disconnects that Kirkness and Barnhardt address at post-secondary institutions are present in most Western dominant school settings, from early-years to post-secondary contexts. In their discussion, Kirkness and Barnhardt illustrated how educational institutions place the onus on Aboriginal students for the disconnects and lack of adjustment. The student is viewed “in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc” (p. 1) by the educational institutions. In contrast, Aboriginal students and communities view the problem in more human terms, with an emphasis on the need for an “educational system that *respects* them for who they are, that is *relevant* to their view of the world, that offers *reciprocity* in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise *responsibility* over their own lives” (pg. 1). Kirkness and Barnhardt’s discussion of the *Four R’s* – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility offer suggestions for educational institutions to examine when thinking about relations with First Nations/Aboriginal students.

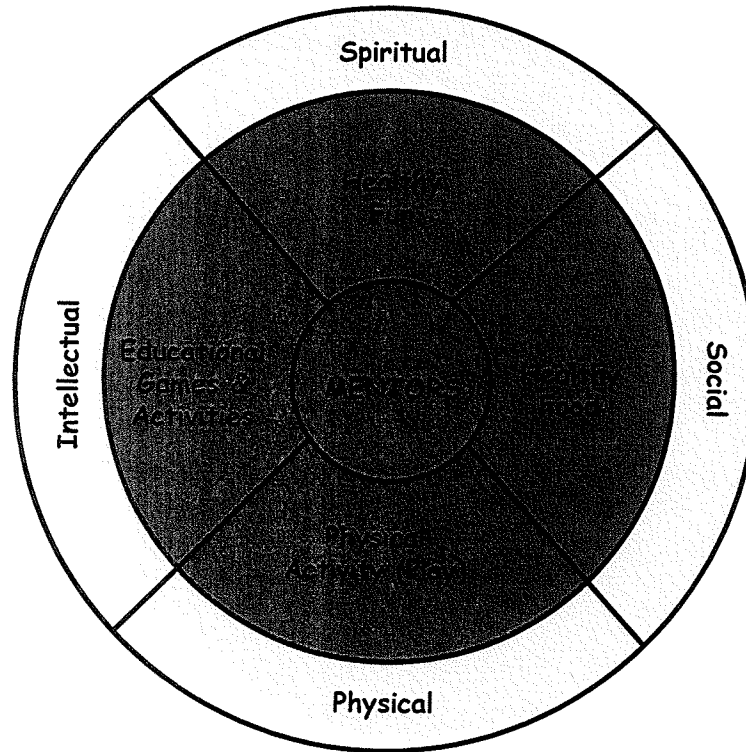
In my role as a community-based researcher, and having had the opportunity to be a part of the Aboriginal youth mentor programs, I believe the *Four R's* can be adopted to articulate the guiding principles for how we interact, build relationships and recognize the responsibility/accountability we have to one another and our communities. In the 'how to' manual the *Four R's* are used as guiding principles in how we interact and co-create a program that is relevant to everyone involved.

The use of the mentor 'how to' manual as a part of this thesis is very deliberate. The intentions that I have for including the manual here are: 1) the manual is a co-written piece of work that demonstrates our shared understandings and interpretations of the mentor program. University and high school mentors have been involved in informing what will go in the manual, the writing of the manual, and the continual dialogue surrounding the decisions of how things are communicated in the manual. The cooperation as to what goes in the manual and how it comes together epitomizes the very essence of the mentor program. By including this, I am once again attempting to demonstrate that this work is by the community for the community; 2) from the very beginning, as was stated in the promises to myself in chapter two, it has been imperative that whatever work I was involved in offered something to the community. I believe that including a 'how to' manual in the body of this thesis demonstrates how this project has remained within the community and will help to further other community development projects.

When working with the "how to" manual I have attempted to look at it from the eyes of an educator and/or community recreation worker. I asked myself: What types of documents do I find easily accessible to both read and implement? What types of

documents do I see other people using? And how could those other documents inform the construction of the 'how to' manual? I know that the 'how to' manual does not look like the academically constructed chapter of a thesis our dominant institutions are familiar with. However, I firmly believe that the inclusion of the "how to" manual demonstrates the ability for research to serve both the academic community and our education and recreation communities where the Aboriginal youth mentor program will most likely be implemented.

PLANNING IDEAS FOR MENTORS, SCHOOLS & COMMUNITIES



The REC & READ Aboriginal Youth Mentor Program: A 'How-To' Manual

DEVELOPING ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

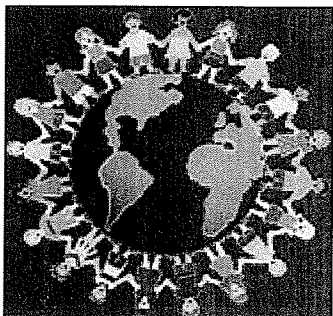
A 'HOW-TO' GUIDE

© ABORIGINAL YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM
Faculty of Kinesiology & Recreation Management
University of Manitoba
R3T 2N2
Winnipeg, MB
Joannie Halas
Phone 204-474-6061 • Fax 204-474-7634
Email: halasjm@cc.umanitoba.ca

Aboriginal youth mentor coordinator: Blair Robilliard
Phone: 250-3477
Email: blairrobilliard@hotmail.com

Coming Together: Finding the Strength Within

Linking Theory & Practice



The model presented in this manual has been constructed based on the analysis of case study data (interviews, observations, discussion, document analysis) from a community based research project involving high school students at two urban Winnipeg high schools, and younger children from neighbouring early years schools.

About Us

The Rec and Read* mentor program evolved out of a community-based research collaboration involving the Seven Oaks School Division, the Winnipeg School Division, and the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management. The initial project was supported by research funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as well as support from ACADRE (Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environments).

This "How To" Guide Shares:

- The principles that guide the development of youth mentor programs;
- How these youth mentor programs are developed;
- How they are implemented, and;
- How your community can develop it's own Aboriginal Youth Mentorship Program.



* Rec & Read was the initial name for the mentor program at our first school site. When a second school joined in to set up their own mentor program, they chose a new name, called *ONE GOAL: Operation North End– Great Opportunities for Aboriginal Leadership*. Both names are great and we recommend you use whatever name best fits your group – let the youth decide ...

The REC & READ Program

The “Rec & Read” Aboriginal mentor program builds on the strengths, talents, and energy of Aboriginal youth. Offered as an after school program, *Rec and Read* provides a supportive, wholistic approach to children and youth physical activity, nutrition and education programming. While designed by and with Aboriginal youth, this program has applications for all young people living in diverse communities.

In writing this manual, we respectfully acknowledge the significant contributions of all of our youth mentors who co-developed the mentor programs. Their input, ideas and imagination are the inspiration for our collective work. Miigwetch!

Tansi, Aniin, Boozhoo, Welcome.

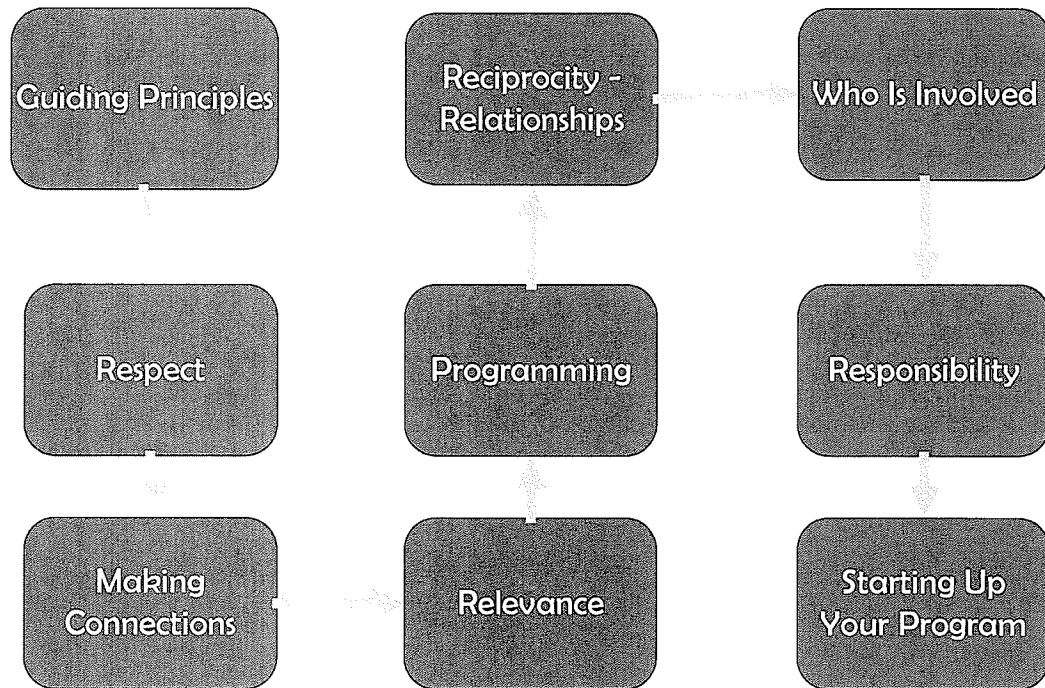
Please join us on a guided tour of our mentor program. This manual represents our collective experiences and evolving understandings about developing and running an urban Aboriginal after-school mentor program.

In this manual we hope to share the key components of the mentor program. This includes the guiding principles of the program and how these principles are employed in creating successful, sustainable community based physical activity programs.

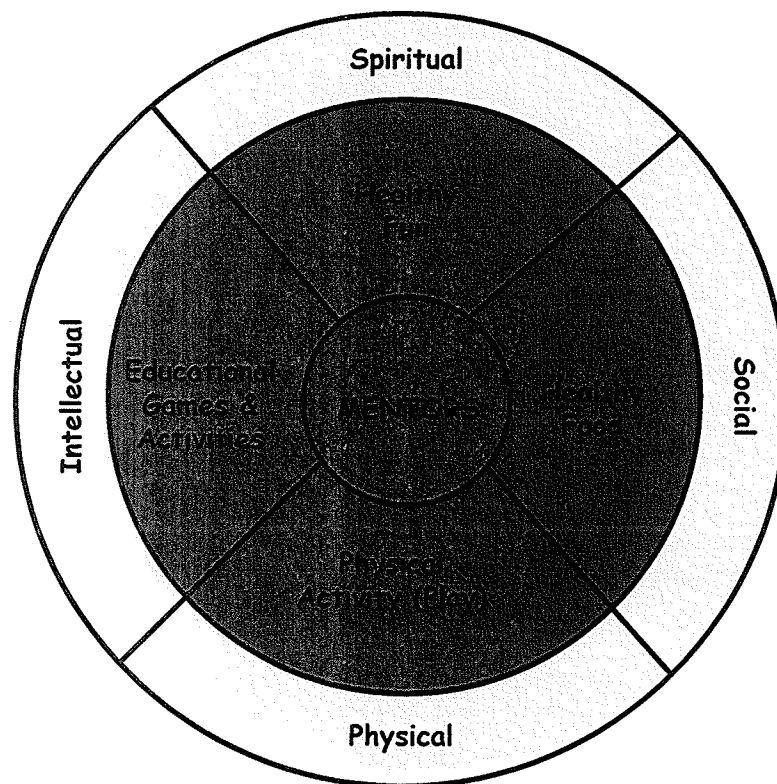
It is not meant as “the only way” to run a mentor program; rather it is “the way” that worked for us and may be of use for you.

We call the manual a ‘how to’ guide because it provides an overview of our educational philosophy and practices that other groups may want to adopt or adapt. We hope our story encourages similar relationship building in your community; kindles open dialogue about educational philosophies and practices; and helps enhance future work and research in this area!

OVERVIEW OF THE MANUAL



KEY COMPONENTS

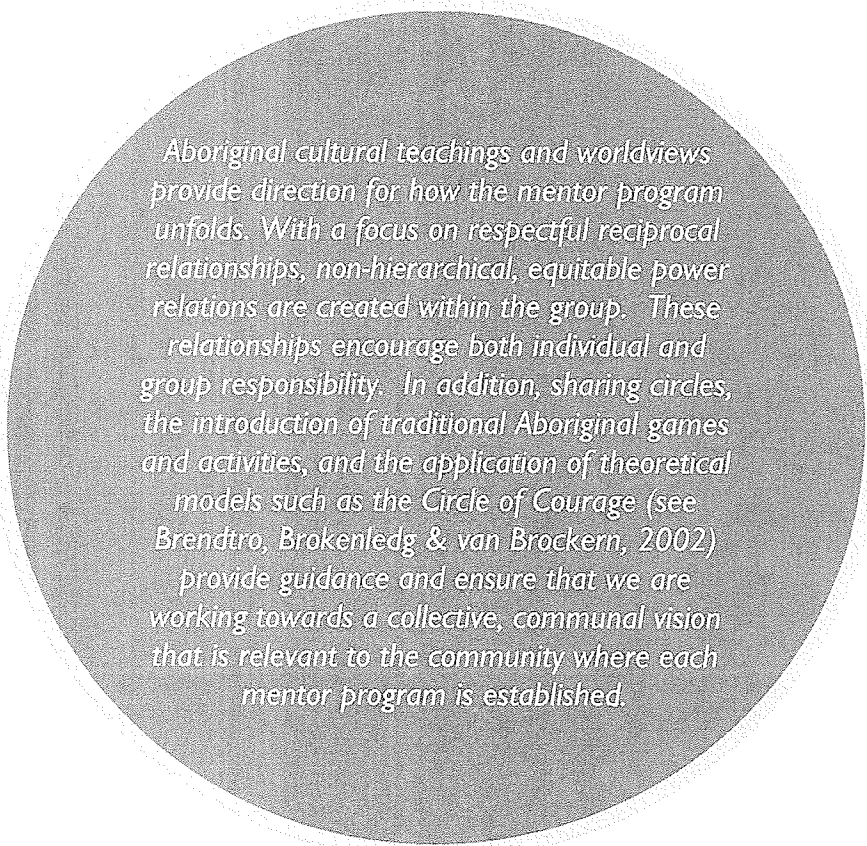


A CIRCULAR WHOLISTIC WORLDVIEW

The mentor program is guided by Aboriginal cultural teachings and worldviews. These worldviews call attention to a circular wholistic understanding of the world and all of creation. Throughout this manual you will find circles. The circles demonstrate that all things are interrelated, interconnected and co dependently work to create balance. For example, the program relies upon a collective approach to mentoring, whereby everyone involved mentors each other. Adults and youth learn from children as much as children learn from adults and youth.

One of the teachings that has guided the program from the start is the need for healthy, well-balanced individuals and communities. This includes the social, physical, intellectual and spiritual quadrants that contribute to the whole.

The circles also show the need for all people involved to support and rely on one another.



Aboriginal cultural teachings and worldviews provide direction for how the mentor program unfolds. With a focus on respectful reciprocal relationships, non-hierarchical, equitable power relations are created within the group. These relationships encourage both individual and group responsibility. In addition, sharing circles, the introduction of traditional Aboriginal games and activities, and the application of theoretical models such as the Circle of Courage (see Brendtro, Brokenleg & van Brockern, 2002) provide guidance and ensure that we are working towards a collective, communal vision that is relevant to the community where each mentor program is established.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

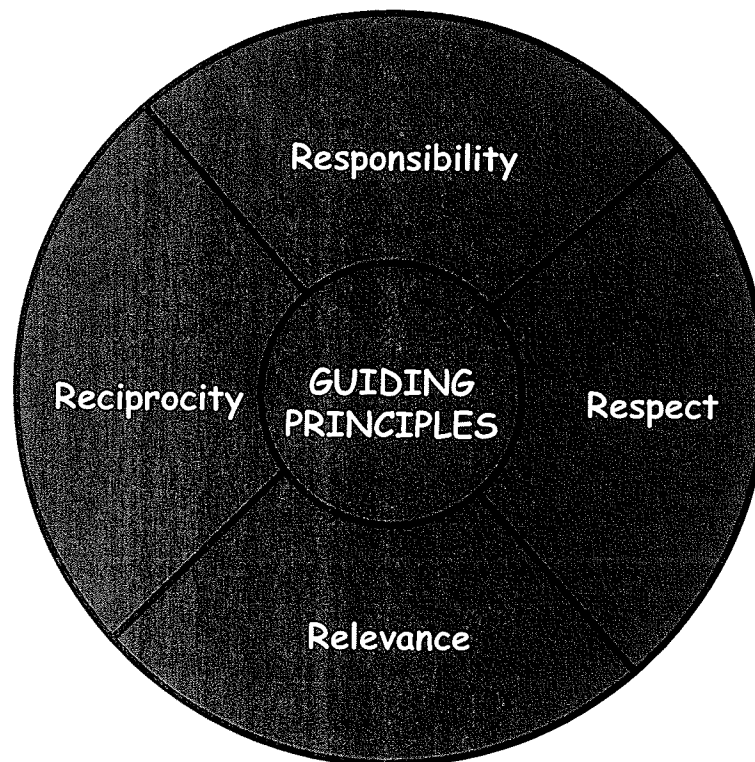
This is a program that 'belongs' to the youth who choose to become mentors. In this 'how to' manual we provide a basic framework for how a school, community or youth group might implement their own mentor program. The model is meant only as a guide, please be flexible to use what works while incorporating your own ideas, suggestions and recommendations from within your group.

As soon as you tap into the ideas and initiative of your own youth participants, your program is on its way ...

Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow – they have great untapped potential for responsible leadership today (Brendtro, Brokenleg & van Bockern, 2002, p. 118).

The Interconnected Four Rs

(Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991)



In 1991, Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt published the article *First Nations and Higher Education: The Four Rs – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility*. We have based our circle methodology on the guiding principles they outlined in their article. The Four Rs guide our community research and work.

What First Nations people are seeking is not a lesser education... not even an equal education, but rather a better education –an education that **respects** them for who they are, that is **relevant** to their view of the world, that offers **reciprocity** in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise **responsibility** over their own lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 13).

Summary of Principles

R**espect:** Respect is about trusting one another to bring our best forward. We both invite and expect each individual to share their strengths, abilities and every part of themselves with the group. Respect is not about conformity or assimilation it is about recognition that there are multiple ways of knowing and coming to understand the world.

