

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

THE HOLLOW BONE HUNTER'S SEARCH FOR SACRED SPACE IN  
CYBERSPACE: A TWO WORLD STORY

BY

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## Approval of Dissertation

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

### **The Hollow Bone Hunter's Search for Sacred Space in Cyberspace: A Two World Story**

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Abstract

*“Grandmother, tell me the story of when you were the Hollow Bone Hunter...”*

*This is the story of a woman with one blue eye and one brown eye. She lived in the North and was an ordinary person like you and I. Then one day her life changed. She began a long journey to help her people. Her journey began quietly, as many important journeys do.*

*First she had a dream. In the dream she was sitting at her computer looking at the screen. Gradually people began to appear until she was surrounded - they stood behind her, in front of her and they filled the computer screen. She understood that some of these people were alive and others were the spirits of the unseen. They came from a sacred space and were trying to reach out to her in her cyber space. The dream people asked her to find a way for them to meet.*

*She awoke from the dream to the sound of the phone ringing. The voice told her that she had been chosen.*

*“Grandmother, what happened next?”*

*The woman understood that she had been chosen to take a journey, but she did not understand the meaning of the dream or how she could help the dream people. She began to prepare. Quietly she went to her closet and pulled out her big red woven basket. Slowly she began to pack. Then she called her family and put her affairs in order. She did not understand what was happening, but she knew where to go to find out. Keys in hand she headed out to her little silver car, stowed the red basket safely in the back seat, tuned in her favourite radio station, started the car and headed up the road.*

*That evening the little silver car pulled into a dusty red parking lot. The blue eyed/brown eyed woman stepped out of the car and stretched. Grabbing her red basket from the back seat she headed down a narrow path that threaded through the woods. After a brief walk she arrived in a clearing with a small house. Tired, she sat down on a rock to rest and wait. She watched warily as the great black sow bear approached.*

*“Were you really afraid Grandma?” “No my girl, that Mukwa was smiling.”*

*The two sat facing each other and then the great bear smiled. “Aanii, anish na gey gii” she growled. “I have been waiting for you. I am here to help you prepare for your journey.”*



*“I have been chosen, but I do not feel worthy” said the woman “I do not understand what I must do to help the people meet. I have so many questions.”*

*“I will help you” said the bear, “First we must empty your bones so that you will be able to be open to the new knowledge and so that you can find the answers that you seek. When you are ready, I will provide two guides to show you the way – Cygnus the swan and Baapaase the woodpecker. Each has a different language and different ways of being in the world - together they will help you find your way.”*

*Four days later, the woman emerged from the woods. Under one arm she cradled a beautiful, large white swan, its graceful neck poised and ready for the important responsibility she had been given. Over her shoulder perched a large piliated woodpecker, its red hair standing upright as he pecked persistently at her head. The Hollow bone Hunter was born.*

*From that day forth, the Hollow Bone Hunter travelled across the land - beginning in the east, then the south, to the west and finally to the north - always with her two companions the swan and the woodpecker. Everywhere she went she asked her questions and sought the new knowledge that would help the people in the Sacred circle. At each place her two companions presented their different understandings of what each visit meant. Together they went to each of the Seven*

*Spirits and spent time with them learning about their ways. After each visit the Hollow Bone Hunter drove away in her little silver car, with her head full of new knowledge, and more questions than answers. After many days she became very tired and had come to realize that she needed to seek out another helper. How could she help the people in her dream? How could she use cyber space to help them gather together and heal? Exhausted she stopped her car at a quiet lake to rest.*

*“Is that when Waasookwe came to help you Grandmother?”*

*“Yes my girl – that is exactly right!”*

*The Hollow Bone Hunter and Waasookwe journeyed together for many months and together were able to understand what the Seven Spirits were saying. The Hollow Bone Hunter spent many more months preparing a journal of all of their experiences so she could return to her people and present them with this beautiful gift.*

*“Read the journal to me now Grandmother.”*

The goal of this study was to examine Indigenous Teaching Circles and their applicability in an online Distance Education setting. The objectives were twofold (1) to define Aboriginal Teaching Circles as a formal method of instruction for cultural teaching in a post-secondary environment, and (2) to identify what elements of Indigenous Teaching Circles would be possible to translate into an online environment. In order to gain a better understanding of the aforementioned I interviewed seven Indigenous Knowledge Keepers who worked in post-secondary institutions and were keepers of the traditional Indigenous values and beliefs.

Drawing on the stories from the participant Knowledge Keepers I define the various Indigenous Circle pedagogies and their subsequent compositions. This thesis confirms that Indigenous Teaching Circles can be conducted in a computer

mediated environment with specific instructional design strategies. The most compelling finding in this thesis was the exploration of the inclusion of spiritual entities as participants in the Circles. These presences are referred to as unseen “helpers” and each of the participants interviewed commented on their existence in various ways. This concept is particularly important as these helpers were identified as residing in a virtual world therefore making teaching and learning that much more significant if one believes in this phenomenon. There is no doubt from the data collected that cultural teaching requires a shift in planning and implementation and this thesis offers some suggestions for planning and designing culturally accurate teaching and learning activities.

The thesis is presented in an Indigenous storytelling style. The authors’ voice is woven into the body of the manuscript as personal reflective stories and graphic text to serve as a bridging process between the Western world and the Indigenous world to demonstrate alternate views on Indigenous knowledge and the Indigenous research process. Similarly, the personal communication from Indigenous Elders and teachers are included in their entirety and in their original syntax. It is my intent to take the reader on the journey as I have experienced it so you will find that the questions you have and want immediate answers to are not necessarily revealed until the Hollow Bone Hunter learns about the information. I have attempted to tell you about my search in chronological order while organizing the text of the dissertation in the traditional Western data analytic format with creative chapter headings. Chapter one as the Introduction; Chapter Two serves as the Literature review; Chapter Three includes the research



methodology; Chapter Four provides the sample profile; Chapter Five details the results; Chapter Six provides a discussion of the results and Chapter seven illustrates some conclusions.

The answers that came to me throughout the search journey and the process to this enlightenment will all be revealed by the end. You will also notice that I will move between the present tense and past tense depending on where I am in my journey and I have used four different ways to fully illustrate this doctoral research experience. Firstly as graphic text that is essentially my internal dialogue which assists to provide transitions between topics. The graphic text is depicted as a conversation between Cygnus the White Swan and Baapaase the pileated woodpecker; secondly as Elders teachings; thirdly as personal life stories which will appear as italicized single spaced text accompanied by a small icon of a basket, and lastly as academic text.

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## **Chapter One: The Hollow Bone Hunter: a two world story**

### **The Awakening**

Quietly, I spoke into my lavalier mic, “I have started the smudge for you.” At this point my world changed forever. As I witnessed the presenter, over 2000 kilometers away become calmer – enough so to continue her presentation, I was struck with the vast possibilities that had just opened up on my path. I saw students with faces reflected in the soft glow of their computer screens – working in houses with snow banked to the eaves, I saw Elders at their kitchen tables drinking tea, candles burning, laptops open to the image of other Elders – voices rich in original language, laughter and prayer – I began to envisage the possibilities of online Teaching Circles for learners who study at a distance who may be separated from their cultural teachers.

I felt my beautiful culture unfolding in ways that are old and new, visible and invisible. As I begin to write this narrative I am reminded of a particular ceremony, called the Sunrise Ceremony that is sometimes used to start the day. Sunrise ceremonies have afforded me opportunities to reflect on my place and relation to all things. The following story is a glimpse of my reflections as I started out this search journey.



***The story of birth and death sharing the same circle (Seen and unseen: the power in the circle)***

*In the time of the leaves changing the people gathered. It was dark and chilly so people were moving around and talking quietly in groups – waiting. Some of the women had pants on under their skirts and colourful shawls over their shoulders to keep out the cold. You could see their breath in the air. A golden glow began to rise from the horizon across the lake. A new day was about to be born and the people had come to witness the birth. The group got very quiet and everything came to life. The birds started to call out greetings to each other; the wind ran playfully across the water, the trees sighed in unison to feel this warmth one more day. The spiders were happily admiring each other's night work and the people were happy.*

**The Hollow Bone Hunter: A teller of stories**

The Elders say come in with 'hollow bones' – if we do this everything that is connected with the 7 stages of life will be there. The Universe will support this intention as will the ancestors and all our relations. If your intention is aligned, you will receive beyond anything you could have imagined (Mno-Jichaag Bezhig, 2010).

Allow me to introduce myself - I am the Hollow Bone Hunter and I would like to share this world changing event with you because well – I believe it will change the world, or at the very least my destination! Being a Hollow Bone Hunter is significant because I am able to be present and open to whatever comes across my path. The Elders say that we should strive to come to any new learning situation like a Hollow Bone. There is nothing inside us that can impede the learning. What flows through us is not fettered with others' perspectives. That information which is meant to stay with us to live a good life will be received in a way that we can comprehend at this stage of our lives. The knowledge gained will become part of our DNA much like the role of the marrow as it is contained inside

bones. The Hollow Bone metaphor will provide the overarching imagery throughout this work.

### **Importance of Indigenous Storytelling**

The metaphors of story and journeying have temporal and metaphorical meaning and have been valuable instruments in my own learning. Narrative is a fundamental aspect of meaning construction, which is a negotiation activity that starts in early childhood and characterizes the whole of human life (Fusai et al., 2003). Much contemporary research by Indigenous scholars uses narrative and storytelling as the primary method of supporting research objectives and community goals (Weber--Pillwax, 2004). I would suggest that human life is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in and reflected upon storied moments of time and space. Narrative thinking is a key form of experience, and a key way of acting upon the reality. Storytelling gives individuals chances to understand others' narrative in a social context, and to clarify their own thinking. Through retelling or rewriting or creating a story, individuals can enlarge their experience and be involved in mutual interdependence and growth (Crick, 2003). McEwan, and Egan (1995) opine that narrative plays a vital foundational role in teaching and learning and that stories form the intellectual and practical sustenance of oral cultures. Storytelling affords individuals opportunities to make sense of the world, to experience and express themselves within it. I have chosen storied narrative because it captures the richness and variety of meaning as well as attempting to communicate who I am, my search story, how I felt and why I followed a certain

course of action. Each story contains an open-ended element that is an invitation to you to perhaps see yourself in the story.

The ability to include facts, ideas, theories, and dreams from my perspective and in the context of my life was valuable. I have been able to reconstruct my investigative experience through a process of reflection of past, present and future. The text, including the deliberate use of specific verb tenses reflects the specific points in time that may be articulated as something remembered, a current event or a concept that may be explained further along in the thesis. According to Bruner (1990), a story must construct two landscapes simultaneously - the outer landscape of action and the inner one of thought and intention (Bruner, 1990). This narrative will be a chronological approach with reflective inserts which will allow for individual personalities to emerge. I will include direct quotes from the participants and others I encountered throughout the research process. My intent is to steer the readers into cultural places of thought, to their inner journey to experience the intentions and dilemmas of change. The autoethnographic elements coupled with the research-based rationale will guide people into spaces of transformation. For the reasons stated above it is critical to place myself at the core of the study as this would demonstrate a critical component of Indigenous research methodology and reinforce a new intellectual freedom. As you travel with me on this journey you will discover that Indigenous knowledge, learning and discourse have had significant challenges in its emergence as a distinct Indigenous intellectual freedom. The telling of this story about Indigenous knowledge learning and discourse, in this distinct way and as

part of an academic requirement exemplifies my notion of Indigenous Anishinaabe intellectual freedoms. Cajete (1994) says that, “Through story we explain and come to understand ourselves (p. 78).”

### **The Hollow Bone Hunter Emerges**

I was born well over half a century ago to an Algonquin mother with ancestral roots in Kitiganzibi, Quebec and a German/Irish father with roots dating back to the United Empire Loyalists. I was brought up with the “natural or universal laws” living in northern Ontario and spent much of my childhood in the bush with various First Nations relatives. Being raised understanding the natural or universal laws simply means that at a very young age I was taught my place and relationship with other living worlds.

My mother never attended formal education and was the smartest person I knew. She spoke two languages and used them discriminately – I knew by the language she spoke that I needed to pay attention. Orphaned as a little child, she grew up on a small island on Mattagami Lake in northern Ontario with her four siblings and her trapper father. She was both strong and vulnerable throughout her life, providing gentle and harsh lessons depending on the circumstance. She never complained and was always striving to create a home that was more than what she had. She worked as a laborer her whole life to create a place and space that engendered civility, discipline and personal empowerment as an individual and within our family. Her modeling provided me with a sense of wonder, justice and place in my world.

My father was a manual laborer, hunter and good storyteller. I learned my most important life lessons listening to the recounting of moose hunts and fishing expeditions. You see, according to my father hunting was not only about providing food but about the relationship with and search for those animals who were willing to sacrifice their lives so our family could survive.

I remember my Dad going into great detail about the weather on the day the animal presented itself, the sound of the snow as it approached, the way the sun was positioned in the sky, how the wind felt on his face as he quietly sat waiting, the knoll to the left, the groan of the pines, the red cap of my brother positioned at the end of the muskeg...and then the call, that grunting sound that was described in such a way that I was right there with them seeing what they saw, feeling the anticipation. My father would demonstrate how he would put his head down in the swamp brush to muffle the sound or hold his head up high to signal to the moose that he was a willing recipient of the gift of sacrifice. These stories were told to the smell of frying moose liver as we celebrated and honoured this four-legged relative for its sacrifice to our family.



### ***The Story of the Moose***

*One night, a family of moose was sitting in the lodge. As they sat around the fire, a strange thing happened. A pipe came floating in through the door. Sweet-smelling smoke came from the long pipe and it circled the lodge, passing close to each of the Moose People. The old Bull Moose saw the pipe but said nothing, and it passed him by. The cow moose said nothing, and the pipe passed her by also. So it passed by each of the Moose People until it reached the youngest of the young Bull Moose near the door of the lodge.*

*“You have come to me,” he said to the pipe. Then he reached out and took the pipe and started to smoke it.*

*“My son,” the old moose said, you have killed us. This is a pipe from the human beings. They are smoking this pipe now and asking for success in their hunt. Now, tomorrow, they will find us. Now, because you smoked their pipe, they will be able to get us.”*

*“I am not afraid,” said the young Bull Moose, “I can run faster than any of those people. They cannot catch me.” But the old Bull Moose said nothing more.*

*When morning came, the Moose People left their lodge. They went across the land looking for food. But as soon as they reached the edge of the forest, they caught the scent of the hunters. It was the time of year when there is a thin crust of snow and the moose found it hard to move quickly.*

*“These human hunters will catch us,” said the old cow moose. “Their feet are feathered like those of the grouse. They can walk on top of the snow.”*

*Then the Moose people began to run as the hunters followed them. The young Bull Moose who had taken the pipe ran off from the others. He was still sure he could outrun the hunters. But the hunters were on snowshoes, and the young moose’s feet sank into the snow. They followed him until he tired, and then they killed him. After they killed him, they thanked him for smoking their pipe and giving himself to them so they could survive. They treated his body with care, and they soothed his spirit.*

*That night, the young Bull Moose woke up in his lodge among his People. Next to his bed was a present given him by the human hunters. He showed it to all of the others.*

*“You see,” he said. “It was not a bad thing for me to accept the long pipe the human people sent to us. Those hunters treated me with respect. It is right for us to allow the human beings to catch us.”*

*And so it is to this day. Those hunters who show respect to the moose are always the ones who are successful when they hunt. (Caduto and Bruchac, 1991)*

I went to a small community elementary school and later on the local high school, moved to southern Ontario to attend Community College and then University. My formal school years were fraught with upheaval being both exhilarating and oppressive almost on a daily basis. In my elementary years I won spelling bees, and always won the prize for the most books read throughout



grades Kindergarten to grade six. In high school I played sports and joined an Outdoors Club hoping to blend my worlds. The inward struggle over simple things became a daily occurrence that was born in Kindergarten and has been a life-long endurance.

Everything I learned in school such as books, tests, class management techniques, scheduling, – absolutely everything was shaped as a Western monocultural vehicle with nothing created or informed by Indigenous Anishinaabe people. My experience as an Indigenous learner was and is fundamentally different from my Western relatives. Simply – as an Indigenous person I see, hear, feel, taste and smell the world differently. In the Western academic system I continue to have to justify my ways of knowing with long descriptive discourses on epistemology which often end up being the basis from which my, and by extension a universal pan identity is created. I would suggest that the term epistemology, as I learned from the participants in this study and applied to my own learning experiences, somewhat compromises my bi-cultural identity. Meyer (2005) opines that epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge. It is another way of saying “Indigenous ways of knowing.” The following story provides a window into my early learning experiences that helped to shape my bi-cultural identity.



### ***The Story of the Girl with Two-Eyed Seeing***

*Did you know that there are people who can see the world in two different ways when they look around? This is the gift of two eyed seeing.*

*Many winters past a baby was born that had an amazing gift. It was recognized very early on that this little girl knew things that others didn't seem to be aware of. She always knew how people were feeling – and sometimes what they were thinking without anyone saying anything and she knew when to keep quiet and when to speak out. People in her family were both intrigued and dismayed by this and were not really sure how to include her in some things. They loved her so much but as hard as they tried she never really fit into their world. Both of her parents tried to teach her things and she was always happy to learn everything. She was always asking to go hunting with her Father and brothers but was repeatedly denied this request and to this day does not understand why.*

*The little girl was so curious about everything, which must have been exhausting for her parents, so she was often taken to the bush to spend time with an old lady. Little did anyone know that staying with this old lady was this little girl's absolute favourite thing to do - just being together with her was the best thing ever. The little girl and the old lady would cook together, walk in the bush or just sit quiet while the old lady smoked her pipe. The little girl never tired of staying with the old lady but she was always collected and brought back to the town. One day the little girl's brother came running down the street and asked the little girl to come with him to school. The little girl, despite not wanting to leave her mother alone happily agreed to go with her brother. When her brother delivered her to the classroom she was told to sit down on the floor and was inspected from head to toe. They looked at her fingernails and she had to flip her hands around and bend her arms so they could look at her elbows. The teacher took two toothpicks and poked at the little girl's hair – they even looked into her ears! She was asked what she had for breakfast which really stumped the little girl because her family didn't really eat breakfast unless someone was hungry. All the other children were reporting that they had bacon, eggs, toast, orange juice and porridge. The little girl quickly learned that, unlike the exciting discoveries shared with the old lady in the bush it was much easier to just repeat what the others were saying which made the teacher very happy.*

## **N'gadendang and Epistemology**

The Anishinaabe People use the word n'gadendang which translates to 'knowing something intimately'. This term, as I understand it is preferable to the term epistemology keeping in mind that Indigenous language is complex with multiple layers of meaning. There are certain elements of tacit knowledge implied in the term epistemology and the use of the Anishinaabe word n'gadendang also lends support to inclusion of tacit knowledge. N'gadendang, and perhaps

epistemology, is a long-term idea that is at the same time primordial and contemporary, deep-seated and marginalized. It is constant and dynamic and has been changed by time and the influence of Indigenous scholars, academic discourse and changing social and political awareness. Meyer (2005), an Indigenous Hawaiian identifies seven ways that knowledge is experienced, (1) through spirituality as the cultural contexts of knowledge, (2) through physical space or the land that provides for survival, (3) from the experiences of the senses, (4) via the relationship of self through “other”, (5) with ideas of wealth and usefulness, (6) as language and thought, and (7) by way of the body-mind connection.

Indigenous knowledge is not something that is reinvented every generation but has continuity that brings about cultural morality, practice, as well as cultural ways of knowing and being. As I understand it, in Indigenous Anishinaabe culture there is a teaching that reinforces the notion of responsibility and continuity in our interactions with each other and the space and place in which we live. It is said that we must look to the seven generations that have come before us and ahead to the seven generations that are yet to be born to situate our thoughts and actions. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I figuratively stand in the centre of the seven generations of ancestors who have passed on and the seven new generations that figuratively are waiting to be born. These are key images with regard to ways of knowing and being because they draw from cultural beliefs about our place and purpose in the hierarchy of family; sacred or ordinary; our land; animistic or static; and our gods; plural or singular. The Seven Grandfather Teachings, which

are fully described in Chapter Three, is one example of an epistemological point because it helps formulate how we approach knowing. In my experience there are many beliefs about the world that shape how I see myself and how I interact with the majority culture. Hart (2002) lists the following values that are common among First Nations people: “vision/wholeness, spirit-centered, respect/harmony, kindness, honesty/integrity, sharing, strength, bravery/courage, wisdom, and respect/humility” (p. 45). The values that I espouse drive me to action but also contain essential information on how I experience the world. One of the most important elements in understanding values is demonstrated in examining Indigenous worldview.

## **Worldview**

Worldview is the principles or codes we acquire and utilize to construct our reality of the universe and to interpret and make sense of the world around us in a holistic way. Worldview provides people with a sense of location and identity in the cosmos and with a set of values as a cognitive map that generates and guides behavior and lends form, direction and continuity to life (Ermine, 2000).

Anishinaabe people, for example, understand that all living things depend on one another for mutual survival; the existence of one ensures the existence of others. This close relationship of mutual dependence means that human beings are a part of this interdependent community.

Our worldview helps us locate our place and rank in the universe; it influences the sense and understanding of culture at a very deep and profound level since it affects the beliefs, values, attitudes, interpretation of time, and other

aspects of culture. Our worldview affects our belief systems, value orientation, decision-making processes, assumptions, and modes of problem solving.

Worldviews are formed through relationships which members of a culture have with both other human beings and nature. Worldviews are often intuitively understood and provide a foundation for the language, beliefs, practices, values and knowledge of any culture (Martin, 1996). Although it represents itself to be 'value-free', the Western educational system makes inherent assumptions which are rooted in philosophical views of human nature and people's place in the world (Wachtel, 1977).

Battiste (1986) explains worldview as the theoretical assumptions that underpin the knowledge and philosophy of Indigenous people which are drawn from two sources of knowledge: (1) the personal and collective perceptions, thoughts and experiences, and (2) the visions, dreams and messages from the spiritual dimension of the universe (Battiste, 1986).

I have learned to see the world through two-eyed seeing. (Marshall, 2004)  
I had to know when I could relax into my Mother's Indigenous world and when I needed to adapt what I said and did into my Western colonial experiences. I have come to learn how to 'switch the codes' so seamlessly that I don't think anyone really notices or knows what I am doing. As a 'code switcher' I am constantly switching back and forth from Western thought and practice to Indigenous thought and practice; torn between personal cultural values and beliefs and the demands to be successful in the Western tradition. Other Indigenous scholars, like

Willie Ermine from Sturgeon Lake Saskatchewan, have shared their own stories about this two-world experience. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I have titled the following quotation (Ermine, 2000) to reflect the critical relationships I have tried to espouse in my research journey.



*A story of holism and sensibility*

*As I stand at the confluence of the Indigenous and Western worlds, I can readily see two very different forms of knowledge being brought forward to the encounter. The West brings with it a fragmented and objective version of existence as constructed by its own seers of knowledge. The Indigenous Peoples bring with them a knowledge that is grounded in subjective relationships with a spiritual universe. The Western seers would not and could not relinquish their belief that human rationality is the basis of universal truth because this would undermine their power and privileged position in knowledge production. Indigenous Peoples, on the other hand, cannot abandon their sacred trusts to uphold holism and the sensibility for the natural and metaphysical because therein lies the basic human discourses of justice and emancipation from forms of intellectual tyranny in the present. (Ermine, 2000).*

**Hollow Bone Hunter's two voices: "Cygnus" the Singing Swan and  
"Baapaase" the Woodpecker**

Throughout the research experience I discovered that I was in a continuous state of internal dissonance with my own ways of being in the world and how others experience it. The constant difference in approaches needed to be thoroughly contemplated and questioned before I could choose the path that would serve me best. These variant paths emerged as two very distinct voices that assisted me in sorting through the myriad of possible options available in a bi-cultural world. These 'helpers', Cygnus and Baapaase, as first introduced in the abstract, provide the forum for excavating the tacit knowledge that consistently

underpins my decisions. The helpers illustrate the junctures where I needed to pause and consider whether to go forward or to change paths. These two voices, like many inner thoughts, provide an intimate purview into the journey that is not always included in scholarly work. The dialogue is sometimes intellectual and at other times simply musings or attempts to sort out the next step in the journey.

Being honoured with cultural responsibilities related to the White Swan, which is depicted in this dissertation as a Mute Swan, it seemed apropos to identify my Indigenous voice as a Mute Swan (Cygnus) and in my Western experiences I visualized the great pileated Woodpecker (Baapaase) persistently pecking away at an idea to extract a particular meaning. The choice of birds and their metaphorical significance was intentional. I chose these particular birds to personify the empowerment of voice and because for many Indigenous cultures there is a belief that animals and birds have spiritual powers greater than those of humans (Hassrick, 1964; Ridington, 1988; Hallowell, 1992). Also, in this Indigenous cultural territory there are bird clans and instances where individuals carry 'spirit names' that are avian.

The two extremely different voices in this paper are very powerful, funny and frustrating at the same time. Both voices are a constant presence with one or the other leading the various topics under discussion. Generally, as Cygnus, I move in a world of interconnectedness that allows for big abstract thinking. When my teachers share information I assume it is the truth – Baapaase would be happy considering their information the best approximation. As Cygnus, I believe that

everything is interconnected, having cycles and patterns that provide structure and guidance for life. Baapaase has had many experiences being segregated from others in person or in thought. Cygnus thrives and experiences deep learning through storytelling while Baapaase enjoys formal didactic teaching and reading. Cygnus would much rather spend time seeing, hearing and experiencing things, learning from mistakes than be molded to someone else's experience as would be Baapaase's preference. Cygnus spends time building relationships with people and believes that everything has a spirit - even the rocks – she feels pain when a tree is cut down for no good reason. As Cygnus I know and understand my place in all of Creation – I know that everything on Mother Earth will go on without me in it – literally nothing on Earth needs humans to survive and I am quite determined to carry on what I have been taught. As Baapaase, I know that we live in a changing world with less reliance on natural laws and more on industrialized solutions. We need to compete in industry, education and health in order to survive as a People. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I feel compelled to take what is best from each of these two worlds and weave them into a good life.

This story of the Swan illustrates patience, grace and a commitment to live in an ethical space and place. These characteristics parallel the qualities of the Indigenous voice that I as the Hollow Bone Hunter aspire to in my role as the Principal Investigator of this research study.



### *The Story of the Swan*

*Swan was flying around the sky looking for the future. She rested for a moment in the coolness of the pond, looking for a way to find the entry point to*



*the future. This was a moment of confusion for Swan as she knew that she had happened into this Sacred Space by accident. This was her first flight alone and she was a bit concerned about the landscape.*

*As Swan looked high above the stone hills over Wolf Lake she saw the biggest swirling black hole she had ever seen. Dragonfly came flying by and Swan stopped him to ask about the black hole. Dragonfly said, “Swan, this is the doorway to the other planes of imagination. I have been guardian of the illusion for many many moons. If you want to enter there, you would have to ask permission and earn the right.”*

*Swan was not so sure that she wanted to enter the black hole. She asked Dragonfly what was necessary for her to earn entry. Dragonfly replied, “You must be willing to accept whatever the future holds as it is presented, “without trying to change the Creator’s plan.” Swan considered this for a moment and then answered, “I will be happy to abide by Creator’s plan. I won’t fight the currents of the black hole; I will surrender to the flow of the spiral and trust what I am shown.” Dragonfly was very happy with the Swan’s answer and began to spin the magic to break the pond’s illusion. Suddenly, Swan was engulfed by a whirlpool in the center of the pond.*

*Swan reappeared many days later a graceful long-necked singing white Swan. Dragonfly was stunned! “Swan, what happened to you!” he exclaimed. Swan smiled and said, “Dragonfly, I learned to surrender to the power of the Creator and was taken to where the future lives. I saw many wonders up on the stone hills and because of this faith I have been changed. I have learned to accept this state of grace.” (Adapted from Sams and Carson, 1988).*

My Western voice (Baapaase) is illustrated in this story as a warrior; someone who is intent on making the world a better place for his family even though it may cost him his life. It is a story of ingenuity, conviction and persistence. Being an Indigenous learner surviving in a Western educational system often requires disputing various decisions that have been made without meaningful consultation or engagement. In the following story Baapaase is assertive – sometimes aggressive – in reaching his goal. He had to make difficult decisions that were continually being challenged and ultimately stand up and fight for what he believed would help his People. These same traits of ingenuity,

conviction and persistence have been integral to this study. I would suggest that these same traits can be used to describe the current and ongoing continuity and change which underpins the accomplishments and recognition of Indigenous research in contemporary Western academic institutions today.