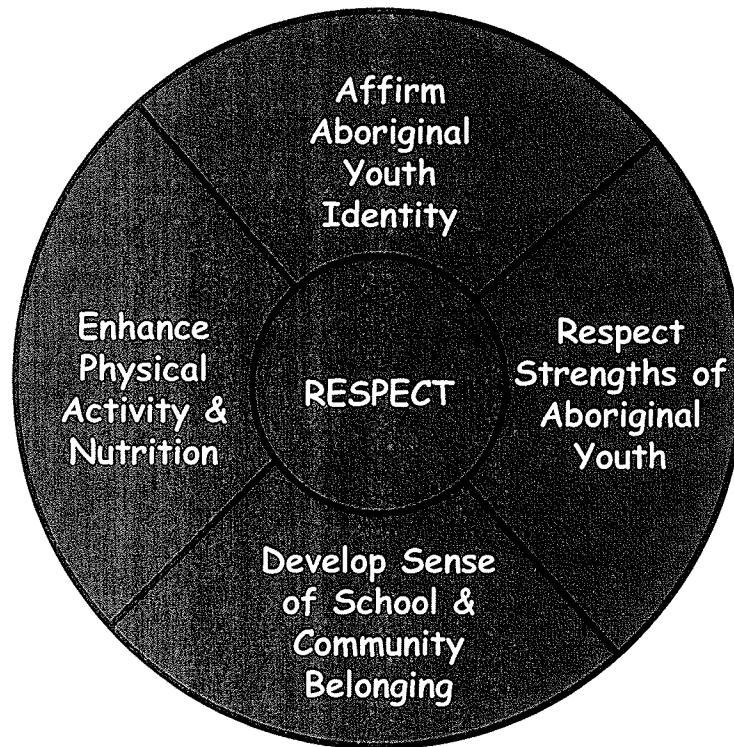
R**elevance:** Relevance asks us to look at “How will this activity impact the people involved?” “How will it impact the community that is involved?” and “Why is the program important?” The success of the mentorship program has come from the involvement of Aboriginal youth, who have shared why this work is both important and relevant for themselves and the communities that they live within.

R**eciprocity (Relationships):** When individuals and/or groups come together with an understanding of mutual respect, where they see their involvement as relevant to themselves and their communities, it is then that authentic relationships are formed. Relationships are about getting to know one another, about listening and about sharing. Relationships take time. Everyone who has been involved in the mentorship program has left with a number of new friendships/relationships with people of all ages. In the mentorship program we have all felt that reciprocity and the giving of oneself pays back in unimaginable ways.

R**esponsibility:** Within the mentor program we are working together to understand and break down systematic barriers that many Aboriginal youth confront on a daily basis. Participants often feel both empowered and responsible to share their intercultural strengths with family, friends, school, and community groups.

RESPECT

A respect for each individual and all that they bring



Respect in Action

- All participants are welcomed with **respect**; respect for the people they are and the strengths and abilities they possess. Within the mentor program participants are encouraged to share their **strengths** with the larger group.
- Together the youth and university mentors **claim a sense of space/belonging** in the school and community. In this space, a sense of belonging is discovered.
- The "Rec & Read" mentor program encourages health and wellness through **physical activity, healthy nutrition**, educational games, and relationship building across age groups.
- As an affirmation of Aboriginal youth identity, the mentor program **relies upon Aboriginal youth** to mentor younger children in a regular program of activities that the youth design and deliver with the support of adult mentors. To date the mentor program(s) have been set within school facilities.

Making the Initial Connections and Creating Space

There are a number of bridges that need to be created prior to the kick off of any mentor program. Here is a brief overview of the initial stages for set up:

1. **School(s) and/or communities need to demonstrate an interest in being involved in a mentor program.** The first stage is to have schools, community centres and/or organizations demonstrate an interest in being involved in mentorship programming. The first resource that is needed for mentor programming is access to a group of youth that could be involved in the mentor program. Therefore, a high school or youth community group should be identified. There is also a need for younger children. Similarly, these participants can come from a school or community group. The third party that is involved can be from a university,⁴³ other education programs or community members. An individual who can organize, liaise, and bring together individual allies from the three schools and/or organizations would be an asset, particularly when the program is initially starting up.

2. After interested parties have been identified, **the logistics of determining program facilities, discussing the days of the week that the facilities and potential program staff are available, and the time of year that would work best for the program need to be figured out.** It is important to identify available community and/or school space. We have found that school spaces

"It's tough growing up Aboriginal"

~youth mentor, 2008

Aboriginal youth regularly share their desire to live a full life however safe physical activity spaces are often limited.

Access to safe spaces are limited due to:

- 1. The priority placed on competitive school sports (e.g., practices and games),*
- 2. Barriers to sport membership (e.g., entrance fees, equipment, geographic distance, etc), and,*
- 3. Poor communication regarding available local & community recreation programs.*

In the Aboriginal youth mentor program we attempt to address the desires of Aboriginal youth to lead a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

⁴³ The University of Manitoba's Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management introduced a *Diverse Populations Mentorship* three credit hour course, which is a guided practicum for university students who wish to work in the Aboriginal mentorship programs. Students who complete the course may be offered opportunities as paid university mentors, in the program.

that offer both a gathering place and a large physical activity space work the best. A space is needed to gather that offers access to a large enough area for all mentors and younger buddies to interact, enjoy a light snack and participate in educational games and activities. To date school libraries, multi-purpose rooms, and classrooms have been used as gathering spaces.

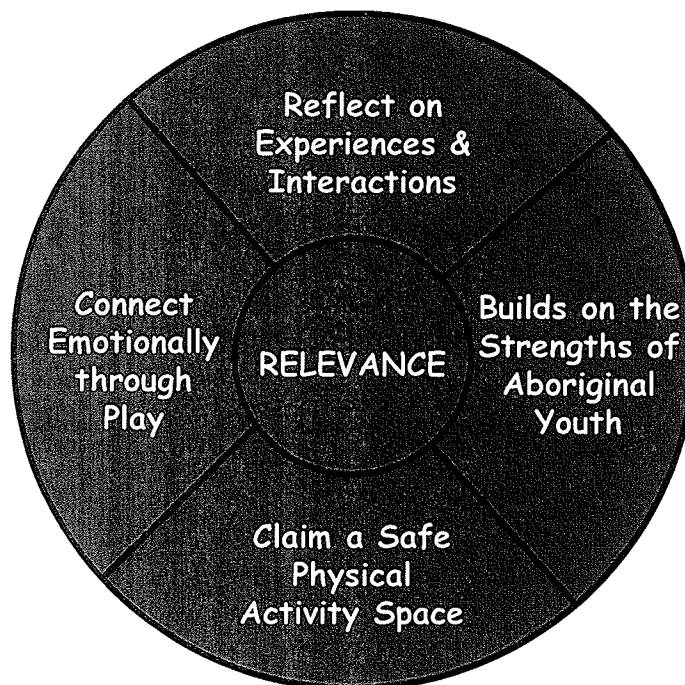
Once these spaces have been identified, it is important to check their availability to ensure that other programs or events will not conflict with the days and times that your mentor group is considering.

3. **Aboriginal youth need to be informed about the program and recruited as high school mentors.** At the high school level it is great to have a number of school employees that know of the program and will encourage students to become involved. If partner schools have been identified, start up dates have been secured and the days of the week have been agreed on, this is great information to get into the hands of school staff. While this program welcomes all youth as participants, it focuses on recruiting Aboriginal youth, recognizing their place as strong role models in our communities. By sharing the program information with all school and/or organizational staff they can help in the recruitment process. In the past, we have used a kick off lunch as a means to share information with interested high schools students, have gone in to speak in classes that focus on Aboriginal studies and have worked to have a well informed go-to person at the high school site. In future years of your mentor program, one of the greatest assets in the recruitment phase is word of mouth from returning and/or previous mentors.
4. **Building those initial relationships and creating a sense of belonging.** Many of the high school participants will initially come to the mentor program because someone has told them that it is a good idea. However, they are looking for more information then 'you will like it'. It is important to offer the high school mentors information about the program at the initial meetings. It is useful to verbally discuss the potentials for the mentor program, offer them a hand out that tells them about the program (see Appendix A) and jump right into programming. We have found that it is beneficial for the training phase of the program to model the same structure that will be used when the younger students become involved. This is further expanded on in Programming Phase of this manual). Most importantly these initial times together with the high school and community mentors offer a time to build relationships where individuals recognize the collective responsibility they have to ensuring that this program will be successful.

We have found that not all high school mentors that initially come out will remain with the mentor program. We celebrate the presence of the people that are with us on any given day, while recognizing that for others this may not be their time or the activity for them. That's okay.

RELEVANCE

Creating a stress-free zone for Aboriginal youth to be active while contributing to the health & wellness of children.



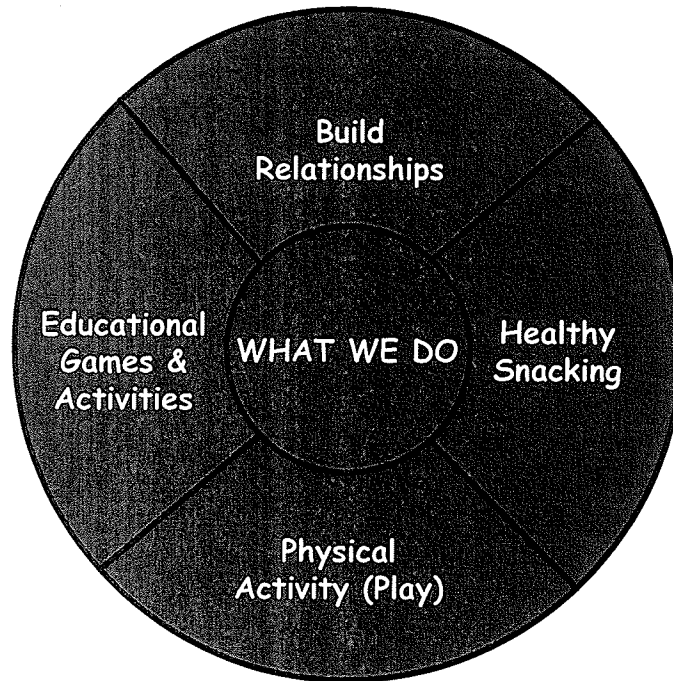
Each mentorship program is unique, as it is based on a particular community's strengths and desires. In this mentor 'how to' manual we have worked to provide you with some foundational structures for programming. Through trial, error, plenty of reflection and discussion we offer you the structures and foundations that we feel are relevant to the success of the mentor programs.

- Ensuring that the project is relevant to both the community and community members involved is essential. The key is to **build on the strengths of the Aboriginal youth** that are involved.
- From 3:30 to 6:00 pm, most early years (elementary) schools have activity spaces available. It is in these school spaces where we have **claimed a safe physical activity space**. Our mentor programs work in partnership with nearby early years schools, accessing these activity spaces twice a week. Greater detail of how these times are coordinated and spent can be found below in "*A Typical Schedule of Activities*".
- Within the active spaces, **the goal of play is self-expression and connection with others**. The ideas and opinions of all program participants inform the

decisions as to what activities the group will be involved in. *For examples, see the section on Games and Activities.*

- As the high school youth mentors begin working alongside and programming for their early years buddies their reflections change. The reflections of “wow, this is fun” change to “wow, this is fun and the work I am doing is important to my community.”

Typical Schedule of Activities



The mentor program connects the notion of “recreation” with “education”; these are seen as inter-connected and representative of a wholistic approach to child and youth development. Our time together in the mentor program follows a similar schedule from day to day and from week to week. Each day we have a light healthy snack, engage in physical activities, and then move into educational games and activities. As the program wraps up we set aside time to actively reflect on how the day went. There is often time before and after the program where people are visiting/hanging out and engaging in independent and/or small group activities.

A Sample Weekly Schedule

Here you will find an example of a typical weekly schedule. The program is run twice a week. One day is set aside for the youth and adult mentors to plan for the upcoming day of programming.

Mondays	3:30 – 5:30 p.m.	Planning session for high school students
Wednesdays	3:30 – 5:30 p.m.	Games & activities with younger students (site 1)
Thursdays*	3:30 - 5:30 p.m.	Games & activities with younger students (site 2)

* The number of possible sites for programming depends upon the number of youth and adult mentors available to support each program. While it can work well to offer multiple sites, we recommend starting with one early years school location before expanding to a second location. The youth mentors will know and communicate whether they feel ready to provide programming at more than one site.

A Typical Planning Day

Youth Mentors Only

On planning days, the youth mentors meet to prepare for the programming with children. A typical planning day looks like this, but can vary:

3:30 - 3:40 p.m.	Youth arrive & food prep (everyone helps)
3:40 - 4:15 p.m.	Sharing food, catching up & planning (get to know each other, start mentor-related activities)
4:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Gym time (playing games, planning activities)
5:00 - 5:30 p.m.	De-brief and play some more

Often the day of mentoring is planned out where people sign up for particular parts of the program (see Appendix B for a blank planning form and Appendix C for one that has been filled in). The day is often planned as the mentor group enjoys a light snack. When the planning is done the mentor group will move into the gym to try out the activities. For this run-through, the leaders that have been identified for each of the activities on the following day take the lead, having the other mentors participate as if they were the younger students.

For the first weeks of the program, the youth and adult mentors meet twice a week to plan and prepare for the overall mentor program. One of the activities we do as a group, is the **Strengths Inventory** activity where we indentify the strengths and abilities of everyone in the group. We have also used this time to discuss what it means to be a positive role model with the **Good Mentor/Bad Mentor** activity. In addition we have planned out the **6 to 8 weeks of programming** (Appendix D) and **practiced small talk** for when our younger buddies initially arrive.

The length of this training period depends upon the dynamics of your particular group, and how long it takes everyone to get to know each other. With clear expectations in mind, the youth mentors will know when they feel ready to begin

programming with the younger children. In the past, the pre-program training period has lasted between six and eight weeks; however, our youth mentors strongly feel that programming can start after three weeks.

A Typical Activity Day

With Early Years Students

3:15-3:30 p.m.	High school and university mentors arrive and prepare the snack for everyone. Food preparation is the first task for all mentors*
3:30-3:45 p.m.	Everyone gathers for a healthy snack . The snack is provided as part of the program activities.
3:45- 4:15 p.m.	Everyone plays low organized, active games in the gym. Taught by the youth mentors, supported by university mentors, these include tag games, sports, obstacle courses, Aboriginal games, etc.
4:15- 4:50 p.m.	Everyone gathers in a Multi-Purpose Room for educational opportunities (e.g., board games, time to read together, art opportunities etc.)
4:50-5:00 p.m.	Clean up and prepare for home time.
5:00-5:30 p.m.	De-brief and wrap-up discussion with high school mentors and adult mentor team.

* The high school students are often dismissed 20 minutes early from their last class on the activity days.

I remember some kids saying, "I don't want to play that game or I don't know how to play that game". I would then try to make it more interesting but easier...

Here is a sample activity: Pull out the poster paper and make a list ... e.g., How to make 'small talk' with children on the first day, etc ... what are some questions you might ask them? (e.g., what's your favourite food, colour, subject in school? How many brothers and sisters do you have...?)

Programming Phase

Summary of Initial Planning Phase with Youth Mentors Only

Build relationships over discussion and healthy food

- ➡ Develop a protocol for the start-up of each day (e.g., who prepares the food; make list of snacks for the next day)
- ➡ Get to know each other
- ➡ Develop an attendance list (use a journal for students to sign in)

Begin gym activities

- ➡ Mixer and trust games
- ➡ Cooperative games
- ➡ Low organized games (LOG)
- ➡ Aboriginal games

Begin leadership development activities

- ➡ Strengths inventory
- ➡ Good Mentor/Bad Mentor activity
- ➡ Practice teaching to peers in the gym (in 2's, youth mentors lead the activity for the day while the others pretend to be children)
- ➡ Photo cards: take photos of each youth mentor, with their name on a card, and post these prominently in the school space that you are using
- ➡ Claim space within the early years school: post photos, weekly plans, posters, etc

Introduce 'sharing circles' for planning and de-briefing

- ➡ Provide opportunities for youth to share their personal perspectives, ideas and experiences with regard to how the program is going. De-briefing conversations following each activity day with the children, which are often facilitated through a sharing circle, are a key component of our program.

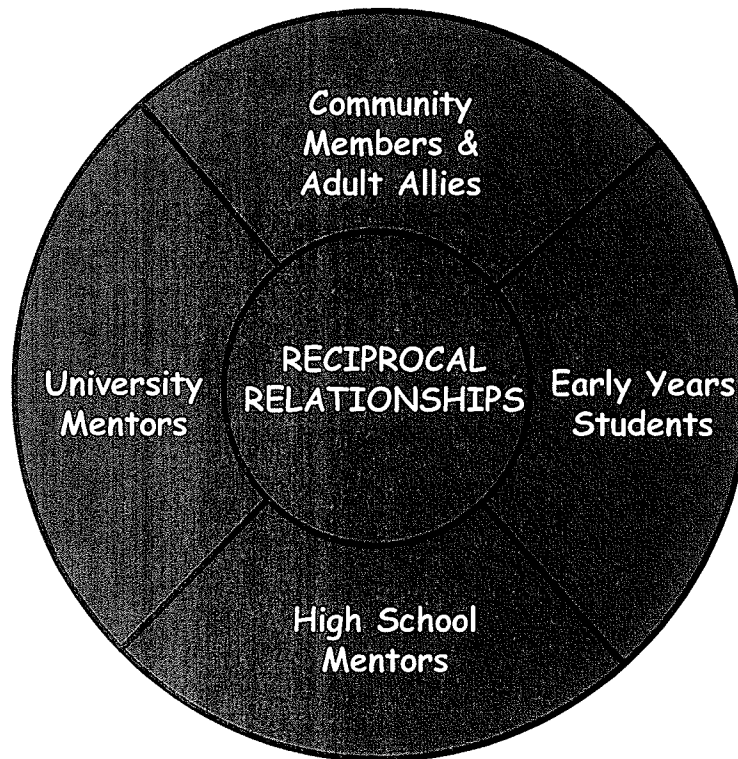
Summary of a Day of Programming with Younger Children

Develop a specific plan for each week. Assign responsibility for:

- ➡ Food prep
- ➡ Meeting and greeting the children
- ➡ Checking to see who is there and who is absent
- ➡ Leading the gym and classroom activities
- ➡ Seeing the children off
- ➡ De-briefing

RECIPROCITY - RELATIONSHIPS

The mentor program applies a reciprocal approach to communal mentoring. Reciprocity is the giving of oneself, of being generous and receiving the generosity of others.



Communal Mentoring

Traditional Western ideas about mentoring are often expressed as hierarchical, with an older person providing friendship, guidance and support to a younger person. While we recognize the benefits of this type of mentoring, and include aspects of this age/experience relationship in our program, we view mentoring as a circular group process, whereby multi-age mentors work with, teach and learn from each other. **The leadership within the group is constantly shifting, as different groups and individuals take responsibility for specific activities.**

Collective wisdom is arrived at by a process of 'putting our minds together' (Brandt Castellano, 2000, p. 26).

Who Participates?

Based on our experiences and the relationships we developed with the early years schools, we recommend the following as a general guideline:

Youth/ High School mentors: Our original research project was designed with a focus on involving urban Aboriginal youth in the development of a cultural approach to sport and recreation. And so, we recruited Aboriginal high school students who were interested in working with children and providing leadership within a physical activity context. While we targeted Aboriginal youth participants, non-Aboriginal youth were also welcome in the program.

A number of students joined because they were curious and thought the mentor program might be fun. Some joined because they like working with children. Others were interested in getting a leadership and/or physical education credit toward their grade 12 graduation.

In terms of numbers of youth mentors, “twelve” is a good number. We have had between five and seventeen attending on a regular basis. The key is to work towards developing a strong core of regular mentors who attend each week.

E**arly years mentors:** The early years teachers identify children they believe would ‘most benefit’ from participating in the program. Some children are identified because they are new to a community, others because they are shy and could benefit from the social support they receive from a youth mentor. Some are in dire need of after school “play” opportunities, and others might benefit from the one on one attention during the academic activities. Generally, we have left it up to the school teachers to recommend a few early years children from each of the identified grades (a form for teachers can be found in Appendix E). Up until now, students from grades two to five have participated in the program.

Because we want all program participants to enjoy their time in the mentor program we encourage teachers to recommend early years students with diverse strengths, abilities and needs. We feel that a diverse group of early years students, as found in most classrooms, helps to ensure success for everyone involved. Therefore we ask the early years school to avoid only recommending students that have identified behaviour challenges.

After the teachers have suggested students’ names, a coordinating teacher at the early years school compiles a list of all of the student’s names, grades, etc. There are often more early years students suggested for the program than there are spaces. For this reason a small team from the early years school (early years mentor support staff, administration, and/or other interested individuals) need to

take the initial list and determine the group of early years students that they feel would find a sense of belonging and support in the mentor program. After this list has been compiled, notes are sent home (Appendix F) with each of the potential early years program participants. In addition, to the notes that go home we have found it useful to contact the early years families by phone or when they are at the school. This helps to create a relationship between the family and the mentor program, opening the door for future communication.

* It is useful to put all of the forms and notes for the mentor program on one colour of paper. If you indicate to families, participants and school staff that all forms that come on that particular colour of paper are associated with the mentor program they will know what they are looking for. We have used this same colour of paper to send out reminder notes that the program is starting (Appendix G) or if there is any change of plans, special events etc.

Dependent on how many youth mentors are interested in the program, a 1:2 (mentor/student) ratio works well. Our mentor programs usually operate with about 12 youth mentors; therefore we typically invite 25 children to join the program. If you are just starting your own program, don't worry if your number of regular youth mentors is small. We started small and we are always excited with the youth that choose to be involved. If you begin with only 4-6 mentors, consider inviting 8-12 children and gradually add younger children as your program becomes more stable and your youth mentors, more confident.

"I talked! ... I actually talked in front of the whole group today ..." (one of our quieter mentors, said with a very big smile)

I learned how to cope with kids. Like the kids and their problems and the way they think and everything. Not what I thought but how they really were...

How Many Adult Allies are needed for a Successful Program?

Dependent on the context of where you offer the program (e.g., community group versus a school), you will want to be creative in your efforts to recruit adult supports for the program. Our mentor programs have been organized through two high schools, and have involved educators from neighbouring early years schools.

Here is an example of what we view as a “*best case*” scenario based upon the supports we have had in place for our programs:

High school: Enlist support from one staff member who has responsibility for the mentor program as part of their assigned work responsibilities. These responsibilities include: recruiting youth mentors from the school’s student body; communicating with youth mentors during the school week regarding upcoming activities; on-site support during the planning and activity days; attending to any necessary school protocols to support programming (e.g., preparing consent letters, communicating with parents, filling out permits for gym use; ordering buses; completing accident report forms, etc); promoting the program with staff at the high school; and acting as an advisor for the youth mentors (e.g., connecting them with potential job opportunities, writing letters of reference for job applications, etc). It is also important to keep track of each student’s participation in the program in order to ensure that all forms required to receive course credit are completed and submitted on time.

Early years school: Enlist support from one staff member who provides on-site educational and organizational support for the program. These responsibilities include: getting to know the youth mentors during planning sessions; providing input during the planning sessions so as to best prepare the youth for the early years children; communicating with school staff and parents about the program; identifying early years students to participate; providing some initial management support when the children first begin the program, such that the activities all start on a positive note; and ensuring that safe transportation is in place for the children as they leave the program each week.

University mentors: Support from two university students with some experience working in physical activity environments and with children and/or youth is an asset. These students act as allies and mentors for the high school students, as they all share their knowledge and skills about working with children. These students should have up-to-date First Aid and CPR, and where possible, have a car available if needed.

I learned how to work with other more... well, people of all ages.

Community members: Where possible, it works very well to enlist the part time, 'paid' support of a community member, and particularly a youth who may have recently graduated and/or has been a youth mentor in the program. By providing this paid position, youth mentors see that their participation in the program can lead to tangible outcomes, such as a part-time job and educational opportunities in the future. In the past, we have paid a community member for 6 hours of work/week at approximately \$10-12/hour.

Other adults: Where possible, support from volunteers, or education/university officials can add to the overall strength of the program. For example, a kindergarten teacher often dropped by the mentor program to just chat with the youth; having this informal support really helped students build a sense of belonging with adults in the school.

Did you know? Participation as a youth mentor might lead to a high school course credit by way of leadership and/or "out of class" physical activity hours towards a physical education credit. Check with your school to see if this is possible.

RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility is for the individual, for our interconnected communities, for the empowerment of all.



I've never done anything like that before. I like to volunteer.

- One of the greatest outcomes of the mentor program is watching as the university and high school mentors develop a greater sense of confidence in the people that they are and the strong roles they play within their communities. Throughout the mentor program one can watch as everyone in the group, in their own unique way recognizes **their place as a strong role model** and works to share their thoughts, voice and ideas in intercultural spaces.
- The relationships formed within the group support everyone in reciprocal ways. As each person gives, they also receive. Here **the mentors celebrate abilities, gain confidence and recognize that they are identified as role models** in their communities.

- As leadership skills are developed and shared the group works collaboratively. This includes working cross-culturally and tapping into the often-untapped abilities of youth, working together in community programming. By observing others, reflecting on our own roles and **bringing our best to the interconnected circle**, we all share.
- Youth mentors demonstrate a sense of empowerment and an ability to say "I can do this". There is a range in how the mentors demonstrate their skills from leading groups to role-modeling within the group, to quietly working one-on-one with the children. Throughout the mentorship program, university and youth **mentors claim responsibility for others and themselves**. The people involved in the mentorship programs have demonstrated an increase in their involvement in activities that they already participated in, a willingness to try new things and have taken greater control of their own well-being. For some, this has included increasing their daily physical activity, volunteering within their local communities and/or making employment connections.

Now that you know how to start up your own mentor program, some of the possibilities and who needs to be involved you need to determine how you will acquire funding.

Budget

The following budget applies to a weekly program with activities offered two times per week. Figures are based on 12 high school mentors & 2-4 adult allies (meeting one day to plan); these budget costs for food are then adjusted with the addition of 15-25 early years children for a second day/week during the program phase.

Prices vary from place to place and increase over time, so ... check out your local store for costs. We buy all of our food from Neechi Foods Co-op, an Aboriginal owned worker cooperative on Dufferin Avenue in Winnipeg. The people at Neechi Foods Co-op are great supporters of our programs, and they have been providing healthy food and product choices since their store began.

Food

A typical menu for one day with costs from Neechi Foods Co-op⁴⁴
(HS mentors only=16 people):

ITEM	COST
5 x loaves of banana bread @ \$4.00 each	\$20.00
6 x 11 boxes of juice &/or skim milk @2.00	\$12.00
1 x bag of apples	\$4.00
1 x bag of oranges	\$4.00
TOTAL	\$40.00

For the same menu offered with 25 early years students, double the amount for a total of \$80.00

Fruits	Vegetables	Carb	Protein	Beverage
Apples	Cucumbers	Bannock	Cheese	Water (with
Bananas	(sliced)	Banana	Puddings	a slice of
Oranges	Carrots (cut)	bread	*Bannock	lemon or
Grapes	Cherry	Cookies	pizza	orange)
Berries	tomatoes	Crackers	*Veggie &	Milk
Melon	Celery	Granola	fruit trays	Soy milk
		bars		Juices
				(frozen and
				boxed)

*Typical foods and special occasion foods (marked with an *)

* For younger children, you need smaller portions because they will eat less.

⁴⁴ Based on 2008 costs.

Education Games

Typically, \$200 can pay for the purchase of enough games to get you going.

Gym Equipment

A bare minimum of equipment and facility space needs are: an open gym, a large bag of gator (soft) balls, 4-8 pylons, a parachute, and gymnastics mats.

*In the past the early years schools have offered access to their gym equipment, provided that it was well taken care of and properly put away.

Salaries

Hire 2 adult mentors to coordinate program at 6 hours per week (4 hours of programming with HS mentors, and 2 hours of planning &/or De-briefing). At \$10/hour, this is a cost of \$120 per week, plus benefits (add 8%).

Special Activity Costs

- Bus transportation for EYS might be necessary
- Arranging an Aboriginal Games and Activities workshop for the high school mentors (Aboriginal Elder/Aboriginal cultural games facilitator)
- Field trips (bus fare, etc)
- Certification of HS mentors for First Aid and CPR
- Certification of HS mentors for Coaching Level 1
- **Some schools require a Criminal Record Check

Estimated Total

Estimate of Costs: \$5100 for a 30 week program

Salaries – \$2500	Food – \$2400	Supplies – \$200	Special Activity Costs
\$2500/2 adult mentors	\$80/week of the program (2 days)	Board games, poster paper, etc	To be determined

SAMPLE GYM ACTIVITES

Gym Activities We Have Played

On the first day of your program, begin by asking the high school mentors which games they played as children. They will come up with a list of ideas that you can immediately start playing, such as What time is it Mr. Wolf, Frozen tag, and other playground games and activities. Start with their games and then just keep adding to the list as you introduce new games each week.

* Make up your own variations for each of these games; change the names (using both genders, as in Mr. and Mrs. Wolf; Simon and Simone Says, etc), change the rules, but keep it simple and fun.

As the younger children play, look around to see if everyone is participating. Does everyone feel comfortable? How do you know? As mentors, ask: is anyone standing by the wall and not playing? Is anyone sitting on their own? What can you do to make the activity more welcoming for everyone?

***You play with the kids in
the gym. I feel more
physically active now
since this program
started.***

***"We got ruled!"
(a mentor speaking about a
day when the young ones
just weren't listening ...).***

Tag Games

For safety, ensure that all students are listening to the instructions for each game. Clearly specify the boundaries (stay away from the walls and any other obstacles). Provide all students with a signal that you use to get their attention.

Frozen Tag	When caught, “freeze” with arms out; you’re unfrozen when someone runs under your arms to free you
-------------------	--

Line Tag	Everyone must run along a line; taggers carry a coloured pinny; if tagged, pass the pinny on; no tagging the tagger
-----------------	---

Colour Tag	Divide group into four teams each with a different colour pinny; call out a colour to be it; if tagged, sit down; you are freed and back in the game when a team mate picks you up by the hand
-------------------	--

Blob Tag	Like chain tag, when caught, join hands as the taggers become a bigger and bigger chain until everyone is linked up...
-----------------	--

Banana Tag	When caught, raise arms above head to make your body like a banana; to be freed, a teammate unpeels the banana by pulling one arm down; when both arms are “peeled”; you’re free
-------------------	--

Ladder Races	In a row, partners sit on the floor with their legs straight in front of them and with their feet touching together on a given line. The next pair sits next to them about a meter away with their feet meeting at the same line. Once all pairs are lined up side by side it should look like a ladder. Give each pair a number. The leader calls a number. When a pair’s number is called, they quickly stand up and race through the “ladder” to the end, then behind the ladder on either side and then back through the ladder stepping between the legs of the other students, until finally returning to their original spots. Repeat & call all numbers.
---------------------	--

Poison Tag	Give red pinnies to 3 or 4 students who will be POISON. They try to tag the others. When tagged, students get sick and have to sit down. Give 2 or 3 MEDICINE PILLS (hockey pucks) to other students. Their job is to look for seated sick people and hand them the pill.
-------------------	---

Aboriginal Games and Activities

Ring on a String	Place a ring on a piece of rope about 8 feet long. Put a small ring or a circular rope. Have 6+ people hold the rope in a circle. One player goes in the centre and tries to follow the ring as the others try to pass it around in an attempt to trick the player in the centre. After a given time, the game stops and the player in the centre gets to choose 3 hands that he/she thinks the ring might be in.
Dog Soldier	The dog soldier stands in a hoop with a flag for a tail in his/her back pocket. He/she has a coo stick (we use a soft ball or a pop bottle contraption with lots of padding). Others circle the dog soldier and try to take the flag without getting hit by the coo stick. If a player gets hit they have to do something before continuing to play (e.g. Wait 3 seconds, go touch a wall, do 3 jumping jacks etc.) If someone gets the flag without getting hit, they become the dog soldier.
Gentle Always Wins	Two students hold opposite ends of a rope with their feet together in a squat position. The object is to get your opponent to let go of the rope or lose his/her balance.
Inuit Wrestling	Two students hold on to the same stick with one hand. They stand side by side with their feet pointing in opposite directions. The object is to get your opponent to let go of the stick or move his/or feet by getting him/her off balance.
Foxtail Games	Target shooting: Throw and catch for points (catching it close to the head is 1 point, in the middle is 2 points, and at the tip of the tail is 3 points – no point for catching the head); Ultimate foxtail – like the Frisbee game but using foxtails.

Ball Manipulation Games

For all 'dodge ball' type games use rules that promote safe play. Have students aim below the waist. Encourage older, stronger students to throw with their non-dominant/weaker arm. Set up clear boundaries and watch closely for any students who might not feel comfortable in a game. Where possible, use pins instead of bodies as targets.

Dr. Dodge Ball	Two teams on each half of the gym, each with a Doctor to save anyone who is hit by the ball; begin by throwing the ball at a player on the opposite team; if hit, sit down and the Doctor will come and rescue you (by pulling you on a mat, holding your hand, or coming to get you on a scooter)
Pin Ball	Place a set of plastic bowling pins on the center line of the gym, length-wise; have team one stand on both sides of the gym, facing the center line - their job is to knock down as many pins in 2 minutes as possible; team two stand on either side of the pin, an arms-length away, and uses their feet to protect the pins from being knocked down. After two minutes, count the remaining pins and then switch sides to try and beat each team's score.
Asteroids	Two teams, one with gator balls, one without; arrange mats at each corner of the gym, such that team one can run from mat to mat in a circle; team two tries to hit a person on team one as they run from mat to mat; if hit below the waist, the runner returns to the last mat and tries to run again; count how many full circles each team member can run.
Prison Dodgeball	Divide the group into two teams and have each team go to opposite sides of the centre line. Designate a "prison" on each side using lines on the floor or mats. When you get hit, you must go to the prison on the other side. If you catch a pass from a team-mate while in the prison, you can return to your team. (Alternate version: when one prisoner catches a ball, all the prisoners are free).
One arm circle "hockey"	Have 6 players form a circle. They stand with their feet very wide, touching the side of the shoe of the person next to them making a circle. A dodge ball is thrown into the middle by one player who is outside the circle. The players now have to attempt to score on each other by knocking the dodge ball through another player's legs. Players can block shots using one arm only, and knock the ball through other player's legs with this same arm. Once you have been scored on you retrieve the ball; the player standing outside the circle takes your place and you throw the ball into the middle and wait until another player gets scored on.

Additional Games and Activities

Obstacle Course	Set up based upon the ideas of the HS mentors and the available equipment. Be sure that the course is developmentally appropriate for children and safe.
Scavenger Hunt	Make a list of items to collect and send students outside for an adventurous hunt for each item.
Parachute Games	Red light (stop shaking) Yellow Light (shake slowly) Green Light (shake fast); Cat and Mouse: One student (mouse) crawls under the parachute while another (cat) crawls on top trying to catch the mouse while the others shake the parachute; Make a tent. Life Guard: Students sit in a circle holding the parachute at their waste with their feet extended underneath the parachute. A shark (player) is underneath the parachute and a life guard (player) walks around the outside of the circle. The lifeguard's job is to save the players when the shark pulls their feet under the water (parachute). It helps for the players to yell for 'help' when they are being attacked by the shark. If pulled under, the player becomes another shark.

Educational Games & Activities

Playing a variety of board games allows for groups of 3-4 older and younger students to build relationships while having fun and learning. Some games encourage the development of math skills (adding and subtracting), patterns and logical thinking, problem solving skills, basic literacy (the vocabulary used for various body parts), memory, elements of chance and probability, as well as interpersonal skills.

Here is a list of games we found work well with children and youth. While we highlight the obvious connections to learning, the games provide more than one element of learning...