### ***The Story of Manabozho and the Woodpecker***

*Manabozho lived with his grandmother, Nokomis, in their lodge near the big water. As Manabozho grew older, his grandmother taught him many things. One day she told him about Megissogwon, the Spirit of Fever.*

*“Megissogwon is very strong,” she told him. “He is the one who killed your grandfather.” When Manabozho learned about Megissogwon he decided that he should destroy him. “Things will be hard for the people to come,” Manabozho said. “I will go and kill this monster.”*

*Nokomis warned her grandson that it would not be easy to do. The way to Megissogwon’s island was a dangerous one. It was guarded by two great serpents that waited on either side and breathed fire on anyone who tried to pass through. If one got past them, the waters of the lake turned into black mud and pitch that would stop the passage of any canoe. However, Manabozho was determined.*

*“Grandmother,” he said, “I must go and fight Megissogwon.”*

*Then Manabozho fasted and prayed for four days. He loaded his birch bark canoe with many arrows. He took with him a bag made from the bladder of the sturgeon which was filled with fish oil. He spoke a single word to his canoe and it shot forward across the water. It went so swiftly that he was soon to the place where the lake narrowed and the two great snakes waited on either side.*

*“Manabozho,” the great snakes said, “if you pass between us we shall destroy you with our fire.” “That is true,” Manabozho said. “I can see that your power is stronger than mine. But what about that other one there behind you?”*

*The two great serpents turned their heads to look behind them. As soon as they did so Manabozho spoke another word to his canoe and it shot between the two great serpents. He lifted his bow and fired his flint-tipped arrows, killing both of the serpents. Then he went on his way.*

*Now he came to the place where the waters turned into black mud and pitch. He took out the fish bladder and poured the slippery fish oil all over the sides of his canoe. Then he spoke another word and his canoe shot forward, sliding through the mud and pitch.*

*At last Manabozho came to the island of Megissogwon. Only a single tree sat on the island, for Megissogwon hated the birds and had destroyed all the other trees to keep them away. On that tree there was a single branch and on it sat Woodpecker.*

*“My friend,” Manabozho said to Woodpecker, “I am glad to see you. I have come to destroy that one who hates us.” Then Manabozho called out in a loud voice as speaking to many men, “My warriors,” he said, “surround this island, I shall fight the monster first, but be ready to attack when I call for help.”*

*Megissogwon heard Manabozho’s voice and came running to attack him. He was taller than any man and his face and hands were painted black. His hair was bound up tightly in a knot on top of his head. His body was covered with wampum painted in bright stripes. He roared as he came and his voice was so loud that it shook the ground.*

*“You are the one who killed my grandfather,” Manabozho shouted. “My men and I will destroy you.”*

*Then they began to fight. Manabozho shot his arrows at Megissogwon. The monster had no weapons, but his breath was colder than winter ice and he tried to grasp Manabozho with his black hands. Each time he came close, though, Manabozho would shout out as if to other warriors. “Now attack him from behind.”*

*Whenever Manabozho shouted, Megissogwon would turn to look. Thus Manabozho would escape his grasp and shoot another arrow at the monster. But Megissogwon’s armor of wampum was so strong that the arrows just bounced off.*

*So they fought all through the day. Now the sun was about to set and Manabozho had only three arrows left. Then Woodpecker called down to Manabozho from the place where he sat on that one last tree.*

*“Shoot at the top of his head.” Woodpecker called, “his power is there, wrapped up in the knot of his hair.” Megissogwon was reaching for Manabozho with his huge black hands. His breath was cold on Manabozho’s face. Manabozho took careful aim and shot. His arrow grazed the giant’s hair and Megissogwon staggered. “Shoot again, shoot again!” Woodpecker called.*

*Manabozho shot his second arrow. It struck Megissogwon’s topknot and the giant fell to his knees.*

*“Shoot again, shoot again!” Woodpecker cried. Manabozho aimed at the centre of the giant’s knot of hair. His arrow flew straight to its mark and Megissogwon fell dead.*

*Manabozho called Woodpecker to him. "My friend," he said, "this victory is also yours."*

*Then he took some of the giant's blood and placed it on woodpecker's crest, making its head red. To this day, Woodpecker has a red head, reminding everyone of how it helped Manabozho defeat the Spirit of the Fever, reminding the people to always respect the bird. (Caduto & Bruchac, 1991)*

In today's world I am a committed member of the Indigenous community, working in health, education and advocacy. I hold academic appointments at two Universities, in two different faculties and am called on to speak locally, regionally, nationally and internationally by both Indigenous communities and Western colleagues. It is for the reasons mentioned above that I have chosen to write this dissertation as a storied narrative approach as the Hollow Bone Hunter who has experienced life through two views and has had to battle with bi-cultural decision making throughout life.

The two world concept is not only about the duality of the two worlds I personally inhabit, but as a concept will be threaded throughout this dissertation in various ways as articulated by the study participants. They include the seen and unseen aspects inherent in Teaching Circles; two lived discourses: academic and storied; sacred space and cyberspace; Western research and Indigenous research methods; emic and etic inclusion; linear and circular teaching methods; and finally research as a social construct and research as theoretical. My goal is to provide the reader with a glimpse into the life of an Indigenous scholar with opportunities to move back and forth between the two views in the hopes of providing you with a realistic experience of bi-cultural Indigenous research

reality. Throughout this dissertation, where reflection is fitting, you will encounter essentials of critical research and be privy to a storied narrative which will appear as italicized subtext and identified by an icon containing a red basket.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The actual event that awakened my interest in Indigenous Teaching Circles, and their possible translatability to an online environment, occurred accidentally during a two-site videoconference between Ontario and Alberta. The feelings and perceptions that this event aroused were narrated in the introduction section titled, “The Awakening.” During this two-site video conference a ceremonial Circle was being conducted, acknowledging the teacher from Alberta, who had provided a curriculum resource for use in our local community. Some preliminary preparation with the Elders enabled them to conduct this ceremony using the videoconference technology. This preparation mainly focused on production and camera direction, voice levels and other minor technical details. It was quickly revealed that, (a) the Elders seemed open to using the technology, and (b) elements of Aboriginal pedagogy were used effectively – specifically prayer and smudging. I felt immediately that this would be a worthy search for possible enhanced educational delivery to Indigenous communities. I wanted answers and I made a decision to embark on this journey by enrolling in Doctoral studies. I knew this would afford me opportunities to visit with Elder Knowledge Keepers, to travel to Indigenous communities, to engage in reflection that would ultimately result in enormous learning. Once I was accepted into Doctoral studies

I consulted with some Elder teachers to affirm that (a) I was worthy of looking for the answers and embarking on this journey, and (b) that the results of this research would be helpful and possibly result in positive changes to Indigenous education. I also reviewed the available literature which helped develop the theoretical framework and shape the guiding processes necessary to carry out this study.

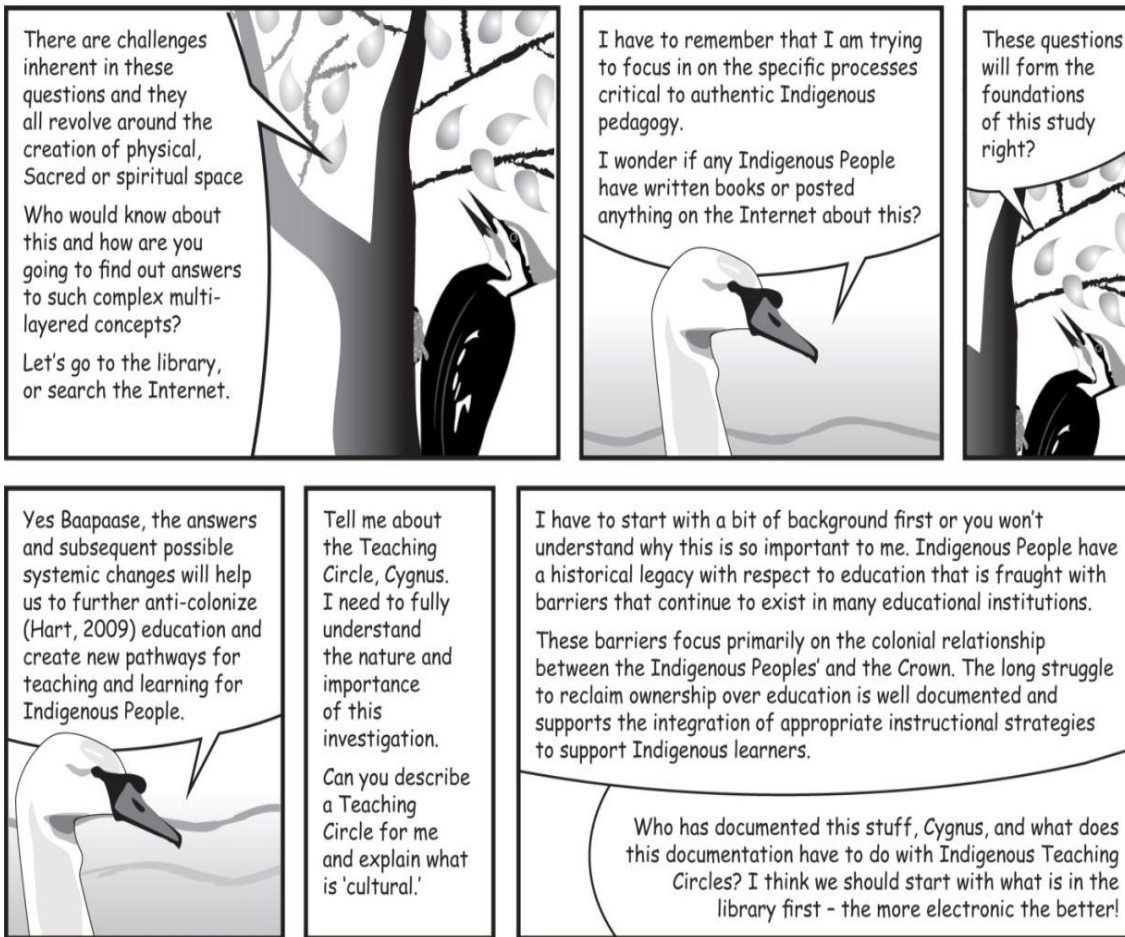
### **Maa ngii bi-nda-gkendaas “I am here to get an education”**

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to study Indigenous Teaching Circles as a means of addressing the lack of culturally appropriate teaching methods for Indigenous People, and (2) to investigate the translatability of the Teaching Circle method to an online environment. In order for readers to appreciate the purpose of my study, it is necessary for me to detail a number of questions that grounded my thinking, particularly in relation to the current changing landscape of post secondary education. I wondered whether it would be possible to implement the Teaching Circle as a method of instruction. I pondered on the Teaching Circle process itself as I currently understand it and wondered if it would work as seamlessly in an online environment as in face-to-face practice settings? I wondered if there were any elements of the Circle model that I understood that would be more conducive to use in an online environment, and whether the Circle pedagogy could be utilized in a way that would maintain the rigour and honour the values, beliefs and traditions of the Indigenous people with whom I live.

## **Hollow Bone Hunter's internal dialogue**

As a bi-cultural storyteller the Hollow Bone Hunter's thinking is almost always in a constant state of fluctuation. Cygnus and Baapaase, as the chosen helpers are in continuous discussion to help her make meaning of her experiences. Baapaase, the colonial voice is often the challenger and provokes further action or thinking, while Cygnus; the Indigenous voice is more cautious and will often assume the position of planner and protector. Each action or engagement throughout this study required an inner conversation that often took considerable time to resolve and often resulted in exhaustion. Minogizhgokwe shares a similar experience. She states: "Negotiating the landscape of my western education was time consuming and required extra effort to explain, articulate and present my worldview, history, and experiences." (Absolon, 2009 p.176). The following graphic text illustrates a sample script of this internal dialogue.

Each graphic text is situated within the dissertation to serve either as a transition between sections, or to provide the reader with provocative statements that are included as an illustration of personal internal dialogue. Statements made by either Cygnus or Baapaase may not be particularly germane to this study but included to further illustrate the dialectic resonance throughout the research process.



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## The road to education

Alfred (1999) asserts the importance of education to Aboriginal peoples, stating that the only real power is knowledge. He believes that “education is the way to knowledge, the weapon our warriors need for the twenty-first century” (p. 133). Kirkness & Barnhardt (2001), Hampton & Roy (2002), and Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) all agree, stating that education is the key to a better future. You will read below that Post-secondary education is important to First Nations peoples, and I believe that it is the responsibility of each post-secondary institution to create an environment where First Nations peoples can feel



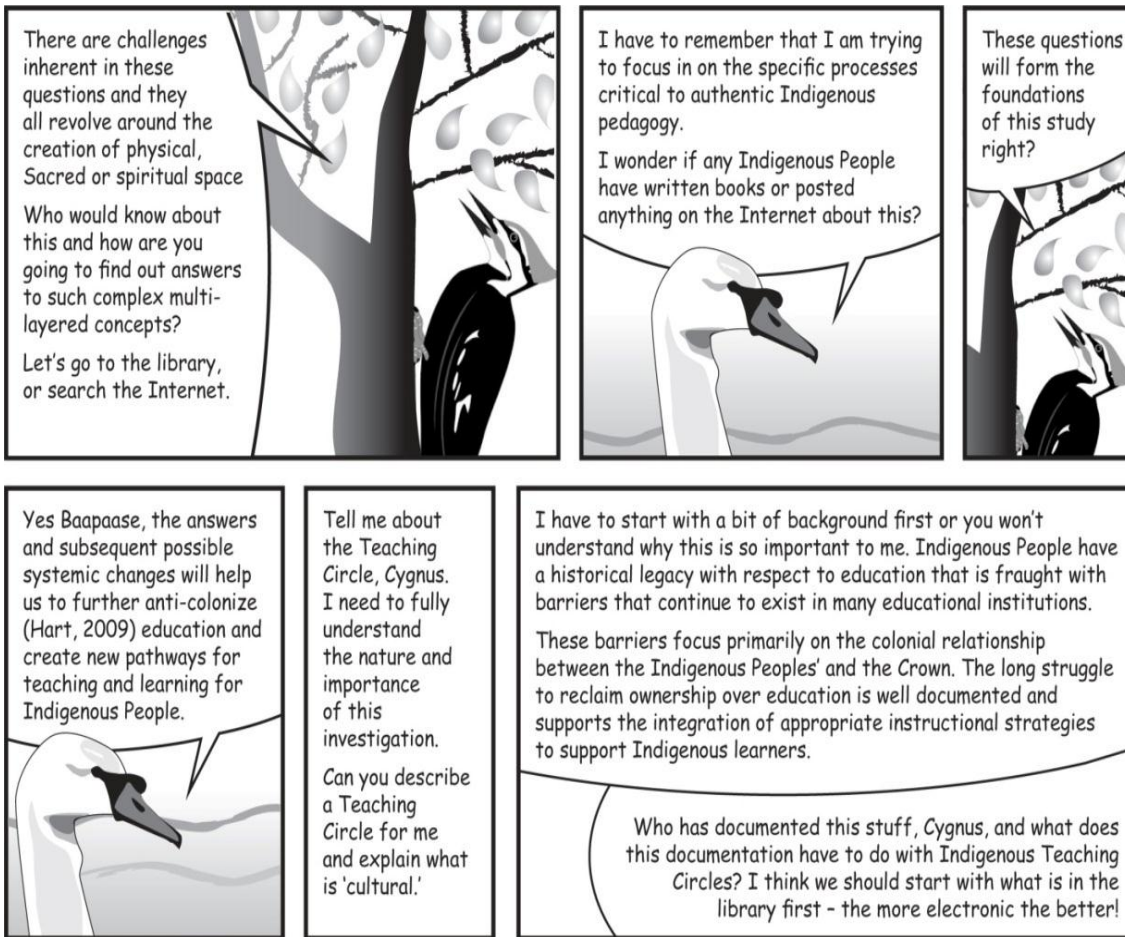
welcome, engage with culturally intelligent curriculum, and succeed in their educational pursuits.

On December 21, 1972, The General Assembly of the National Indian Brotherhood presented a paper entitled: Indian Control of Indian Education to the Federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. In a letter to the President of the National Indian Brotherhood, dated February 2, 1973, the Minister gave official recognition to Indian Control of Indian Education, approving its proposals and committing the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to implementing them. In 1996 the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) reaffirmed the importance of implementing the 1972 policy and began Chapter 5 with the following: Control over the education of their children has been a pressing priority of Aboriginal peoples for decades....The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next. The notion of Cultural DNA can be compared to genomic DNA in that there is a perpetual replication. In the context of cultural knowledge ways of being and knowing are reproduced with each generation. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people (RCAP, vol. 3, Chapter 5, Section 3.2) .

The report goes on to state that “the federal government has generally insisted that schools conform to provincial regulations with respect to curriculum,

school year and so on, thereby restricting schools' ability to include innovative, culture-based curriculum" (RCAP, 1996). Ten years after the completion of the RCAP report, the Assembly of First Nations prepared a report card designed to assess progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. The Report Card stated that "based on our assessment, Canada (and by default, Canadians) has failed in terms of its action to date" (Assembly of First Nations, 2006, p. 2). In 2006, the Ontario Provincial government had commissioned a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Secondary School Education Policy framework that outlined promising practices for Aboriginal students enrolled in the secondary school system. This framework was meant to complement the current provincial curriculum with Aboriginal history, theory and practice threaded throughout the courses of study.

Stonechild says that the Assembly of First Nations' 1988 report *Tradition and Education: Toward a Vision of Our Future*, "espouses a new vision of the empowerment potential of First Nations education" (p. 97). In his conclusion, Stonechild states: "being allowed to pursue [post secondary education] will mean that future generations of Aboriginal peoples will have a unique ability to participate in post-secondary education, but will be able to acquire the tools that can one day enable them to contribute at the highest levels to the country they know as their homeland" (p. 138).



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## The modern way

Ovid Mercredi said that “we would not be focused on access programs for Aboriginal students if the Crown would have honoured their agreement to support Aboriginal control of education. In fact, it has taken over 130 years for schools to be built on the reserves”. He also encouraged the Aboriginal educators to focus their efforts on preparing the next generation of children for a different society - for the “modern” way. He stated that Western education didn’t “have it right yet”. He opined that having a school building on reserve did not mean control of curriculum – which is still designed by the Province (personal communication, August 2010).

As the Hollow Bone Hunter I have learned that I am correct in my assumptions regarding the state of change with regard to Indigenous education. In my searching through the literature I have learned that for Indigenous People, one of the most meaningful and powerful ways of organizing knowledge is the Indigenous Teaching Circle (Graveline, 1998). It can provide a base for instructional design that is solid and grounded in the beliefs, values, and way of life of Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous Teaching Circle is distinctly different from the educational process that has historically been utilized with Indigenous people in Mainstream Western settings, where often in my experience the learner is passive in the process: an unquestioning receptacle. The Western educational approaches are viewed as an extension of the colonial process experienced by Indigenous People. By contrast, the Circle is an experience of anti or decolonization (Hart, 1997). Anti-colonialism “is understood as the political struggle of colonized peoples against the specific and existing ideology and practice of colonialism.” (Ashcroft et al. 1995) Smith defines anti-colonialism as the proactive position of resistance that Indigenous people have adopted to challenge the colonial framework (Smith, 1999).

In contrast to the Western process and inherent in the Circle process is the understanding that people need to relate to each other while reflecting on a particular issue, considering in an open way whatever is said by others (Graveline, 1998). The Circle embodies the four aspects of Creation; the knowledge shared in the Circle comes not just from the logical mind but also from the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of reality (Hart, 1997). Clearly I

was starting to understand the huge need for specific Indigenous Anishinaabe cultural pedagogy and the need for Western education to include these cultural teaching methods as a fully integrated system within their educational structure.

After reading about the Circle process, I knew that I need to go to my own community to learn more. My first stop was a visit to a Cree Elder, respected for his long standing contributions to education in Western Canada. I asked him to explain the purpose and meaning of the circle. He offered me a glimpse of the Circle process and the ways it has been utilized by the People historically.



#### ***The story of convening a process***

*“We have always used a circle; we work towards consensus. Everyone comes with things to say or do, and leaves with ideas or tools, to go back and work on their consensus. We are reactive to things that come at us, as we struggle to survive. We convene to figure things out and decide what to do. Everyone has to be able to speak; some are more assertive, others are more passive, but all need the opportunity to speak. We are convening a process; we must honour the process and go from there. The Circle is a process of equality. In the Circle we are aiming towards meeting our objectives. That’s how we always did things before the Indian Act and elections” (D. Musqua, personal communication, 1995)*

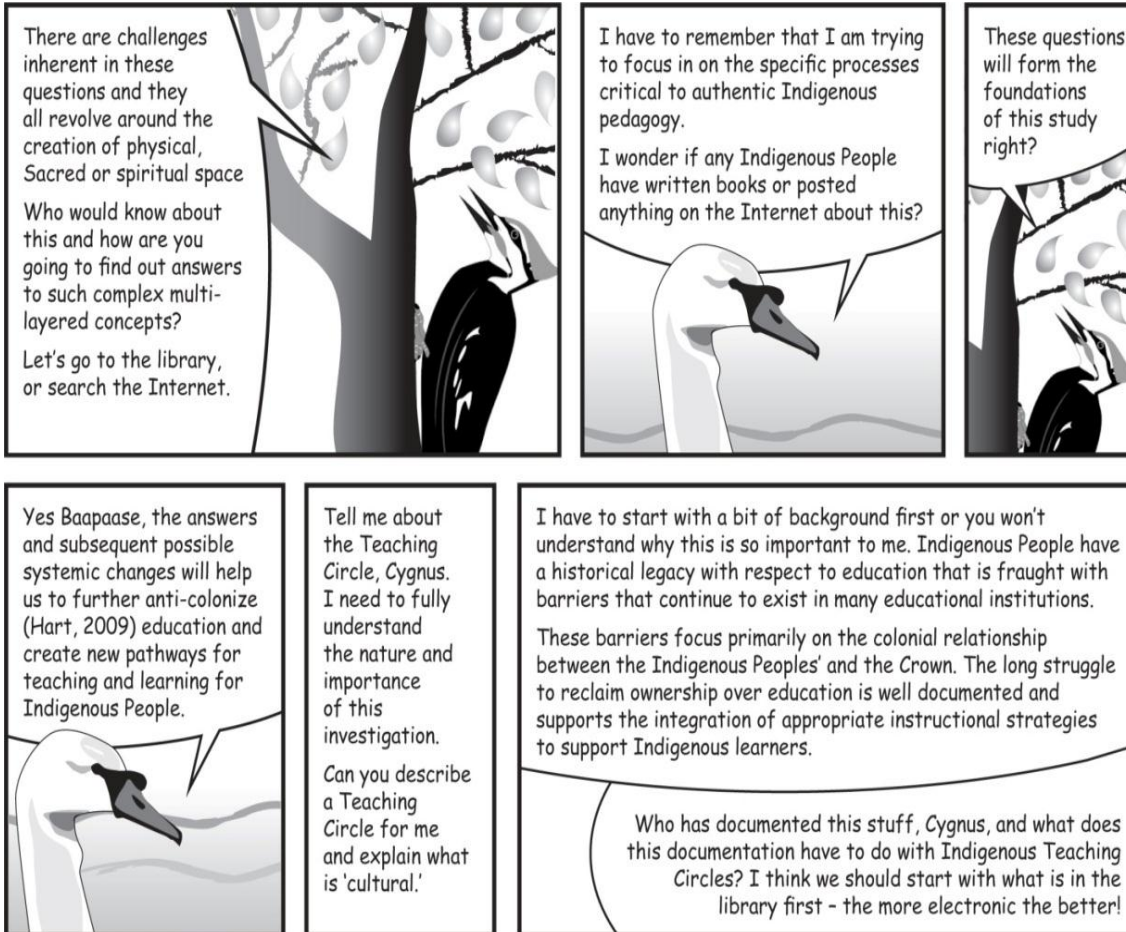
Utilization of the Circle process provides a way for educators to work, at the same time providing a methodology which is holistic in its development and implementation. I know from my own experience, along with Absolon (1993), Graveline (1998), and Hart (2009), that the Circle itself allows for several things to happen: firstly, everyone in the Circle is considered equal, with no one person being considered more important than another. Secondly, the educator is part of the Circle, thereby equalizing the relationship between the educator and the

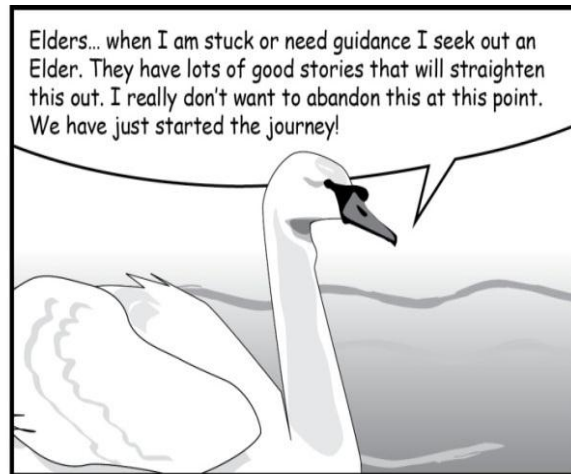
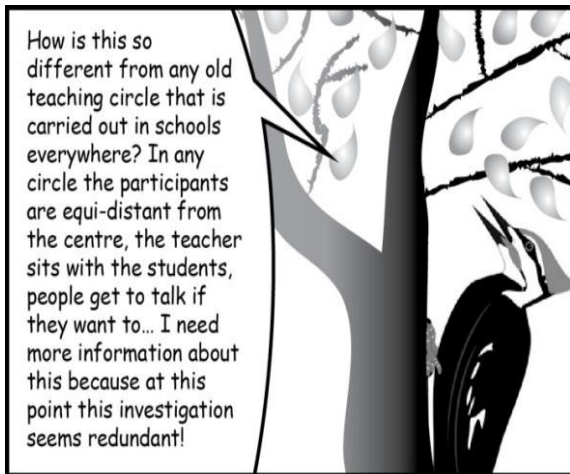
participants. Thirdly, a different atmosphere is created in the conversation, by which I mean everyone has time to think, and listen; and fourthly, there is a shift from “talking heads” or speaking from the logical mind, to focusing on emotions and spirit. Use of the Circle process exemplifies the message consistently conveyed by Elders that we need to connect logical mind with emotion and spirit (B. Cardinal, personal communication, August 28, 2009; and J. Lavalee, personal communication, October 5, 2009). These tenets engender a strong tendency to “refocus” the discussion to what is important. When “head and heart” are combined, something stronger than either one is created.

If education is to be beneficial to the community - school community, then the community must be active participants in the process, which includes having their voices heard and validated (Battiste, 1995). Graveline (1998) says “that people sitting in the circle collectively are able to provide a 360-degree perspective with the centre being the point of reference. The centre of the Circle is viewed as being both empty and full of everything that each participant brings to the discussion. Everyone is equi-distant from the middle so there is no sense of hierarchy (p. 170).”

Many years ago I was given the following story in relation to another research study that I was involved in. The research team was working to establish our ethical guidelines to conduct this study within a number of Indigenous communities and this was one of the stories that were shared with us as we deliberated. As I reflected on a place to start this study this story once again came

to mind. It provided the scaffolding we needed to conduct our past study and is providing an essential foundation in this study. It succinctly describes the overall process and general intention of the Circle.





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### The Story of the Circle

*Among our people we have a way to describe the role of a leader or leadership. We say that they are the “Ogimah”. In looking at the essence of the word, it means to carry the “spirit and voice”. That description describes the role and responsibility of the designated person. Variations may occur with regard to spelling and pronunciations in dialects.*

*The person who is given this title carries the sacred spirit, trust and intent of their people. It becomes obvious that the individual in the role must be of esteemed superior character. The manner through which this is done is through the process of the Circle and/or meeting.*

*Upon entering the Circle individuals remove their titles and carry with them only their “Sense of Being”. Any baggage of any nature whether physical, emotional or other is left outside. The understanding is, they bring into the gathering an open mind and their humanness. The intent of the practice is to get rid of anything that may cloud issues, cause disruptions and lead meetings into sidetracks and breakdown. It is made clear that the purpose is to deal only with the issue at hand.*

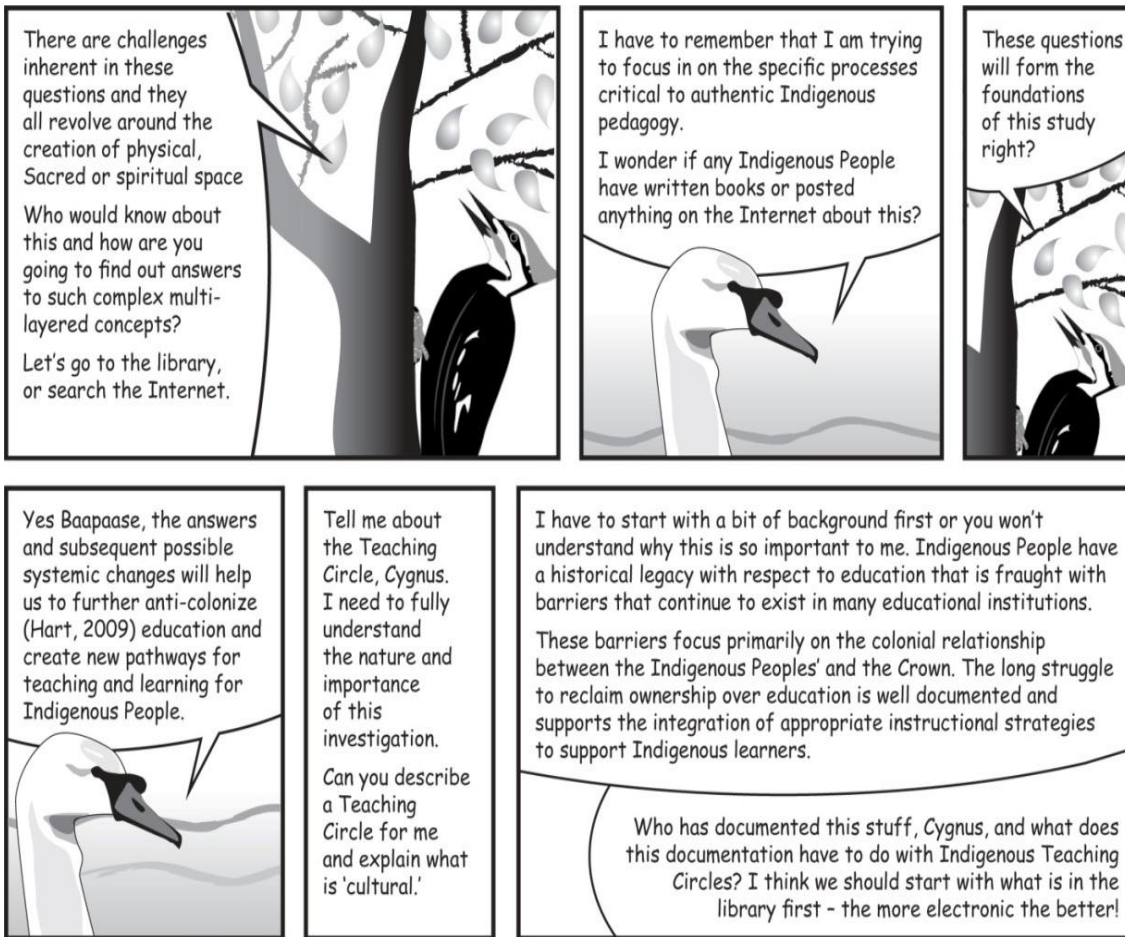
*When a Circle is opened the person with an issue or problem may be given the opportunity to begin the discussion. Otherwise a person approached, possibly*



*an Elder may begin the process. Each person present is given the opportunity and time to present their thoughts and argument. The session may continue for a lengthy time. Discussion may proceed to the right or left and may be aided by the person speaking, holding onto a sacred feather or similar aid. There is an implied understanding that there will be no heckling or disruption of the person that is talking. Debate is permitted to continue until such time as a sense of “truth” emerges. This process of enabling the “truth” to emerge is described as “Debweh”. Discussions may also lead to plans of actions. It is the emergence of the truth, “Debweh” that is assigned to the “Ogimah” to carry. The person designated as “Ogimah” puts aside their personal thought, feeling and choice. The understanding is they are carrying the “Debweh” or truth. This truth represents the “will” and “earth” of their people. Personal interest is put aside. Hence, voice, heart, spirit, truth and people are linked. (A. Petahtegoose, personal communication, November 21, 1996)*

## The Circle





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In pursuit of significant differences I visited other Elders who provided some additional information about Circle conductors, Sacred items and timing. There are specific recognitions, and responsibilities, of the leader or conductor in Indigenous Teaching Circles (Hart 1999). One of my teaching Elders says that, “this person is usually the educator, and therefore has a critical role to play in what happens to the information that is shared.” (H. Nadjiwon, personal communication, September, 2009). Sometimes an invocation or prayer is offered to begin the session, or a burning of certain herbs to provide further focus

to the participants. The burning of herbs or medicines is a common practice and is referred to as smudging.