Math/Patterns	Literacy	Problem solving	Others
Snakes and Ladders Connect Four Battleship Dice Playing Cards	Cranium – multiple intelligences	Twister (math, science, directions, balance) Jenga Checkers	Pictionary (art) Bingo Name Game (interpersonal skills)

Other activities:

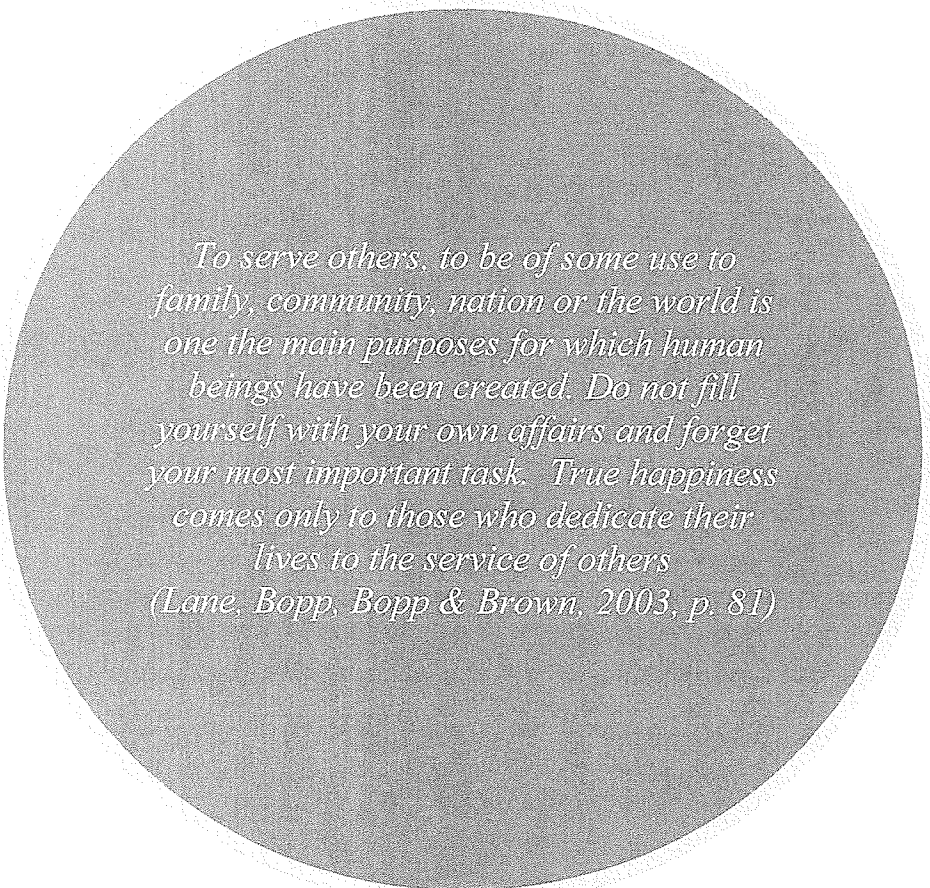
- Reading books
- Scavenger Hunts
- Arts and Crafts
- Literacy activities (e.g., Mad Libs, cross words, word search)

CONCLUSION

In this “How To” Manual we have attempted to offer:

- ➔ The principles that have guided the development of youth mentor programs;
- ➔ How the youth mentor programs are developed;
- ➔ How they are implemented, and;
- ➔ How your community can develop their own Youth Mentorship Program

Now we encourage your community to make it your own!



*To serve others, to be of some use to family, community, nation or the world is one the main purposes for which human beings have been created. Do not fill yourself with your own affairs and forget your most important task. True happiness comes only to those who dedicate their lives to the service of others
(Lane, Bopp, Bopp & Brown, 2003, p. 81)*

REFERENCES

- Brant Castellano, M. (2000). Updating Aboriginal traditions of knowledge. In G. Dei, B. Hall & D. Rosenberg (Eds.) *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 21-36). University of Toronto Press. Canada.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S. (2002). *Reclaiming youth at risk. Our hope for the future* (Revised Edition). Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Carpenter, A., Rothney, A., Mousseau, J., Halas, J., & Forsyth, J. (2008). Seeds of encouragement: Initiating an Aboriginal youth mentorship program. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(2), 51-69.
- Kirkness, V. & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four Rs – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15.
- Lane, P., Bopp, M., Bopp, J. & Brown, L. (2003). *The Sacred Tree*. Produced for the Four Worlds International Institute for Human and Community Development: Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

APPENDIX

- A. Brief Informative Summary of Mentor Program
- B. Daily Planning Form – Blank
- C. Daily Planning Form – Filled In
- D. Long-term Planning Form
- E. Initial Communication Form for School Staff
- F. Information and Consent Forms for the Families of Younger Participants
- G. A Reminder Note for Families

Appendix A

Rec & Read Schedule

3:30-Snack Time

- ❖ arrive at school between 3:00 and 3:15
- ❖ prepare a snack for the younger students
 - ❖ cut up food and place it on plates
- ❖ banana bread, bannock, crackers, fruit, juice

4:00-Gym

- ❖ take the students into the gym
- ❖ sit the students down and explain games
- ❖ participate in physical activities with students
- ❖ mission impossible, swamp ball, olly olly octopus,
 - ❖ Obstacles, bean bag game, tag games

4:30-Mulitpurpose Room

- ❖ bring the students back into the room
- ❖ set up and play organized games or do crafts
 - ❖ board games, drawing, crafts

4:50-Home time

- ❖ get students ready to get on the bus

5:00-Debreif

- ❖ discuss how the day went (good things/things to improve on)

Daily Planning Sheet

Date:

Event	Times	Plans
Snack		
Gym Activities		
Educational Activities		
Get Ready & Load Bus		

Notes:

Appendix C

Daily Planning Sheet – Filled In

Date: April 6, 2006

Event	Times	Plans
Snack	3:35-3:50	Alex will help to organize this piece. He will be at the early years school at 3:00 to make sure everything is ready. Everyone signs in and has photo taken. Mentors watching for buddies. * Sign In: * Pictures: Snack will be sliced apples, juice and goldfish crackers * Helpers: Have pictures taken, get snack and visit with buddies.
Gym Activities	3:50 - 4:20	Joe will lead the games we played the day before including Banana Tag, Human Knot and Dr. Dodgeball. He may ask for volunteers.
Educational Activities	4:20-4:40	Amy will explain this activity and will have the supplies ready. Getting to Know you Bingo. Mentors and buddies will move around the room to try to fill up sheets first. Enthusiasm and joking will help make your buddies feel comfortable.
Get Ready & Load Bus	4:40-4:45	This will have to be fast. If everyone can take the lead with to get their two buddies on the bus that would be great. Amy will be on the bus with a list of names to ensure everyone is present.

Notes: For some programs we had bussing and for some we walked the early years students home.

Appendix D

Planning for days with our younger buddies Planning ahead for upcoming weeks

Date	Team (mentors that are in charge of particular activities that day)	Activities (this includes snack, gym activities, multipurpose room activities, clean up etc.)

Appendix E

Attention Grade 3, 4 & 5 Teachers:

The (university or organization name), (high school name) and our school are involved in a community mentorship program. The university staff members have already started. Some mentors from (high school name) have been recruited and are keen to begin. Now all we need are students from (early years school).

We are targeting students in grades 3 to 5 who would benefit from some extra time with a mentor from within our community. This will be an after school program. We are hoping to run a session for (number of weeks) weeks that will begin in the first few weeks of (Month).

The best part of this is all you have to do is suggest anywhere from zero to four students in your class. We will contact families that will potentially be involved both by phone and through written explanations of the program.

The program will run on (day of the week) from 3:30 to 4:45. Snacks, physical activity, learning games and transportation will all be provided.

Teacher's Name: _____

Students: (please provide first and last names)

If you have any questions or comments please let me know, this will help us to ensure that we are running the best program we can.

Thanks for your help,

Rec & Read



To: Participants and Families

From: (Your name) and The Rec & Read Team

The (name(s) of other schools involved) and our school are involved in a community mentorship program. This is an after school mentorship program that we would like to invite (child's name) to be a part of.

The program will start on (start date) and run for a total of (#) weeks. The program will run every (day of the week) from 3:30 to 5:00 at (name of facility). The mentorship program will see one to two early years students partnered up with an older friend/ mentor from (high school). In addition to the high school students, there will be a team of four staff members from the (name of university or organization involved).

The purpose of the program is to bring community together while developing individuals. The program will follow a similar format every (day of the week).

3:30 - 3:50: Everyone gathers in the Multi-Purpose Room for a **healthy snack**. The snack will be provided.

3:50 - 4:25: Everyone will play low organized, **active games** in the gym. These may include tag games, sports, relays etc.

4:25 - 4:55: Everyone will gather for **educational opportunities**. This time may include board games, time to read together, art opportunities etc.

4:55 - 5:00: A school bus will arrive at (location) to take all of the students' home. **Transportation** is provided.

As a teacher at (plug in school name) I encourage each of you to contact me if you have any questions, (plug in school number). Thank you for your support. If you would like your child to be a part of the Rec & Read program please fill out and return the attached form by (Date).

Permission Form

❖ To be filled out and returned

I give my child permission to attend activities at (name of school or community facility) with the Rec & Read Community Program.

(Child's Name)

(Parents/ Guardians Signature)

Within this program pictures may be taken of my child to be used for promotion of and final report of program.

(Child's Name)

(Parents/ Guardians Signature)

Information About Child

Child's Name _____ Birth date _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Emergency Contact:

Name _____

Ph. Number _____

Medical Concerns and/ or Allergies

Doctor's Name _____

Doctor's Ph. # _____

Child's Medical Number _____

Reminder:

The Rec & Read program will start on (Day of the week) this week. Your child will be staying after school and will be bussed home. The bus will leave the school at 4:45.

Reminder:

The Rec & Read program will start on (Day of the week) this week. Your child will be staying after school and will be bussed home. The bus will leave the school at 4:45.

Reminder:

The Rec & Read program will start on (Day of the week) this week. Your child will be staying after school and will be bussed home. The bus will leave the school at 4:45.

Reminder:

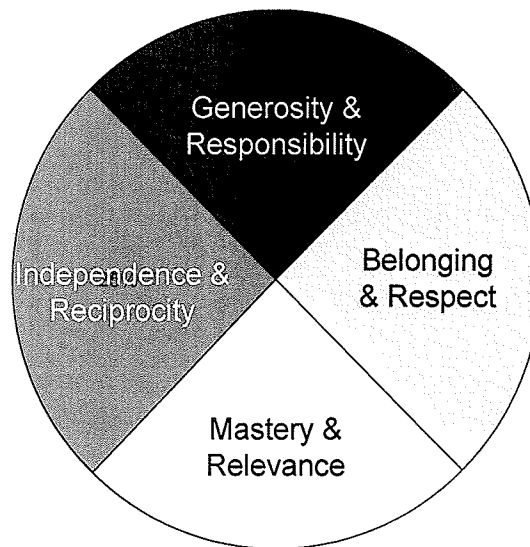
The Rec & Read program will start on (Day of the week) this week. Your child will be staying after school and will be bussed home. The bus will leave the school at 4:45.

**This paper has multiple notes on the same page. They just need to be cut up into individual notes to go home with each early years program participant.*

CHAPTER SIX: LEARNING, CONVERSING AND WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

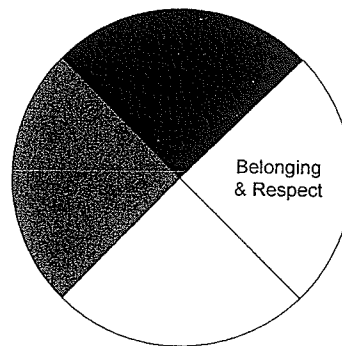
I now find myself in the western quadrant of the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation. Here, I have slowly spun my cocoon and taken the opportunity to reflectively examine what I have learned over the course of my graduate research. Through stories, reflections and ponderings this chapter is an attempt to share the immensity of what I have discovered from my experiences with the Rec & Read mentor programs.

The discussion that will unfold on the following pages will further build on what I have learned in relation to the *Circle of Courage* quadrants of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity and the *4 R's of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility*. Here I will further reflect on some of the key elements that have emerged throughout my involvement with the mentor program and how they can be understood within the following framework:



I am hopeful that what I share here will connect, reinforce or remind other researchers, recreation professionals, community workers and educators of how a cultural approach to urban Aboriginal physical activity and recreation can meaningfully engage young people as fully contributing members in our dynamic communities.

The Interplay of Respect and Belonging



Respect is not about conformity or assimilation it is about recognizing that there are multiple ways of knowing. It is with this understanding of respect that the mentor program welcomes people saying, “you belong here.”

Respecting Our Shared Voices

As with most community-based research projects it was important that fieldwork data was collected as a means to interpret and understand the successes, challenges and aspects that could be improved upon in the mentor program. As a research team we approached the research process as bricoleurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln’s description of a bricoleur is a researcher who, “produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to problems in a concrete situation” (p. 4). Working as bricoleurs, we utilized various research methods, tools and techniques. As the study unfolded, we remained flexible in our approach to

data collection, which paid off. The anticipated research activities included university team members keeping journals to document their observations and thoughts in relation to the study, as well as to have the thoughts and feelings of the youth participants documented in their own individual journals.

Entering the mentor program and research process I prepared myself in ways that were shaped by my teaching experience and looked forward to the unfolding of the research project. Little did I know how quickly my plans would change.

I remember that week of mentoring so clearly. In anticipation of the program start, I had spent hours buying the supplies and putting together fancy binders for each of the high school mentors to use as a journal. I purchased new three ring binders filled with paper to write on. I even wrote a letter to everyone to introduce what the binders might be used for. There was a package that included some of our favourite gym activities with room to add on. There was an empty table to list our favourite snacks, planning sheets, everything we need to get started. I was excited that day to hand out everyone's fancy new journal and anticipated the many wonderful things that the mentors would fill them with.

All went reasonably well as we went over the letter and the games but there certainly wasn't the sense of joy and anticipation in the air that I had hoped for. As we got closer to writing down our own thoughts and ideas the air seemed to thicken with hesitation. Hunkered down with our fancy pens and journals, quiet descended on the room. I wasn't sure what to say or think until finally, Steven broke the awkward silence with, "what do you want us to write?"

"Yeah," chimed in Melissa, "what should we write down?"

"Whatever you want," I responded. "How is the mentor program going so far? What do you like about it? What is going well? Just write down your thoughts and feelings about the mentor program." I had already said this but maybe they just needed me to restate it.

"So what do you want me to put down Amy?" Steven asked once more, directly.

"Well what do you think of the mentor program?" I asked.

"I like it." Steven stated.

"Good, that's a start. Write that down." I replied.

"Okay, I will write down that 'I like it.' Is that okay?" asked Steven.

A little perplexed, I watched as some of the pages remained blank while a few other students wrote down, "I like it".

"Now what do you want us to put down?" asked Melissa.

Before I could even formulate a response, another chimed, "I don't like this."

It was clear within those few moments that this research activity was not meant for us. Perhaps it could work for another mentor group, but for our group that year, keeping research journals was not the activity of choice. I looked out at the group and thought, "what next?"

In the cupboard with our numerous supplies was a tape recorder, tapes and batteries; all supplies that were on hand for when needed. "Okay," I said. "What do you think of putting the books away for now and just having a conversation?"

This suggestion seemed to produce a bit of relief. We moved the journals aside and placed the recorder in the centre of our group. After some uncertainty around the new tape recorder and a few "hello, hello" tests by the group, the conversation started.

The dialogue that day flowed beautifully. Everyone shared what was going well with the mentor program, what they liked, and we all discussed what we thought we could work on to improve for next week. From that day forward this type of debriefing circle became a part of our regular routine, a routine that has allowed us to work together, to grow together and to collectively inform 'our' mentor programming. Even though the data collection component of the mentor program has long been complete, and the tape recorders have been put away, the debriefing conversations continue because we learned from the youth participants that this was a meaningful way to generate discussion. Because we respected them and their ideas and let go of our own prescriptive data collection ideas, we were able to identify a cultural component that would become an integral part of the mentor programs.

Our debriefing circles are a place for everyone to share their thoughts, feelings, opinions and questions. They are also a place for us to connect, affirm our sense of belonging and see that each of the program's successes rely on our multiple perspectives and abilities. Not everyone speaks each day, but everyone definitely knows that the opportunity is there...

The inclusion of the debriefing circles is one of many examples of how youth guided their engagement in the development and organization of the mentor programs. As the story above demonstrates, the resistance demonstrated by the youth was respected. In response to this resistance we learned to look for other means to communicate. The means that informed and continue to inform our mentor programs are the use of circle discussions. It is within these circles that university mentors and high school mentors share power, where everyone's opinions and perspectives are valued and inform our

understanding of our shared mentor experiences. Over years and with different groups of mentors, the debriefing circles are always welcomed as space for discussion. The reminder that Creator gave us two ears and one mouth, therefore we should listen twice as much as we talk, is also helpful.

The teaching of respect has offered guidance throughout the mentor programs. This is one of the teachings that I have intentionally worked to place in all of my relationships and roles. I think it is important to respect children, youth, families, and colleagues with the same sense of respect that we would want others to show us. That is, listen to them, get to know who they are and appreciate individuals for who they are without measuring them against who they are not. Share with them pieces of who you are. Let them know where you come from, tell them about your family and what you enjoy doing. In this way, respect creates the sense of belonging in the group.

Far too often I feel that I hear teachers imply that they should be 'respected' because of the role they occupy. This respect is often demanded without being reciprocated. And from my observations these forms of student-teacher relationships can be volatile. I have noticed reluctance in many educators and recreation professionals to allow themselves to fully share decision making, planning and delivery with the young people around them. Burned into the thoughts of many individuals is that of the teacher or instructor who stands in front of the group delivering a plan for everyone to follow. What I have found is that not only are people more committed when the planning and delivery efforts are collaborative, it is also a lot more fun.

I believe that a few of the fears and misconceptions that people have to let go of before they will be able to move forward in a collaborative manner is the misconception

that shared voice and decision making means no structure. I believe that if anything there needs to be more routine and structure in a group in order for the unthinkable to happen. For instance in the mentor program, there is the structure of welcoming and settling, time for a snack, physical activity time, followed by time for small group, often educationally based activities. These are the structures that flow from one week to the next. Where the unexpected happens is in what activities we do at each particular segment. When the responsibility for the program or adventure is shared the structure often remains, but what is released is the rigidity that often determines what will happen at each particular moment. Going back to Merton's (1957) theory of self-fulfilling prophecy I can't help but wonder if...

“Perhaps What You See is What You Get”

From the very inception of the mentor programs I knew in my heart that the youth would be fantastic. I also knew that beliefs were not shared by everybody, which was reinforced when a group of educators and researchers sat together to initially discuss the potential of an Aboriginal youth mentorship program.

At the meeting Joannie and I shared a basic framework for an after-school mentor program at Early Years Community School. It was proposed that the “Rec & Read” mentorship program would include a self-selected group of Aboriginal youth from the high school working alongside a multi-cultural group of children from the early years school.

For the most part everyone around the table seemed on board and willing to offer their support where needed. However, still to this day something lingers with me from

that initial meeting. It was when we identified our goal to involve Aboriginal youth as role models and mentors for the younger students. Immediately in response, one teacher guffawed as a second expressed concern. The two teachers who the school had identified as supporters suggested that we rethink our target group of high school mentors because, as one said, "most of those kids aren't role models. If anything, they need role models themselves!"

For me, those words provided a blow that sucked the energy out of my spirit. It hurt. The message wasn't directed at me, but I sure felt it. It was clear to me at that moment those two individuals and I were viewing the world and Aboriginal youth through very different lenses. I recall having to emotionally dust myself off from the blow, as I realized the importance of the work we were doing. I wondered to myself, "If this is how the people who are identified as allies were viewing the youth, then what reception were they getting from other teachers?" I know of many colleagues who are less interested in supporting programs for Aboriginal youth, and this encounter reminded me of the challenges Aboriginal youth face on a daily basis.

At that instant, I knew that the mentor program had to continue and more than anything it had to highlight the strengths that so many Aboriginal youth have to share.

Respecting Aboriginal Youth and All That They Have to Offer

Throughout the five years that the Rec & Read mentor programs have developed, transformed and continued to grow the youth who have been involved in the mentor programs have never ceased to amaze me. When I think about the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm that they have brought to the mentor program as leaders and role models

in our numerous school-based communities, I feel a sense of wonder, amazement and pride. Within Laara Fitznor's (2002) doctoral thesis she shared the stories of many educators and offered them the opportunity to voice what they saw as important in our schools and communities. One of the voices that Laara brought forward and someone who supported her work was Bruce Elijah. In his comments, Bruce Elijah shares that children are hungry for role models, they are hungry to demonstrate their sense of responsibility to their communities and they want to be leaders. I think that if Laara or Bruce had the chance to see the Rec & Read youth mentors in our schools and communities as young, active role-models they would agree that our mentors are both the children and role models that they were envisioning.

The high school mentors who have committed themselves by generously serving their communities through their time, energy and strengths, have made each of the mentor programs uniquely successful. When Aboriginal youth are respected and find a sense of belonging, they can shine. In response to my wondering above where I ponder, "Perhaps what you see is what you get", I add "yes, what you see is what you get," as the following reflection illustrates:

I look back to that first year of the mentor program and I cannot help but laugh to myself. The program was up and running fabulously. Week after week the high school mentors were present and involved in the program. They were happy to support our multi-school group and ensure that the younger students had everything that they needed. The high school youth mentors were all that we had envisioned and hoped they would be.

I remember Joe, Alex and myself sitting around one day after the early and senior years participants had left. We were chatting about how the high school must have

wanted to make a good impression, since the students that they had encouraged to come out to the mentor program were top notch. To the three of us there was no way that these were the students who were “in need of” role models, as had been initially suggested. These high school participants were not only role models for the younger participants but they continually acted as role models for us, the university participants.

Two weeks following the conversation between Joe, Alex and I, our mentor group was sitting around chatting in the multi-purpose room. As anyone who has been involved in the mentor program knows, “hanging out” together is something that we do a lot. That particular Thursday Aaron had not shown up for the mentor program. So, wondering where he was, Joe asked whether anyone had seen or connected with him at school that day. In response the other high school students looked at us with puzzlement on their faces. One asked, “Are you joking?” A second added, “Don’t you know?”

To our surprise, the students told us that Aaron had been expelled from school over a month ago. Somehow, all three of us had no knowledge of that, as Aaron hadn’t missed attending the mentor program until today.

“What?” Alex, Joe and I couldn’t believe what we were hearing. How Aaron could have been coming to the mentor program each week, showing up on time, being fully involved, while none of us had picked up on his expulsion from school, had the three of us in a state of disbelief.

Somehow, Aaron felt connected with the mentor program but not with school. He continued to come out to the group twice a week to participate and share his strengths. As co-mentors we loved how Aaron could find ways to both play hard yet have us

laughing. In the mentor program Aaron's lightness mixed with dedication encouraged everyone to get involved. After that day, Aaron remained a consistent participant in our mentor group for the rest of the year, far beyond his expulsion from school. And we have continued this policy of welcoming those who have been 'kicked' out of school.

As I think back, I have a smile on my face which can be easily explained. Aaron and all of the high school mentors have been the responsible young people that I expected to meet. They are all kind and caring; they have demonstrated leadership qualities; and they have shown their desire to be involved in their community. The question here is, "are young people in need of role models, or are they waiting to be viewed and approached in a positive way, as all youth should be?"

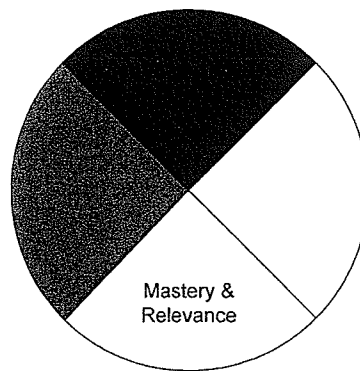
This sense of commitment and wanting to be with the large mentor group has also stretched to the early years mentors. I have had a number of teachers at the early years schools tell me how some students' attendance went up on the days that they would be involved in the mentor program. Even though it makes for a longer school day, there is some draw to the mentor program that has the students ensure that they are at school on those particular days.

So what is it that made Aaron and others like him want to be present and involved in the mentor program? From our research we have found that the sense of community that is created contributes to the participants returning from week to week. Other factors include the voice that everyone has in decision making. In addition, the participants appreciate how their presence is celebrated by their fellow mentors rather than someone dwelling on their absence.⁴⁵ Everyone shares laughter and excitement as they plan for,

⁴⁵ In the mentor program we have had children and youth who have come out to the program a few times and chose not to return. In these cases we feel that this isn't the time for those individuals. The key is to

play and discuss the fun activities. Importantly, everyone likes to know that they are needed and appreciated; this is reinforced by everyone contributing to the planning of activities, preparation of snacks, cleaning up and participating. Another drawing point is the social atmosphere that is created. Whether it is conversations over a healthy snack, loud outbursts of screams and laughter in the gym or the quiet discussions that are shared over a good book or intense board game, there always seems to be a hum that fills up the social spaces of the mentor programs. These are some of the pieces that the youth have said keep them coming back. I don't think that I can say it is one particular thing; it is all of these pieces and more, that keep mentors such as Aaron and myself coming back from one year to the next.

The Interplay of Relevance & Mastery



It is by acknowledging and respecting the various perspectives that we all brought and continue to bring to the mentor program that I recognize it as culturally relevant.

That is, it is relevant to the people who participate, the cultures we exist within, and the various connections that we all have which continue to guide the mentor program. With

celebrate the presence of the people that are present and always welcome new comers or people that choose to reconnect.

this approach we have worked to build on the cultural capital that everyone brings to our shared experiences and interactions. As discussed in chapter four, it is with a sense of belonging in the program, where their views are respected, the mentors can apply their strengths and master the skills they bring and gain from their involvement. And within our various interconnected circles we build programs that are relevant to us all.

“Are We Ready?”

Somehow, it seems no matter what mentor group it is, what school or neighbourhood it is in, the same question arises, “is our group ready for the early years participants?” I think if the initial training period were twenty weeks this same question would be asked because until the early years mentors begin and the program has all of its components in place the magic of it remains under the surface.

The high school and university mentors do not seem to fully demonstrate all of their strengths and capabilities until the early years mentors are around. All of the conversations, role modeling and planning that occur in the training stage of the mentor program seem to come together. For the most part, the cell phones and cigarettes get put away. The swearing subsides. Questionable clothing including inappropriate symbols and low cut shirts get left at home or covered up by a sweater. On cue, the role models come out in full force, ready to try out their skills where needed. For some, this is simply chatter one on one with a younger mentor. For others, it’s leading the gym activities. The skills that the mentors feel they are ready to use are discussed on training days and most often welcomed when the whole group is together. Having observed this transformation numerous times, I now know to relax and trust in the group to bring their best. Along with the lesson to trust in others, I have also learned to trust that things will

work out as they should. Even when they don't, as demonstrated in the upcoming story of pizza day, I see the apparent failures as "opportunities to learn" (Brendtro et. al., 1993).

Allowing Our Various Perspectives to Co-Create Relevant Programming

One of the key questions that is continuously posed and discussed over the course of any of our mentor programs is, "What should we..." or "What do you want to do?" It is the conversations that stem from these questions that initially form a sense of communal control surrounding the program and eventually have everyone sharing their thoughts in relation to the direction of programming. However, if the questions are posed it is important to listen to the requests and ideas of the group and that you are not just asking to ask and then proceeding to fill in your own ideas. I have observed student groups move from being open to ideas, to later appearing unreceptive when they have been asked for their opinions but their ideas are never followed through on. Listening and following through demonstrates respect for the opinions of everyone in the group.

In the mentor program one of the first decisions that is made by the group is regarding the snack that will be provided the following day. This may sound easy enough, and it is. However, that simple question and follow through demonstrates that the decisions we make are real and tangible and they are made together. From there bigger decisions are made, including what activities we want to do, who is going to take on what responsibilities and so on. In little time, a program is up and running and decisions are made by the group.

In the early stages of one mentor program we used a mix of decision making strategies, including a group discussion followed by a vote to ensure everyone had an opportunity to voice their opinions.

It was a Thursday and we just finished loading our younger mentor buddies onto the bus to head home. Exhaustedly, we made our way back to the multi-purpose room for our weekly debriefing. A look of defeat was shared by everyone. For the first time, the bounce had been taken from our steps. Without a word, a simple glance to one another from our respective seats in the circle begged the question, "what just happened?"

We were in our fifth week of the Rec & Read Mentorship Program and somehow that day things just flopped. Up until that point everything was flowing smoothly. Now, here we were sitting around the table, baffled by what had unfolded in the last hour and a half. We turned on the recorder and allowed the conversation to begin.

"So, how is everyone feeling after today?" I asked.

Blair jumped right to the point, "Bad! They were brats today!" Much to the relief of everyone his opening remarks moved to the heart of what we all needed to express.

"Yeah, while we were in here trying to put the pizzas in the oven those girls kept stealing food. We tried to send them into the gym and they just laughed at us. Even when we told them to stop, they continued and they were so rude," Samantha said still visibly upset as she stated this.

I replied, "I know the group that you are talking about because I found them in the hall and when I asked why they weren't in the gym, they were rude to me as well. I ended up having to talk very sternly with them." From my own point of defeat, I shared that I, "felt like such a monster."

"Yeah and in the gym, half of the kids weren't participating. Some of them were even hanging on Blair's hoodie trying to choke him." Vanessa vented.

"So what do we do?" Alex asked the group.

For the first time since the start of the program, we had experienced failure. But it was a group failure. We were further bonded by our defeat and looking at how we could work to get back what we felt had been stripped away. Within five minutes the venting was over and the resilience of our team started the search for solutions.

I shared with the group that our younger buddies may be testing our boundaries. From classroom and recreation work, I had experienced this many times before when children and youth have been presented with new freedoms and respect. During the conversation I thought about Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern's (2002) work where they identified three stages of trust building that children and youth go through when forming new relationships. The stages include: 1. Casing: when they are checking the person out, often called the honeymoon period. 2. Limit Testing: where they may push the limits to see what the response will be. 3. Predictability: the stage in which both parties form trust and they know what to expect of one another. In sharing my own experiences with the group, I wondered out loud whether we were at the Limit Testing stage at this particular time in the mentor program.

Tyrone pointed out that we were short mentors that day and perhaps that impacted the situation. We also noted that some of the mentors weren't as involved as in weeks past; a few were sitting on the mats in the gym rather than being actively involved.

"When the kids are looking to us as role models they are going to do what we do and if we are lying around, they are going to follow," Joe pointed out.

"I don't understand, this was supposed to be a fun day. We had planned on making pizzas and pudding. As the food was cooking we would play games in the gym and then come back to this room to eat. Why didn't it work out better?" Miranda asked.

It's true we were looking forward to this week. We couldn't wait to cook with the kids.

"Maybe we should have fed them first," Jimmy said quietly.

"What was that Jimmy?" I asked.

Jimmy elaborated on his original point, "Maybe we should have fed them first. You know we usually start with a snack. Maybe the kids were hungry. We could have had a light snack to start." With these words, a light seemed to come on for all of us.

In our reflective problem solving on that day, over an hour passed as we discussed what we could have done differently as well as what actions we could take if these situations presented themselves again. As Eber Hampton (1995) stated, "reflective thinking" (p. 13) offers participants as well as the initiator of the conversation the opportunity to build thoughts together. In our group the reflective discussion flowed as we conversed about internal versus external rewards, the same conversations that are often heard in school staffrooms and in university classrooms. The voices of the youth illustrated how the dangling of the carrot (i.e., the pizza) just doesn't work nor is it enjoyable for anyone involved. The discussions also led to possibilities for new activities and ideas for a final celebration.

As the discussion wound down, we held an independent, confidential vote, and a unanimous decision was made to change the duration of the mentor program from the original six weeks to eight weeks. Eager to try out their new ideas and reconnect with

their younger mentors the group asked me to seek permission from the school and the younger participant's families to continue the Rec & Read Mentor Program for two additional weeks. What began as our worst day ended with a real commitment to build on what we had started.

As the mentors left the building that day Joe, Alex and I were left feeling newly invigorated. We realized the gift was ours to have the opportunity to work alongside this wonderful group of young people. One of the initial drawing points for the involvement of the high school students in the mentor program was a volunteer course credit towards their high school graduation. At this point in the after-school program the unanimous decision by the students to continue demonstrated "altruistic generosity" (Brendtro et al., 2002), since we were all aware that the mandated course credit hours were already filled for most of the high school mentors. This type of commitment has been demonstrated time and again.

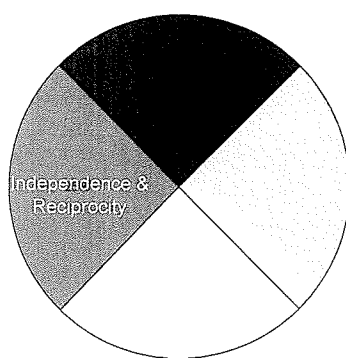
Our Time to Say Thanks

As was mentioned earlier, if you ask, you should follow through.

Near the conclusion of our first year of the Rec and Read mentor program Joe, Alex and I asked the youth mentors what they wanted to do for the final wrap up. Having spent a number of months together and knowing that they had worked well beyond their volunteer credit, they wanted it to be big. As a group they decided that they wanted an overnight camping adventure, with just the high school and university mentors. It would be a packed event.

Our overnight camping expedition included synchronized swimming in a freezing cold lake on a drizzly night. We enjoyed numerous camp fires, marshmallows, hotdogs and every imaginable camp food. The trip also included a game of Sniper in the dark, loads of mosquito repellent, lots of laughs and very little sleep. Needless to say we asked, we followed through, and it was a wonderful way to celebrate our year.

The Interplay of Reciprocal Relationships & Independence



Power in Western culture was based on dominance, but in tribal traditions it meant respecting the right for independence...From earliest childhood, children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults modelled, nurtured, taught values, and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion (Reclaiming Youth International, 2009).

From the mentor program I have learned that when individuals and/or groups come together with an understanding of mutual respect, where they see their involvement as relevant to themselves and their communities it is then that authentic reciprocal relationships are formed. Reciprocity is met when relationships respect people's independence and we value our connections to each other.

Redefining 'Mentor' ~ Understanding Reciprocal Relationships

Something that we quickly learned in the mentor program was that our understanding of a mentor was quite different from the traditional, Western definition of a mentor. According to the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999) a "Mentor" is an "Experienced adviser and supporter, somebody, usually older and more experienced, who provides advice and support to, and, watches over and fosters the progress of, a younger, less experienced person" (p. 1131). As a group, we saw and continue to see mentoring as a reciprocal, relational activity. It is not a hierarchical activity where the older, wiser participants impart knowledge and guide; rather it is an opportunity to walk, share, and learn together. This was highlighted in the *Seeds of Encouragement* paper where the five co-authors, myself included, reflect on the notion of Mentors Teaching Mentors and ask, "Who is the Real Mentor Here?" In that paper, through personal stories, we share our interpretations of mentoring by highlighting moments related to the mentor program; moments which demonstrate that we all have and continue to reciprocally mentor one another.

These mentoring relationships flow between high school and university mentors, between high school and early years mentors, and between university and early years mentors, and so on. I truly view the mentor program as a large group of people coming together in a very inter-connected circle, where teachings are provided across age groups, as the on-going story of Donavon will show.

One particular early years mentor that has guided us all is Donavan, the young Aboriginal boy who I had first met a number of years ago at the Monday night drop-in. Donavon was in the mentor program from grades three to five. Notably, from the age of

eight Donovan was counting how many years it would be till he is one of the high school mentors, a role that he keenly anticipates.

Donovan was always an active participant in every component of Rec & Read, sometimes a little too active for his older buddies but he was also a strong observer. In the school hallways and/or school playground, Donovan would make a point of catching up with me outside of the Rec & Read program to share some thoughts he had in relation to how the mentor program was going or to ask a question related to upcoming activities.

Donovan's third year with Rec & Read was also his final year as an early years student. The next school year he would be moving onto middle years. In anticipation of this move Donovan became increasingly aware and personally concerned about his literacy abilities. During conversations on the playground, he and I would discuss some ways that he could work on his reading and writing skills. After some dialogue Donovan and I decided that we would work to increase the amount of one-on-one or small group reading time offered in the mentor program that year. It seemed to be a good idea, and I was left hoping that Donovan would get some extra support with his reading and writing, as would everyone else in the mentor program.

A few days after our discussion about the increase in reading in the mentor program, Donovan sought me out to talk about something that was on his mind.

"You know, I've been thinking," Donovan opened.

"What are you thinking Donovan?" I asked.

After what seemed like a long pause only filled with the shuffling of Donovan's feet, he added, "I don't know how all the high school students would feel about reading and writing with us." Donovan continued to share that he knew one of the older buddies

is not a very confident reader and writer. Donovan was worried that if there was too much pressure on some of the high school students to be literacy leaders that they may feel uncomfortable.