As an active participant in Circles I know that in this territory, the conductor may include personal narrative or storytelling, a smudge using sage, cedar, sweet grass or tobacco, an invocation, prayer or affirmations at the beginning and ending of the teaching session. The Circle leader begins by presenting the topic of discussion and offering an object such as a stone or a feather to the person on his/her left. For the Indigenous People in this territory, talking proceeds around the Circle in a clock-wise direction, with the individual holding the object as the only speaker. As mentioned earlier by Elder Petahtegoose, talking may also proceed in a counter-clockwise direction. This would depend on the Indigenous origin of the conductor. Other participants in the Circle are expected to be active listeners (Hart, 2005) and are not expected to interrupt the person speaking by asking questions or adding to the discussion until their turn, at which time they can speak as long as they choose (M.Saulis, personal communication, August, 1995).

Generally, there is never a set time limit to a Teaching Circle and it will end when the leader is satisfied that the discussion has exhausted the topic and everyone has had the opportunity to speak. Central to the Circle environment that is clearly evident in face-to-face learning is the spiritual energy of the Circle. Many Indigenous educator colleagues remark on the inclusion of spirit in Circles as being that which makes our teaching and learning unique and powerful. I

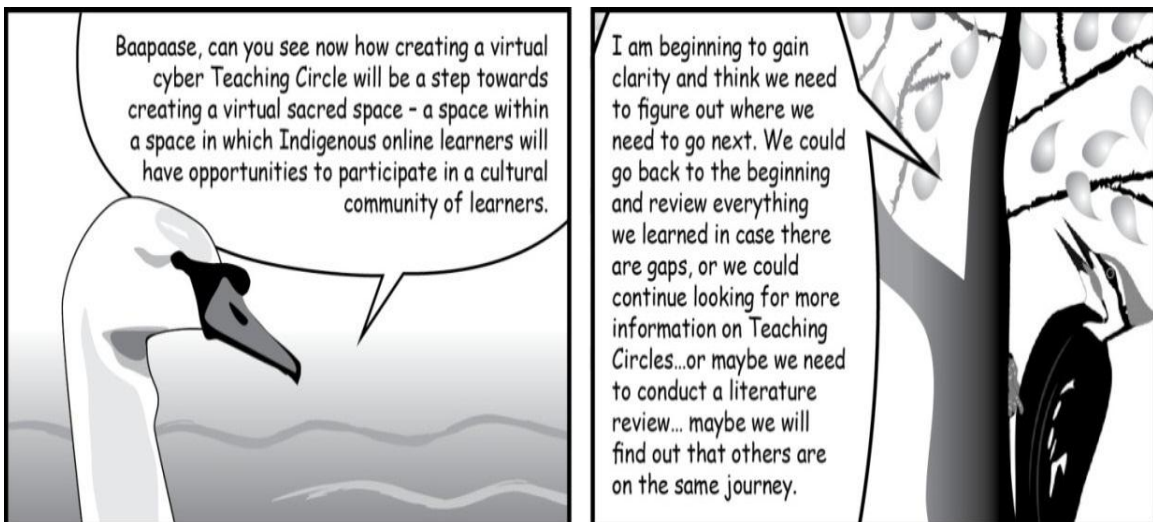
believe that this spiritual energy or spiritual essence is one of the critical components in the creation of a Sacred space. The concept of Sacred space is important to an understanding of Indigenous world views, and in this study will be one of the critical elements to understanding the production and transmission of traditional knowledge – especially when using electronic technology. The term Sacred space will be used in this investigation to recognize the relationship between the participant, in relation to all of Creation, i.e. kinship and familial relationships as well as correlation with the plant and animal life, and the Ancestors.

Further recognition and related use of Sacred space is captured by The Institute for Aboriginal Peoples Health, a member of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. In Section II in the Ethical Principles of Aboriginal Peoples Health Research it states that the notion of sacred space is “key to understanding accountability in the production and transmission of traditional knowledge.” They go on to qualify that the term sacred space “has been widely discussed and debated by Aboriginal people, scholars, policy-makers and others throughout the world for decades and there is no single agreed definition”(May, 2007). These guidelines articulate Sacred space, as “an interconnectedness founded on purity, clarity, peace, generosity and responsibility between the recognized spiritual entity, the Land and the Ancestors” (May, 2007). May’s description of Sacred Space provides the basis from which I proceeded with my search. It resonates with what I have experienced as a Circle participant, a learner and an educator. It

encompasses the connected world of the seen and unseen realms and anchors the notion in space and place – essentially two worlds.

### Hollow Bone Hunter takes stock

In Chapter One, I introduced myself as the storyteller – the purveyor of my research story. I offered some personal detail to begin building a relationship with you so you can have a deeper experience as we journey along together. The purpose, importance and structure of my journey were described along with some specific features, significance and complexities of my bi-cultural worldview. I outlined some facets of Indigenous Teaching Circles and concluded with my reflections on how to proceed. In the next leg of my journey, Chapter Two, I will metaphorically pack my red basket and head out to find out what others know and have experienced in Sacred space and Cyber worlds. I will hunt through the written word and continue visiting with the Elders so that, when the time comes, I will have a better understanding of what questions I need to ask on this quest.



## **Chapter Two – Packing the Red Willow Basket: Gathering the Knowledge**

The story of my journey so far has provided some information about me and my search for Sacred Space in Cyberspace and its importance to education pedagogy. In this chapter, I begin my search for what others know about technology and Sacred Space and Cyberspace. I will review whether and/or how people are using computers and visit with others to gain further perspective on their educational experiences. I use a container metaphor, a red willow basket, to depict the collection of knowledge gained and retained as part of the preparation for this investigation. Red willow is a common shrub in northern Ontario that is often used both in basketry and as a healing plant.

This review addresses eight themes which encompass the institutional environment and its constructs for learning. The themes are a distillation of the information gathered from other scholarly literature and enhanced with information provided by the participants in this study. The first theme mainly focuses on the institutional environment and the curriculum. The second explores identity and resilience. The third reviews the notion of deficit thinking, while the fourth discusses spirituality. The fifth theme will highlight isolation and access to technology. The sixth theme discusses an important element of the changing demographics and the final theme provides a synopsis of cultural reproduction.

Throughout the research journey I was constantly in touch with other Indigenous scholars who had already completed their doctorates. The lack of

specific literature on Indigenous Teaching pedagogies was discouraging and required creative critical thinking and dialogue with other educators and learners. I was provided with many uplifting words of encouragement to continue to pursue the information that I needed to answer my questions. This story attempts to describe the plethora of ways the Hollow Bone Hunter was supported along the sometimes overwhelming and confusing journey.



### ***The story of support***

*It was the second moon of winter when everyone was in their houses trying to keep warm and occupied themselves by sharing stories. The young Grandmother was feeling very discouraged and sad. She had to make a choice about a very important matter and had been struggling with what to do since the leaves returned to the Earth. She tried all of the things that she had learned over her many years and was still not any further ahead. One bright, clear, cold day she looked out across the frozen lake and saw for the first time how the snow sat on the trees. Even the skinniest little branches at the very top held a few flakes. The boughs that were drooping almost to the ground still held the snow and the woman knew she had found her answer. She offered her gratitude to the snow and trees for helping her find her answer.*

In my search for relevant literature I learned that the post-secondary educational experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada is only beginning to gain the attention of scholars. The goal of this study is to define the Indigenous Teaching Circle as a part of Indigenous pedagogy, specifically as it is carried out in the geographical territory of the People of the Three Fires Confederacy. Another goal is to discern whether the Circle, normally carried out as a traditional face-to-face method, can be replicated as an online teaching method. To date, I have not found any literature that specifically articulates the experience of post secondary Indigenous learners and the use of Aboriginal teaching Circles in an

online environment. There is, however, much related literature that provides the basis from which to create a foundation to understand how the notion of Teaching Circles online can be realized.

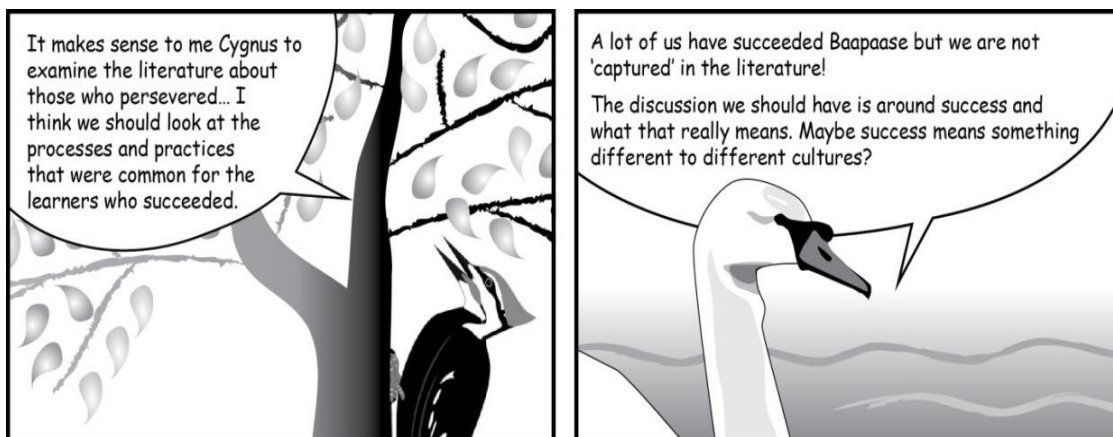
This research will build upon the work of a number of scholars working in areas related to Aboriginal pedagogy and the decolonization of educational practices. Ultimately, understanding this traditional Indigenous teaching approach and its possible effectiveness in an online learning environment will afford Indigenous educators an equal voice within mainstream Western educational practice, where historically, their expertise has not been valued in the education system (Graveline, 1988; Hart, 1997; Battiste, 2002). The following section will provide an overview of various factors, as identified earlier, which will illustrate the indicators of Indigenous educational implementation.

### **Factors of the Institutional Environment**

The current curriculum in contemporary Canadian schools is still based on Western ideologies and practice which only serve to perpetuate an educational experience that reinforces the divide and between Indigenous thought and practice and Western systems of learning (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Bazylak, 2002; Graveline, 1998; Bouvier and Karlenzig, 2006; Henderson-A, 2000; Henderson-B, 2000; Swartz and Ball, 2001). In order to create transformational change this current way of educating must change. (Bazylak, 2002; Swartz & Ball, 2001; Bell, 2004; Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003; Lundberg, 2007; White Shield, 2004;) have identified that learning outcomes may improve if the current practices



change to include content and context that aligns with the learners cultural heritage. White Shield (2004) has identified that “...freedom to express our Indigenous identity fully in our educational experience is paramount...” (p. 123). Obvious institutional commitment and responsibility; coupled with a healthy understanding of diversity will have a positive affect with respect to learner retention and success (Lundberg, 2007).



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### **Identity and Resilience**

As an Indigenous learner I came to understand that my cultural identity provided a measure of strength and resilience throughout my formal Western education. As mentioned in my personal stories these experiences were not always positive nor did they engender a healthy self esteem. Alfred, 1999; Antone, 2001; Grande, 2004; Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Huffman, 2001; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; McKenna, 2003; Shields,

2005) have identified cultural capital some of the common elements that are inherent in Indigenous learners and their success in mainstream education. The ability and confidence to move between the Indigenous world and the Western world was recognized as criteria for success. McKenna (2003) and Grande (2004) both identify this phenomenon as “border crossing”. As a” border crosser” I move through my life with the constant pressure of difference and uncertainty regarding the norms, values and beliefs of the different interactions. I have often been reminded by the Elders Knowledge Keepers to always remember who I am. Acknowledging both Indigenous and Western ideologies has served to strengthen each interaction.

In the post-secondary environment, Grande (2004) challenges whether learners feel inadequate as their worldview and ways of knowing are not valued or acknowledged. In my own experience, as mentioned in my introduction, I refer to this phenomenon as “switching the codes”, by which I mean switching back and forth between Western thought and practice and Indigenous thought and practice; torn between personal cultural values and beliefs and the demands to be successful in the Western tradition. In addition, this experience of continuous code switching becomes an exhausting experience in that all lived experience is essentially reflected through a double lens. I will use storytelling to illustrate this phenomenon. Storytelling is used as a primary teaching method for Indigenous People. The teller of the story uses their life experiences to illustrate any given point or lesson. The meaning is not explicit as it is up to the listener to relate to the story depending on their own learning needs at the time. The responsibility of

the storyteller is to share the story as it relates to him/herself. It may take some time for the listener to relate or understand how the story applies to their learning. This requires deep personal reflection and a greater sense of personal self-knowledge to link the story to what is needed in life. In actuality the only task of the Indigenous learner in storytelling venues utilizing an 'Indigenous code of conduct' is to listen. In Western approaches the story is fully explained with all the possible meanings or options available to connect learning. The requirement to make sense of the material is immediate and is often accompanied by a request to interpret the meaning of the story at the end. It is a requisite condition in my academic institutional world to be able to contribute to the discussion immediately and I feel that I would be viewed differently – maybe not as intelligent if I do not speak up. In my Indigenous learning world the stories are told with no expectation to discuss meanings. They are given as a means to personally decide individual significance. In Indigenous learning each teaching or story will mean something different to each listener depending on where they are in their life. The stories are taken away to relish and reflect on for many years. Connecting what was heard and making a decision to accept what was said is not contingent on any further discussion. It is honourable to return to the story over and over to discover how the story relates at any given point in one's life.

Furthermore, one Indigenous colleague (Absolon, 2009) also reported feelings of disconnection and helplessness in the mainstream educational experience. She stated that a transformation happens when a critical mass of scholars are able to reclaim the practices that were once our accepted

epistemologies. In an attempt to make sense of this ambiguity and situate themselves from an anti-colonial perspective, they are using the process of critically reflecting and documenting personal internalized oppression (Absolon 2009; Battiste, 2002; Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2005; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Rice, 2005; Yellow Bird & Wilson, 2006). The storytelling approach, with Cygnus and Baapaase, used in the writing of this dissertation is an example of an anti-colonial approach which in part mitigates internalized oppression and serves to liberate Indigenous ways of learning.

Huffman (2001) opines that cultural traditionalism is related to learner success. She suggests that learners who strongly identify with their cultural roots are less likely to become assimilated into the colonial system. She identifies transculturation as the “ability to effectively engage the cultural setting of non-Indians without assimilation (p. 29)”. She suggests that, “transcultured students generally had successful academic experiences... and they displayed the unique ability to interact within and between cultures as demanded by the situation (p. 17).

McLaren (2003) identifies three insights that serve to clarify cultural relations. He suggests that culture is “connected to the structure of social relations;” and that there is an unequal distribution of power that will situate individuals within a dominant or subordinate position; and lastly, that cultural production and practice are often sources of conflict. It is a well known fact that historically the practices of cultural activities were illegal. While cultural practices

are now readily accepted in many arenas, the balance of power between learners and educators is evident for mainstream learners but exacerbated for Indigenous learners trying to survive from both etic and emic perspectives.

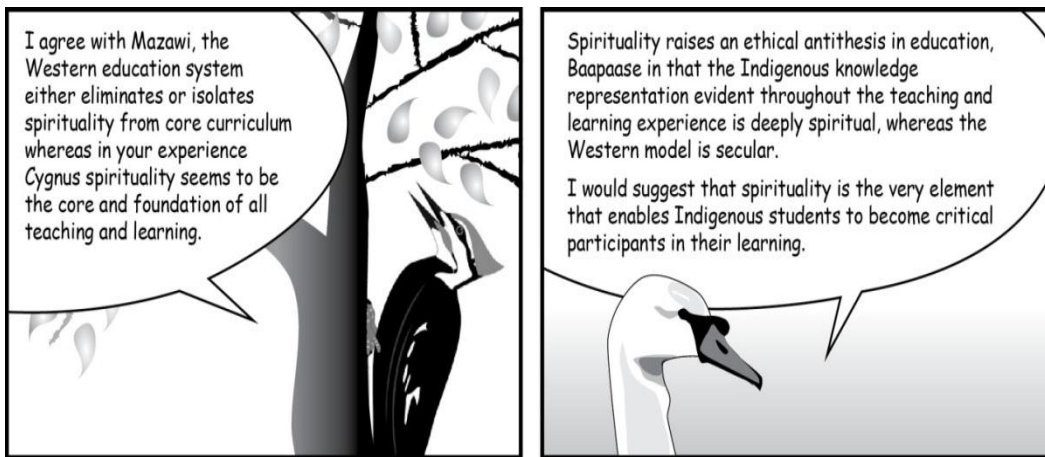


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### **Deficit Thinking**

Deficit thinking places emphasis on the identification of various skill weaknesses. An assumption by Western educators that underpins Indigenous education is to view knowledge, learning, language and cultural difference as deficits. Cajete (1994) says, “Too often the Indian student is viewed as a problem, rather than the unquestioned approaches, attitudes, and curricula of the education system” (p.188). He adds, “The knowledge, values, skills and interests that Indian students possess are largely ignored in favour of strategies aimed at enticing them to conform to mainstream education” (p. 188). I would argue that computer

illiteracy, as mentioned earlier and often evident among Indigenous and many non-Indigenous adult learners, contributes to the educators' perception of academic inability. In addition to the complexities of deficit thinking there are a number of polarizing differences between Western and Aboriginal notions of spirituality in education.



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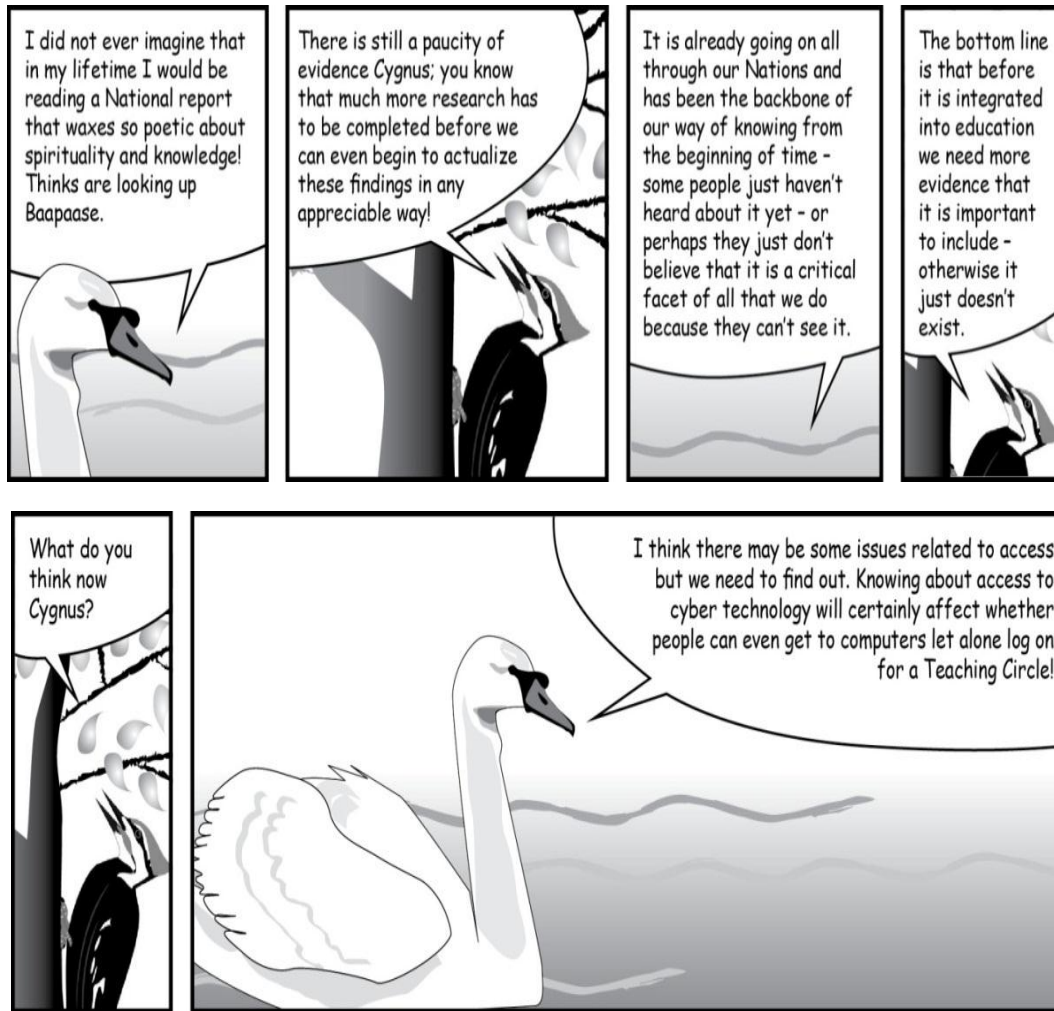
## Spirituality

Battiste (1998), Cajete (1998), Ermine (1995), and Couture (1996), are particularly helpful in fostering an understanding of the link between spirituality and education. These authors say that Indigenous spirituality is a way of thinking that pervades a way of life. Spirituality seems to be at the heart of values and morals. Ermine (1995) states that the task for contemporary Indigenous education is “the accumulation and synthesis of insights and tribal understanding acquired through inwardness [individual spirituality], and the juxtaposition of knowledge

on the physical plane as culture and community” (p. 105). He goes further to state that “the inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, and the self in the being” (p.103). Cajete (1994) says “inherent in Indigenous education is the recognition that there is a Knowing Centre [one’s spirituality] in all human beings” (p. 210). Forbes (1979) further links knowledge with spirituality by saying that “Knowledge without the spiritual core is a very dangerous thing because learning remains at the superficial level of skills and facts” (p. 11). Elder Jules Lavalee (personal communication, 2009) says that “curriculum today only address curriculum from the neck up, forgetting about the heart and the soul.” He suggests that “our students hunger for our spiritual way of life and we want to give them food.”

Battiste (1998) advocates the imperative for Indigenous education as being able to “draw from the ecological context of the people, their social and cultural frames of reference, and embody their philosophical foundations of spiritual interconnected realities” (p.21). Wahpmaskwas (Little White Bear, 2009) discusses how people learn self-determination through their spiritual cosmology. She states that “the primary law of Indian government is the spiritual law... Our first and most important duty is to see that the spiritual ceremonies are carried out (p. 41).” While this primarily describes governance, the statement has relevance and applicability in the education of Indigenous people in a Western system. It speaks to the fundamental difference in worldview which translates to very different approaches to life and education about life. The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada Report (2009) Canada Council on Learning indicates that

“spiritual experiences are equated with knowledge in itself and are manifested in the physical world through ceremony, vision quests and dreams.”



### **Isolation and access to electronic technology**

There is a significant difference related to computer access and experience in northeastern Ontario. A large population of the Indigenous learners enrolled in post secondary education originates from rural and remote Northern Ontario and



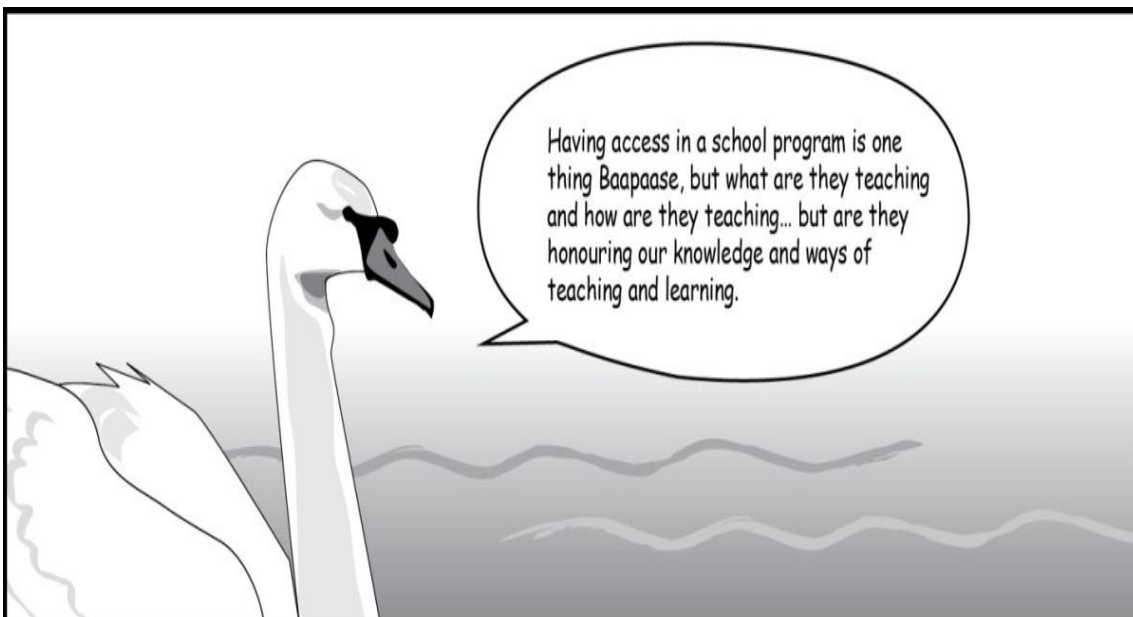
Quebec First Nation communities. Other post secondary learners from some parts of Manitoulin Island and Algoma regions of northern Ontario also attend post secondary institutions in their home communities as a community based outreach experience. Many of these communities have little or “interrupted” communication connectivity. In addition, many of these learners have not been exposed to computers as fundamental to educational delivery and may not own or have access to a personal computer. The Aboriginal People’s Survey (2006) identified 80% of Indigenous adults aged 18 – 24 used the internet in 2005 with this number decreasing significantly with age. As stated earlier, this lack of access, coupled with computer illiteracy, and usage positions some of the Indigenous post secondary learners in a deficit situation in mainstream education. In addition, these same learners may have an understanding of, and have participated in, Teaching Circles as a common practice in their communities.



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## Demographics

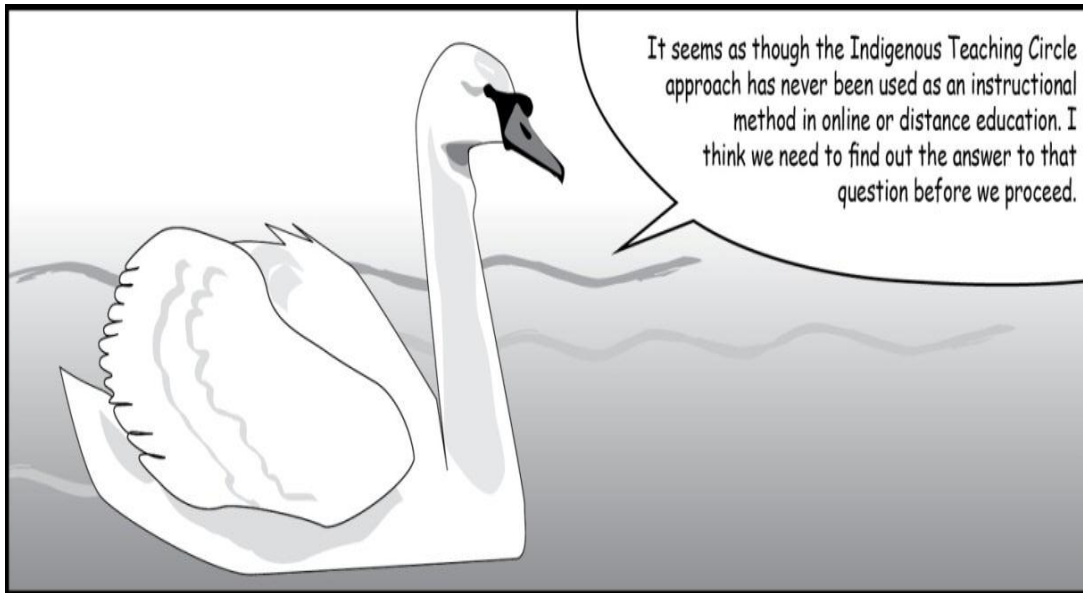
A change that is taking place in the local urban Indigenous experience is the prolific use of computers by the younger learners. The Statistics Canada demographics indicate that in the District of Sudbury, the registered status Indigenous population exceeds 21,000 which represent 10% of the total population. The data also identifies that over 75% of the registered status Indigenous population is above the age of 15 years (Statcan, 2008). These figures indicate that there will be a large number of younger, computer literate Indigenous people entering post secondary institutions in the future. Furthermore, in the last decade, I have witnessed a noticeable decrease in attendance of younger Indigenous people at cultural Teaching Circle gatherings in the local Indigenous communities. In particular, the introduction of computers and technology may be playing a role in youth seeking out information from the web instead of attending the Circles. Web information is direct, quicker and often easier than the ancient, lengthy and indirect way of gathering information traditionally practiced in Indigenous Teaching Circles.



## **Cultural reproduction**

As stated earlier education systems reproduce the structure of power relationships and are translated as such from generation to generation. The predominance of Western social hierarchies will naturally reproduce similar social relations over time. According to Giroux (2003) the amount of cultural capital of an individual determines how successful those learners are in the education system. Dimitriadis & Kamberelis (2006) distinguish cultural capital as those characteristics given by families of individuals' such as their linguistic and cultural competence and cultural qualities. Common and Frost (1994) identify that a disproportionate number of mature Indigenous learners are not successful and often drop out. To ensure that all practices are culturally sensitive, it is important to challenge the prevailing notions of normal practice and to disrupt the existing marginalizing practices that function as gate keepers.

Compounding this argument, there is little literature currently available with respect to how, or if, Indigenous cultural teaching practices can be replicated using electronic technology. The use of technology combined with familiar Indigenous pedagogical methods, such as the Indigenous Teaching Circle may contribute to positive learning experiences for Indigenous learners.



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### **The applicability of the Circle Approach in Distance Education**

Currie and Kaminski (2008) have begun to investigate the broader scope of online Indigenous education by refining the definition of First Nations pedagogy, identifying online learning opportunities, as well as specific culturally relevant resources. On their website, they describe First Nations pedagogy as being “profoundly different from those of the Mainstream system” (Currie & Kaminski, 2008) with educational activities that encompass a holistic (physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual) approach that builds on experiential learning, and supports oral traditional, positionality, relevance, and reflectivity. “Pedagogy is not merely styles, methods, and strategies. It is also the epistemological/philosophical framework from which one approaches instruction...the philosophical and epistemological beliefs that inform and guide cultural practices (Hodgson-Smith, 2000, p. 159). In the State of Aboriginal

Learning in Canada (2009) experiential learning is defined as also encompassing “traditional ceremonies, meditation, storytelling, observation and imitation” (p. 10). Currie and Kaminski’s overview of Aboriginal pedagogy also supports Hart (2002, 2009) and Graveline’s (1998) notion that Indigenous pedagogy is grounded in spirituality and highlights the importance of utilizing Elders to guide, direct and serve as teachers.

### **Hollow Bone Hunter Takes Stock**

This chapter has outlined the multiplicity of factors that comprise the Aboriginal educational experience, in both the historical context and in contemporary circumstances. The physical and institutional environment, identity and resilience, deficit thinking, and spirituality have all contributed to the success or otherwise of Aboriginal students. It is my intention to investigate whether it is possible to structure a virtual Aboriginal sacred/spiritual space utilizing the Circle pedagogy with the goal of assisting Aboriginal students to increase their academic success. This is a new area of exploration and will require direction, information and instruction from the Elder Knowledge Keepers to effect appropriate change. In this study, this direction will be achieved by conducting participant interviews utilizing the Seven Grandfather Teachings and careful consideration of Chapter Nine of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples. Chapter Three will outline specific research methodology and design to be taken in this study.

### **Chapter Three: Circumnavigating the landscapes**

“Through story we explain and come to understand ourselves” G. Cajete (Cajete, 1994, p. 78)

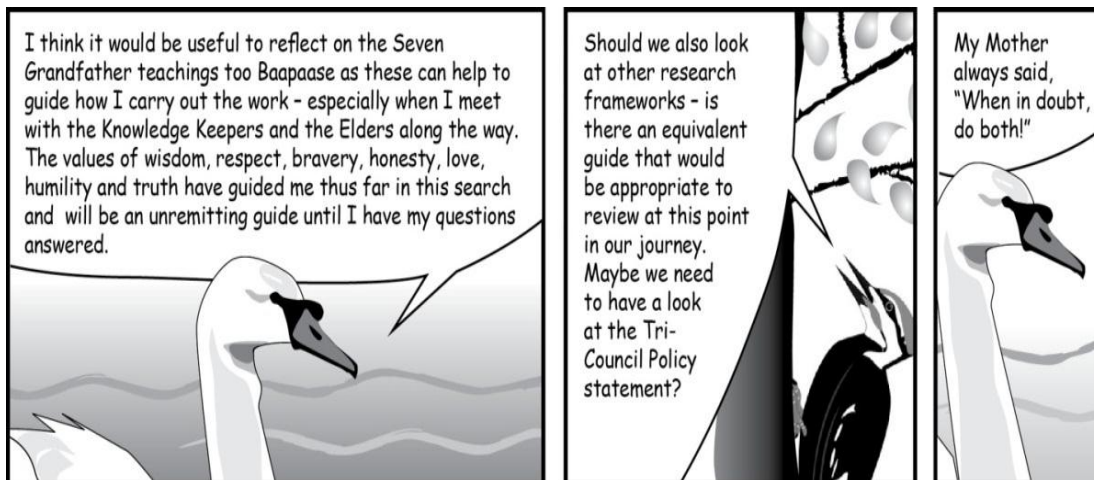
I learned a great deal in Chapter Two about the work of other fellow hunters in their quest for knowledge. I learned that there are multiple factors that can either dramatically hinder or dramatically assist successful Indigenous education. I discovered that there is incongruence between mainstream Western usage of computers and Indigenous utilization rate. Now I need a plan. In this segment of my journey I am ready to establish my approach and will collect additional information and tools in my red willow basket. I will need to determine the conceptual framework, consider the study design along with the scope and limitations. I have to decide on the participants and determine what questions to ask and how I will get my answers.

On the basis of the previous discussion of the literature which provides a background to this study, the research methodology for the study must be premised on the internalization of issues specific to Indigenous people and also be based upon ethical Indigenous research values and principles. In this study I learned that each encounter along the way was mine to figure out based on a multitude of factors that could work for or against the pursuit. My constant reinforcement was the notion of working from an ethical and relational place. Jacobs (2008) sums up the chosen approach to the study at this point in the process.

In the past, when someone approached a skilled angler and asked “show me how to fish,” the skilled one would answer “I will show you the water, the land, the seasons, and all the relations that connect you and the fish. When you understand these things you will understand how to harvest fish (Four Arrows, p. 29)

## **Two People Standing**

In my lifetime, I have been privileged to walk two inevitable pathways of intellectual capacity both distinguished by their individual worldviews and established patterns of construction. There is deep meaning in the way of life of my ancestors which I continue to preserve and which affords me considerable resources to measure my own Indigenous life world. I am also grateful to Western-based education which has afforded me the ability to thrive within the Euro-Canadian context. My personal experiences in the two forms of knowledge have resulted in the understanding that a division still exists in understanding between Indigenous Peoples and the Western world. The process of carrying out this research study reaffirmed this separation and confirms that there is an approach which is authentically Indigenous.



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### **An Indigenous research framework**

I have grounded this research in my own Indigenous knowledge which incorporates the values and beliefs of the Indigenous participants and their respective communities in the design, methodology, analysis and dissemination choices. The two principles of Indigenous research that underpin the decisions regarding research methods are both tied to the personal responsibility of the researcher (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). These principles include: (1) the researcher is accountable for the effects of the research project on the lives of the participants, and (2) the purpose of research is to benefit the community and the people of the community (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Kovach (2005) identifies the following four assertions that enable research from an Indigenous epistemology: (a) lived experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) storytelling as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; (c) receptivity and relationship between the researcher and the participants as a natural part of the research process; (d) collectivity as a way of



knowing that assumes a reciprocal relationship with the community (meaning both two-legged and four-legged creatures). (p. 28).

The section below will provide a brief explanation of how my Indigenous knowledge, values and beliefs have underpinned each element of the research process in this study.

### **Values and Beliefs**

Following an Indigenous research framework involves rewriting and ‘rerighting’ the Indigenous position in history and society (Smith, 1999). As the Hollow Bone Hunter I am rerighting and rewriting this dissertation in an Indigenous storied approach in part as a process of decolonizing the academy. I have integrated Indigenous knowledge throughout the process rather than relying solely on Western theories and have imbedded the core values and beliefs through an Indigenous storytelling approach. I utilized the Seven Grandfather teachings, described below, as a guiding philosophy for practice and employ the Medicine Wheel as an inherent theoretical basis. As I understand it the Medicine Wheel is both a symbol and an instrument to understand phenomena. It is visually represented as a circle divided into four quadrants. The Medicine Wheel circle represents inestimable life and contains all of the living teachings to live a “good life.” I have personally used the Medicine wheel as an instructional design tool, an evaluation framework and a strategic planning structure.

While Indigenous communities are not homogenous, they do share a perspective of life that is holistic in nature (Hart, 1997), and there is evidence of this in a common and well-utilized symbol: the Medicine Wheel (Absolon, 1993). While there is no single version for Indigenous people, this model reflects several concepts of life that relate to teaching and learning, and are common to many Indigenous nations in northern Ontario. The concept of wholeness is about incorporating all aspects of life and energy that is given to each aspect within us and the universe around us (Hart, 2009). Pewewardy (1999) says that a holistic education would give “new recognition of the organic, subconscious, subjective, intuitive, artistic, mythological and spiritual dimensions of our lives” (p.28). While I have not specifically used the Medicine Wheel in this study as a concrete framework I was mindful of the wholistic nature of Indigenous practice and sought to include this concept philosophically.

### **The Seven Grandfather Teachings as Guided Practice**

For the Anishinabek Nation in northern Ontario, there are teachings or guiding principles known as the Seven Grandfather’s teachings ground much of the social, educational and cultural practice in this geographical area. The Anishinabek Nation is the Ojibwe Nation from the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe, Odawa and Pottawatomi). The Seven Grandfather teachings originated with the Ojibwe People as part of their Creation story and have been identified in the Political Manifesto of the Anishinabek Nation (2008). There is continual encouragement by the Elders who live in this area to try to incorporate these

principles into all aspects of our personal and professional lives. Accordingly, as illustrated above, culture-specific guidelines based on these Seven Teachings were intentionally developed to carry out this study, assisted in the analysis and interpretation of the findings and will play an important role in the dissemination components as well. Two current contemporary examples of how these principles are further integrated into educational practice include: (1) the adoption of these Teachings to support Aboriginal elementary, secondary and post secondary education pedagogy throughout our local school system, and (2) inclusion of these Teachings as part of ethical research practice – in particular as a model of ethical engagement (Marr, Sutherland, and McGregor, 2007).

As a guiding philosophical framework, the Seven Grandfather Teachings speak to the following seven values: respect, wisdom, love, honesty, humility, bravery and truth (Benton-Banai, 1979). In my understanding of these Seven Grandfather teachings there is a corollary that addresses the interconnectedness of these teachings which affords educators and researchers opportunities to design rich holistic learning experiences. In practice, this means that the educator and researcher must look for the connections, honour the traditions and avoid over-generalizing.

While ensuring that there is this framework to guide this research, as the Hollow Bone Hunter seeking reliable and useful information I had to engage in a research design that provided the best possible climate for data collection, analysis and interpretation. I needed to consider respectful access to Elder

Knowledge Keepers and adhere to the ethical considerations presented in Chapter Nine of the Tri-Council Policy Statement.

It is my belief that every culture has a starting point from which to base their personal life philosophy. The following story illustrates how the Seven Grandfather teachings are integrated into life skills at a very early age. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I was also provided with these values at a young age and continue to integrate these concepts into my professional and personal life.

This personally developed interpretation of the Seven Grandfather teachings served as integral guiding principles for this study. The following illustrates how I utilized and integrated each of the values into this investigation.

**Nbwaakaawin: WISDOM**

- Throughout all components of the research process I recognized and acknowledged the expertise and the importance of each individual's life experience.
- Throughout the research process I attempted to provide continuous sharing of the information with others so that they benefit from the research process and the knowledge gained from the study.

**Zaagidwin: LOVE**

- I consciously approached each participant with humility, kindness, warmth and appreciation for taking the time to answer the interview questions, clarify ideas and assisting with the interpretation of the data.
- I committed to focus entirely on the individual providing the information.

**Mnaandendmowin: RESPECT**

- I listened carefully and fully to each person's ideas with respect.
- I refrained from generalizing personal experiences.
- I always prepared a tobacco offering along with the written consent form in order to respect the diversity of cultural practices in this territory.

**Aakidehewin: BRAVERY**

- I was mindful that there may be difficulties reflecting on personal educational experiences.
- I have and will continue to openly disclose the research findings with the intention of creating change.

**Gwekwaadziwin: HONESTY**

- I have endeavoured to clearly articulate how the research proposal came to be.
- I view the participants as valued collaborators and acknowledge their contribution in ways that they approve of.
- I have openly revealed the purpose and intent of the study and what I hope to accomplish.

**Dbaadendziwin: HUMILITY**

- I consistently sought the guidance from Elders and other knowledgeable people in structuring and operationalizing the study.
- I considered suggestions given by others and promptly acknowledged any misunderstandings.
- I was careful to avoid being intrusive by probing the participants to disclose information that they were not comfortable disclosing.

**Debwewin: TRUTH**

- I tried to understand that interviewees' words are part of themselves, so that it became crucial to treat those words with care.

- I have placed the Elder Knowledge Keepers' perspective at the forefront of the study.
- I have provided a guarantee that all information provided was kept confidential, and in the case of research data retained in a safe, secure location



### *The story of Shkimma and Sam*

*One cool spring afternoon a boy named Shkimma was sitting beneath a budding maple tree that looked out over the Bay of the Brown Beaver. This lookout was a special place for Shkimma and his friends. It was a place to talk and a place where everyone could see the glistening waters. Shkimma was an Ojibwe name that was given to him by his family when he was just a little boy. In Ojibwe, Shkimma means "always getting angry". This name seemed to suit him. Shkimma was boy who always wanted things to happen his way. If they didn't, he made sure they didn't happen at all.*

*Sam, a wise Elder from the village, was walking along a rocky path leading up to the lookout. He saw Shkimma sitting beneath his special maple tree. Sam called out, "Hello Shkimma, I see your friends are still in school. Why aren't you there?"*

*Shkimma leveled his cold dark eyes at Sam and answered, "My friends are just wasting their time going to school. There is nothing new to learn there, just junk about history and bad things that happened to everyone."*

*"Listening to you, I can see that you are a very caring young man" replied the wise Elder. "If you go to school, instead of just sitting here, you will learn to help people. You will be a great help to Mother Earth," Sam said gently.*

*Sam tilted his head and with a mischievous smile said, "It looks like you are holding up that tree. I think that the tree is doing just fine without your help.*

*Shkimma did not allow a smile to cross his face.*

*Sam whispered, "I was given a secret many years ago which I would like to share with you, Shkimma."*

*Shkimma was interested in what this wise Elder had to say and he leaned closer to listen.*

*Sam continued, "It's a secret called 'chance'." It is a gift you learn, a great gift for you."*

*Shkimma wanted to learn more about this gift, so he leaned even closer to hear what Sam was going to say.*

*Sam said, "Just give yourself a chance. Take a chance and learn about the tools and knowledge that will help you to survive as you travel on the good path. Only you can give that chance to your own spirit." You see Shkimma, there is a special place inside each one of us for our own spirit," the wise Elder said softly. "If we don't help our spirit to learn and grow, it will curl up like a baby inside its mother." "Everything we need to survive lives around us. From the moment we are born, our spirit begins to learn about harmony and balance in the circle of life. Each day brings new learning." "The learning of Bravery, Honesty, Humility, Love, Respect, Truth and Wisdom begins as each new life enters this world. You must give yourself a chance to learn and if you fail, give yourself another chance. Keep giving yourself chances and you will learn."*

*Sam was a humble and kind man who loved to fish and hunt. Shkimma knew him as someone who spent much of his time on the water where he learned all about how to survive. He knew Sam's words were always honest and full of truth.*

*As Sam walked away, Shkimma thought about the teaching this wise Elder had just given him. He felt his own spirit stir inside him. He knew that Sam had given him a truly special gift.*

*Shkimma grew up to be a respected man in his community. Whenever he began to feel angry, he would remember Sam's teaching. These teaching helped him to live in peace and harmony with people and with Mother Earth. He would always remember the words of the wise Elder Sam. (Mishibinijima, 2004)*

## **Indigenous Research Reality**

Webster and Nabigon (1992) suggest that "it has not always been understood, nor accepted, in behavioural sciences that cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs can influence research results and can lead to unanticipated conflicts if research design and methodology fail to reflect the strengths of community culture" (p. 160). Indeed it is my experience that research on contemporary Indigenous issues in Canada has become an immensely complex endeavor, and requires special knowledge and training of the researcher in the areas of



Indigenous issues, cultural pedagogy, participatory research methodology, and specific Indigenous research ethics. I would argue that research and educational practice with Indigenous Peoples requires individuals to consider the impact of colonization-related factors on Indigenous community. Many of these factors are still largely unexplored and undocumented. However, Indigenous research requires not only expertise in the area of social determinants, but also an understanding of the history of interaction between the dominant or colonial cultures and Indigenous people. This history, in addition to the historic legacy (Webster and Nabigon, 1992) of how research has been conducted in Indigenous communities in the past, has a profound impact on the way research and education is conducted in Indigenous communities today.

I propose that currently, in many of the Indigenous communities across Canada, there is a growing fatigue with respect to non-Indigenous academics requesting opportunities to conduct studies on Aboriginal People. Another Indigenous research reality is that Indigenous communities are moving politically towards increasing self-determination and Indigenous organizations are under increasing pressure to conduct their own research and to create their own culturally-responsive curriculum and methods (Ermine, 1995; Marr, Sutherland, McGregor, 2007). The Ontario Ministry of Education and other funding agencies are continuing to pressure researchers to produce reliable data, as well as increase the complexity of monitoring the success of community-based initiatives.

## **The Hollow Bone Hunter as an insider**

Locating myself as a researcher is important, particularly within an Indigenous research framework (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Baskin, 2005; Restoule, 2004). A positivist epistemological framework suggests that the researcher remain objective and neutral. Researchers within post positivist and constructivist/interpretivist models sometimes position themselves to identify possible biases. A similar but slightly different approach to identifying possible biases applies with an Indigenous research framework. Bias to a Western researcher could be construed as interfering with the collection of data or skewing the interpretation of the information. The notion of bias in Indigenous research practice in fact assists in the initial and ongoing relationship building with the study participants and sometimes affects whether or not one can carry out research in a given community. The practice of introducing myself and identifying who I am, where I come from and who my ancestors are not only tells people who I am but also helps to establish trust (Absolon & Willett, 2005) as someone the participants can identify with as coming from a similar worldview. As the Hollow Bone Hunter, seeking knowledge I extended this practice into my research methodology and demonstrated this practice at the beginning of Chapter One of this dissertation.

## **Developing ethical relationships**

Returning to my journey as the Hollow Bone Hunter it is of paramount importance that I pay attention to the way in which I interact with the Elder

Knowledge Keepers. A number of guidelines have emerged about how to conduct research with Indigenous Peoples. The Steering Committee of the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey in Canada created the OCAP Principles that while they had their genesis in health have been widely utilized in all Indigenous research regardless of the discipline. OCAP refers to the following principles as critical: ownership of research and data; control of the research; access to the data; and possession of the data. These principles were established to provide specific direction on how the community should be involved in the research process and how research with Indigenous peoples should be conducted (Schnarch, 2004). In my research process I invited the Elder Knowledge keepers into the process throughout the process. We talked about each principle at various stages of the journey and how it related to the whole research endeavour.

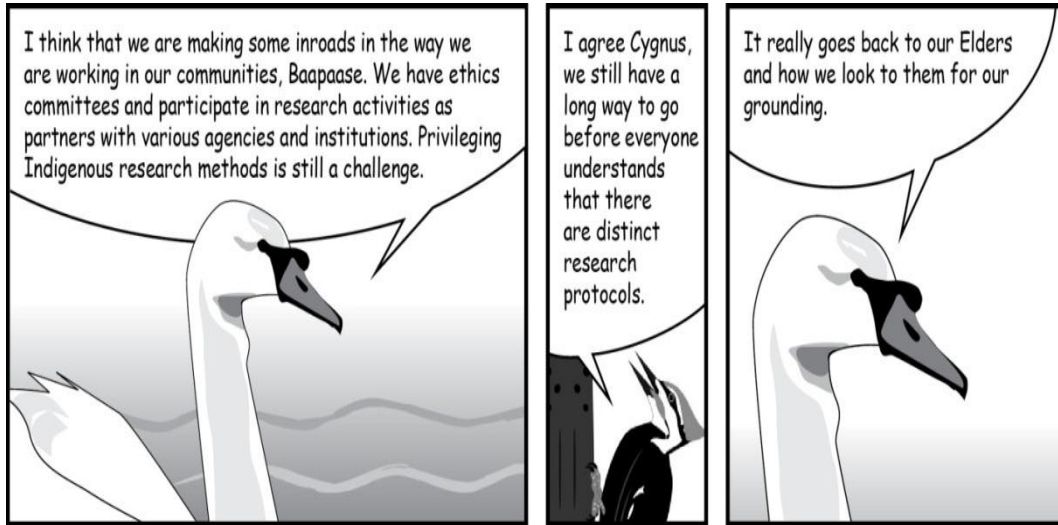
In addition, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) created 15 guidelines for research involving Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) people and more recently, in December 2010, the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) approved ethical guidelines for research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada. Both CIHR and the TCPS have principles which refer to understanding and respecting Aboriginal worldviews, specifically the responsibilities around access to traditional or sacred knowledge (CIHR, 2007). Research involving Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders, conducted by researchers from The University of South Australia (2008) requires an ethical review by the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research. These guidelines refer to six core components: reciprocity, respect, equality,

responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003). At the local level, research ethics guidelines are being developed to provide direction through various First Nations communities across Canada. Two examples include the Manitoulin Research Review Committee (MARRC) in northeastern Ontario and the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch in eastern Canada which states as their mission that, "any research, study, or inquiry into the collective Mi'kmaw knowledge, culture, arts, or spirituality which involves partnerships in research shall be reviewed by the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch" (Mi'kmaw College Institute, n.d.).

In an effort to carry out this investigation in a culturally appropriate way, this study was guided by the work of Indigenous scholars who have captured the essence of anti-colonial practice. In addition, there is a growing body of literature associated with some of the ethical challenges and intrinsic tensions between an Indigenous research approach and a Western academic approach. For instance, Piquemal (2001) and Meadows, Lagendyk, Thurston, and Eisener (2003) have discussed the challenges posed by the standard ethics consent forms that are required by universities and the need for an oral consent process from Indigenous People. There are a number of Indigenous practices that have been employed by Indigenous research scholars which provided some guidance in this study.

Loppie (2007) has discussed how she incorporated Indigenous principles and Western science into her doctoral research process, particularly by acknowledging the wisdom of female Elders. The well-known Maori scholar

Smith (1999) promoted the use of decolonizing methodologies in order to privilege an Indigenous perspective and demonstrate respect for and valuing of Indigenous ways of knowing. Battiste (1998) refers to ongoing colonizing practices as cognitive imperialism, a belief that there is one source of knowledge, an official knowledge, which is transmitted through public education. Ball (2004) states that education conceptualized and delivered predominantly by academics and professionals of European descent can shatter Indigenous students' sense of cultural pride and can seriously challenge their confidence in the validity of their cultural knowledge. These colonizing practices frequently marginalize Indigenous students. Graveline (1998) says that to strive in a colonial environment students have little choice but to "participate in academic endeavours that either devalue or do not recognize our cultural identities" (p. 35). She goes on to state that Indigenous knowledge is not given any legitimate academic role in higher education, resulting in Aboriginal people being groomed to perpetuate the predominate Western knowledge and practice.



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### **Positionality of Elders**

In Indigenous n’gadendang or epistemology as identified in Chapter One, it is critical to seek guidance from Elders on issues related to collective change and to originate all process and progress from this base. In the same way, it is vital to capture authentic experience and amplify individual Aboriginal voices. Johnson (1994) explained that Indigenous Elders are not always defined by age or gender. She indicates that Elders are people who carry knowledge of traditions; possess wisdom of the heart; walk with truth, integrity, and humility; serve the people by offering whatever they have; and heal others with natural and spiritual medicines. Couture (1996) adds to Johnson’s description by adding that Elders “exemplify the kind of person which a traditional, culturally based learning environment can and does form and mould” (p. 47). The role and importance of Indigenous Elders has been documented in the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report (RCAP, 1996). The report states that “Elders are known by many

names in Aboriginal societies: the Old Ones, the Wise Ones, Grandmothers and Grandfathers and, in the Métis Nation, Senators. They are teachers, philosophers, linguists, historians, healers, judges, counselors - all these roles and more” (RCAP, 1996). The report also describes Elders as the “keepers of spiritual knowledge that has sustained people through thousands of years - knowledge of ceremonies and traditional activities, of laws and rules set down by the Creator to enable the people to live as a nation” (RCAP, 1996). They have also been described as the “living embodiments of Aboriginal traditions and cultures” (RCAP, 1996). Among the Ojibwe people, the role models and repositories of authoritative knowledge are the Elders (Reynolds, 1997). The above-mentioned attributes clearly position Elder Knowledge Keepers as the decision makers and agents of change in Indigenous community engagement. Along with Elder involvement it is essential to replicate the values of the People with whom you are studying as outlined earlier in this chapter under the subheading, ‘Values and Beliefs’. One of the ways to reflect how these values and beliefs become incorporated into research is by the use of a conceptual framework which includes the ideas and research of others. The seven Grandfather teachings also shaped and informed the way in which this study was carried out.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study focused mainly on the published works of Fyre Jean Graveline, Kaskitemahikan (Michael Hart), Minogizhigokwe (Kathy Absolon), Greg Cajete, and Marie Battiste. These authors provide cultural

philosophical expression, and specific detail regarding circle processes in both teaching and social work practices.

In addition to this literature, providing information and rich description of the Indigenous education and cultural practices, provided by these scholars, has been critical as there is a paucity of this specific information in the published literature. Since the literature provided few primary sources, I have included the literature from a number of secondary sources which have addressed and supported certain elements pertinent to this study. As examples, Absolon (1993), Battiste (1995, 1998, 2000, 2002,), McCormick (1995), Hart (2002) and Haig-Brown (1997) have outlined the need for cultural teaching methods, or anti-colonial approaches that are lacking in the Western approaches to education.



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## Design

This study is a qualitative study, using critical ethnography with the research providing an in-depth examination and examination of the Indigenous



Teaching circle as a method of instruction. At its simplest, and unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is value-based. In this study, I have aligned with Benesch's (2007) view that notions of individuality and power are central to critical ethnography. Unlike conventional ethnography, which is considered to be mostly descriptive, critical ethnography is also deemed to be mainly reflective. Critical ethnographers take into account historical, political, sociological, and other macro contextual factors that influence a person's life. They seek to pose probing questions at the boundaries of ideology, power, knowledge, class, race, and gender (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 183).

In this study critical ethnography assumes that Western culture creates expectations around what is normal and right. These expectations predominately reflect the dominant ideology, thus discounting other worldviews. Often, those with alternative world views internalize the belief that there is something inherently missing in them, since they face challenges in the dominant society (Gilchrist, 1994). Critical ethnography goes beyond describing culture and proposes action for change. In *Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility*, Simon (1987) states that educators must do more than just create a level playing field. He states that it is our responsibility, as educators, to create practices that encourage, make possible and enable the realization of differentiated human capacities. Graveline (1998) refers to this element of critical ethnography as giving everyone "voice". In other words, recognizing and valuing the Aboriginal Peoples' lived lives. Critical ethnography questions conventional perspectives, includes community ownership and participation in decision making, removes

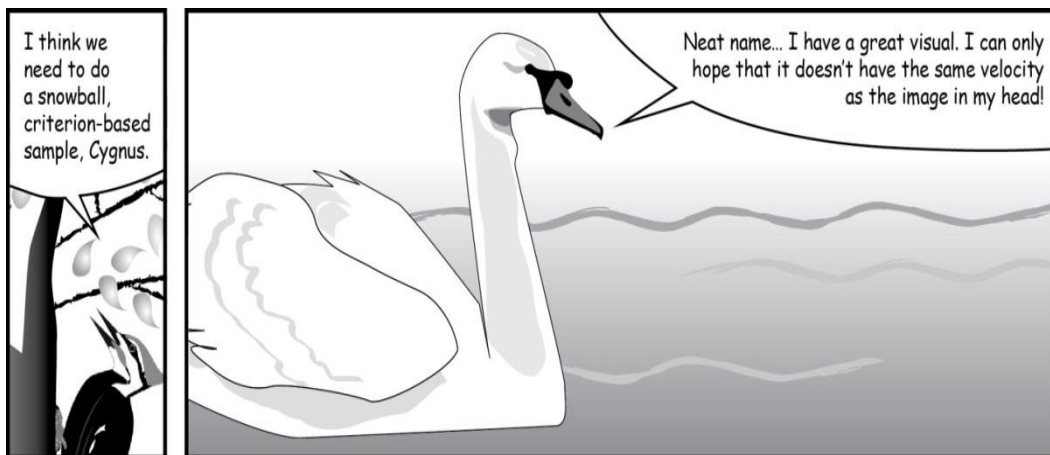
credentialed, maintains relevance, and supports structural changes (Gilchrist, 1994). Indigenous research methodologies are those ones which permit and enable Indigenous researchers to be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in the research process (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). As Rosen (1991, p. 12) puts it, ethnography is “a construction cast in the theory and language of the describer and his or her audience”. Hence, while the methods used in ethnographic research are important, what is of greater importance is the question of what the ethnographer does with the “lived experience” – the methodological question of how the data are subjectively interpreted. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I realized that many aspects of this research fits within a general ethnographic framework. It places me in the the midst of the individuals whom I will be interviewing while emphasizing the distinct perspectives and contexts mentioned earlier, that form the foundation of Indigenous epistemology. As I journey I will be entering into a reciprocal research partnership with the Elder participants to produce the data that will help to inform the questions posed in this research study.

### **Participant selection**

My search journey so far has included some important learning about how I needed to conduct this study. In order to acquire enough information to provide substantive answers I began my search to interview at least seven Elder Knowledge Keepers who had experience using the Teaching Circles as a method of instruction. The Aboriginal territory, in which this study was carried out is known as the Robinson Huron Treaty area, and often referred to as the territory of

the Three Fires Confederacy. The Three Fires Territory encompasses the entire Sudbury Ontario basin with North Bay Ontario to the south, with Sault St. Marie, Ontario on the westerly border and including Manitoulin Island along the north shore of Lake Ontario. All of the participants in this study resided in this territory. Local residency is important as customs, traditions and practices vary greatly within and among Indigenous communities. To ensure that the answers to the questions will be understood and have the potential to be integrated into educational practice it is critical that the sample was selected from the local Tribal area. This ensured some reliability in the information that was collected. I asked the Knowledge Keepers to recommend others for me to visit assuming that they would have a familiarity with their peers in this subject matter. Living and working in this Tribal area for many years affords me the opportunity to have contact with the Elder Knowledge Keepers and their networks of education and community service.

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“Criterion-based sampling requires that one establish the criteria, bases or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation: one then finds a sampling that matches these criteria” (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). In relation to the interviews, and aligned with grounded theory, I carried out a purposive snowball sampling procedure. Snowball sampling refers to the practice a researcher may use in which the first interviewee is used as a resource to suggest or recommend other interviewees (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Snowball sampling is designed to identify people with particular knowledge, skills or characteristics that are considered necessary as part of the investigation. By this means, recommendations by people with the necessary specific knowledge can be used to find people with the specific range of skills that has been determined to be useful. As such, snowball sampling aims to make use of community knowledge about those who have skills or information in particular areas (Creswell, 1998). As I continued to gather information about the research design I understood that this snowball sample process would not only build on existing networks of Elder Knowledge Keepers, but may increase the number of participants in the study and provide me with the knowledge of potential participants who may not otherwise be known to me.