For me, his words were a revelation. In Donovan, we had an example of how one of our youngest mentors was concerned with how other people in the mentor program would feel and/or perceive themselves in terms of their reading and writing skills as a role model within the group. Here was Donovan, the boy who I knew can bug his big buddies, who gets angry and cries when his feelings get hurt, who can run and demonstrate the gifts of an athlete...watching out for others. And here it was my job, my responsibility to listen to one of my many mentors. He had obviously thought about this and played out the many situations in his mind and heart. If I believe that we are interconnected and can learn from one another then it was/is my responsibility to both listen and to act.

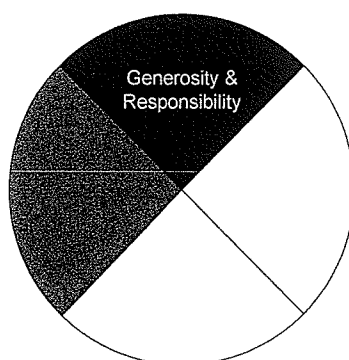
That year, we did incorporate more reading but it was on a volunteer basis where people who were most comfortable leading small groups would take on that responsibility as other mentors pitched in where they felt most needed and/or successful.

Another significant element to the development of reciprocal relations, I believe, is the importance of laughing together. For a lot of us this laughter begins in the active gym spaces. Some low organized games such as banana or toilet tag seem to get our feet moving, our hearts pumping and our bellies shaking with laughter.

It takes time to build the relationships of trust and reciprocity to truly allow ourselves to walk together. I have watched relationships develop over the preparation of food, playing games in the gym, doing dishes and cleaning up together, as well as over

board games, the reading of a book, drawing together, shooting hoops and the list can go on. The secret is to find a way that you are comfortable in forming relationships with others; ways that allow you to be yourself, that allow you to relax and offer moments where you can be completely engaged in a conversation. This may and probably will look different from person to person but the important piece is to ensure time is made to build those relationships between the various people that you will work alongside of and hopefully reciprocally mentor with.

The Interplay of Generosity & Responsibility



From the moment the early years mentors begin the mentor program it is easy to see the generosity within the mentor group. It is when an individual's generous spirit acknowledges a sense of commitment and accountability, that they have realized their responsibility.

The New Mentor Equation: You + Me = We

In addition to watching out for one another, the high school and early years mentors watch out, mentor and role model for the university and community mentors as well. In one particular situation a number of the mentors came together to support and

journey alongside one another as a number of us went through a particularly difficult time.

I still remember the first day that I met Jessie. He was in the second grade and his family had recently moved into an area where I spent my Monday nights working at a drop-in. Jessie's family had moved to a housing complex nearby. Like others in the neighbourhood, Jessie's family was Aboriginal and in Winnipeg to access better health care. Unlike other families who lived in the area, it was Jessie who needed the health care, not his older parents or grandparents. He was a little guy with big health issues, and that's how I first came to know him.

Jessie's family was great. They knew the transition was going to be difficult and they wanted him to fit in. Would he make friends? Would he like it here? They made sure he made it to the Monday night drop-ins, as that became the place to be for all kids in the neighbourhood.

As I recall, that first evening for Jessie must have been overwhelming. First, he was in this unfamiliar place filled with new faces. It seemed like he had a few friends but, being new, he was also being checked out by the other kids. One was Ken, a young man I knew well from all the times I had to step in to stop him harassing someone else. He targeted the vulnerable ones, and that night, it would be Jessie's turn.

While I don't remember exactly what Ken said or did to Jessie, I do remember asking Ken to leave for the evening and watching Jessie curl his head in his arms as the tears fell from his eyes. They were big tears for such a little guy, and I feared he'd never recover.

For the next hour or so, Jessie remained curled up in the corner until it was time to head home for the night. He just watched the others and I wondered if he'd ever return. So much for creating safe spaces...

The following Monday, I hoped but didn't expect Jessie to return. As the night began and the youth filed in, he wasn't among them. A little later, from my seat at the craft table, I looked up as a little guy in a dark green jacket caught my eye. It was Jessie, and as I saw him walk in and take his jacket off, he was laughing and joking with a few new friends, I felt a sigh of relief. In fact, I felt joyful. What a brave little guy, I thought. He had picked himself up and got back in the game.

From then on, that is how it went. Jessie became a regular at the drop-in. Week after week, activity after activity, Jessie was there, providing he felt alright and his medical treatment schedule didn't conflict. Over the next few years, and a number of drop-in programs, I watched Jessie laugh, tease, and joke while enjoying the company of friends.

One particular summer evening I was visiting family who lived in the same housing complex as Jessie. I was outside with a group of kids from the neighbourhood when Jessie raced his bike up to me. He skidded his back tire to a screeching halt in front of the group and asked in his own friendly way: "Hey Amy...remember me?"

He made me laugh, and with that opening, I couldn't help but chuckle, "of course, I remember you Jessie. It's been less than a year since I last saw you and you haven't changed that much."

As he cycled his bike away I thought to myself that how even in the fading light of the evening sky Jessie's personality blazed bright.

Seven years after that first drop-in where we first met, Jessie joined the mentor program. He was in high school now, and when he strolled in with his group of friends, I laughed again thinking I could barely tell them apart. With hoods over their heads, bangs covering their eyes, and prankster jokes, it was hard to tell who was who. He fit right in and no one would know he was a young man with a serious illness. From week to week in the start of that year's mentor program, Jessie was in the thick of things; laughing, joking, playing in the gym. When the mentors decided to organize a Secret Santa to celebrate the upcoming December holidays, Jessie was there, gift in hand, enjoying everyone's company.

Tragically, Jessie's time in the mentor program would be way too short. As would his time on earth.

Despite years of resilience and his ability to overcome so many illnesses and close calls over the course of his childhood, Jessie's struggle to survive came to an end.

Surrounded by family and friends, Jessie's last weeks in the hospital were filled with the love of those whose lives he had deeply affected, including a number of the mentors who went to the hospital to see him.

For me, to see the outpouring of support for Jessie and his family from these young people was beautiful.

After Jessie passed on we postponed what was to be our first scheduled activity day with the early years students. There was no script for how to support each other in our grief, but somehow, our circle enfolded, allowing each of us a way to honour Jessie. Grieving himself, it was Joe who recognized the need to start the healing process. Turning to his own traditional teachings, he sought the support of cultural advisors, and

with permission from Jessie's school admin team, Joe orchestrated a healing circle for Jessie's many friends, the mentors, as well as his school supports and teachers.

The sweet burning smell of sacred medicines, the soothing sound of the drum and a circle of support offered a safe space for tears to flow and stories to be told. Following the circle, the healing continued as we filled our spirits with one another's company and our bellies with delicious bannock pizza (a mentor program favourite), fruit and drinks. On that day, Aboriginal culture infused the high school space.

On the days leading up to the funeral service I was immersed in dialogue with the mentors. From emails to text messages to phone calls, we organized ourselves for the frosty winter's day of Jessie's memorial. At the chapel, Kevin brought flowers, Allison and Mandy developed a collage of photo memories, and warm words of condolence were offered to Jessie's family. As a group of mentors, youth, university students, allies ... we gathered to honour our young, courageous friend. When one family member spoke about how Jessie, in his perseverance over the many years of suffering and illness, was "his teacher", I knew exactly what he meant.

In my multiple roles that week of chauffeur, friend, mourner, observer and learner, the mentors were my teacher. From them, I watched and I learned what it looks like to be genuinely kind and supportive. This was especially true for Donavon.

Donavon was one of the kids from the neighbourhood who knew Jessie best. In fact, Donavon was probably there that first day that Jessie came to the drop-in. For years, I had watched them together at the Monday drop-ins or tearing up the neighbourhood on their bikes, laughing, hanging with the other kids outside or spending endless hours attached to their video games.

Just as Donavon had watched out for one of his high school friends some time ago, on this day, it was my time to be cared for. As we gathered round the gravesite for the final burial rituals, I was purposefully standing back, lost in my own thoughts, thinking of Jessie. Out of the crowd, Donavon walked over to me, and with his hand, gently guided me to the front. Bending to the ground, he picked up some earth, looked at me, and with a quiet gesture of support he said, "here, I got this for you." Acknowledging the earth now in both of our hands, he added: "You just sprinkle it like this."

I did as he said, and together we sprinkled the earth and said our farewells to Jessie.

This is the culture of the Aboriginal youth I have come to associate with the Aboriginal youth mentor program: a generosity of spirit that demonstrates responsibility to one another. It is this generosity that informs the cultural approach to Aboriginal youth recreation and physical activity.

Making Connections and Feeling a Sense of Responsibility

From my perspective, as each of the mentors developed stronger connections to the mentor program, they have also become more confident and secure in the people that they are. It seems that they gain greater strength, awareness and sense of pride in who they are as Aboriginal peoples or persons who could be considered strong Aboriginal allies. The high school mentors in particular recognize their positioning as role models and leaders within their communities. For some of the high school mentors, this sense of belonging and pride offers them the strength to call attention to the injustices around them. Others are more apt to join school groups, including school teams and school initiated activities. Many of the high school mentors have pushed our research team

mentors to think deeper about our roles as inter-cultural educators, allies, recreation professionals, and/or community members. At least I know they have done this for me.

As I have worked at spinning my own cocoon and often found myself lost in the solitude of my reflections, one thing that has emerged is that the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation is not a one size fits all model. The cocoon I enwrapped myself in, where I allowed myself to reflect on what I had learned was one that fit me just right...for now.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER

Introduction

The purpose of my thesis has been to reflectively examine a cultural approach to Aboriginal youth recreation programming. Over the past five and a half years I have been involved in a community-based research project. Within this research project, I worked as part of a research team, guided by our Aboriginal youth community, to design, develop and deliver the Rec & Read Aboriginal youth mentorship program. It is my experiences related to the mentor program that informed my thesis discussion.

In my thesis my intentions were to reflect on my experiences as related to the mentor program in an intentional and deliberate manner. This self-reflective approach was guided by three key research questions: (1) How have Aboriginal epistemologies and Aboriginal youth guided the development of an Aboriginal youth mentorship program? (2) What have I, as a Métis woman, public school educator, graduate student, and researcher, learned from the community-based research process that will inform both my own teaching and being in the world? and (3) How can this research support educators and recreation professionals who are committed to working alongside Aboriginal youth in their schools and communities?

For me to share that my time in graduate studies has been easy and that everything followed a prescribed manner that I could read about in a text on research would be an illusionary tale at best. In fact, for much of the research process I had to trust the people around me and all of creation that the journey I was on would bring me to a good place.

As a graduate student, I was never able to look at the thesis as a proposal ... followed by research ... followed by an analysis of that research. No, first I had to be

fully immersed in the experience. I needed to recognize the connections and learn from the many relationships I formed. Then I could write this thesis. Perhaps I can offer a metaphor that may help you walk with me and better understand this journey.

While preparing for my thesis proposal presentation I read Shawn Wilson's (2008) book, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Many of the discussions that emerged from the pages of Wilson's book resonated with me. However, one particular area that I connected with was Wilson's discussion of the challenges of presenting Indigenous research and circular work in a linear fashion. Wilson went on to state that in presenting our work, we can use a metaphor to both analyze and present complex ideas that are not easily conveyed. This had me wondering. What is something that I am familiar with and could use as a means to discuss both my experiences and intentions as connected to the mentor program and the thesis process?

Then one night a thought came to me. I saw writing this thesis and my experiences as a community-based researcher as collecting the pieces and putting together a jigsaw puzzle⁴⁶. I will discuss and connect with the jigsaw puzzle metaphor for this concluding chapter of my thesis and graduate studies experience.

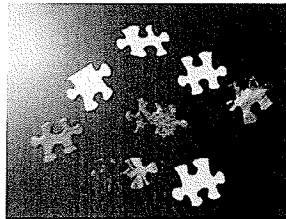
Gathering the Pieces

For as long as I can remember I have loved to work on jigsaw puzzles. Many of my warm inside, cold outside childhood memories involve puzzle making. I would snuggle up beside my grandpa as he stayed in his pyjamas for days working on the toughest puzzle I had ever seen. Evenings would pass in a mix of long talks and

⁴⁶ Other places where the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle has been used to interpret life experiences include Elijah (1998) as discussed in Fitznor's (2002) Doctoral Thesis; Little Bear (2000); and Wagamese (1994).

comfortable silence with my mom at the dining room table as she and I would work on a puzzle together. Yes, puzzles are something that make sense to me but by far the hardest puzzle I have had to do thus far is the research puzzle.

When I entered graduate studies I had a rough idea of what I hoped for from my education but the only concrete pieces that I held close were a few promises that I had made to myself in regards to my multiple roles as a school educator, community member, role model, family member, Métis woman, graduate student and soon to be researcher and mentor. Initially I didn't see how or where these promises would connect however I kept them with me.



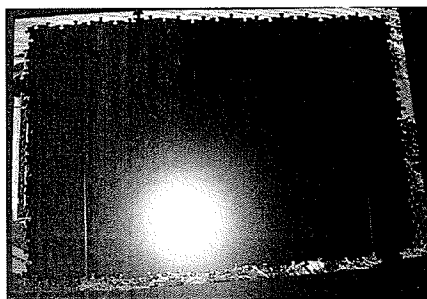
As anyone who regularly does puzzles would know there is nothing more frustrating than coming near the end of completing a puzzle and realizing that you are one or two pieces short. Having experienced this more than a few times, I learned to keep those lingering pieces in a safe place. That is what I did with these promises initially; I kept them in a safe place. I used the pieces I needed at different times to guide my actions and interactions. At the same time, I kept them together, to be used when I found the puzzle that they were meant to be a part of. Now as I write this concluding chapter I can see how these promises were intricately built into the mentor puzzle. Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will illustrate how these promises were maintained.

Fortunately for me, it didn't take long to find a potential fit for my key puzzle pieces. Working alongside Joannie Halas, she welcomed me into a participant action

research project that she was developing. The initial research project allowed me to connect with two groups of urban Aboriginal youth and their school communities. These initial relationships, along with the guidance of the youth involved, progressed into a second research study that I was invited to be a part of.

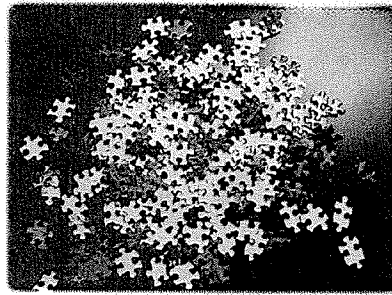
The second study that was initiated by Janice Forsyth, Joannie Halas and Michael Heine (2003), a *Cultural Approach to Urban Aboriginal Youth Sport and Physical Activity* was to include mentoring, collaboration, and research that was informed by the voices, dreams and desires of the urban youth community. It was here that Promise One found a home. That is, the community norms and practices were viewed from a strengths based approach. Informed by the voices and actions of Aboriginal youth, the Aboriginal youth mentor program was developed and delivered.

To me, the Rec & Read mentor program seemed to meet all of the promises that I had made to myself regarding my multiple roles. I felt I had found a place for my few puzzle pieces. In terms of the overall puzzle, what the mentor program initially offered was the border to my puzzle. This border provided specific parameters and a place to further interlink the connections for this puzzle.

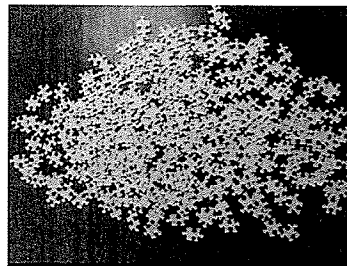


When I found my fit it was a great feeling. I jumped in with both feet and ran with every new experience. However, I quickly realized that this puzzle was not going to come together all at once. I had a huge border yet I knew I had too few pieces. So

instead of attempting to make something that just wasn't there yet, I had to collect more pieces for the puzzle. It was the forming of many relationships with university, high school and early years mentors as co-researchers, co-mentors, and co-participants that brought great masses of pieces to the puzzle. Some of these pieces came from data collected throughout the three-year research process. Other pieces came from on-going reading, listening, and reflection that I did as a graduate student. And many came from the ongoing relationships that continue to be informed by the people involved in the program and the realities that they bring to the yearly Rec & Read mentor programs.



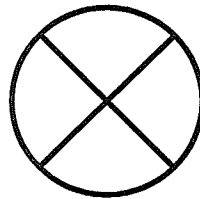
Over the course of five years I gathered many puzzle pieces and while it seemed as though I had enough to complete the puzzle, there remained a problem. The pieces were all face down. I could recognize their complexity in form and see that they were meant to be linked together. However, I could not see the larger picture.



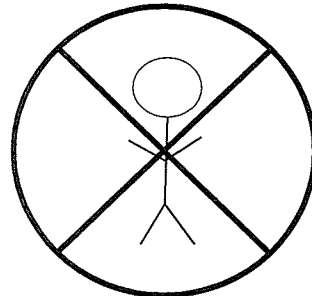
Discovering Where I Fit

Fortunately, a few key events transpired. At some point during the research process, I found confidence in myself and celebrated the complexity of the multiple roles I co-exist within. I took comfort in these complexities and rather than continually begging for space or apologizing for not always following the projected norm of graduate studies, research and teaching, I ‘claimed space’ and recognized the power within my positionality.

This confidence allowed me to stop searching for a paradigm to connect to and instead claimed that I understand, and am guided by an Indigenous Paradigm. An Indigenous Wholistic Paradigm that is circular, informed and connected by all of creation, which is fluid in that it is dynamic and ever-changing, and that seeks balance within both the individual and between all of creation.



It is within this paradigm that I situate myself. This paradigm and all of my experiences inform the worldview that I bring to all my roles, relationships and experiences.



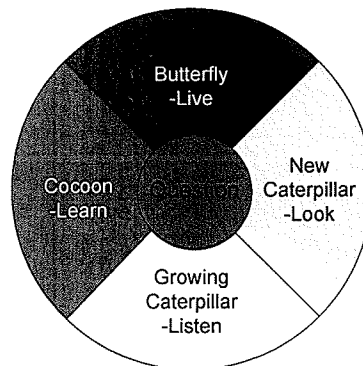
It seemed that once I was able to claim my positionality, the paradigm in which I situate myself and the perspective from which I see all of creation, that the blank puzzle

pieces, suddenly revealed their colour, depth, and details. I was able to see each piece as well as how they may potentially connect.