In this study, my intention was to ask each of the Elder Knowledge Keepers to suggest others who may be known as having information that would add to this study, as well as suggest others who may not share the same knowledge or experience. These participants may be Elders who work in different capacities in the community, such as social service or health and wellness. The

criteria for selecting the first participant Elder Knowledge Keepers included their role in the community, their knowledge, their willingness to communicate, their ability to communicate, and their identification as Aboriginal.

I sought out Elder Knowledge Keepers who work as educators and administrators in a variety of educational settings; those who engage with faculty, learners and post secondary curriculum in a number of different academic disciplines. I easily connected with individuals with those credentials because of my long history as an Indigenous educator in this area. As I stated earlier, this means that I have emic familiarity of the individuals in this geographical area whose knowledge or opinions would be respected by the community.

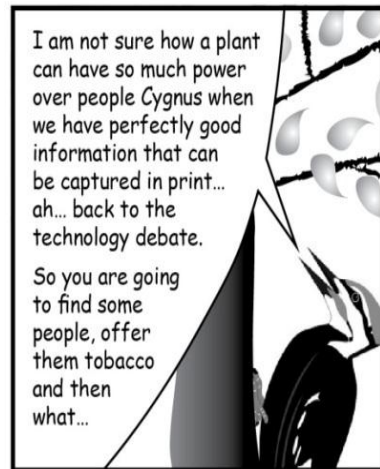
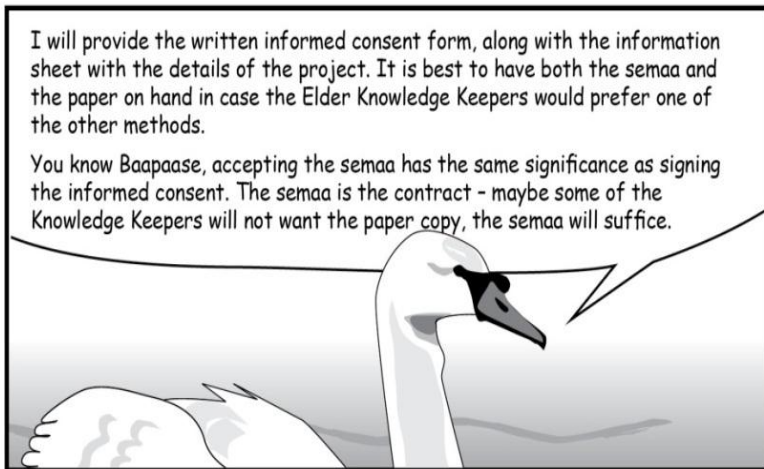
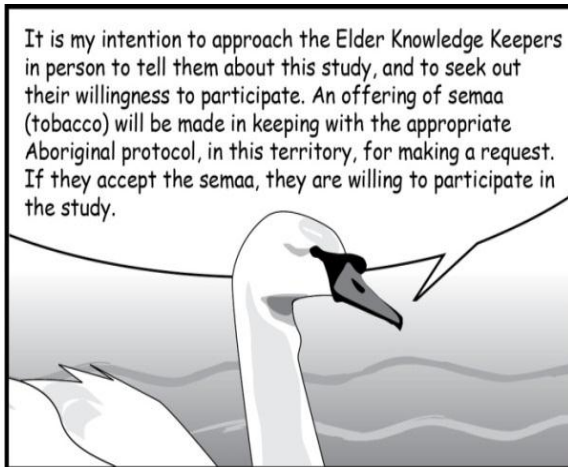
In my search for interviewees I looked for individuals who would understand the significance of the study and for the above-mentioned reasons would be willing to work on this study to capture information that could support positive change for Indigenous people. Weber-Pillwax (1999) says, "the foundation of Indigenous research lies within the reality of the lived Indigenous experience. Indigenous researchers ground their research knowingly in the lives of real persons as individuals and social beings, not on the world of ideas." For the reasons mentioned above, as well as my traditional experience and upbringing, I believe that seeking the information from the Elder Knowledge Keepers is appropriate for this study.



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### **Access to Knowledge Keepers**

As stated previously, my status as a member of this community and as an active supporter of community events and traditional activities afforded me multiple opportunities to connect more easily with the Elder Knowledge Keepers. I have also supported, attended and conducted many Teaching Circles and used this as an opportunity to meet up with appropriate participants.



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## Data Collection

The information was gathered, and captured electronically, unless the Elder Knowledge Keepers indicated otherwise, at a time and place suggested by them. Brief handwritten notes were also taken to identify points for clarification. In order to capture responses and engage in appropriate reflection, it was essential to align the data collection activities with the rhythms of the lives of the participants. I prepared for multiple visits with each Elder to allow for deeper reflective responses. This pacing added additional time to this phase of the study

but was necessary for respectful, ethical sharing based on the values and principles articulated in the Seven Grandfather Teachings illustrated earlier.

A set of general open-ended questions (see Appendix A) about Indigenous Teaching Circles and their utilization in education, specifically while employing electronic technology were adapted from Hart's (1997) study on Sharing Circles (see Appendix B). Permission was sought and granted to adapt the Sharing circle questions for this study.

On my travels, even as the Hollow Bone Hunter I have visited many communities and experienced many situations that seemed impenetrable to me. I was unsure of my position, role and responsibility to the people whose path was different from my own. I learned that sometimes it is appropriate to simply observe and learn and other times an action is required. I learned that if one is asked to be part of a discussion then the relationship is beginning to be established. This story describes my experience with learning how to learn to relate to communities in a research relationship.

Throughout this research study the Elder Knowledge Keepers provided guidance and support to ensure that I was sustained and focused. They were part of each aspect of the research process from question generation to providing suggestions on the written presentation format. In this respect and in keeping with the Indigenous research methodology employed in this study, these seven participants are therefore regarded as research partners.





### ***The story of me and Zyn***

*One day a small wizened man named Zyn accidentally came across a community of people living in a very cold place. The wizened man observed that the community seemed to be in crisis. Children were hungry and there was no work for anyone except the large warehouse for sad or angry people. While having no job meant there was little food on the table Zyn decided that he would stay and see if he could help the people. The sad and angry people just kept getting sadder and angrier no matter what happened in the community. They just did not have the energy to reinvent themselves which was the only way out of their predicament.*

*Zyn was a learned man and had the opportunity to study many things in many places. He had travelled in the sky and under the water and knew a lot about a lot. Zyn was struck with the way he was welcomed into this community even though he could see that the people were in dire straits. Being a quiet and unassuming type he watched day after day as the community struggled to try to get out of their situation. One day at a community meeting he was asked for his opinion. He was somewhat shocked and humbled by this because he had only been visiting the community a short time. He stood up and slowly began to talk. He said, "Thank you, all my relatives for allowing me to be on your land and in your presence. I have been many places in the sky and in the water and have found myself lost but in a familiar place at the same time. I have been given many gifts in my lifetime that I carry with honour. Some of these gifts have come to me at great cost to who I am – my true self – and these are the precious ones. Because you have welcomed me as a relative I offer all that I have and all that I am to you...I have been held up and now I can hold you up. I offer this to you...all my Relations."*



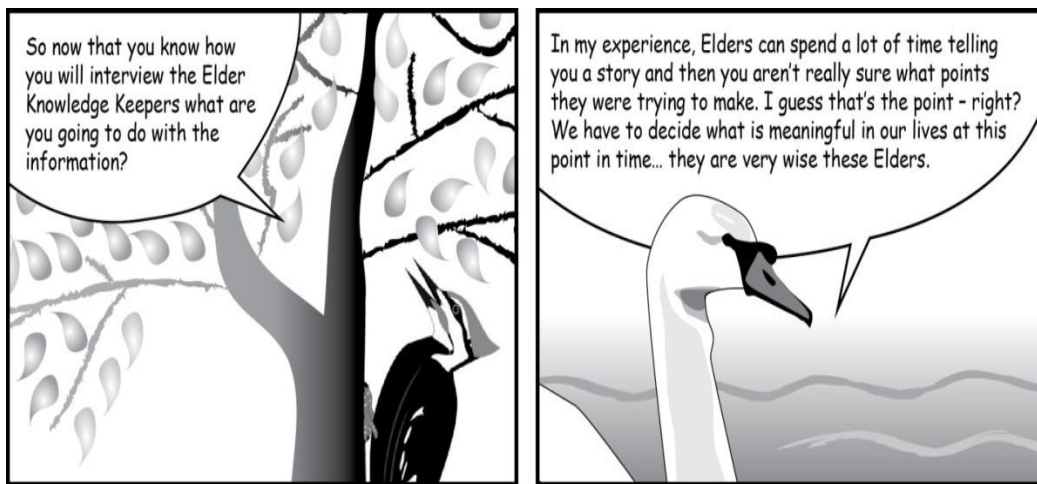
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### **Additional Indigenous Research considerations**

I allowed sufficient time for the interviews because some additional time had to be allotted to do other activities during our data collection visits. I understood that the research-focused conversation would not take place until the Elder Knowledge Keeper felt comfortable that the rapport and confidence had been re-established from the last time we visited. This pre-interview visiting sometimes took a few minutes or a whole day depending on the Elder's schedule. I was always prepared to share a meal, visit with the Elder's family, participate in invited ceremonies, take a walk, and help with household chores or any other relationship building activity that was required to restore or maintain previous social comfort. All of the Elder Knowledge Keepers chose to share their insights in English with Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibwe language used for common well known words that I easily understood. As stated earlier, I am not a fluent speaker of Anishinaabemowin but have included all of the original data in the language in which it was shared. I have also included the final story in Anishinaabemowin and

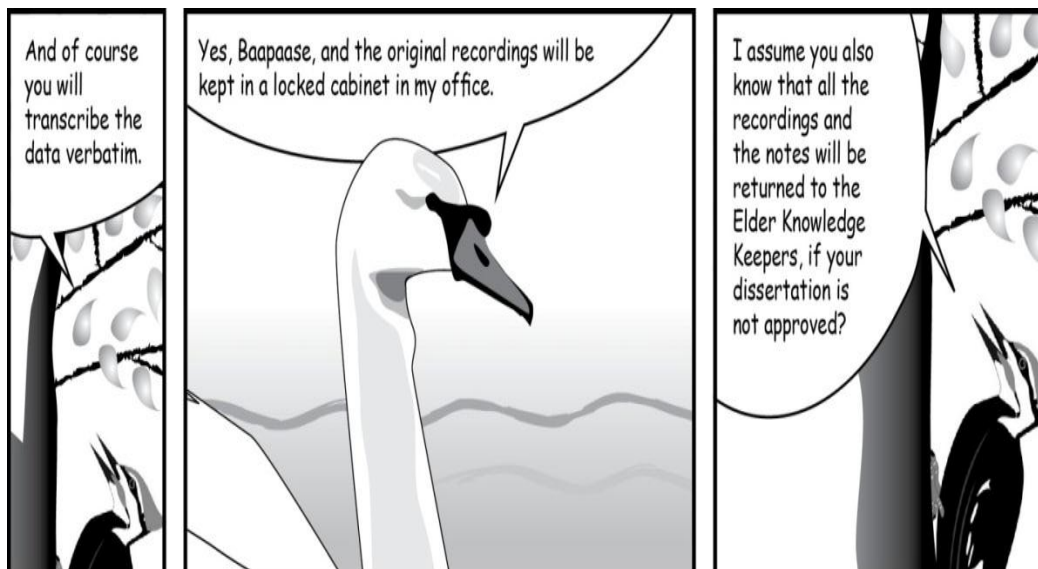
English to illustrate the fragile nature of change. Battiste (2000) says that “the attempt to make people aware of how the language they speak affects the way they view the world is a difficult and sometimes agonizing activity.” Some researchers take the view that people who do not understand the Indigenous language are limited, because the true meaning of ideas, phrases, connotations and worldview in general are only understood at one level. Peat (1994), for example has stated that:

When we enter the world of Indigenous American languages, we encounter profoundly different concepts and worldviews. Indeed, not only are the concepts enfolded within the languages radically different, but even the meaning of language itself and the function of the sounds people make is profoundly different. Language, so traditional Indigenous people say, is the door into their world. (Peat, p. 221)



## Data analysis

Process data analysis refers to the process of deriving meaning from the data collected during the study. The first stage of data analysis acquaints the researcher with data. In the second stage, data will be inspected for patterns and themes. The goal will be to identify data categories. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I spent some time considering asking for help by engaging a co-coder who could assist with both identifying thematic content analysis and providing a forum from which to interpret what the participants are saying. Saldana (2009) suggests that discussion provides not only an opportunity to articulate your internal thinking processes, but also presents windows of opportunity for clarifying your emergent ideas and possibly making new insights about the data.



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## **Hollow Bone Hunter takes stock**

I begin this fragment of the journey learning about the research methodology and design of the study. I added some information on the positionality of the Elders in Indigenous communities' relations and reaffirmed the importance of guiding and grounding my practice in the Seven Grandfather Teachings. I reviewed the design and provided an overview of the criteria for participant selection and access. Methods of data collection, data analysis, relationship building and trust were outlined.

Now it is time to meet the Elder Knowledge Keepers!

## Chapter Four: Gathering Voices

[The] things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as its necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. (Foucault, 1977)

In this part of the journey the search for Elder Knowledge Keepers began in earnest. I felt confident that I had gathered everything I needed in my red willow basket to flourish. Many moons had passed since I started out my search story with the question of whether Indigenous Teaching Circles could be facilitated in a computer mediated environment. I learned that having a better understanding of this idea was very important to student success and to Indigenous educators in particular; I learned that there is a general understanding of Indigenous Circle approaches; I gave consideration to factors that affect Indigenous learners and their efforts to succeed; and realized that there are a variety of vantage points from which to consider the notion of technology. The next part of my journey, Chapter Three, afforded me opportunities to decide on all of the components necessary to chart my path.

In this chapter, Chapter Four, I will introduce you to the research participants and provide you with the participant profile information along with my connection to them as spiritual beings. I have included personal stories to

illustrate this esoteric facet of the research process. Providing these stories is an attempt to honour the individuals for more than their spoken words while providing some degree of confidentiality. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, Indigenous participants are viewed as research partners and the engagement with the researcher varies depending on the emic or etic positionality of the researcher. The participants in the study have a diverse knowledge and experience and have impacted me in different ways as I spent time with each of them. The short imbedded stories will provide you with another example of two world experience and the complexities of an Indigenous research relationship. You will feel the mysterious and the tangible, the unfamiliar and the familiar all of which help to complete the circle of understanding about Sacred Space in Cyberspace. Table 1 provides additional details describing educational background, residency, employment, age and other specific defining attributes and contributions to the community which I titled “gifts.”

I have introduced the participants as Mno-Jichaags - Spirits, for example participant one will be referred to as Mno-Jichaag Bezhig which means the “First Spirit or Spirit One.” The stories are told in chronological order.

## Niizhwaaswi Mno-Jichaag - Seven Spirits

**Table 1 - Participant Profile**

Participant	Educational Background	Residency	Employment	Age	Gifts
Mno-Jichaag Bezhig (one) female	Post secondary college diploma	Urban	Post Secondary Support staff	50+	Singer/song writer
Mno-Jichaag Niizho (two) female	Post secondary college diploma	Urban	Elder, teacher	70+	Language keeper; Elder Council
Mno-Jichaag Nswi (three) female	Undergraduate degree Teaching certification	On-reserve	Elder, Healer, teacher	50+	Traditional dancer; language keeper; online gamer
Mno-Jichaag Niiwin (four) female	Post secondary degree	On reserve	Educational administration	50+	Traditional craft knowledge; language keeper; online gamer



Mno-Jichaag Naanan (five) Male	Post secondary college diploma	On reserve	Social worker	50+	Drum maker; language keeper
Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso (six) female	Graduate degree	Urban with residence on reserve	Private health practice and primary school teacher	50+	Traditional dancer ; qualified pilot
Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi (seven) male	Secondary school diploma	Urban and seasonal on reserve housing	Elder, post secondary support staff	60+	Member of a Sacred Medicine Society; language keeper

I approached ten Elder Knowledge Keepers but only formally interviewed seven. Three of those approached were unable to commit to the long term relationship that is inherent in such a request. Two of these three participants were already engaged in other studies and the third person not interviewed stated family illness as a barrier to participation.

I did have the privilege of spending many hours with seven Elder Knowledge Keepers who collectively possess 165 years of experience with

Indigenous Circle as a pedagogical methodology. There were two males and five females ranging in age from 52 to 72. Two of the seven completed high school, three hold Diplomas from Community Colleges; two have undergraduate degrees and one holds a Masters degree. Two of the participants live in an urban centre and five reside on a reserve or currently live in an urban centre but maintain a residence on reserve

Their primary occupations include: Metal worker/Post Secondary Elder; Retired Social Service worker/Native Drug and Alcohol Program; Social Worker/Educator/Post Secondary Administrator; Post Secondary Elder and Educator; Primary School educator/Post Secondary Elder; Speech Language Pathologist/Secondary School teacher; and a program Administrator in a Post Secondary institution.

In addition to their years of service to various Indigenous communities these seven Elder Knowledge Keepers are also known as language keepers, traditional dancers, drum makers, singers and songwriters. They own businesses, and fly planes, belong to Governance bodies and Sacred Medicine Societies. They have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. They have a breadth of knowledge that provided rich and complex ideas about Teaching Circles and their use in a virtual environment.

While five of the seven participants own and use a computer (or laptop) in both home and work related activities, two of the seven do not own or use a computer. One participant indicated that there was no need for a computer in their

line of work and another cited financial reasons for not personally owning one. This participant added that their children and grandchildren's needs were supported first and computers were purchased for the future generations as this was seen as the area of greatest benefit to the community. All of the participants owned cell phones and four out of seven were knowledgeable about downloading music for recreation. Four out of seven hold internet video based communication accounts and two are avid online gamers.

The next eight months of my journey were filled with multiple meetings, email correspondence and phone discussions about their ideas, thoughts, opinions and feedback on this quest. Along the way I was touched in a place deeper than the intellect. These seven individuals shared their information unconditionally, trusting me to carry their voice forward. The following stories bring you into the spirit of each relationship.



#### **The story of meeting Mno-Jichaag Bezhig (The First Spirit)**

*I head down the long corridor looking for room number 2671. I see some colourful artwork and feel like I am getting closer. I spot the number and read the flip chart in front of the door. On it is written, 'root chakra today!' I am intrigued and a bit nervous as I knock on the door at once hoping this is the right place and hoping that I am not expected to know anything much about mediation and chakras. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig is particularly known for her exemplary work in leading meditation and stress reduction. I am led into a room that is so beautiful and peaceful that I just wanted to sigh. The anxiety that I felt finding a parking spot and searching through the institution just melted away in this sanctuary. I am warmly greeted by a woman in a beautiful shawl, a long skirt to her ankles and worn old boots. I immediately felt like I knew her or maybe was related in some way. I have heard other Indigenous people say this as well when they meet someone for the first time. Maybe it stems from our Universal law of interconnectedness? Anyway, we settle in for a more formal interview as I had already provided an electronic version of the questions to her a number of weeks*

earlier. As I looked over I saw that she had written answers to each of the questions and I was immediately humbled that someone would take the time to think and compose answers to over 20 questions – for me! She took great care with her words and related everything back to her own teachings leaving me with a feeling of just how enormous this investigation is and a bit frightened that I would not be able to portray these shared stories with the honour that I believe they require. The three hours we spent together seemed like minutes as it was so engaging. Looking at the time I offered to take her for a meal as I had caused her to miss her dinner. We continued our conversation throughout dinner and time stood still.



### ***The story of meeting Mno-Jichaag Nüzho (The Second Spirit)***

*The steady pounding of the drum draws me to the building. It feels so familiar and yet I have never heard this song before. I lug my red willow basket filled with all the research paraphernalia up the cement steps, feeling excited and not knowing why. I hoped this little detour was not going to take me off my trail. I felt compelled by the sound of the drums and knew somewhere in my core that this was the right path, today – right now. I enter the building and before me is a sea of colour and movement – people dancing in the most amazing regalia – young ones and Elders all in rhythm. I sit quietly watching the spectacle feeling very fortunate to have happened upon this gathering. I am tired and before long I find myself nodding off to the rhythmic beat. Almost immediately I am joined by a beautiful woman dressed in the most wonderful outfit – all beads and fringes. We are happy to see each other and reminisce about our past adventures. We have journeyed together before. As we catch up on our relations I realize that she has had some experiences that could help in my gathering of wisdom – somehow on the fringe of my consciousness I now this was meant to be – some helper has guided me here. She is very pleased to chat and shares some great stories about her life and how she has learned to live in a good way. In time I subconsciously feel the silence descend around me and realize that I am sitting alone, awake holding my recorder. I am a bit disappointed that this was a dream but when I checked the recorder there on the screen was 2 hours and 35 minutes of recorded words. As the Hollow Bone Hunter I have come to realize that things are not always what they seem.*



### ***The story of meeting Mno-Jichaag Nswi minwaa Niiwin (The Third and Fourth Spirits)***

*I decide to take a break and head for water. There are many beautiful lakes and rivers in northeastern Ontario that are within easy access. I add some food to my red basket and set off down the highway. Feeling adventurous I turn off the highway and head down a dirt road that I hope will lead me to water. The road is very treacherous and I am looking for a turnaround spot when I see two sets of foot prints seemingly starting from right before my eyes. They are side-by-side and seem to be beckoning me onward. I figured since I did not see any houses on this road up to now then obviously there is something ahead. I decide to continue and do so for many miles. The further I travelled on this road following the two sets of foot prints the more intrigued I became. At one point I came to a fork in the road and became excited at the possibilities of meeting these two mysterious beings. I decided spontaneously to take the left in the fork and abruptly the road ended at a lodge. I was very nervous because I had obviously trespassed on someone's Sacred space unknowingly – one the other hand – maybe I was again being guided to be here at this time. I have learned on this journey that the Mno-Jichaags have their own ways of making me pay attention. I sat in my truck not knowing what to do and yet not wanting to leave either. I sat and sat until finally the door to the lodge opened and two old women were peering out. They were both smiling and waving and beckoning me to come in. Taking this as a good sign I collected my red willow basket and entered the lodge. The fire was going and the smell of food cooking was making my mouth water as I had been on the road now for many hours. I added my food and tea in gratitude of the invitation and waited to be directed where to sit. The lodge was so warm and inviting with comfortable couches and lovely views of a large expanse of water and rocks. Even though there were no words spoken yet I felt very comfortable and confident in their presence. Unceremoniously I was handed a plate of food and they began to ask me questions. I realized that this was more than just catching up on all the relations – that there was more here that I had to pay attention too. One of the old ones had a cell phone in her hand the whole time she was talking and the other held a note pad. I realized that this was indeed a teaching that I was meant to experience. I shared my journey and was given permission to record their voices for parts of their stories. I was at once grateful and humble to realize that this was a very special experience that I was chosen for – an experience that may not be afforded to just any old researcher looking for information.*



***The story of meeting Mno-Jichaag Naanan minwaa Ngodwaaso (The Fifth and Sixth Spirit)***

*A circle skirt.....a circle skirt.....for hours on the phone we laughed and laughed till our sides ached imagining what the ideal circle skirt would be. We determined that it had to have pockets of many sizes to accommodate drums, tobacco, shakers, tissues, cloth, water and many other important items. We talked about it having pants built in underneath for comfort yet invisible so everyone*

would think you were actually conforming. It was such fun to weave laughter into our conversations because many of the conversations would center on the health and wellbeing of our community. The conversations would be a platform for testing out ideas, dreams and perceived failures, work, school and family. It was a natural conclusion to approach my friend, colleague and mentor to see what her ideas were about this quest. She immediately and enthusiastically agreed and off I travelled to her home. I repacked my red willow basket with more food and gifts and set off for the much anticipated visit. Along the way I stopped at a craft shop to see if I could purchase a gift to acknowledge this relationship. Scouring through the rows and stacks of items I spot a person sitting behind a table at the back of the store. On the table were beautiful birch bark quill baskets with designs that dated back many generations from the family. I knew this person a bit and decided to sit down for a chat to keep him company for awhile. We caught up on the relations and work was quietly completed as I filled him in on what I was doing. He only looked up once during my story which I took as a good sign. As is often the case when one shares their immediate experience the Elder Knowledge Keepers will share their own stories to provide you with some additional guideposts to help with the good life. I asked him if I could record his stories and offered him some semaa and the consent form. He immediately accepted the semaa and signed the consent form without taking time to read through it. He haltingly retold of his vast experiences with Circles and how they had affected his life. After awhile, at the end of a long comfortable silence I gave him the gift for his time and wisdom and proceed on my way secure in the knowing that I had much to think about and that the Knowledge Keepers have a lot to share.



### **The story of meeting Mno-Jichaag Nūzhwaaswi (The Seventh Spirit)**

As I rest under the shade of a huge white pine I see in the distance an image coming towards me. I am not afraid because the image seems to be shimmering and has a softness encircling it. I am not really sure if it is a waking vision or I am actually going to meet another spirit. The other Mno-Jichaags came in different ways and times so I would not be surprised if this turns out to be another one who understands what I need to know. Very soon I realize that this is a person smiling brightly and I am both relieved and pleased. It has been a number of days since I have talked to anyone about this quest and I am looking forward to a visit.

After a long afternoon of catching up on our shared relations I take out the red willow basket and place it between us. I gingerly take out a tobacco tie and the papers describing what I am trying to do. The being is quite intrigued about what is coming next and seems quite eager for me to begin. Sitting quietly I feel the gaze on the top of my head as I lay out the recorder and straighten out my papers. Everything is very quiet, the light is starting to go and the damp feeling is coming to the air. I hand the papers over and hold the semaa in my left hand

*while I explain what I need. I hand over a pen so a signature can be captured for the academic requirement. There is stillness and the paper is handed back unsigned. I look up and into piercing eyes and hear, "I don't need this paper to tell me what is in your heart." I breathe a sigh of relief as we begin to talk.*

### **Trust and reciprocity**

Within an Indigenous research framework the principle of reciprocity, or giving back, is essential and can occur at many levels and times during the research process. In this study the Elder Knowledge Keepers' gift to me was their knowledge, time, honesty, and trust. Trustworthiness in this study is based on my extended engagement with the Elder Knowledge Keepers collecting data, verifying and clarifying information, attendance at ceremonies and community events, and by confirming that interpretations were correct. Guba (1981) states that trustworthiness can include the use of prolonged engagement at a site which allows for a researcher to check his or her own developing perceptions (p. 84). Guba also asserts that, "member checks are the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion" (p.85).

To honour their trust, time and knowledge the participants were offered semaa (tobacco) before each encounter and gifted with a woolen blanket for their contribution. For every encounter food was provided and shared either in the homes of the Knowledge Keepers or in one case I provided for a meal in a restaurant. All of the Knowledge Keepers expressed the importance of this research as having an impact on the future generations which I have learned is one of the most significant pre-occupation with many Elders. The interactions between me and each of the participants were more like a conversation with

questions and responses being posed equally. The Knowledge Keepers wanted to ensure that they understood what I was trying to accomplish and whether or not this could or would bring about any significant changes to improve the way of life for the future generations.

Providing an opportunity for the participants to ask questions and share their ideas not only gives voice to the participants but demonstrates how Indigenous ways of knowing can be included within a research paradigm. In Indigenous ways of knowing, this sharing of ideas between participant and researcher can be viewed as an act of reciprocity (Hart, 2009).

### **Hollow Bone Hunter takes stock**

In this part of the journey the Elder Knowledge Keepers were introduced from a number of different facets. Now that you have met these seven good Spirits I would like to share with you what they had to say about what they believe constitute an Indigenous Teaching Circle and whether this pedagogical method can be conducted in a computer mediated environment. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the data analysis process and further clarification and validation about the Teaching Circle as an Indigenous teaching method.



## Chapter Five: Hunter searches for meaning and finds answers



### *The story of life's teachings*

*The wisdom keepers say there are 44 Universal Laws - Teachings. There are wampum belts that carry these teachings. These are the laws that govern all of life. As human be-ings we really don't know anything for sure while we are here in this lifetime. We have an understanding of some things today and these things may change tomorrow. A human being sees about 1 % of what exists. The other 99% is undetected by most of us due to the limits we place on our abilities. Our senses can detect beyond that 1% but many of us are using less and less of the gifts that help us do this; smell, touch, taste, sound, instinct, prayer...meditation. Our survival is dependent on many things that we have very little understanding of – things deep within Mother Earth and the Universe. A decision one makes here today will have an effect on another person on the other side of the world. It will effect 7 generations yet to come, but most do not think about such things when making plans – we don't have that consideration when we are making simple or even complex decisions. When we sit in the Teaching Circle if we are all there with a common purpose – a teaching on the 7 stages of life for instance – we walk into that circle understanding that if we are open to all that is...all that has ever been...all that will be, we will connect with the Universe and its laws-teachings (Mno-Jichaag Bezbig, 2010)*

My journey of travelling alone ended and I meet another fellow traveler to help organize the information that was provided over the many months. I learned a great deal from the participants during our first visits together and also on my many return visits. Information needed to be clarified, and further interpretations needed to be excavated with the help of the Knowledge Keepers. Each subsequent visit further confirmed my own understandings, beliefs and knowledge about the various topics under scrutiny. In Chapter Four you were introduced to the seven research participants, the Niizhwaaswi Mno-Jichaags, who provided the data for this project. Chapter Five, will take you into the area of searching for the answers

to my questions as identified in Chapter One and making sense of the information that was provided by the Niizhwaaswi Mno-Jichaags or Elder Knowledge Keepers. This chapter will provide detailed information about the data collected and the method used to organize and analyze it. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section outlines the method and process of coding and analyzing the information and the second section will outline the themes derived from the content analysis.

As I transcribe the stories of the Elder Knowledge Keepers I am struck with the realization that I had some preconceived assumptions about my own knowledge, experience and practice conducting and participating in Indigenous Teaching Circles. I assumed that I understood the process of conducting a Teaching Circle and that each Circle included elements of sharing, talking, teaching and healing. In reflecting on these assumptions I came to realize that perhaps the inclusion of another individual to aid in the analysis of the data could provide a balancing point to address these assumptions. I met with the Elders to discuss the possibility of asking someone else to be involved in the data. As a researcher entrusted with information I wanted to check to make sure that this would be acceptable. I was encouraged to proceed with a second coder. One Elder declared that it was a manifestation of strength and humility (two of the Seven Grandfather's Teachings) to ask for help and they were pleased to be asked for direction on this issue. Armed with this endorsement I said a prayer of gratitude for all that I had learned so far on my journey and began the search for a fellow traveler.