Discovering a Means to Sort the Pieces

After seeing the diversity of the pieces I needed a means to sort and understand the many themes, colours, patterns and descriptions that were held in the interconnected pieces. Just as the pieces seemed to gain colour at the right time other parts of the research journey fell into place. When looking for a lens, a framework from which to understand the mentor program, two ideas came together. In a discussion of how we may understand research data and describe the research experience my friend and colleague Sherri Denysuik (personal communication, 2008) shared with me the Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning that had been shared with her by Myra Lamee.

As Sherri shared the Four Pedagogies I recognized the similarities to the Butterfly Teaching I had heard many years ago from Jules and Margaret Lavalley (personal communication, 2001). Sherri and I discussed the connection and interconnections between the two teachings and how they could inform an Indigenous Perspective of Transformation.



An Indigenous Perspective of Transformation is circular and is in balance when all of its parts are present. Connecting with this circular framework was a fantastic feeling. By having a framework in place that is both circular and interconnected I was ready to analyze my experiences in the Aboriginal youth Rec & Read mentor program. Having this lens allowed me to sort the pieces of the research project, yet still validate and celebrate their independence and interconnections. After connecting with the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation I was able to see how this thesis could come together. I clearly envisioned how my transformations could inform chapters four through seven.

To Look, Listen, Learn and ...

In chapter four, I entered the eastern quadrant of the circle as a new caterpillar that discovered what the mentor program looks like. Here I found a secure place for Promises Two and Three: there were high expectations of everyone involved (and we/they more than stepped up to those expectations); and a sense of belonging was created from the inception of the mentor program. In this chapter we discussed the relevance of the *Circle of Courage* (Brendtro et. al., 2002) and the teachings of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity and how they can inform Aboriginal urban sport and physical activity programming.

As I moved into the southern quadrant of the Indigenous Perspective of Transformation, where I asked you the reader to join me, we were listening. We were listening to both the logistics of how the mentor program is developed and delivered, as well as the guiding principles for working together to co-create a program that is

respectful and relevant to everyone involved. Chapter five is the *Rec & Read 'How To' Mentor Manual*, a manual that has been collaboratively written by numerous authors, editors and contributors who have all in some capacity been connected to the mentor program.

The use of the mentor manual as a part of my thesis was very deliberate. The manual is a co-written piece of work that demonstrates our shared understandings and interpretations of the mentor program. The cooperation as to what went in the manual and how it came together epitomizes the very essence of the mentor program and demonstrates the inclusion of promises four and six. Promise Four states that: respecting multiple views and perspectives is imperative and, I believe the mentor manual illustrates this promise. Promise Six is: to ensure that any research that I am involved in is respectful to the community and people(s) involved, this includes the assurance that my voice is just one voice in the collective whole. What better way to respect this promise than with a mentor manual that is informed by many authors, editors and contributors? Importantly, the premise of the manual is not a 'one size fits all' "how to" run a mentor program but is "how to" create places and spaces where youth can interpret, create, develop, and deliver programs that are relevant to themselves.

My second reason for including the mentor manual reflects Promise Seven that I made to myself: it is imperative that the work is relevant to the people and community involved. I believe that including a "how to" manual in the body of this thesis demonstrates how this project has remained within the community, for the community and will help to support other community development projects. I firmly believe that the inclusion of the "how to" manual demonstrates the ability for research to serve both the

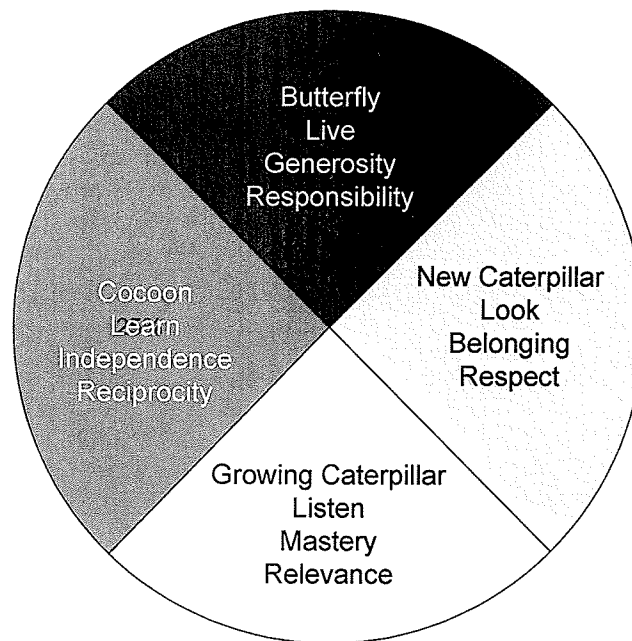
academic community, as well as our education and recreation communities where the Aboriginal youth mentor program will most likely be implemented.

The western quadrant offered me time to reflect on what I have learned from my involvement in the mentor program. In chapter six I spun my cocoon and situated myself in a place where I could retell and reflect on the stories I hold closest; with each reflection, I asked, “what have I learned from these experiences?” My hopes were to demonstrate how the stories that I gathered from the mentor program and continue to learn from carry the lessons and guidance of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Weber-Pilliwax ,2001; and Wilson ,2001). More so than in any other chapter I saw how Promise Five was addressed. In Promise Five I stated: that there needs to be time to build meaningful, reciprocal relationships. In writing and re-writing these stories, I realized the significance of the reciprocal relationships I have been a part of for many years, relationships that have intermingled with the mentor program but many of which began before any of our involvement as mentors. These early relationships and many that were created along the way will continue to inform the person I am as I remain a part of the mentor programs, an educator, community member and ... friend.

I now find myself in the northern quadrant. It is here that I hope to emerge as a beautiful butterfly. A butterfly, who will live in a good way, sharing what I have learned from my involvement in the mentor program. Here, in the conclusion of this thesis discussion I will share how the completed puzzle looks now that it has come together. In addition, I will share how I hope to live within my multiple roles as a butterfly that has learned from what I have seen, heard and reflected on.

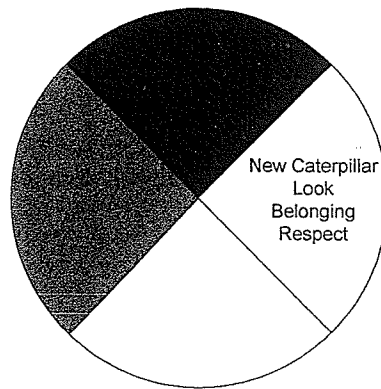
... Live

Throughout this thesis process I have repeatedly found myself looking to a variety of wholistic circular Indigenous teachings to guide and understand my experiences. I believe that these teachings can inform other educators and recreation professionals who work alongside Aboriginal youth in their schools and communities. Essentially, as I had promised myself in Promise Eight, Aboriginal epistemologies have guided the development of the mentor program, the research process and the path that I have journeyed on throughout graduate studies. The more I have looked at, listened to, learned from, and worked to live by these teachings, the more I have been able to see how they are connected and reinforce the message that each teach. The circle teachings⁴⁷ that have guided and informed my thesis process are: the Four Aboriginal Pedagogies of Learning, the Butterfly Teaching, the *Circle of Courage*, and the *4 R's of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility*.

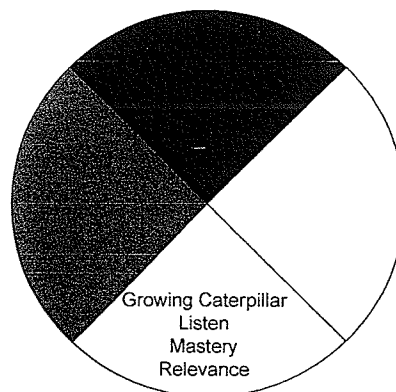


⁴⁷ I recognize and am guided by many other circle teachings, including those of the Medicine Wheel. However, these are the circle teachings that have been the primary focus of this thesis discussion.

Now that the framework of the mentor puzzle is complete, an image of culturally relevant education/recreation programming emerges.

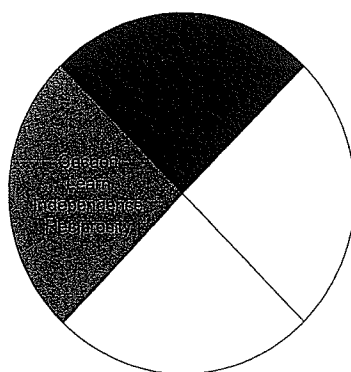


The mentor program offers a respectful space where everyone belongs. Interestingly, the mentor program's analogy to a puzzle highlights the complex difference between welcoming the whole person rather than focusing only on the strengths of each individual. In the mentor program, I have witnessed and experienced firsthand that at times as individuals we can feel bent, worn down or a little rough around the edges yet we are still welcomed into the mentor group. As individual pieces (people) we feel a sense of empowerment when we recognize our fit and allow ourselves to become connected. I am compelled to re-visit promise number one, which focused on a strengths perspective. I would now restate that this is more than a strengths based approach rather, it is a whole person approach that highlights our individual strengths.



As this puzzle has come together the interconnections between the pieces have been informed by what the participants/mentors have viewed as relevant. Each mentor program is a creation of everyone involved, which reinforces a collaborative worldview whereby knowledge is not an individual entity but is created by and belongs to all. The mentor programs have shown me spaces where conversations are open and respectful, places where people work together in a collaborative manner towards an agreed upon purpose. The mentor programs have demonstrated collaboration, where researchers and community members worked together throughout every step of the research process.

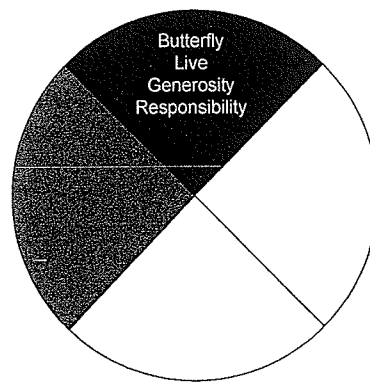
A key piece to the mentor program is purpose. It is more than creating a sense of belonging and ensuring everyone feels good. It must be relevant. The Rec & Read Aboriginal youth mentor program is about having a sense of purpose, a sense of responsibility. Ensuring a safe place of belonging is but one of the components of the mentor program, as are the mastery of skills, the forming of reciprocal relationships and the generosity of self, to name a few.



One thing about puzzles is there is not a certain place to start or finish. In fact, a puzzle can begin with any piece and just continue to build from there. In this manner, every piece is equally as important to the whole. The mentor program has offered a space where we are all connected. However, it is within this same space that our diversity,

complexity and uniqueness have been celebrated as contributing to the whole. I believe that it is our collective responsibility to nurture and celebrate the diversity among us. It is up to us to work together, to learn from, respect and rely on one another's independence while nurturing our interdependence. Independence and reciprocity go hand in hand.

As I reach the conclusion of my thesis, I now realize that the puzzle that has been assembled has expanded beyond the original border that I foresaw. I now see the mentor program without the usual smooth border outline that often enwraps a puzzle, but instead having edges that are ready to build on to. These pieces offer connections for new pieces and enable further expansion.



Now that the intricacies of the puzzle have been explained, the question that remains is, "what image can be found on this puzzle?" The image that I see is of many butterflies. The numerous butterflies represent and celebrate that this research involved the transformation of many individuals from the inception up until now, and I know that the transformation process will continue.

In addition, I see the individual butterflies as being able to move. From my own experiences with the circle teachings that were shared in this thesis, we do not move in a linear manner from one quadrant to the next. Rather, we move among the quadrants. We

may find ourselves primarily positioned in one quadrant but still listening, borrowing and learning from the other quadrants which work to inform our whole experiences.

As an individual butterfly that is part of the collective whole I recognize that I have numerous responsibilities to live up to. One is to complete this thesis as a means to document the huge potential and talent within our Aboriginal youth communities. I have had the opportunity to work alongside Aboriginal youth in the mentor programs and other settings, where I have recognized that they have enormous strengths and gifts that they are eager to share.

In the opening chapter to this thesis I introduced Star and a few of the other wonderful people that I met at the Monday night drop-ins. I also shared the question I had as I wondered about the disconnect that happened between Star and so many other Aboriginal children and youth who are remaining on the margins of educational institutions. While these are big questions and much remains to be learned, I feel that my involvement with the mentor program has allowed me to see possibilities.

Fitznor (1998) has stated, “our youth need to be re-integrated into the Aboriginal circle of life with pride and honour while living without the pain of racism, rejection and alienation they experience from conflicts in the dominant culture” (p. 33). As educators and/or recreation professionals we have access to the extensive strengths and abilities in our young people. It is just a matter of respecting youth, working towards something that the groups see as relevant, continuously working at building relationships and collectively stepping up to the responsibilities that we are presented with. I think the Rec & Read mentor programs have allowed me to see all of these things come together.

A New Promise to Myself

Throughout my graduate studies there have been times when I have found myself in some difficult situations, where I had to remind myself of our interconnected whole and remember my belief that “to hurt another, is to hurt oneself.” However, something that I have learned and will continue to work on is finding ways to better communicate and work to understand across cultural, religious, economical, gender, class and generational spectrums. I know from my own experiences there have been times when I thought that I was communicating clearly, only to later find that my message was misunderstood. There have also been times where I felt that I understood the message that someone was trying to convey to later discover that I didn’t. I do not think that there is any one particular party at fault in these situations. Something that I will take from this graduate studies experience is to give relationships time and energy, to work hard at listening to others, while at the same time work at finding ways to respectfully communicate my thoughts and advocate. This is how I will live in a manner that recognizes the reciprocity and connections between everything and everyone.

My own positionality as a Métis woman within an urban setting in a province with a rich yet unheard and/or distorted history of Aboriginal peoples has encouraged me to honour and welcome Aboriginal youth into safe spaces where they can connect and belong. In the Rec & Read mentor programs, I have observed and been a part of many wonderful stories where Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal allies have worked together, ensuring the success and satisfaction of everyone involved. These are the stories that have informed this thesis and my own growth and transformation. These are the stories that I will continue to shine light on, because these are the stories that we as

Aboriginal people need to hear, and these are the stories that I will continue to share long after this thesis process is complete. Perhaps as these stories are told, our western dominant educational institutions and educators working within them may go through their own transformations.

The new promise that I have made is to continuously position myself as an ally. Within this position I will advocate for those with marginalized voices to be heard, recognized and valued within our intercultural spaces. This will take courage on my part but it is a promise I have to keep.

And so, my transformation continues...

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER EDUCATORS, RECREATION PROFESSIONALS, GRADUATE STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS

Upon the completion of my thesis defence, my committee requested that I add a list of recommendations. The recommendations that I will share below offer a brief summary of what I have learned through the graduate studies process. I share these recommendations with other educators, recreation professionals, graduate students and researchers that are hoping to work alongside communities. Such work may include the development of programs, learning together, co-researching and/or the co-development of culturally-relevant educational experiences. The list of recommendations includes:

- **Work to ensure that individuals and communities are respected and valued for all that they can teach and offer.** To share this understanding, I like Ladson-Billings' (1994) analogy to a miner versus a banker. Culturally relevant approaches see people working as miners who tap into the riches that individuals or groups bring, versus bankers who see themselves as the depositors of goods.
- **Ensure respect is offered to everyone involved.** This includes that everyone feels a sense of belonging.
- **There must be purpose for the people who are involved.** Often individuals and institutions put resources (people, financial, time and energy) in place to create environments for 'others' to feel good without reflecting on purpose. These measures can help to make 'others' feel good yet keep the roles of hierarchy and giver/receiver in place without a commitment or goal of moving to reciprocity.
- **Work with people and communities. Ensure that the work being done involves everyone.** This will require time, commitment, plenty of communication and action. However, there are necessities for reciprocal relationships, where all people belong

and strive towards purpose(s) that are relevant to the individuals and/or whole group.

Of note, time, commitment, open communication and the sharing of ourselves is often in contrast with the constraints of time, roles and resources that are systemically in place within educational and research institutions. However, it is necessary to look beyond the constraints for other options.

- **It is imperative that the work is culturally relevant to the people and community involved.** The work should be informed by the interests, strengths, dreams and desires of the community. It should also be relevant to the cultures that community members bring to the work and the dynamic cultures they live within.
- **Work as a coach who is striving to tap into the talents of individual players and to create a team that plays together.** In Ladson-Billings' (1994) discussion of culturally relevant education she builds on Winfield's (1986) conceptualization of teachers' behaviours toward academically at-risk students. Winfield discussed teacher-student relations that include the four roles that teachers may personify. These roles may include that of a tutor, general contractor, custodian or referral agent. Ladson-Billings' vision of behaviours toward students moves beyond the teacher-student relations that Winfield saw, to include the roles of conductors and coaches.

In her discussion, Ladson-Billings suggests that "culturally relevant teaching is the antithesis of the assimilationist teaching..." (p. 23). Personally, it has always been my goal to function in the role of a coach. As Ladson-Billings suggests, a coach believes that their students are capable of excellence and they are comfortable in sharing responsibility to achieve team success. In the role of a coach, I see that we

need to know the players and we need to know how to blend their talents to achieve the greatest team success. Each of the players needs to improve and it is should be our goal as coaches, to work from the sidelines pushing every individual to achieve their various degrees of excellence. In the role of coaches we need to remain organized and adaptable to the demands, desires, strengths and talents of the whole team. It also means the recognition that we are just one part and without others, there would be no team.

- **Recognize and name the worldviews and epistemologies where one is positioned.**

I discovered strength, security and re-assurance when I named and celebrated my positionality from an Indigenous worldview. I found further comfort when I looked to Indigenous epistemologies for guidance in navigating and understanding the research process and my graduate studies experience. I am not saying that all people should find themselves in the same positionality and/or look to the same epistemologies for guidance. However, I am sharing that we should be free to position ourselves in places where we find security, places that physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually make sense to us.