The story of Waasookwe illustrates the serendipitous nature of meeting with a willing participant to work with me to analyze and interpret the data. My choice was not contrived and I had no formal criteria for choosing this individual. Our working together was more a matter of willingness, availability and strong sense of community that cemented the relationship. This part of the journey also helped me to confirm some of my beliefs and interpretations.



### ***The story of Waasookwe the Sparkling Woman***

*I awoke to the sounds of silence and decided I would get up and continue on my walk. I dressed without light, picked up the red willow basket and headed quietly into the night. The Milky Way was brilliant above my head with millions of stars glistening. I stand quietly for a moment to acknowledge these relatives and am drawn to this beautiful bright star shining brighter than her sky world relatives. I am so struck by her magnificence that I lie down on the path to talk. She tells me that she has been gazing down on the Earth for so long that she has witnessed the destinies of the entire life world below her. In all of this time no one has talked to her because they think she is too beautiful to know anything that is going on. I am saddened by this because I can see that she must have a lot of knowledge from this great vantage point. As if guided, I ask her for help telling her about my quest and all that I have encountered over the years on this journey. She smiled gently the whole time, winking occasionally when I shared some funny stories. She was so alluring that I ask her to travel with me for awhile and help me to honour the words that I was gifted with. Playfully – and to my amazement – she swooped in a spiral across the sky trailing a path of light for all to see. As she moved I realized that there were words appearing in her wake. She finally, breathlessly came to a stop and behind her were the words - Waasookwe, Sparkling Woman.*

## **Method and Process of Coding: A Social Construct and Collaborative**

### **Process**

It became very important at this stage to settle into a very organized and detail oriented frame of mind. If I was to honour the voices of the Knowledge Keepers I needed to be able to report my analytical procedures in a detailed

approach. I was embarking on a method of analyzing information that was different from anything I had learned to date and wanted to be true to my preferred method of working with other Indigenous scholars in a socially constructed paradigm. Agar (1991) rightly cautions, intensive data coding, disassembly, sorting, and sifting, is neither the only way to analyze your data, nor is it necessarily the most appropriate strategy. For these reasons it is appropriate and necessary to provide you with a rich description of this process in order to demonstrate the validity of my findings.

Once all the information was collected it became a challenge to make sense of it. The data set, or the total amount of information collected in this study was not large enough to warrant the use of computer analysis software so I chose to manually work with the data instead. This, along with the introduction of Waasookwe, the research Helper afforded me the opportunity to work in a more socially constructed framework and to understand more organically the requisite procedures of the analytical process. In traditional Western research methods the individual is often referred to as a second-coder. I believe that conducting Indigenous research is a sacred responsibility and as such requires a level of rigour and scrutiny that is greater than my own. Working with a Helper provided the opportunity to work with someone who inherently understood the sacredness of carrying the voices of the people and would provide the necessary environment to allow me to challenge my own assumptions and interrogate the data in a culturally safe way. As such, Waasookwe served the role of sounding board to my discoveries. She did not attend the visits with the participants and was only

working from written transcripts, so her ability to provide interpretation was limited to the text, some field notes and my recollection of the interviews. The addition of a second-coder into research is certainly not new. In making use of a Research Helper in this study, the Western notion of a second-coder is replaced with a model that seems to better suit the Indigenous approach taken. The role of the Helper, therefore, represents an innovation of this study.

Following the traditional Western data analysis approach, I made three paper copies of the transcribed audio files, created two back-up electronic copies which are stored on separate computer systems and memory sticks. The original audio files are stored in a locked cabinet in my home office.

Each participant file or complete data set has also been filed in a chronological file so that I can review the data in the order in which it was collected. A separate analytical file has been maintained which contains field or journal notes which are a general chronological compilation of thoughts, ideas, reflections and meanings that surfaced throughout the research journey. The field notes provided much of the story contents imbedded throughout this dissertation. I noted relevant annotations on the research methodology, i.e. what worked and what did not work, along with personal reflections on my own assumptions, biases and perceptions. I wanted to ensure that this was a wholistic experience and that I was not just capturing data for data's sake. I wanted to make sure that I positioned myself in the research and to articulate how this experience would impact my future research and practice with Indigenous Teaching Circles. The

comprehensive field notes have proved invaluable in the production of this manuscript because it has allowed for accurate reporting of experiences, thoughts and feelings which I have translated into personal stories. It has provided clues to knowledge gaps and fragments of the essence of the relationships encountered along the way. Much like this journey so far describing and understanding the data set depended on more than just the coded features of the information. I felt strongly that the data could not be reduced to the coded features only but by studying the transcripts in a way that took into consideration how others interpreted the data – especially Waasookwe. This collaborative and focused reflection and attention allowed for some of the unique nuances to be revealed from the information. I opine that perhaps this level of detail would not have been explicated using computer analysis software or by working up the data on my own. As the data analysis process continued to develop the way in which we thought about the data changed. At various points in the development we began to look at the past segments of data as well as to the segment we were studying; we looked at the whole as well as the individual; we found patterns within, between and among the data segments. We often returned to the original data and reread the interview transcript. This invariably led to the discovery of other things to make note of. For instance, we discovered consistent patterns in how participants described the process of Indigenous Teaching Circles; certain specific and descriptive language; and similar approaches to responding to the questions (often as stories about personal experiences).

There were four distinct phases or processes involved in the coding and thematic content analysis of the information.

### **Phase one: First level coding - the Hybrid Cutting and Sorting Method**

All of the data was read several times separately by me and Waasookwe, the second coder, over a period of weeks. A preliminary meeting involved initial systematic grounded coding, using heuristic coding of all of the seven data sets organized by question. In heuristic coding the code words are identifiers that point to things in the data. Heuristic codes help to recognize and represent what was noticed in the data and facilitate further rigorous analysis and scrutiny.

Instead of cutting and sorting as is often identified in the literature as appropriate for manual coding we created and consolidated the information from all of the participants on flip chart paper for each of the 20 questions in the study. After each question was completed we reviewed the data segment and independently applied coloured sticky dots or symbols to words, ideas, concepts, or full sentences. As each data segment was added the information was reviewed by me and the second coder independently and scrutinized for relationships, word or phrase repetitions, comparisons, metaphors, transitions, and any possible connectors. We also searched for possible links, relationships, comparisons or contradictions to the other data segments already captured. As we discovered counter or confirming examples codes changed or were modified to suit the initial interpretation. Patton (2002) suggests that this part of the process is similar to constructing an index for a book or labels for a filing system. He cautions that the

inherent challenge is to ensure that the categories are internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous. This means that everything in one category must hold together in some meaningful way and that the differences between categories need to be bold and clear (Patton, 2002). The sorting of the data in this initial phase was exhaustive in that each segment of the information was written out on flip chart paper, identified and labeled with coloured symbols. All of the data were not mutually exclusive as some of the information fit into more than one category and therefore may have had more than one coloured symbol. This was done concurrently by me and the Research Helper without discussion as to the choices we were making or the reasons why. This initial phase allowed us to become aware of what the participants were contributing and helped us to facilitate a process of thinking about the data.

### **Phase two: Organizing individual participant responses by question**

Phase two involved creating electronic tables to retrieve and assemble the data for each question, namely all of the participant responses to question one were listed in one column, collective responses for question two in a separate column and so on. Each participant was assigned a coloured font or highlight to assist in identifying the comments from each participant.

### **Phase three: Organizing collective responses by code**

Phase three was the development of a two column table format which included the distillation of the collective responses in each of the data segments



and the responses were organized by the first level codes as mentioned in Phase one. At this point in the analysis process specific themes were starting to emerge and were noted using a different font size.

#### **Phase four: Theme corroboration**

During this fourth phase of the analysis each themed data segment was read out loud and discussed for correlation. This was quite a lengthy and time consuming process but over time and discourse yielded a concise list of themes that summarized the data. The six themes that were identified include: (1) Spiral Relationships, (2) Ceremony with three sub-themes – circle as ceremony, ceremony in Circle and Circles as healing, (3). Facilitators include four subthemes – knowledge, experience, skills and apprenticeship; (4) Circle as Sacred Space includes three sub-themes – creating the Space, seen and unseen, holding the space; (5) Tools, and (6) Teachings. As a result of this socially constructed data analysis methodology I would suggest that the resulting classification system is meaningful, relevant and useful in the context of this study.

The next section will provide you with a summary of the descriptive data in relation to each of the themes identified above. In order to capture the data in this text I will present the information from the Elder Knowledge Keepers verbatim as well as through stories, tables and lists. These will not only summarize the data content of the themes but provide some context with which to understand the relationship to the actual practice of conducting a Teaching Circle.

## Theme One: Spiral Relationships



### *The Story of changing Circles*

*I truly believe that there is just one type of circle and over time we have had to label different structures that have developed. I believe a long time ago – our ancestors – when we sat together in a circle that whatever happened in that circle was meant to happen – healing always happened – somebody walked out of there with a healing – someone walked out of there with a teaching because someone shared and if somebody didn't share someone talked – a couple of people talking and they may have been sitting beside them and it was during the time that they were sharing food or at the time they were coming in and saying hi at the beginning of the circle – I think over time we have had to define certain things and I think some of it has to do with time – the time we spend and intention – we have become knowledge carriers in another language – like how that spiral goes – and this is how I believe it was in the old old time – when people came in it started out as a talking circle and as that spiral goes deeper and deeper into the earth because we are working with the earth when we are sharing whether its virtual or not talking and then that teaching comes in and sets the tone – that intention if you will - and then that sharing starts – people start opening up and they start realizing that wow what I thought I was here about is really not what I was here about and that intention changes and then that healing starts – that deep healing – just like a spiral and that is why I am wondering where all that has changed – has it changed? Have we defined that spiral as different circles? Did our ancestors say no that's all the same line and it's connected to the earth and it's connect to everything that is up above (Mno-Jichaag Nswi, 2010)*

One of the prevailing messages within the data was the notion of endless motion or energy that moved around the circle and moves between the Earth and the Sky world. This movement was described as a spiral. As Hollow Bone Hunter I know that the Milky Way is called the Spiral Galaxy and from my vantage point in northern Ontario I can look directly overhead at certain times of the year and see this spectacle. If you recall this is exactly where I located Waasookwe, the second coder who helped me to organize the information the Knowledge Keepers provided.

Spirals are described as either a helix or corkscrew or spring. A helix is broadly described as having a circular or spiral shape and often spiral and helix are used interchangeably. A spiral such as a spring curves and winds about a fixed point and as it ascends it is at an ever increasing distance from the fixed point. In Teaching Circles the facilitators direct the discussion in a clockwise direction. Each time the discussion continues around the Circle the spiral figuratively expands and moves upward. I have come to understand that the purpose of the spiraling upwards in the Circle process is to send the accumulated energy, wisdom and knowledge from the participants to the Creator. The constant building of knowledge from person to person as the process moves around the circle is unique to Indigenous teaching and learning. If sensitive issues are being discussed where results are needed, this spiral process also assists with consensus building as mentioned in Chapter One by Elder Musqua.

## **Theme Two: Ceremony**

The theme of ceremony is divided into three sections, (1) Circle as ceremony, (2) Ceremony in Circle, and (3) Healing. This distinction was presented many times as a way to further distinguish a Teaching Circle from a Healing Circle but also to describe components of a Teaching Circle as different from a Ceremonial Circle. This becomes complex in that certain activities i.e. ceremonies are conducted and deemed appropriate for Teaching Circles while other activities are purely ceremonial and conducted in a circular format. It became important to begin to further define these nuances.

A number of the participants said that Teaching Circles are ceremonies or that they can be a ceremony. The inclusion of certain practices, for instance the use of medicines as a ceremonial practice challenged the participants to think about Teaching Circles as ceremonial.

### **Circle as ceremony**

While they did not necessarily specify whether they were referring to face-to-face or online Circles, the Knowledge Keepers talked about the Teaching Circle as a ceremony in and of itself. They proposed that there is a connection that people make when placed in a circular fashion that resonates with many ceremonies that are also held in this format. Mno-Jichaag Niizho says that “Teaching circles can be ceremony,” and Mno-Jichaag Naanan says that, “There is a ceremony - it is a teaching circle.” Mno-Jichaag Nswi, a traditional dancer shares his experience with Circles as ceremony. He says that:

“When I go to the singings and the rain dance there are components of it that is – it’s a healing circle – a teaching circle- a sharing circle, a talking circle when it comes to the feast time but first and foremost it is a healing circle and in between they do the teachings – they hand that feather fan to one of the grandfathers and sometimes to one of the grandmothers and sometimes to one of the dancers who had already done their four years and they do a teaching and that’s a wonderful place for people to learn and the singings building up to that rain dance the same thing.”

### **Ceremony in Circle**

All of the participants identified that various ceremonies are held within Teaching Circles and are common practice which may vary depending on the

facilitator, the participants, perhaps the time of the year or the topic under discussion. The participants provided examples of different ceremonies that could be included in Indigenous Teaching circles in both face-to-face and computer mediated scenarios which are identified in Theme Six. The ceremonies identified are common in many Indigenous teaching pedagogical methods, such as prayer, songs and smudging.

### **Circle as Healing**

Another aspect that was of particular interest to the participants was the element of healing that was identified as inherent in any form of Indigenous Circles whether they were called Teaching, Sharing, Healing or Talking Circles. This differentiation was clearer with the intention of the Healing Circle. The participants clearly indicated that healing is a component of all Indigenous Circles however Healing Circles are the one format that explicitly identifies healing as a specific defined goal or intention. Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso, Mno-Jichaag Bezhig and Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi identified that Circles – no matter what they are called they all have a healing component and the healing is a teaching in itself that may happen during or at some time after the Circle is over. Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso says that, “You never know when any of those circles are going to turn into a healing circle - Healing circles are teaching circles in themselves.” Mno-Jichaag Bezhig states:

When you are in a circle the circle takes on a life of its own – it is in a spirit sense and even the word for circle in Ojibwe means unity so everybody that is in that Circle is participating whether they are just

listening, observing or sharing they're going to be affected by that process so when you go to a teaching circle to learn about something it is going to affect your spirit and your emotional aspect – also mental, physical – all four aspects of the person so it is very hard to say that a teaching circle is not a healing circle – because sometimes listening to other peoples response to information helps you to reflect on where you are at and to be able to receive new knowledge or to deal with past situations – like it's all interconnected but I think the difference is the agenda and what brings you to that place – so you are initially going there to learn something but it's part of your healing process as well and it is something that you are going to carry with you – that experience and that knowledge to reflect on it later and it may help you deal with stuff – maybe things have interfered with your learning of that in the past.

Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi indicates that, “The Elder says that a good place to begin in a circle – that is where healing begins – even though you may not know you are beginning your healing journey.” Healing in either a face-to-face Circle or in an online Teaching Circle requires specific strategies. The following quote describes how the facilitator could enlist the help of others in the Circle to assist with healing work in an online environment. This participant, Mno-Jichaag Niiwin, shares a personal experience and offers a suggestion to have a support person be available to the Teaching Circle participants at each electronically linked-in site to serve as their helper. This suggestion would assume that the online participant is part of a larger cohort of learners who are situated in one location while the facilitator and other learners are located in a different location. She shared that:

Some circles involve women on their moon time and in order not to exclude them – then the feather is passed around one of their friends or sister would hold the feather for them while they spoke and sometimes they would even put a circle of tobacco around themselves so they are still sitting in the circle but they are in their own bubble – their own circle within a circle. So there were women there that would be supporting the

work of the facilitator so if someone was having a hard time emotionally those two women would bring the water and smudge and smudge everybody but especially the person who is having a hard time – it is kind of like a team thing but if you didn't have a couple of people with you to do that work you would want to make sure that there is someone there at the different sites to do that because it is really effective. (Mno-Jichaag Niiwin, 2010)

Another participant also discussed healing via a computer mediated environment and suggests that while the practice may be challenging there could be benefits as well.

On computer - the difficult parts are you don't have a person right there – there is an element to the healing process that has to do with an exchange of direct energy – direct personal energy because that is one whole component within that circle. With the computer you have another energy – another physical energy that is in between the two – sort of like a telephone – you've got one person on one end and another person on the other end but then there is the phone line connecting the two of you – it can be a challenge and then at the same time it can be a benefit because some people can do healing better without having that other energy right there for them. (Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi, 2010)

### **Theme Three: Facilitators**

Each of the people interviewed noted the critical importance of a skilled facilitator or conductor. These two terms were used interchangeably by everyone and translates into the person who leads the Teaching Circle process. When asked about who would meet the requirements as the conductors or facilitators and their requisite 'qualifications' the participants identified four main areas of significance. It was acknowledged that the facilitator be very well-informed of both the Circle process and in the topic being discussed; that s/he have extremely adept facilitation skills; that s/he have experience as both a participant in Circles

and have led a good life; and finally, that s/he have had some mentorship or apprenticed with an experienced facilitator/conductor prior to conducting Teaching Circles.

### **Facilitator Knowledge**

Five of the seven participants spoke of the facilitator as having an understanding of the process and protocols of Teaching Circles. Others offered the suggestion that facilitators need not be of a certain age but understand the effective utilization of ceremonies that would be appropriate for inclusion in Teaching Circles. They suggested that facilitators be considered the Elders or Wisdom Keepers within the community. The Knowledge Keepers alleged that these individuals would need to have particular in-depth knowledge about the various topics offered in the Circle, for example, if someone was facilitating a Teaching Circle on cedar baths they must have extensive knowledge and experience of cedar baths before conducting a Teaching Circle on the topic.

### **Facilitator Experience**

Essential to the facilitators' knowledge acquisition is their experience in life. Lifelong learning was identified as fundamental to success in conducting Circles. Being a positive role model in the community would engender respect from others and garner respect and trust in the participants. Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi said:



Respect has to be there – deep respect for the teaching you are receiving along your journey. You have to live it to teach it and if you haven't lived it to teach it then who is teaching you to teach the Circles. Who is guiding you? This comes from the Elders. Who is taking you under their wing to teach you?

Mno-Jichaag Niizho added that, “Teachers are primarily those who have experienced the past at hand. You need to have had the experience to teach in a Teaching Circle.” Mno-Jichaag Bezhig agrees saying, “Qualifications for those kinds of things is where you are in life.” Mno-Jichaag Bezhig opines that, “An experienced conductor is imperative to contribute to wellness and balance.”

Mno-Jichaag Nswi, when speaking about the qualifications of a Teaching Circle facilitator suggests that the designation is an earned one. She stated that: “It is not automatically given to a person just because they have attained a certain age, nor because they are related to someone of importance. It is earned. We want to feel safe when we enter a Circle. We are placing sacred trust into the hands that are guiding the Circle.” She further explains that this person has to be, “Somebody that I can trust and is known as a positive role model. You need somebody who has a positive influence on people.

### **Facilitator Skills**

The participants identified the following list of 16 specific required skills that an Indigenous Teaching Circle facilitator would need to conduct Teaching Circles. When asked if these skills would apply in a computer mediated environment all seven of the participants agreed that the skills were identical whether the Circle was held face-to-face or online. Some of the skills listed below would need video as well as audio support. These skills include:

1. to be gentle and kind;

2. to be prepared with an agenda to open the circle and close the circle
3. to be part of the experience as a participant learner
4. to be observant
5. to be careful
6. to be respectful
7. to be patient
8. to be empathetic
9. to pay attention
10. to create and implement rules of conduct/behavior
11. to know how to take care of emotional outbursts
12. to understand the impact and significance of ceremonial items
13. understand how to ground or balance learners before the circle is done
14. to understand how to recognize boundaries
15. to have knowledge of body language
16. to understand how to engender trust and confidentiality

## **Facilitator Apprenticeship**

Another aspect deemed important by the Elder Knowledge Keepers was the experience of apprenticeship. Three participants identified that working as a trainee, as a participant or helper to the conductor and as a learner in the Circle process were essential to their own success as facilitators of Teaching Circles. This process of apprenticing allowed them to be trained while participating and observing someone else conducting the Circle and taking care of the learners in the Circle. When asked about how one would become a conductor Mno-Jichaag Naanan said that, “You would need to know the protocol of the circles. So you would have to be trained by someone else who is running circles and the training would usually be with you participating so that you see how it is demonstrated.” Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso started as a participant and learned from that experience that he was able to conduct circles in time. While a time limit was not mentioned specifically, from participant input, it seems that the apprenticeship continues until the apprentice is asked by the mentor to conduct the session on their own. The trainee would only take this on if they felt confident of their own knowledge and skills and felt they had sufficient experience.

## **Theme four: Circle as sacred space**

The theme of Circle as Sacred Space yielded three sub-categories: (1) creating the Teaching Circle space, (2) the seen and the unseen in the Circle, and (3) holding the Teaching Circle space.

## **Creating Teaching Circle space**

All of the Elder Knowledge Keepers identified that a Teaching Circle space must be set up in a circular fashion with no restriction as to whether it was held in a building, outside or on the computer. Mno-Jichaag Naanan said, “You can have Teaching Circles anytime, anywhere as long as you have an opening – and it is ok.”

Mno-Jichaag Nizhoo noted that in her classroom the learners would automatically put their chairs in a circle. They would also provide input to her as the conductor either through email or verbally. Once they had provided her with this information she states that she would, “sit and pray with these topics.” Mno-Jichaag Nizhoo opines that each person is a Teaching Circle and as individuals are able to personally connect to each other socially, emotionally, spiritually and physically. She goes on to say that:

I think one person can be a teaching circle – I think two people can be a Teaching Circle – I believe that the Circle is within us and connecting all of us; it is inside of us – it is like concentric rings and I think the Circle can be whatever you make it – it’s all about intent and all about what you bring into the Circle whether it is over a computer or whether it is in person or whether it is in somebody’s heart.

Mno-Jichaag Bezhig and Mno-Jichaag suggest that if there is a need for Teaching Circles then they can happen anywhere. They suggest that there should be four openings created when the Circle space is set up. In a face-to-face setting this can be accommodated by leaving one chair out of each of the cardinal direction points on the Circle. While they described these specific Circle

configurations as being important to replicate, the participants did not provide any specific suggestions as to how this could be accomplished in an electronic environment. Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso shared that, “sometimes we had Circle where we would go counterclockwise because we had a different Indigenous Nation with us whose Circle protocol was to begin the discussion with the person to the right of the facilitator instead of the left or clockwise.”

### **Seen and unseen in the Circle Space**

The notion of an unseen presence as part of the Circle process was identified by all seven of the Elder Knowledge Keepers. The unseen presence was referred to as spirits, ancestors or spirit helpers. These unseen presences within the Teaching Circles were not limited to face-to-face environments but were a stable presence whenever people gathered in any type of Circle whether they were identified as a Teaching Circle, Sharing Circle, Talking Circle or a Healing Circle. The spirit helpers were recognized by the Mno-Jichaags as a natural part of the process. Mno-Jichaag Nswi states that, “Even in a Healing Circle where you are talking about issues the spirits do come in because a lot of time the facilitator will use a hand drum or a pipe and invite the helping spirits of everybody to come in – and give you guidance.” Mno-Jichaag Nswi continues the explanation saying that, “for the unseen part of it – it is usually spoken about at the beginning of the circle where explanation are made and what the topic of the Teaching Circle is.” The facilitator always talks about how everyone that is there belongs there and that they are meant to be there at this particular point in time.”

Mno-Jichaag Niiwin cautions about the preparedness of the facilitator to accommodate the spirit helpers in an online environment. She says that:

You would have to put great care into how you would bring that support into that circle and be prepared for a door opening up when someone is doing some healing work – it can it be done – absolutely – that would be up to whoever is the creator of that Circle or that software or format or whatever you are doing it on – would it be difficult – yeah – yeah but it can be done.

### **Holding the Teaching Circle space**

Holding the space within the Teaching Circle can be likened to the creation of a positive learning environment. The facilitator would have to be mindful of a learner-centered approach as well as intended learning outcomes, pacing and sequencing.

As a long time educator one of the first important technical skills learned as a pre-service teacher was how to manage classroom activities so learners are empowered and engaged with their own learning. In Indigenous Teaching Circle pedagogy holding the space or creating a positive learning environment for the Circle participants is also of paramount importance and a learned facilitator has the responsibility to carry that out. There were a variety of ways to maintain a positive learning environment that were offered by the Elder Knowledge Keepers which included offering the Teaching Circle participants some sample guidelines or group agreements which could include statements about not interrupting while someone is talking, protocols concerning confidentiality, agreeing on what it means to be respectful and non-judgmental, and to reinforce that silent

participation is acceptable. Mno-Jichaag Nswi says that, “When I am facilitating a Teaching Circle they do not have to participate with their voice. They are already participating with their presence.”

There are also some contemporary issues that challenge the creation of space with the various Circles. There is a definite dichotomy in thinking and practice among the participants in this study on two issues - the wearing of skirts by the woman, and the ‘moon time’ or women’s menses and their inclusion within the Circle. A number of facilitators welcome women into the Circle whether or not she is wearing a skirt and others ask that women not wearing skirts sit outside the Circle proper. Many facilitators will also ask that women on their menses or moon time also sit on the outside of the Circle and some facilitators invite these women into the Circle. These two issues are subject to the knowledge, skills and experience of the facilitator and are usually identified at the outset of the Circle before the Teaching starts. A number of the Mno-Jichaags identified protocols that they implement as conductors of Teaching Circles. While some of the protocols identified may seem contradictory to others it should be noted that each facilitator has come through an apprenticeship and will have different values, beliefs, skills and experience.

The Elder Knowledge Keepers talked about equality in participants, that everyone in the circle was equal no matter the age. Mno-Jichaag Niizho said that when she was providing Moss Bag Teachings that she had, “no ground rules about women on their moon time.” She explains that it is ok because she was not

using medicines or opening the Circle with a smudging ceremony. She goes on to include that she also does not, “make restrictions if they have been using alcohol or drugs the night before.” She continues saying that there are different protocols if a drum is going to be used and women are experiencing their moon time [menses]. She says that, “Women on their time are not able to participate in the circle but they can participate on the outside of the circle – but they are still there.”

Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi talks about women and the protocol regarding wearing a skirt. She says that most Circles she participates in require that, “women come with a skirt on.” She says that, “for me, if I am doing a circle I let people know that the women don’t have to have a skirt on if they are uncomfortable - there is a lot of two-spirited people who don’t feel comfortable in a skirt.”

In order to maintain cultural integrity these two contemporary issues will need further investigation relative to the various computer mediated environments.

Mno-Jichaag Niiwin speaks of holding space in a computer mediated environment. She says that she envisions that:

There could be three people at one site and three people at another site linked up together so the people at each computer are looking at their screens and creating a larger circle from the two smaller ones. If it is videoconferencing they would have the larger circle as well but still have the smaller Circles at the various sites for small group work and support. If it is not videoconferencing it would be better if they each had a camera and they could see people, because I think non-verbals and physicality are important too. I think people like to know that what they are saying is affecting the other people.



Mno-Jichaag Niiwin agrees saying, “Videoconference technology is good because it is a visual technology - we need to see the person we are talking to.”

Mno-Jichaag Bezhig says that holding the space would require, “a key board with a webcam and audio.” Mno-Jichaag Niizho says that for him it would be important to know who was present if there was not visual contact available. He says, “as long as people know who all is there and they acknowledge each other - maybe just go through a list of names and say I am here – going around the circle - as long as they know who is there that would work.”

Mno-Jichaag Naanan believes that holding space in an online Teaching Circle would necessitate another component to enhance the experience. She cautions, “I see circle being on computer but there are limitations – it would need some fieldwork that they [the participants] would have to do or there would be an uprising with the Elders if part of that fieldwork is in that computerize system.” I would suggest that this Elder is referring to the continuous self-directed learning process that is encouraged as part of life experience. The fieldwork she speaks of is the mentoring and apprenticing that is integral to Indigenous learning. She is suggesting that this process of working with Elders to deepen learning needs to somehow be integrated into the instructional design of online Teaching Circles.

Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi and Mno-Jichaag Bezhig agree that holding the space in a computer environment could be accomplished and Mno-Jichaag Niiwin expands this notion further saying, “I really believe this whole process you’re exploring with a virtual sharing can be the perfect conduit for taking people to

their own inner sacred space – their own inner circle – it can be a wonderful lead in for that [inner sacred space] and for them to explore outside of that [virtual learning space] after.” I believe Mno-Jichaag Niiwin is referring to personal reflection and meditation which is often encouraged in Indigenous learning. Engaging in introspection affords opportunities for deep learning and knowledge acquisition. She seems to be suggesting that similar practices and processes that are normally included in a face to face learning environment would also be necessary in virtual learning environments.

Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso shares her ideas about how she would hold space with regard to the use of sacred items in an online method. She says:

In a computer mediated environment you could, in an introduction, talk to people about what that might look like [the inclusion of sacred items] or you could even just do a circle on what sacred items they carry and how they came to carry them. That is a whole Teaching Circle in itself and it is sacred knowledge for each of the participants and it is ok to share it in that way because you have the Circle that protects it and makes sure that it is respectfully dealt with. It would be important to reinforce the sacredness of this Circle space – we would not want people to put this information up on their blog – I think that would work – even with sacred knowledge.

Mno-Jichaag Nswi states that, “some teachings cannot happen because of the way it was brought to our people and it’s got to stay that way.” There is an ongoing dialogue among Elder Knowledge Keepers generally about what is kept as private knowledge and what is permissible in the public domain. Some of the Teachings were passed down through generations as specific sacred knowledge.

The fifth theme identified which sacred items were deemed suitable and often used by the Elder Knowledge Keepers in Indigenous Teaching Circles.

## Theme Five: Tools

Various implements are utilized during Teaching Circles and each facilitator chooses which item would best suit the situation. Table 2 below illustrates the items that were suggested, accompanied by some examples of how they could be used in either a face-to-face or online Teaching Circle. It is important to note that others may use different objects which are highly regarded also but this study identified only these specific items. In addition, each of the items identified were not described as specifically for either face to face Circles or virtual Circles. I would suggest that this is another area of future enquiry.

**Table 2 - Sacred items used in Circle work**

Tool or item	Elder Knowledge Keepers words
Eagle Feather	<p data-bbox="889 1150 1333 1514">“If a woman is on their moon time [menses] and an Eagle feather is passed around one of their friends or sister would hold the feather for them while they spoke and sometimes they would even put a circle of tobacco around themselves so they are still sitting in the circle but they are in their own bubble – their own circle within a circle.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p> <p data-bbox="889 1583 1273 1717">“I used eagle feather in some institutions because we were not allowed to use smudge.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p> <p data-bbox="889 1787 1333 1877">“In a computer environment - Passing the feather – you would just have to state that so and so has the floor.”</p>

	(Mno-Jichaag Bezhig)
Drum	“You must be aware how a drum will impact the participant.” (Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso)
Goose Feather	“When I work with youth and children I use a goose feather because when they are talking they just don’t stroke the feather some of them bend it. It seems to work. It is their feather – it stays in their classroom and they know it is special.” (Mno-Jichaag Nswi)
Rock or stone	“They could have a stone because we are told that when you are working with a stone and you are learning something the stone is going to help you remember the new knowledge because the stone and rocks are the oldest aspect of our world – our physical world and they are very very ancient and very wise. If you have a stone with you in the process it is something tangible and it might help that student or learner to pick up the knowledge and carry it because they can reflect with that stone later.” (Mno-Jichaag Niiwin)
Talking Stick	<p>“You can pass around a stick so that each person knows that when they are holding the stick they are the only one speaking.” (Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi)</p> <p>“They used a talking stick that was chosen on a walk. Each child picked different coloured ribbons and tied them on the stick to use in their Teaching Circle.” (Mno-Jichaag Nswi)</p>
Water, Sage and Smudge	“In healing circles there was always water and smudge – usually sage

	<p>because that is your heart medicine – it looks after balancing you emotionally.” (Mno-Jichaag Bezbig)</p> <p>“In a computer Circle they could have some water there.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p> <p>“When you light a smudge it doesn’t just go in this area it goes worldwide.” (Mno-Jichaag Niizhoo)</p>
<p>Personal bundles</p>	<p>“In a computer Circle - if students had their bundles with them that would help – it would be part of the process and we [as educators] would want them to be supported.”</p> <p>(Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p>
<p>Fire and Candles</p>	<p>“This was used in a First Nations school so I was able to light a candle so we had fire there to help - sometimes the Circle participants had issues and they needed to be honest with each other, for ex. They may be angry with someone in their family. I was always taught that if you have fire in the Circle the fire will transform any of the negative energy back into positive.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p> <p>“In a computer mediated environment you would probably want them to have a candle there so it can transform the energy into a more positive space; but if they are in a school they might not be able to light a candle so they would have to use something else.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)</p>

Talking Feather	“I would introduce something of interest and then use the talking feather and pass it around so that everyone had an opportunity to share.” (Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso)
Medicines	“Medicines in virtual circle – depends on their [learners] environment – if they are able to smudge I would advise them to have their smudge with them at the site in case they need it - then they could light it up and have a smudge at any point.” (Mno-Jichaag Niizho)
Pipe and/or hand drum	“I use a hand drum or maybe even a pipe and invite the helping spirits of everybody to come in.”(Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi)
Prayer	“The circle may start off with a prayer and a greeting.” (Mno-Jichaag Nswi)

There is no specific literature that identifies explicit curriculum topics that would or could be carried out in Teaching Circles. My previous assumption about Teaching Circle content was based primarily on the contents of a course syllabus developed as part of an educational program offering. In Theme Six the Knowledge Keepers offered some additional suggestions, from their personal experience, either participating or conducting Teaching Circles that were on or about certain subject areas and not linked to any specific program of study.

## **Theme Six: Teachings for Indigenous Teaching Circles**

The Elder Knowledge Keepers produced a list of 25 activities and identified each as being appropriate for Indigenous Teaching Circles. The topics include: Sacred, spiritual or ceremonial knowledge and basic life skills. Sacred, spiritual or ceremonial topics consist of: Creation stories; Clan teachings; Midewewin Degree teachings; Pipe, water, tobacco and fire teachings; water drum teachings; Universal laws, and the significance of the four doorways. Additional suggestions included: sewing Moss Bags, designing and creating amulets, Seven Stages of Life, Hand Drum knowledge, Life paths, Life stages, that is where you are in life, building a lodge – both ceremonial and sweat lodge teachings, Grandfather teachings, four aspects – emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, four hills of life, Sacred bundles, full moon ceremony, Preparing people for circle work, Singings - the rain dance and the Sun dance, Smudge teaching.

It must be noted that this is by no means a comprehensive list of all that is available for sharing in a Teaching Circle. This list represents the ideas of the Elder Knowledge Keepers in this study. I have attended other Teaching Circles with many other topics, such as beading or other craft instruction, that were also carried out with the same Teaching Circle processes and protocols identified throughout this study. It is also important to note that there is no definition or descriptions of the topics listed by the Elder Knowledge Keepers. This study did not encompass this depth of questioning and would require another enquiry to

determine whether the particular descriptions and content of each topic would be appropriate for transcribing.

### **Four types of Circles**

One of the most complex issues to decipher was the language used to identify Circle methodologies. There does not seem to be a formally articulated lexicon to describe the variety of Circles that are possible. The language used to identify Circles seems to be interchangeable, for example the terms Sharing Circles, Teaching Circles, and Talking Circles all seem to be used to describe the Circle methodology. I have noted that the only concrete difference in understanding among my professional and social peers seems to be when individuals are referring to Healing Circles. Healing Circles, as I have come to know, are normally convened by an individual, family or community to address an imbalance in one or a combination of the physical, emotional, social, cognitive or spiritual domains. In my professional career and in my community involvement I have heard many people refer to Circles and have been constantly trying to understand the specific differences among the naming of the Circle activity.





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The participants in this study provided clear delineation among the various types of Circle methodologies. There are some distinct similarities among the Teaching, Sharing and Talking Circles with some additional definitive purposes for Healing Circles. Table 3 below contains a synthesis of the data from the participants. The similarities and differences noted seemed to derive more from the intentions rather than being expressed as definitions. It was obvious to me as I distilled the information that the Circle methodologies are dynamic and evolving as individual entities but also through the facilitators and the participants of each Circle. I learned that Circle methodologies are neither prescriptive nor rigid but have an identified intention that may be identified as a purpose or goal or simply experienced as a non-verbal intention. In the non-verbal context the intention may be a response to a spiritual intention.

**Table 3 - Definitions of various types of Circles**

Name of Circle	Intention
Teaching Circle	<p>To provide teachings from Elders, Storytellers, Spiritual Leaders, and/or the Wisdom Keepers</p> <p>To create a space for ceremonies to enhance the teaching</p>
Talking Circle	<p>To create a space where people get to know each other</p> <p>To share life experiences and to gather a little bit of knowledge to help individuals along in life</p> <p>To create a space for the inclusion of specific ceremonies</p>
Sharing Circle	<p>To provide a space to allow for everyone attending to be given the opportunity to share what they feel they would like to share – they have a healing a component</p> <p>To include the element of</p>

	<p>confidentiality</p> <p>To create an environment to allow for the inclusion of ceremonies if requested.</p>
Healing Circle	<p>To create a space for participants to heal from trauma in their lives</p> <p>To create a space that allows for specific ceremonies for individual healing practices.</p>
Ceremonial circles	<p>To create a space that allows for discrete ceremonial practices</p>

I would suggest that the identification of the various types of Circle methodologies will assist practitioners and participants to understand what is required of them either as a facilitator or a participant. Individuals may want to attend a Talking Circle for social interaction and may not be interested in disclosing personal information or need the support of a Healing space. Without this basic understanding facilitators and participants may experience a dissonance which would result in less than ideal teaching, learning and healing experience. Participants may arrive expecting to attend a Teaching Circle when a Healing Circle is on the agenda.

As I listened to the Elder Knowledge Keepers and reflected on what they had to share it was becoming clear to me that much of my personal experience with Teaching Circles was reflected in the approaches and processes they had suggested. As I journeyed I did have the opportunity to attend a Teaching Circle on the creation of Medicine Bags. The following story illustrates the experience in the Circle and using verbatim quotes from the Elder Knowledge Keepers provides some validation of the process and practices. The story provides examples related to the themes and sub-categories of ceremony, circle as healing, facilitators knowledge, experience, skills and apprenticeship; creating sacred space and holding the space and the tools used to do so as identified earlier in the chapter. For clarity the story is chronicled continuously down the left side of the page with the participants' examples adjacent to the pertinent circumstance in the story.



### **The story of the Hollow Bone Hunter's Teaching Circle Experience**

Hollow Bone Hunters Circle experience

Participants' validation

*As I stood looking at the bulletin board I noticed a poster that had this beautiful beaded bag on it. It was an invitation to a Teaching Circle on Medicine bags. I was intrigued because I had never been to a Teaching Circle about Medicine bags and I wondered what it was all about. I wondered if I was even allowed to attend but then noticed that the poster indicated that "Everyone was welcome". I decided that I would attend.*



Participants are able to visit a little before the Circle begins (Mno-Jichaag

*On the evening of the Circle I walked very slowly to the community centre. I didn't want to get there too early because I wanted to see what others would do and I could learn what I was supposed to do. I see a few other people heading in the same direction so join in the line as they proceeded up the stairs and into the hall.*

Niizhwaaswi)

*I slowed down a bit and entered the room immediately stepping to the left of the doorway and leaned on the back wall a bit. I wanted to give the room a good look before I decided whether or not to stay. There were a few others there talking quietly and some children were running in and out of the building jumping the stairs two at a time.*

*In the centre of the room there was a circle of about 20 chairs with one chair removed at four different locations in the circle. You could walk straight across the circle from right to left or east to west and then through the circle in the other directions or south to north. No one was sitting in any of the chairs and the children were not running anywhere near it as well. I was a bit nervous because this seemed to be formal yet comfortable and I didn't know what to expect.*



People sit around in a circular fashion and there is a person who is there to teach, to talk about different topics and there could be a second or third person there who is more knowledgeable on a specific topic, a guest speaker or something like that (Mno-Jichaag Bezbig)

*Very soon an Elderly couple arrives and they are carrying a lot of bags and other containers. Immediately everyone approached them to assist them with their baggage. I guessed correctly that our facilitators had arrived.*



An experienced conductor/facilitator is imperative to the wellness and balance of a circle (Mno-Jichaag Niizho).

*They seemed very preoccupied*

When you have an



*with the set up of the room and filled in the empty spots in the Circle all except one opening. I was to learn later that this was the eastern doorway and the preferred entrance to this Teaching circle in this geographical territory. They spread out a beautiful woolen blanket in the middle of the Circle of chairs and the two began to open up the various bags and containers and put the items on the blanket. The people in the room were watching what was going on without using their eyes. It somehow seemed disrespectful to stare while they were preparing for the session. This seemed to go on for awhile and then without any sort of signal people began to enter the Circle and sit down. Again I waited to make sure that I was doing the right thing.*



opening in the circle and for us in our area it would be the eastern doorway and so once that circle opens and we come around we have created a wall – so one of the things we were asked to do was when we come into the circle we come through that opening rather than come through the chairs because it would be like coming through a wall – that was our teaching circle for our region. We can go in through the east (Mno-Jichaag Nswi).

The other thing is I find that what you need to be aware of is where you want to have an opening – where people can come in and go – sometimes you need to explain that you cannot just walk in from anywhere – there are different ways you can do that but it all depends on the type of circle that you have-teaching circles with medicines (Mno-Jichaag Niiwin)

*I notice that when people entered the Circle the always went to the left around the Circle and if the attempted to turn right the facilitators motioned them with a half circle of their arm to go the*



Participants generally arrive, say hello walk into the circle and depending on what territory you are in

*other way. I entered the Circle and went halfway around and sat directly across from the opening.*

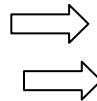
will either go clockwise or counter clockwise as they walk within the circle and find a seat to sit in – we sit in a circle so that everybody is equal but no one is sitting behind another so no one can talk behind somebody’s back (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)

*Once everyone was seated the facilitators sat down directly to the left of the opening – the lady and then the man. They sat quietly until everyone was quiet and the lady introduced herself. She spoke in Ojibwe and announced her name to the Circle; she talked about her name and the responsibility that she carries with it. She talked about her family and about her life. Her name was Aline.*



Depending on the conductor’s teachings, as you enter in the eastern doorway the conductor is either directly to your left or they may be sitting at the western direction. Their helper(s) may be to the left or right of the eastern doorway. Traditionally, there are places within the circle for those who are aiding the person conducting the circle (Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso)

*The man spoke next and also introduced himself in Ojibwe and talked about his family and his life. His name was Emerson and he was a traditional dancer and pipe carrier.*



The conductor/facilitator needs to have an understanding about the concept of circle and how that could be used in a good way. I have not seen anything formal for credentials for Teaching Circles. The way I see it – it is somebody who is

living in a good way to the best way they know how or like a role model and we need positive role models (Mno-Jichaag Naanan).

If we were to develop a criteria there is an understanding that when people are conducting any kind of circle that living in a good way is a requirement whether it's a Traditional, Aboriginal or Christian and has an understanding with groups, an understanding with circles and how they relate to us as Aboriginal people (Mno-Jichaag Nswi).

*When they were finished introducing themselves they offered a prayer and lit a smudge which was a small cast iron frying pan with some sage. The man went around the circle of people and offered the smudge to each person in the group. We were told that we could pass if we wanted to. The smell of the burning sage seemed to bring centeredness or calmness to the circle. It had the effect of creating invisible walls around that Circle of chairs so much so the I felt safe and protected in that space.*



Often the Circle open with a prayer or a smudge and a greeting (Mno-Jichaag Bezbig)



You would want to make sure there are trained people with water, and smudge for people who need them.

It [Circle space] is like a structured community that is open to everything and anyone who would like to participate, has an open heart and mind



and enters with a respect for all that will take place. As soon as that circle forms it doesn't belong to anything or anyone but it becomes part of everything (Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi).

*When this was done Aline asked each of us to introduce ourselves in the way that we each felt comfortable. We were offered the opportunity to just say our name if that was comfortable or more about who we were are why we were interested in coming to this teaching on Medicine Bags.*



When you are in a circle the circle takes on a life of its own – it is in a spirit sense and even the word for circle in Ojibwe means unity (Mno-Jichaag Niiwin)

*Aline was holding a small stone in her left hand the whole time she was talking and passed it to Emerson to hold when she was done. When Emerson was done he passed the stone to the person to his left and it continued around the Circle.*



A feather may be passed around, a rock or a talking stick while people introduce themselves. This is a good way for everybody to know who everyone is and where they are from. This is generally a short introduction. If there is a community announcement, this is a good time to share it (Mno-Jichaag Naanan).

*When it was my turn I was a bit nervous because I had listened so intently to what each person had to say that I didn't feel prepared to say anything. I usually figure out in my head what I am going to say when a person is talking and this time I was just listening – it was a bit unsettling. When I received the stone and sat with it for a few seconds the words*



It is important to listen carefully. This is the way and everybody relates to what they hear in a different way. This depends on what their previous understanding and knowledge is

*just came to me. I could feel the warmth of the smooth surface of the rock which seemed to be pulsating into my hand. I actually looked at it to make sure it wasn't moving. I cannot remember what I said and almost everyone was just looking down at the centre of the Circle anyway but I really felt comfortable and safe.*

*Once Aline glanced at me and smiled when I talked about being on this journey to find answers about Sacred Space in Cyberspace. It was a knowing look and one that I felt curious and happy with at the same time. I felt like just settling in for whatever was going to come next.*

*When everyone was finished introducing themselves Aline and Emerson began to talk about the Medicine Bag, its origins, usage, and its purpose and so on. They each carried Medicine Bags which they showed to the group and talked about how theirs came to them and why they carry it. During this time everyone just listened and watched.*

*When they were done Aline again asked each of us to comment on what we had heard. I noticed that she did not ask us if we carry Medicine Bags or not. I found this to be comforting because those people in the Circle who do carry a*

[teachings] on the subject and what their frame of reference is [life experience]. It may be that a participant does not understand what was shared that day, and then 5 years down the road they may have a moment of uhhah – that is what it was about. (Mno-Jichaag Niizho)

The physical set up is conducive to inclusion of everyone because you can see everyone in a circle and then you can see their non-verbal responses too so there is a relationship between the speaker and the listeners for sure – so when you are talking you are receiving that response. (Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso)

It is an understanding that each person has a contribution to make whether it is neither right nor wrong. You have an opportunity to come back to clarify or to add. (Mno-Jichaag Naanan)

We do our best to remain open and share in an equal way without getting in each other's way – no egos – no personal agendas - contributing



*Medicine Bag may not want to share that information and those who do not may feel embarrassed if they do not. It felt empowering to be offered an opportunity to share what we wanted to and not feel singled out.*

with good intention for the good of all that is. (Mno-Jichaag Nswi)

*The Circle continued for a very long time going round and round until everyone had a chance to introduce themselves and speak about what their relationships were to Medicine Bags. Aline and Emerson were very patient as some of stories seemed to take a long time to tell and I wasn't sure were totally related to the topic.*



Even in these circles when you call them Teaching Circles really whatever topic that is being discussed there is always, always, always a healing to that circle. It goes around and around many times as you are there and each time it goes around it touches somebody and those Teaching Circles can just flip over and turn into a healing circle because of the awareness that it touches their spirit somewhere – it touches their body memory somewhere – their senses somewhere. (Mno-Jichaag Niiwin)

*One of the participants got quite emotional when he was talking about an experience he had with his late Grandfather and immediately Emerson relit the smudge and went to the gentleman. Aline lit a candle that was on the blanket and poured some water into a small paper cup and it was passed around the Circle. It was all very natural and rhythmic – it felt like this was exactly how things were supposed to happen.*



The participant is able to express their feelings and sometimes there is no limitation they will use that circle time – especially if they can relate to the topic – they will talk about their own personal thoughts, feelings or experiences. (Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso)

*After this lengthy discussion Aline and Emerson thanked everyone for coming to share their knowledge and*

*offered to answer any further questions later by inviting people to call on them. They provided encouragement to the group to continue with their quest for knowledge on their efforts to maintain a good life.*

*The Circle ended with a prayer of gratitude by Aline and we continue to go left around to the Circle opening being careful not to step on the blanket or the sacred items still in the Circle.*

*Everyone was talking and laughing and I felt renewed and related to something that is far greater and bigger than anything I have ever known – and I was connected of it*

### **Linking the Teaching Circle to Seven Grandfather Teachings**

The Seven Grandfather Teachings of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth as outlined in Chapter Three were clear and evident in my experience attending the Teaching Circle on Medicine Bag making. I was beginning to understand what it was about the Circle that touched people. In this Circle the conductors demonstrated their knowledge through modeling and sharing of their lived experience which immediately sets up a more personal dynamic between the participants and the facilitators. Their approach to directing participants to protocol and process was done with respect not singling out any individual for their lack of understanding but creating a space to allow for self-directed learning to take place. The placement of the chairs in a circular format and the encouragement to move in the clockwise direction to find a seat felt familiar yet new and suggests a process of continuous learning. The circle itself

has no beginning and no end and while I have attended many other Circles in my lifetime I was in a different place and time from the previous Circles I had attended. While familiar I was different, I knew different things, I was older and this Circle was adding to my life experience and my personal and professional experience.

My relationship to everyone in the Circle was cemented through the use of techniques such as the opening prayer and ceremony. The opportunity to hold the stone that each of the other participants held to share their information not only connected me to all of creation through the wisdom of the stone but directly to those who had held it before me and added their energy and knowledge to this particular rock that I was holding. I submit that these tangible experiences coupled with the Seven Grandfather teachings demonstrate that Teaching Circles are a unique and valuable teaching pedagogy.

### **Hollow Bone Hunter takes stock**

This part of the story has provided you with in-depth knowledge of my collaborative socially-constructed experience with Waasookwe my research Helper as well as a robust summary of what was shared by the Elder Knowledge Keepers. I talked about how the information was organized, identified and categorized. I chose to provide much of the Elder Knowledge Keepers information verbatim in a variety of formats to honour participant's voices and to provide you with a full and complete consolidation of the data. This attention to the data will provide a comprehensive foundation for the research interpretation

which is the next leg of my journey. In Chapter Six I will provide a thorough interpretation of the data set as discussed in this chapter and agreed to by me, the participants and the Research Helper as previously discussed. It became a standard of practice throughout this dissertation to ‘check in’ and validate the data with both the Elder Knowledge Keepers and Waasookwe.

### **Chapter Six: Hollow Bone Hunter Builds New Knowledge**

First and foremost of the implications for practice is that learning technologists should be aware of the impact of their actions upon the learning environments in which their work is used. They should also be aware of their responsibilities so that they can act in the best interests of all of those involved (Ellaway, Begg, Dewhurst and MacLeod, 2006).

My journey as the Hollow Bone has brought me to a place of knowing. I have spent time with Elder Knowledge Keepers who have provided a great deal of information that I now have to begin to comprehend. In the last part of my travels I spent time with Waasookwe the co-coder who helped me to sort, separate, disassemble and put into order all of the information that I was trusted with from the Knowledge Keepers. The purpose of this process was to (re)assemble the information in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (Jorgenson, 1989: 107). I also wanted to ensure that I captured the voices of the Knowledge Keepers which not only privileges their contribution but demonstrates that they are firmly established as research partners in the endeavor. It was at this point in my journey when I had to figure out how this new knowledge can be used to make some positive changes in Indigenous teaching and learning.

This chapter describes four major foci that have been developed from the consolidation of the information that emerged during my search for meaning within the data set as described in Chapter Five. The four areas of focus include, Sacred Space and Cyberspace; Cultural Repatriation; Healing; and Institutional limitations.

### **Sacred Space and Cyberspace**

The notion of a space within a space is pivotal to understanding how someone could facilitate a Teaching Circle in an electronic environment. In a tangible sense the chairs provide a structure that one could be used to represent the learning space however in a virtual environment there may not be a video component to allow for this visual representation. The upcoming sections will provide various ideas to enable the creation of Sacred Space in a Cyber environment. The next story was one of my first memories of profound interconnectedness that is evident in nature and epitomizes how I envision creating a space that both provides a learning environment and allows for the inclusion of the sacred without tension or dissonance.



#### ***The story of a space within a space***

*The little girl followed the old lady into the bush wondering what was going to happen. The old lady looked on at once excited and knowing. She was looking around in all directions and finally slowed down and kneeled in the leaves. The little girl did not see anything of particular interest in the trees or on the ground. The old lady motioned her to come and kneel down beside her – she smiled her eye crinkly smile and gently lifted up a dead brown leaf looking at the little girl the whole time. There, under the leaf were the tiniest little pink, hairless mice the little girl had ever seen. There were four of them and they were all curled*

*into a ball, nestled within each other and the small indentation in the ground. They looked peaceful and warm curling into themselves and each other oblivious to the world above the leaf.*

### **How Space is created: Four Circles**

As discussed in Chapter Five, there seems to be a basic supposition or understanding in Indigenous communities and the Elder Knowledge Keepers in this study that Circles are essentially categorized into four types: Talking Circles, Sharing Circles, Teaching Circles and Healing Circles. These Circles are four discrete activities that have different goals, objectives and dynamics associated with each Circle correspondingly. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig offers an analogy to describe the nuances of each. She says, “I am beginning to see it almost like Psychology – there is a clinical psychologist, a psychoanalyst, a counselor but they are all psychologists and they all work in a different ways – they have a different method because they have a different way of seeing how a subject/concern/issue can be explored.” This is a particularly useful metaphor because it suggests that all Circles do have a commonality yet each is distinct and individual.

In my experience people refer to the four types of Circles interchangeably with Talking and Sharing circles seemingly being synonymous. One example that can be used to illustrate the similarities between Teaching Circles and Sharing Circles is a comparison between Hart’s (1997) study which focused primarily on Sharing Circles and the findings identified in this study. As identified in Chapter Three, it is important to note that the questions generated for this study were an



adaptation of the questions used in the Hart study. Table 4 below illustrates a comparison between the findings in Hart’s study and the information from the participants of this study. The specific considerations identified in the table evolved from the study questions and the responses generated by the participants.

**Table 4 - A comparison between Sharing Circles and Teaching Circles**

Considerations	Hart’s study	Cyberspace and Sacred Space Study
	<b>SHARING CIRCLES</b>	<b>TEACHING CIRCLES</b>
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• various purposes identified such as sharing information, arranging hunting expeditions and marriages, strengthening ties, addressing delinquency, making decisions and for spiritual gatherings (Hart, p. 124)</li> </ul> <p>A particular concept is presented to learn about it (Hart, 1997 p. 157)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allow people to express who they are and what they think and feel – it is a way to validate thoughts and feelings (Hart, 1997. p. 141)</li> <li>• Sharing Circles can be a healing Circle (Hart, 1997. p.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different from Sharing Circles</li> <li>•To hear teachings shared by Elders, Storytellers, Spiritual Leaders, and/or the Wisdom Keepers</li> <li>•They have a healing component</li> </ul>
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Facilitated by a conductor or leader (Hart, 1997. p. 126)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated by a conductor or leader</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No time restrictions (Hart, 1997. p. 127)</li> <li>• Number of participants varied (Hart, 1997, p. 126)</li> <li>• Purification ceremony (smudge) and opening prayer (Hart, 1997. p. 142)</li> <li>• Circle proceed to the left or clockwise</li> <li>• People can choose to pass (Hart, 1997. p. 132)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No time restrictions</li> <li>• No restrictions on number of participants</li> <li>• Opening can include smudge and prayer</li> <li>• Circle proceeds to the left but in certain Nations may proceed counterclockwise</li> <li>• Individuals can choose to pass</li> </ul>
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of locations but can be conducted anywhere (Hart, 1997. p. 128)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anywhere and anytime</li> </ul>
Configuration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circular arrangement of chairs so everyone is considered equal with no hierarchy physically evident (Hart, 1997. p. 128)</li> <li>• Usually the east doorway is open</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circular arrangement of seating to demonstrate equality</li> <li>• Minimum opening is east doorway or entrance but</li> </ul>

	(Hart, 1997. p.128)	can include four openings in the four cardinal directions
Conductor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characteristics include: being kind, gentle, respectful, moral, ethical, confident, strong, flexible, good listener, patient, accommodating, accepting, maintains confidentiality, create a safe environment (Hart, 1997. p. 130)</li> <li>• The conductor holds the intent to teach a particular concept (Hart, 1997 p.157)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be gentle and kind</li> <li>• prepared with an agenda to open the circle and close the circle in a good way</li> <li>• be part of the experience as a participant</li> <li>• be observant</li> <li>• be careful</li> <li>• be respectful</li> <li>• be patient</li> <li>• be empathetic</li> <li>• pay attention</li> <li>• create rules of conduct/behavior</li> <li>• know how to take care of emotions</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the impact and significance of ceremonial items on people</li> <li>• understand how to ground people before the circle is done</li> <li>• understand how to recognize boundaries</li> <li>• have knowledge of body language</li> <li>• understand how to engender trust and confidentiality</li> </ul>
<p>Participation (open/closed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary (Hart, 1997. p. 136)</li> <li>• Men’s Circles are sometimes closed to women and vice versa; Women on menstrual cycle may be removed or excluded (Hart, 1997. p. 138)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary</li> <li>• Use of different Medicines for purification depending on female participation and menstrual cycle, alcohol or substance use</li> </ul>

Participant's Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respectful non-judgmental Listening (Hart, 1997). p. 140)</li> <li>• Keeping an open mind (Hart, 1997). p. 140)</li> <li>• Responsible for self (Hart, 1997. p. 141)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open mind</li> <li>• Respectful listening</li> <li>• Ownership and responsibility for behavior</li> </ul>
Sacred items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicine bundles, candles, eagle feathers, rocks, sticks, ribbons, water, rattles, drums, items of significance to the conductor (Hart 1997. p. 143)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All items consistent with Sharing Circles except rattles were not mentioned by the Elder Knowledge Keepers</li> </ul>
Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healing includes cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual elements (Hart, 1997. p. 149)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching circles inherently include a healing component but specific healing elements were not identified</li> </ul>
Energy – circles and cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recursive continuous learning (Hart, 1997. p. 155)</li> <li>• Circle itself is a symbol of unity (Hart, 1997. p. 165)</li> <li>• Based on spirituality and incorporates spiritual expression (Hart, 1997. p.157)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process and participation is recursive and continuous spiral relationships within each individual and within the Circle itself</li> </ul>
Spiritual Helpers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement of spiritual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes spiritual others,</li> </ul>

	others, spiritual helpers or spiritual guides (Hart, 1997). p.160	helpers, ancestors and guides as the invisible or unseen elements
Sacred Space/ Ceremonies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of prayers, symbols, smudging, cedar surrounding the outside of the Circle, pipe ceremonies (Hart, 1997). p. 163</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of prayer, symbols, various rituals</li> </ul> <p>Instead of surrounding the outside of the Circle with cedar one of the Mno-Jichaags talked about participants visualizing a wall on the outside of the circle to create a safe, sacred space</p>

As indicated, these two types of Circles are virtually the same with the exception of the purpose or intent which was clearly articulated by the Mno-Jichaags in this investigation and is consistent with the findings of Dr. Hart’s study. The Cyberspace and Sacred Space participants also identified specific topics suitable and specific to Indigenous Teaching Circles that were listed in Chapter Six. To date there are no studies that have been conducted on Talking Circles or Healing Circle pedagogy as practiced in the territory of the Three Fires Confederacy.