- **Acknowledge that there will be challenges as one works beyond the margins of our dominant institutions.** In order to continue working alongside community in culturally relevant ways, surround yourself with good people, remain committed to the community, observe, listen, discuss and continue to advocate.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Baikie, S. (2003). The 'Bright Side of the Road:' The strengths perspective in Nain, Labrador. In Paraschak, V. & Forsyth, J. (Eds.), *North American Indigenous Games Research Symposium: Proceedings* (pp. 70-76). Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba.
- Barnhardt, R. (2005). *Teaching / learning across cultures: Strategies for success*. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. Retrieved on January 15, 2007, from www.ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/RayBarnhardt/TLAC.html
- Battiste, M. (2000a). What is Indigenous knowledge? In Battiste, M. & Youngblood Henderson, J. (Eds.), *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (pp. 35-48). Saskatoon: Purich Press.
- Battiste, M. (2000b). Maintaining Aboriginal identity language, and culture in modern society. In Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (pp. 192-208). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Battiste, M. & Youngblood Henderson, J. (2000). Ethical Issues in Research. In M. Battiste & J. Youngblood Henderson (Eds.), *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (pp. 132-144). Saskatoon: Purich Press.
- Beck, M., & Malley, J. (1998). A pedagogy of belonging. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*, 7(3), 133-137.

- Bedard, G. (2000). Deconstruction whiteness: Pedagogical implications for anti-racism education. In A. Calliste & G. Dei (Eds.), *Power, Knowledge and Anti-Racism Education: A Critical Reader* (pp. 41-56). Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Bishop, A. (1994). *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Bishop, R. (1998). Freeing ourselves from neo-colonial domination in research: A Maori approach to creating knowledge. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11 (2), 199-219.
- Bocarro, J. & Witt, P.A. (2003). Relationship-based programming: The key to successful youth development in recreation settings. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 21(3), 75-96.
- Brabson, Ben as cited by Mills, H., Jennings, L. Donnelly, A., & Mueller, L. (2001). Teachers' ways of knowing: The value of curricular conversations. *Language Arts*, 79 (1), 20-28.
- Brant Castellano, M. (2000). Updating Aboriginal traditions of knowledge. In G. Dei, B. Hall & D. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 21-36). Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Brant Castellano, M. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, January, 98-114.
- Brendtro, L. & Brokenleg, M. (1993). Beyond the curriculum of control. Reclaiming children and youth. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*, 1993 (Winter), 5-11.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S. (2002). *Reclaiming youth at risk. Our hope for the future* (Revised Edition). Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.

- Brokenleg, M. & Van Bockern, S. (2003). The science of raising courageous kids. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 12(1), 22-27.
- Bruchac, J. (1991). *The Native stories from keepers of the earth*. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Fifth House Publishers.
- Burstein, M. (2005). Combatting the social exclusion of at-risk groups research report. *PRI Project: New Approaches for Addressing Poverty and Exclusion*. Canada: Policy Research Initiative - Canadian Government.
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education*. Durango, Colorado: Kivakf Press.
- Calliou, S. (1995). Peacekeeping actions at home: A medicine wheel model for a peacekeeping pedagogy. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 47-72). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Canadian Council on Social Development. (2001). *Recreation and children and youth living in poverty. Summary Report*. Ottawa: Canadian Parks and Recreation Association.
- Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR). (2007). CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People. Government of Canada: Ottawa. Retrieved on August 14, 2008, from <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>
- Carpenter, A., Rothney, A., Mousseau, J., Halas, J., & Forsyth, J. (2008). Seeds of encouragement: Initiating an Aboriginal youth mentorship program. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(2), 51-69.
- Carter, M. (2003). Telling tales out of school: "What's the fate of a Black story in a White world of White stories?" In G.R. Lopez & L.Parker (Eds.), *Interrogating Racism in*

- Qualitative Research Methodology* (pp. 29-48). New York: Peter Long Publishing Inc.
- Champagne, L. & Halas, J. (2003). "I quit!" Aboriginal students negotiate the "contact zone" in physical education. In V. Parashak & J. Forsyth, (Eds.), *North American Indigenous Games Research Symposium: Proceedings* (pp. 55-64). Winnipeg: Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute.
- Champagne, L. (2006). *Physical education teachers as allies to Aboriginal students: Dimensions of social consciousness*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
- Chartrand, R. (2008, November). Métis connections to the new Social Studies curriculum. At the *Council for Aboriginal Education of Manitoba (CAEM): Current Issues in Aboriginal Education conference*. Symposium conducted at the 37th Annual Special Area Groups Coordinated Conference, Manitoba Teachers' Society. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
- Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies. (2002). *Learning about walking in beauty: Placing Aboriginal perspectives in Canadian classrooms*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.
- Cochran, P., Marshall, C., Garcia-Downing, C., Kendall, E., Cook, D., McCubbin, L. & Gover, M. (2008). Indigenous ways of knowing: Implications for participatory research and community. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(1), 8-13.
- Couture, J. (1991): Explorations in Native knowing. In J.W. Friesen (Ed.), *The cultural maze: Complex questions on Native destiny in western Canada* (pp. 53-73). Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.

- Crichlow, W.E. & Penner, C. (1997). Deconstruction. In C.A. Grant & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Dictionary of multicultural education* (pp. 83-84). Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press.
- Deloria, V. Jr. (1991). Commentary: Research, redskins, and reality. *American Indian Quarterly*, 15(4), 457-469.
- Deloria, V. Jr. (1997). *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. Canada: The New Press.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 1-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Denysuik, S. (2008). *Personal Communication*.
- Dominiguez, M., Fielding, V., & Perrault, M., (2001). *Findings of the youth engagement program: Youth views on community partnerships*. Winnipeg: Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.
- Duran, E. & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dyck, N. (1996). *What is the Indian 'Problem': Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (3rd Ed.). St. John's, Newfoundland: The Institute of Social and Economic Research Memorial University of Newfoundland.

- Elijah, B. (2002). Personal Communication. In Laara Fitznor (2002) *Aboriginal educators' stories: Rekindling Aboriginal worldviews*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario.
- Ellis, J. (1998). Introduction: The Teacher as interpretive inquirer. In J. Ellis (Ed.), *Teaching from Understanding: Teacher as Interpretive Inquirer* (pp. 5-14). New York: Garland Publishing.
- Ellis, J., Hart, S. & Small-McGinley, J. (1998). "Difficult" students' perspectives on belonging and inclusion in the classroom. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*. 7(3), 142-146.
- Encarta. (1999). *World English Dictionary*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Ermine, W. (1995). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 102-112). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Fitznor, L. (1998). The Circle of Life: Affirming Aboriginal Philosophies in Everyday Living. In Dawne C. McCance (Ed.), *Life Ethics in World Religions* (pp. 21-40). Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba.
- Fitznor, L. (2002). *Aboriginal educators' stories: Rekindling Aboriginal worldviews*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario.
- Forsyth, J., Halas, J. & Heine, M. (2003). *Cultural approach to urban Aboriginal youth sport and physical activity*. (Unpublished SSHRC: Aboriginal Research Grant Proposal).
- Forsyth, J., Heine, M., & Halas, J. (2007). A Cultural approach to Aboriginal youth sport and recreation: Observations from Year 1. In Jerry P. White, Susan Wingert, Dan

- Beavon, & Paul Simon (Eds.), *Aboriginal Policy Research. Moving Forward, Making a Difference. Volume IV* (pp. 93-100). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- Government of Canada, Department of Justice. (1982). *The Constitution Act*.
- Government of Manitoba. (2006). *Aboriginal teachers' Questionnaire report 2006*.
- Retrieved on June 11th, 2008, from
http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/aborig_teachers.pdf
- Gramann, J. & Allison, M. (1999). Ethnicity, race and leisure. In Jackson, E. & Burton, T. (Eds.), *Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 283-297). Pennsylvania: Venture Publishing.
- Graveline, F. J. (1998). *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Halas, J. (2006). Developing a White race-consciousness: A foundation for culturally relevant physical education for Aboriginal youth. In Ellen Singleton & Aniko Varpalotai (Eds.), *Stones in the sneaker: Active theory for secondary school physical and health educators* (pp. 155-182). London: The Althouse Press.
- Halas, J. (1998). Runners in the gym: Tales of resistance and conversion at an adolescent treatment center. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22 (2), 210-222.
- Halas, J. & Watkinson, J. (1999). Everyone gets a chance: A group of "at-risk" students describe what it is like at their "active living" school. *Runner*, 37(1), 14-21.
- Hampton, E. (1995). Towards a redefinition of Indian education. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 5-46). Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press.

- Hart, M. A. (1996). Sharing circles: Utilizing traditional practise methods for teaching, helping and supporting. In Sylvia O'Meara and Douglas A. West (Eds.), *From our eyes: Learning from Indigenous peoples* (pp. 59-72). Toronto, ON: Garamond Press.
- Hart, M. A. (2002). *Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal approach to helping*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Health Canada. (1999). *Hearing the voices of youth: A review of research and consultation documents*. Ottawa: Author.
- Hemingway, J. & Green Wood Parr, M. (2000). Leisure research and leisure practice: three perspectives on constructing the research-practice relation. *Leisure Sciences*, 22, 139-162.
- Hermes, M. (1998). Research methods as a situated response: towards a First Nations' methodology. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11 (1), 155-168.
- Hingangaroa Smith, G. (2000). Protecting and respecting Indigenous knowledge. In Battiste, (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (pp. 209-224). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Holmes, L. (2000). Heart knowledge, blood memory, and the voice of the land: Implications of research among Hawaiian Elders. In G.J. Sefa, B.L. Hall and D.G. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 37-53). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hookimaw-Witt, J. (1998). Any changes since residential school? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(2), 159-170.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.

- Howard, T. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 195-202.
- Hubbard, T. (2008). Voices heard in the silence, history held in the memory: Ways of knowing Jeanette Armstrong's 'Threads of old memory'. In R. Hulan & R. Eigenbrod (Eds.), *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics* (pp. 139-153). Halifax & Winnipeg, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
- Information Centre on Aboriginal Health, (2009). Glossary Terms: Common Terms. National Aboriginal Health Organization: Ottawa, Canada. Retrieved on July 7, 2009, from <http://www.icaah.ca/content/en/glossary/terms/>
- Irwin, K. (1992). Towards theories of Maori feminism. In R. DuPlessis, P. Bunkle, K. Irwin, A. Laurie and S. Middleton (Eds.), *Feminist voices: Women's studies texts for Aotearoa/ New Zealand* (pp. 5). Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Kailin, J. (1999). How white teachers perceive the problem of racism in their schools: A case study in "Liberal" Lakeview. *Teachers' College Record*, 100 (4), 724-750.
- Karsten, W.C., & Lolli, E. M. (1998). *Implementing Multiage Education: A Practical Guide*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.
- Kenny, C., Faries, E., Fiske, J. & Voyageur, C. (2004). *A holistic framework for Aboriginal policy research*. Ottawa, Ontario: Status of Women Canada.
- Kincheloe, J. L. & McLaren, P. L. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 138-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- King, T. (1997). Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial. In A. Heble, D.P. Pennee and J.R. Struthers (Eds.), *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (pp. 241-248). Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- King, T. (2003). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Kirkness, V. & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four Rs – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility [Electronic Version]. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15.
- Kovach, M. (2005). Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 19-36). Toronto: Canada Scholars' Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago, United States: University of Chicago Press.
- Lacourt, J. (1997). Cultural Capital. In C.A. Grant & G. Ladson-Billings (eds.) *Dictionary of multicultural education* (pp. 55-56). Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. California, U.S: Jossey-Bass
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. California, U.S.: HB Printing.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Culturally relevant teaching: The key to making multicultural education work. In C.A. Grant (Ed.), *Research and multicultural education* (pp. 106-121). London: Falmer Press.
- Laenui, P. (2000). Hawaiian statehood revisited in Battiste, (Ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. (pp. 50-56). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Laidlaw Foundation. (2001). *Youth as decision-makers: Strategies for youth engagement in governance and decision-making in recreation*. Laidlaw Foundation.
- Lane, P., Bopp, J., Bopp, M. & Brown, L. (2003). *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality*. Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada: Four World International Institute for Human and Community Development.
- Laramée, M. (2008). Making sense of Aboriginal education in Canadian public schools: A case study of four inner city elementary principals and their vision of Aboriginal education. *First Nations Perspectives: The Journal of The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre*. (pp. 57-73). Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre.
- Lavallee, J. & Lavallee, M. (2001). Sharing Circle, August. Personal Communication.
- Lavallée, L., (2007). Physical activity and healing through the Medicine Wheel. *Pimatisiwin: Journal of Indigenous and Aboriginal Community Health*, 5(1), 127-153.
- Lavallée, L. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework

- and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 21-40.
- Leroy, C. & Symes, B. (2001). Teacher's perspectives on the family backgrounds of children "at risk". *McGill Journal of Education*, 36(1), 45-60.
- Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged Worldviews Colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (pp. 77-86). UBC Press.
- Lloyd, D. (2001). Unconditional schools, youth of promise. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 10(3), 150-152.
- Mackay, R. & Myles, L. (1995). A major challenge for the education system: Aboriginal retention and dropout. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds* (pp. 157-178). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- McDonald, D. & McAvoy, L. (1997). Native Americans and leisure: state of the research and future directions. *Journal of Leisure Sciences*, 29(2), 145-166.
- Merton, R. (1957). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York, N.Y.: The Free Press.
- Merriam-Webster's Online. (2003). *Dictionary and Thesaurus*. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Pidgeon, M. & Hardy Cox, D. (2002). Researching with Aboriginal peoples: Practices and principles. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 96-106.
- Piquemal, N. (2001). Free and informed consent in research involving Native American communities. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 25(1), 65-79.

- Piquemal, N. (2003). Redefining ethics in research. In J. Oakes, R. Riewe, K. Wilde, A. Edmunds & A. Dubois (Eds.), *Native Voices in Research* (pp. 199-219). Winnipeg, Manitoba: Aboriginal Issues Press.
- Piquemal, N. & Nickels, B. (2005). Cultural congruence in the education of and research with Aboriginal students: Ethical implications for classroom researchers. *The Alberta Journal of Education Research*, 51(2), 118-134.
- Politano, C., & Davies, A. (1994). *Multi-Age and More: Building Connections*. Winnipeg, Canada: Peguis Publishers.
- Popkewitz, T.S., Fuller, L. & Brown, J.E. (1997). Postmodernism. In C.A. Grant & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Dictionary of multicultural education* (pp. 219-222). Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press.
- Ralston Saul, J. (2008). *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Penguin Group.
- Reclaiming Youth International. (2009). The Circle of Courage philosophy. *Reclaiming Youth International: Equipping Adults to work with Today's Youth*. Retrieved on November 21, 2009, from www.reclaiming.com/content/about-circle-of-courage
- Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 21. London: Sage Publications
- Ristock, J. L. & Pennell, J. (1996). *Community Research as Empowerment: Feminist Links, Postmodern Interruptions*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Ross, R. (1992). *Dancing with a ghost : Exploring Indian reality*. Markham, ON:

- Octopus Publication Group.
- Ross, R. (1996). *Returning to the teachings: Exploring Aboriginal justice*.
Saskatchewan, Canada: Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.
- Roy, J. (n.d). Acknowledging Racism. Report was prepared for the *Canadian Race Relations Foundation*. Retrieved on December 27, 2008, from
<http://www.crr.ca/content/view/220/377/lang,english/>
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993). *Integrated Research Plan: Ethical Guidelines for Research*. RCAP: Ottawa.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Gathering Strength*. Ottawa.
- Saleebey, D. (1992). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Scheurich, J. & Young, M. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Research*, 26(4), 4-16.
- Schnarch, B. (2004). Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) or Self determination applied to research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 1(1), 80-95.
- Shwandt, T.A. (1998). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.) *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 221-259). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Silver, J., Mallet, K., Greene, J. & Simard, F. (2002). *Aboriginal education in Winnipeg inner city schools*. Manitoba: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

- Spielman, R. (1992). *'They're always laughing at me': Value conflicts in Native-White collaborative research*. Paper presented at INORD Conference, Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario.
- SSHRC Aboriginal Research Grants (2004). *Call for Proposals*. Ottawa: Author.
- Statistics Canada. (2007). *Winnipeg, Manitoba (table). 2006 Community Profiles*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007. Retrieved on December 20, 2008, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2008a). *The Daily: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*. Ottawa. Released January 15, 2008. Retrieved on December 20, 2008, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080115/dq080115a-eng.htm>
- Statistics Canada. (2008b). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Half of the Aboriginal population comprised of children and youth. 2006 Census: Analysis Series*. Ottawa. Released January 10, 2008. Retrieved on December 20, 2008, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/children.cfm>
- Sumara, D. & Carson, T. (1997). Reconceptualizing action research as a living practice. In Terrance R. Carson & Dennis Sumara (Eds.), *Action research as living practice* (pp. xiii-xxxv). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Suzuki, D. (2002). *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature* (2nd ed.). Vancouver, British Columbia: Greystone Books.

- Swisher, K. (1998). Why Indian people should be the ones to write about Indian education. In Mihesuah (Ed.), *Native and Academics. Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 190-199). United States of America: University of Nebraska Press.
- Taylor, E., Tisdell, E. A. & Hanley, M. S. (2000). *The role of positionality in teaching for critical consciousness: Implications for adult education*. 2000 AERC Proceedings. <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2000/taylorreetal1-web.htm>.
- Thomas, R.A., (2005). Honouring the oral traditions of my ancestors through storytelling. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 237-254). Toronto: Canada Scholars' Press.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2005). On tricky ground: Researching the Native in the age of uncertainty. In Norman K. Denzin.& Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (third Ed.) (pp. 85-107). London: SAGE Publications.
- United Nations. (2004). *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples*. Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples. PFII/2004/WS.1/3. United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs: New York.
- University of Manitoba, Aboriginal Student Centre. (2008). *Elder's Protocol*. <http://umanitoba.ca/student/asc/tpac/protocol.html>
- van Ingen, C. & Halas, J. (2006). Claiming space: Aboriginal students within school landscapes. *Children's Geographies*, (4), 3, 379-398.

- Wagamese, R. (2006). *Keeper N' Me*. Canada: Anchor Canada.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2001). "What is Indigenous research?" *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 166-174.
- Wikipedia. (n.d). Costructivism (Learning Theory). Retrieved on January 12, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_\(learning_theory\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_(learning_theory))
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175-179.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Fernwood Publishing
- Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy. (1999). *National Aboriginal Youth Strategy*. Ottawa: Author.
- Young-Ing, G. (2008). Conflicts, discourse, negotiations and proposed solutions regarding transformations of traditional knowledge. In R. Hulan & R. Eigenbrod (Eds.), *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics* (pp. 61-78). Halifax & Winnipeg, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.