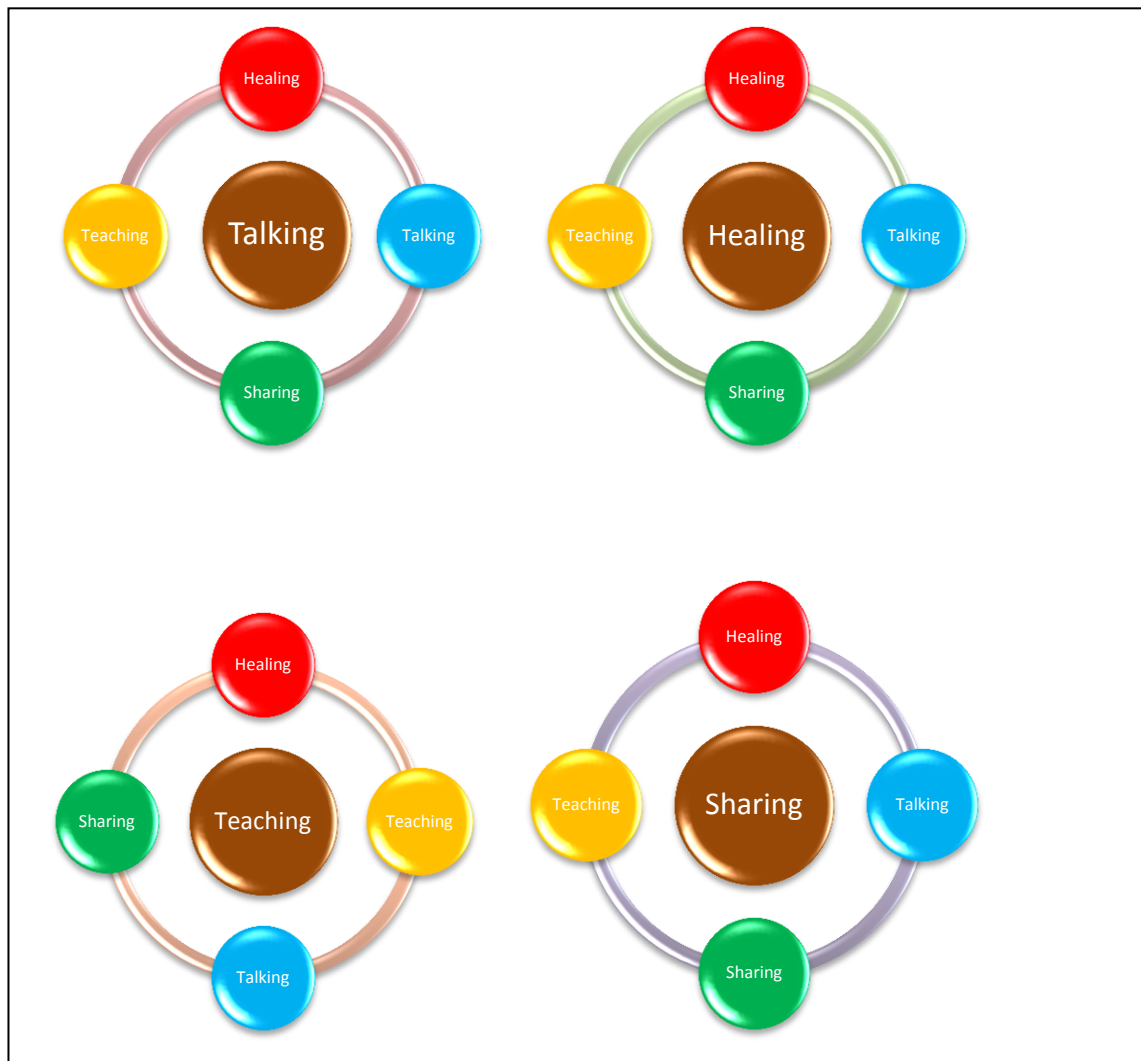
In addition to the above table we delved into the nuances of each “type” of the four Circles (Talking, Sharing, Teaching and Healing) and the participants began to further identify elements that could be used as possible definitions. For instance, Mno-Jichaag Naanan said that, “when people see a Teaching Circle advertised they assume that is going to be Traditional [Indigenous] teachings – once you mentioned Teaching and Circle that is the assumption.” The intention which drives each the four types of Circles seem to range from less formal to more formal. Talking Circles, being the least formal are mainly a mechanism for social networking while Sharing Circles are also a form of social networking but have an element of confidentiality as well because participants may be sharing or disclosing more personal information that is intended to remain with the group. Teaching Circles, as defined by the Seven Mno-Jichaags in this search, are intended to translate traditional knowledge as delivered by Elders, Storytellers, Spiritual Leaders, and Wisdom Keepers. Healing Circles are very specific to the search for wellness when one is out of balance. This can be physical, emotional, cognitive or spiritual healing as a result of some trauma in the lives of the participants.

As a participant in many of the identified Circles, and as the Hollow Bone Hunter I have learned that there is a rhythm to each Circle process – a cycle of energy that is both iterative and progressive. An iterative and progressive process means that the facilitator continues to promote sharing by passing the desired object around the Circle such as a feather or stone until the facilitator feels that the Circle participants have reached some level of understanding about the topic

being discussed. There is a notion in Circles that the collective energy that flows with the object being passed around assists the participant to progress to a higher level of understanding reinforcing the iterative and progressive rhythm that I have often experienced. Within each type of Circle there is a repetition of listening/hearing, sharing/reflecting, teaching/learning and healing. With each “round” of the circle discussion the learners are adding to what they already know and adding their thoughts and ideas to the discussion. Each iteration builds on the previous understanding and so on. These elements may occur in different arrangements and varying repetitions but are essentially the key elements in each of the Four Circles. The following diagram (see Figure 1) illustrates a possible configuration of this iterative cycle in each of the above mentioned types.



**Figure 1: Iterative Circle Process**



While these individual circles demonstrate specific and similar components there are other important elements that require additional discussion, as listed in the data segments in Chapter Six. The following topics were repeatedly and comprehensively discussed by the Mno-Jichaags as fundamental to all Circles whether they were face-to-face or virtual. These include the notion of

the circle Space as a form of spiral energy; the inclusion of the spirits; the nature of ceremony in Circles; the logistics of doorways in virtual Teaching Circles; the logistics of Sacred bundles or items in virtual Teaching Circles; Cyber facilitators; the acknowledgement of energy and finally some mindful considerations when planning or implementing online Teaching Circles.

In this research study I also posed four questions (see Appendix A) that focused specifically on computers and computer mediated learning. Two of the questions asked for suggestions regarding what parts of the Circle methodology could be replicated online and what parts could not. All seven of the Knowledge Keepers indicated that Teaching Circles could definitely be conducted in a computer mediated environment and either provided concrete examples that would work or advice and cautions regarding what may be a challenge. The advice and the cautions will be described in the following pages. The scope of this investigation was to seek out general knowledge and acceptance of the notion of Indigenous Teaching Circle in a computer mediated environment. It was not to identify platforms, tools or specific systems. Any suggestions made by the participants resulted from their own personal knowledge and experience of both Teaching Circles and computer environments, which were used to provide illustrative examples.

### **Circle space as Spirals: Composition and delivery, energy and spirit**

The teaching of the “hollow bones” came to me many years ago and has been repeated many times at different junctures in my life. Having this teaching

repeated very early on in my data collection signaled a way of being that I adhered to throughout the research process. Bones, by their very composition are circular and the content within each bone connects all living cells with our bodies. The Elders say come in with ‘hollow bones’ – if we do this everything that is connected with the Seven Stages of Life will be there. The Seven Stages of Life is a teaching that outlines a developmental lifespan approach from birth to death. There are corresponding milestones and ceremonial responsibilities that are experienced at each stage. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig said that, “The Universe will support this intention as will the ancestors and all our relations. If your intention is aligned, you will receive beyond anything you could have imagined.” The Hollow Bones teaching, as described above, also provides a metaphor for the composition, energy and spirit that is contained within the Circle space.

Throughout the Circle experience individuals listen and reflect on each contribution and in doing so elevate their own relationship or understanding to the point being made. This process then becomes an infinite spiral. Knowledge is viewed as never ending, in that throughout our lives we are always seeking knowledge and never attain total understanding of everything. During the iterative repetitive process of Circle pedagogy there is also a recursive process in that the Circle participant or conductor may be drawn back to an earlier contribution and may encourage the process to continue until the point is either made or the participants have been offered a number of opportunities to share their information. As a conductor I may be busy facilitating the process but I am cognizant of the content and could draw attention to patterns or elements of note

to be further discussed. The way I imagine it is as a spiral of energy that flows around the circle of individuals from one to the other in the Circle in an ever widening expanse, as well as a spiral of energy that emanates from each individual also in an ever widening expanse. Mno-Jichaag Niiwin indicates that, “the circles are a spiral – not so much on top of each other – but they morph into each other – it is all the same circle that changes based on the needs of the people in the circle and what is being shared.” If I was to draw this image it would appear holographic in that each individual in the Teaching Circle constitutes everything necessary for a complete learning process and the larger spiral also contains all of the elements necessary for the entire process. As the participants engage in Teaching Circle methodology they figuratively root themselves at the base of the spiral and the rest flows from there.

While the aforementioned components help to describe some of the elements of Circles, there is another factor that has been identified as integral to the process. The Knowledge Keepers talked about the spiritual presences within the circle when the Circle space has been created. The description of the seen being the physical presences of the people and the unseen being the spirits, ancestors or helpers that each individual comes into the Circle with was a commonly identified factor and present in every Circle. The Elder Knowledge Keepers in this study did not expand on how the unseen helpers assist or hinder the process or if they get acknowledged or utilized in any tangible way by the facilitator.

This notion of individual helpers seems to be a natural and normal part of teaching, learning and life for Indigenous Peoples. In my Western educational experience, having been schooled in a public system there was no acknowledgement that this phenomenon was available to help me learn. While Western educational methods exclude most references to the supernatural Indigenous methods include supernatural elements as an inevitable component of human interaction. The open acknowledgement of helpers in Indigenous life worlds is something that Western educators and systems could acknowledge with their learners to strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the learner. In my practice as an educator I understand that this may require a leap of faith on the part of Western educators however, I also know that in my own learning experiences the open acknowledgment of helpers has strengthened my scholarship and contributed to my overall retention and success.

The notion of openly acknowledging helpers to anyone other than Elders and Elder Knowledge Keepers, family and like- minded learners has resulted in much reflection over the course of this research study. I wondered about the response I would get in a Math class if I told the teacher that I was going to call on the Crow, my spirit helper to assist me during exam week. It is not something I am prepared to take on even today as a Grandmother enrolled in Doctoral studies! This story depicts the struggles and manipulations I believe many Indigenous learners go through to fit into a system that disregards elemental parts of oneself – sometimes to their detriment.



### **The story of not being enough**

*A long time ago the squirrel was playing in the forest. As he was playing he could hear all this laughter coming from somewhere in the distance. He was curious, so he decided to go and find out what was going on. He came upon a clearing in the forest and he saw a group of birds playing a game with each other. They were having so much fun, the little squirrel really wanted to join in the fun. After a while he got the courage to go to the birds and ask to join in the fun. The birds looked at the little squirrel. They asked him if he could fly but the squirrel could not fly. The birds told him that he could not join unless he could fly. He tried to tell them that he could run very fast and jump very high. The birds told him that this was not enough. The little squirrel went away crying because he could not join their game. He went to the edge of the clearing and there he stayed crying his little eyes out. The birds felt sorry for him. They tried to figure out a way that he could join the game. They gathered together to find a solution. After some discussion amongst themselves they came up with one. They approached the squirrel and told him what they planned to do. The squirrel was very excited because he really wanted to play with the birds. He said "I'll do whatever you say". He was told to lie on the ground and spread himself out. The birds grabbed a hold of each of his legs, two at the back and two at the front. As he lay spread out more birds grabbed his sides. They began to pull at his sides, until they stretched his skin. The birds told him to run and then jump. The little squirrel was told that once he jumped he would stretch out his limbs. He began at a brisk run. As he leapt he stretched his limbs. Once he was in the air he began to soar over the field. He was so excited. Now he could play with his new found friends. This is how the squirrel became the flying squirrel. (Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, 2007)*

### **Spirits in Circle Cyberspace**

Further to the above discussion, Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi describes the inclusion of spirits or helpers in this way, "the circle is within you – in your heart – circle is worldwide because spirits can come and go anywhere and are not restrained by a place." He talked about the power of the direct contact within the face-to-face scenario and indicated that the same power exists regardless of the "computer in the middle." He went on to caution that in a computer mediated environment "for some people it will be easier and for others it will be more

difficult.” A useful metaphor to illustrate this is creating art using various mediums. The use of pastels for instance provides a different connection to the paper than a paint brush would. In pastel work the artists often use their hands to smooth out edges or blend colours; it is a more controllable environment. Using a paint brush literally distances the artist from the work with the brush being between them and the page which implies less control. Both activities impart a different control to the creation. By comparison, the artist like the Circle facilitator or conductor of the process applies whatever treatment to the process that is deemed necessary and important. In online Circles the computer, like the paintbrush, may serve as a buffer for people who feel the need to control their participation (emotionally, physically, or socially).

The possible inhibition to participate in an online Teaching Circle may be further influenced by the adoption of an asynchronous delivery where people are essentially independent learners logging in at different times versus a synchronous delivery where everyone is participating simultaneously. This study did not define online learning as either asynchronous or synchronous to allow for broad feedback. This is a foundational research study that is meant to identify whether online Teaching Circles would be appropriate as a possible teaching pedagogy and to begin exploration into the initial understanding of Teaching circles and the possibilities for carrying them out in a virtual environment rather than face-to-face.

The data presented did not provide a broad scope of computer tools and techniques that could be suitable for Indigenous Teaching Circles. The conclusions that were drawn were integrated into the study as participants' voices and personal experiences with Teaching Circles and computing environments.

### **The nature of Ceremony in Teaching Space**

Contiguous with the creation of space is the inclusion of ceremonial practice within the flow of Circle practice. As mentioned earlier, in Chapter Six, the Teaching Circle in and of itself can be a ceremony and there can also be ceremonial elements incorporated into the Circle to change the process.

Ceremonies conducted within a Circle space involve tapping into the individual participants' emotional well being and spiritual balance. The conductor may call on the Spirit Helpers to be part of the Circle and acknowledges all of Creation as part of Circle. Although not specifically identified in this study I have learned through experience that individuals have various birds, animals, and people who provide a foci to that individual so that they can proceed with any given experience with a sense of strength and solidarity with something or someone else. This ceremonial inclusion serves to figuratively bring the universe into the Circle and affords each participant opportunities to alter their present reality. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig says that, "often the Circle will open with a prayer or a smudge." It allows each participant to create their own safe space within the Circle space – whether the Circle is conducted in a virtual environment or in a



face-to-face setting. Ceremony may be used at the beginning, throughout and at the closing of each Teaching Circle

The participants identified a number of items that could be utilized during the ceremonial phase of the Teaching Circles. These items would have significance to the conductor but would also be acknowledged by the participants in various ways. For instance, the conductor may introduce a purification ceremony, typically called “smudge”, at the beginning and at various points throughout the Circle. Different facilitators would include medicines that would resonate with the individuals attending the Circle and the purpose of the Teaching. Ceremonies assist with the movement of energy – or spiritual presence through the Circle. Ceremonies welcome the spirits and keeps the Circle progressing. Mno-Jichaag Niizho says that “it [ceremony] is like the crank on the old car – [ceremony] makes it bigger than the circle and brings in what powers the circle contains so you have to have it [ceremony].” In agreement, Mno-Jichaag Naanan noted, “this [ceremony] is a really powerful thing and it will be the challenge with the computer – it is more than just a ritual – it is the power of the circle.” One caveat that requires mention is a statement made by one of the participants. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig said, “Ceremony only works if people recognize it and there has to be a belief.” This is an important reminder in any Indigenous approach and not specific to online pedagogical methods. I have experienced much diversity in understanding of Indigenous traditional knowledge and practice. The influence of Western religious assimilation has resulted in a long and wide continuum of

beliefs and practices which facilitators need to recognize when they embark on the preparations for conducting a Circle of any type.

Another component that may be different in conducting or participating in virtual Teaching Circles, as mentioned in Chapter Six, is the requirement for women to wear a skirt and to remove themselves from the Circle proper if they are menstruating. Some conductors are stricter about these protocols than others. However, for some individuals in contemporary society these regimens can sometimes affect attendance and participation. While not meant to discount these tenets related to women's participation, virtual Teaching Circles may serve to provide a environment where women feel less inhibited to attend the Circle while not wearing a skirt or during menses. As stated earlier, I would suggest that a virtual Circle may also help to serve as the vehicle to discuss more openly why these sanctions are in place and how they affect the Circle process.

### **The logistics of Doorways in virtual Teaching Circles**

There were number of logistical points that were presented in Chapter Five that are related to the inclusion of ceremony and were seen as challenges to conducting Teaching Circles in a virtual environment. For instance, the Elder Knowledge Keepers questioned the inclusion of the Circle set up. In face-to-face settings the chairs are arranged in a Circular fashion and they questioned how this could be accomplished without "seeing across the circle." They also noted that the entrances and exits, known as doorways had to be considered as well. The participants in this territory (Three Fires Confederacy) will enter via the eastern

entrance or doorway and circle to the left or clockwise to find a place to sit. As mentioned earlier, by several of the participants, and consistent with our current ceremonial practice, there are often four openings to the Circle, one in each cardinal direction. Each opening has spiritual significance as well as practical application and is recognized in the opening ceremony of many Circles. In a virtual synchronous Teaching Circle I would propose that graphic images could help with the visual representation of the Circle. A Circle of chairs could be created and arranged on the whiteboard, or on a Power Point slide. The configuration would include the openings in each cardinal direction, for example leaving a virtual chair out of the diagram in each of the four cardinal directions. The virtual participants could enter in the eastern doorway, as illustrated, and virtually proceed around the Circle to a virtual Chair of their choice. Each participant would identify their seat by adding a colour or an image or their photo to the graphic image of the Chair they have chosen to sit at. This would be very helpful for the conductor to facilitate as it then allows for a parallel process as in the face-to-face setting and helps the others in the virtual Circle learn something about their Circle colleagues. Individuals would be able to choose their own position in the Circle at random or by design. Choosing a seat in a virtual Circle much like a face-to-face Circle is particularly important because the Circle process moves to the left of the facilitator and by extension the energy, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, flows in this clockwise direction as well. Some individuals will choose to go all the way around the Circle and choose a seat to the right of the facilitator. The choice of this seat means that they would not be

called on to share anything until the discussion moves all the way around the Circle. Sometimes, if the topic is new, individuals will choose to sit to the right of the facilitator to allow for longer periods of listening to others and more time to formulate their own ideas or opinions about the topic under discussion.

### **The logistics of Sacred Bundles in Virtual Teaching Circles**

Further to the choice of seating the participants in a virtual Teaching Circle would receive the same opening instructions as in a face-to-face Circle. As mentioned earlier individual participants would have their own Sacred items at their disposal in their respective sites. Mno-Jichaag Niizho notes:

Having medicines in the Circle in a computer mediated environment depends on their (learners) environment. If they are able to smudge I would advise them to have their smudge there in case they need it and then they could light it up and have a smudge at any point or they could have some water there or they could light a candle.

She goes on to propose that an introductory Teaching Circle be conducted to introduce each individual and their Sacred bundle to the other Circle participants. Sacred bundle items can clearly be available and utilized in both asynchronous and synchronous learning situations by the individual participant for their own support as they would be included in any face-to-face Circle. Just as in face-to-face Teaching Circles, this inclusion could also possibly assist everyone participating in the Circle to understand who is in the Circle and allow individuals to recognize their own Spirit Helpers who would then be available to them

individually and to the Circle collectively. In one example provided by Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso, there was a situation whereby a number of individuals in the Circle assisted with the Circle process by offering water or lighting a smudge. Individuals could offer to carry this out for the virtual group as well. Another possibility available to use in a synchronous virtual learning situation is the use of the graphic tools available in the learning management platform to draw the fire, smoke or water around the person in the Circle in need of that particular support. I know from personal experience as described in Chapter Once that this does work, as it was the catalyst to embark on this study. Another advantage of hosting an introductory Circle would be to acknowledge that everyone may not be the keepers of Sacred items and that this is perfectly acceptable. Everyone does however have fire and water at their disposal and could be encouraged to use them if this was something that they had been taught to incorporate into their learning. I have been taught that fire and water are the basic essentials and often initial components of an individual's bundle. Sharing some of this personal knowledge prior to beginning to conduct a Teaching Circle may reinforce the practice of interdependence that is often established in Indigenous collective experience. Hosting an introductory Teaching Circle can help the participants to substantiate their own context and help to shape their experience in relation to the other participants. Sharing this type of knowledge and disclosure of Sacred responsibilities demonstrates the notion of responsibility for others and also affords each individual the opportunity to be validated by the others in the Circle. It must be noted that the Indigenous Teaching Circles envisioned are being

conducted between learners enrolled in postsecondary classrooms and their teachers.

### **Cyber Facilitators**

The Elder Knowledge Keepers did not provide many examples to differentiate between face-to-face and virtual skills, knowledge, experience and apprenticing required by the conductors. They spoke of the importance of exemplary knowledge, life long experience and ongoing work with other conductors and Elders who hold this privilege. Mno-Jichaag Nswi noted, “In computer environments - you just have to have somebody who knows how to work with that. If you have an understanding of how to connect with somebody it doesn’t matter what is in between.” I understand this to mean that in order to work with all aspects of face-to-face Circle facilitation, including the unseen helpers that the facilitators would have to know how this is taken care of in the context of a computer mediated environment. Conductors are viewed as being part of the Circle process not separate from it. They have the responsibility of instructing the participants in process and protocol. The Circle participants are encouraged to follow what the facilitator asks of them, “otherwise it can be very confusing and there can be a lot of contradiction in the Circle.”

One of the challenges noted was the inability to see each other as in face-to-face Circles. The Elder Knowledge Keepers felt that this may affect the observance of boundaries between and among the participants. Four of the seven Knowledge Keepers listed this as a concern and questioned how personal

boundaries could be acknowledged and adhered to in a virtual learning environment. Perhaps one of the obvious ways to alleviate this concern would be the inclusion of webcam's by individuals in the Circle and to include boundaries as a group agreement which would be discussed at the beginning of each Teaching Circle. Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso states, "it would be better if they each had a camera and they could see people - if there would be a way to do that because I think those non-verbals are important too - and then the physicality of it to know that what you are saying and how it is affecting the other people."

Cameras are mostly standard equipment on contemporary computers. However, the connectivity barriers in some of the communities in this territory, as discussed in Chapter Two, may not permit this visual transmission. Another suggestion, although requiring intensive internet capacity and high bandwidth, would be the creation of virtual Circles in a software platform such as Second Life. Second Life is a synthetic virtual environment and as such would not be suitable for addressing the authentic physical expressions and body language of the participants. However, Second Life or other similar virtual worlds could provide the learners with the ability to create an online virtual world which would require enhanced computer skills of the conductors and the participants. Such virtual worlds could afford the learners and facilitators the opportunities for creative co-creation of the Teaching space that would be suitable for individual teachings as identified by the participants. For example, instead of seeing a picture on a whiteboard or hearing a verbal oration of the construction of a hand drum or moss bag individuals could virtually build a hand drum, or moss bag and

see the sequence of construction. They could create and re-create their own image to correspond to their own notions of self and explore Teaching Circles literally and figuratively. Other possible avenues for visual contact could include the Skype software or simply videoconferencing the sessions.

## **Energy**

The Elder Knowledge Keepers were apprehensive about the provision of adequate support during and after the Teaching Circles and this was specifically recognized as a possible challenge especially when individuals are engaged in healing work. Two of the participants suggested that additional support people should be available either online or at individual sites if small groups are working together at different sites. Mno-Jichaag Niizho explained that, “there is an element to the healing process that has to do with an exchange of direct energy” and that, “direct personal energy is one whole component within a circle.” She opined that, “with the computer you have energy – another physical energy that is in between the two.” On our second visit together this issue was discussed and clarified through the analogy of a telephone. She added, “It is sort of like a telephone – you’ve got one person on one end and another person on the other end but then there is the phone line connecting the two of you – it can be a challenge but some kind of connection is being made and energy is being shared.” Another Knowledge Keeper, Mno-Jichaag Naanan shared his view of energy transfer related to an animistic connection. He said, “You don’t have to use your voice to talk to other people – he said all you have to do is touch a tree - I will touch the



same tree and we will connect that way because the roots connect us wherever we are – that is our telephone.” These metaphors suggest that the Elder Knowledge Keepers have considered electronic environments in a far deeper and abstract construct than I had anticipated. Mno-Jichaag Naanan, in a matter of fact voice said, “The spirits live in a virtual world – that is their environment and we are the ones who don’t understand it [the virtual world].” This statement exemplifies the acknowledgement of spirit helpers as not only critical to accepting Indigenous worldview but pivotal in understanding the depth and scope of understanding about the possibilities for virtual learning and the additional guidance that will be necessary to proceed with this pedagogy. This more than any other statement provided by the Elder Knowledge Keepers in this research study cemented the notion of all the possibilities that are available for online learning with Indigenous teachers and learners.

Another significant concern as stated by Mno-Jichaag Naanan was in regards to the transfer of uncontrolled energy and the ability to “clean” the space. Cleaning Circle space is a spiritual process that requires different medicines, prayer and sometimes songs to ensure that the balance of positive energy in the area has been restored. There was uncertainty about the practical application of this vital component of Circles. Mno-Jichaag Naanan felt that there was in some way a lingering energy imbedded in the creation of the computer programs. He articulated that this cleansing should be analogous to cleaning a purification lodge after a ceremony has taken place. Mno-Jichaag Naanan stated that, “when I go in the sweat lodge they [lodge participants] give off their negative energy in there

and pick the good energy and then they come out - when I am finished I make sure that everything is all clean – it gets smudged again – all the doorways, outside and then we smudge all of it again and then we can go back in – I make sure it is all clean.” Another participant, Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso suggested that, “If you are working with good energy and a good heart then that is the energy that goes with it [the computer environment].” Another Knowledge Keeper noted that the negative and positive energy get transmitted the same way. She said, “Sometimes the negative energy is real strong and it tries to take over the positive energy but we must remember that the helper energy goes with it.”

This particular concern of positive and negative energy would necessitate additional research to find out how or what the process would include to clean electronic equipment used to conduct Teaching Circles. These comments seem to suggest that this transfer of different energies could be extended to personal music devices or social networking devices which could also potentially require a way to maintain positive energy for the user.

One of the participants suggested that a list of ceremonies could be provided so learners would be able to access additional teachings in person in part to access the physical energy of others to support their life-long learning. Mno-Jichaag Ngodwaaso noted that the curriculum could incorporate a field work or placement component which would allow individuals attending the Circles to, “sign up to be a Helper at the rain dance, sun dance or sweats [purification ceremonies].” This would not only enhance their Teaching Circle learning but

allow for the introduction of new knowledge to be shared in the next Teaching Circle. This is another example of how Circle work extends to knowledge gained from all learning experiences.

### **Additional Considerations and possible risks**

Mno-Jichaag Niizhwaaswi was initially skeptical when we first began to explore the topic of online Teaching Circles. She shared that at first she was insulted by the thought of transmitting knowledge electronically when it was customarily transmitted in a face-to-face oral tradition. She subsequently had the opportunity to take an online course which included many hours of meditation (online with people around the world) and realized that the, “whole process of virtual sharing can be the perfect conduit for taking people to their own inner sacred space.” She adds that learners could be encouraged to have a candle burning during their online session so, “it [the candle] can transform that [healing process] into a more positive experience.”

Three Knowledge Keepers were adamant about certain teachings not being shared in any form of computer mediated environment. They did not elaborate on the specific examples but specified that the knowledge was, “so sacred they cannot be shared that way – it has to be person to person.” (Mno-Jichaag Naanan, 2010) There was also an admonishment to be aware that some people would expropriate this sacred knowledge and market it for their own purposes rather than the collective good. This attitude could be the result of personal experience and/or the historic intergenerational sacred knowledge that is only provided by

certain people at certain times and seasons of the year. Many of the Knowledge Keepers who are entrusted with this Sacred knowledge are also the Circle facilitators so it would seem logical that this sacred knowledge would remain protected. The Knowledge Keepers serve as the stewards of the information and would ensure the sacred knowledge is shared appropriately.

A number of participants identified that there would be some necessary additional training in computer literacy and support but did not see these as significant barriers. As an online educator and learner I would advocate that some enhanced computer training with a course in e-moderating would be necessary. Facilitators would need to discuss how to implement or conduct the ceremonies in a computer mediated environment. The establishment of a support circle for e-Elders would also assist those Elder facilitators to share best practices.

### **Teaching Circles as cultural repatriation**

Culture is very challenging to define as it possesses many different meanings for each individual, Nation, Tribal area and within each group. I have heard people say that culture is our way of life, our history and traditions, our language, our art and our stories. It is complex and has a breadth and depth that while integral to this study will not be explored and explained as extensively as possible as it could be in a longer study. In this dissertation, the notions of culture and cultural practices have only been elaborated for the purposed of readers making meaning from this research study. One of the observations that I have made is that people describe lived experiences when talking about culture rather

than providing a definition in isolation or out of context. They will talk about their relationship to the land, animals or plants or their interconnectedness to all of Creation. The Encarta Dictionary (2011) defines culture as, ‘the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation of people; a group of people whose shared beliefs and practices identify the particular place, class or time to which they belong.’” The practice, content and context of Indigenous Teaching Circles has, at its core cultural meanings which is not necessarily aligned with the cultural context, content and practice of Western educational approaches.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, education as a Western paradigm has been problematic for generations. The evolution of technological advances adds another dimension to the complexities of trying to integrate Indigenous pedagogies within this predominant system. From the ideas voiced by the participants in this study, it would seem that defining, refining and reproducing Indigenous Teaching Circles online could be a vehicle for individuals to retain or reclaim traditional knowledge as well as providing a vehicle to entice individuals to return to traditional forms of knowledge translations. Mno-Jichaag Naanan said, “I can see virtual circles as a way to bring people back to ceremony – back to talking to Elders – back to community.” Another participant stated that, “Maybe if the youth attended these computer Circles they would come back to our ceremonies.” She went on to talk about the importance of working with Elder teachers in person and as a life-long activity. Mno-Jichaag Nswi’s view is that participation in online Teaching Circles could be limiting because individuals would need to continue to learn, apprentice and mentor others and she did not see

a computer environment as the mechanism which could provide that necessary component. While this may seem like a contradiction based on the statements made by the various Knowledge Keepers, there does seem to be a rhythm of interaction between the synchronous engagement and face-to-face learning as educators and learners become more familiar with how each of the learning modalities support each other.

One of the stories that were shared exemplifies the hope that Indigenous ways of learning, even though taking a different format, can and should maintain certain practices as the scaffolding.



### ***The Story of the Little Men***

*I have been thinking of your project quite a bit and every now and then I get a picture of this – an image – I will get a vision and I will just sit down and travel along in this computer system and see this little animation characters going to these teaching circles – ok – and then I seen this one little person get up out of that circle and quickly walk to the doorway and I thought where is that one going – that one can't go any further in that circle – he can't progress any more in that circle so what is the next level in the circle then ok – so you go around in the circle in the little animations in the computer teaching circles so when you get to the max level – the person who wanted to leave the doorway where are you going to put him – what part of the teaching circle – where are they going to go for the leg work or fieldwork in other words? (Mno-Jichaag Nswi, 2010)*

While this illustrates a distinct example it is important to note that two other Knowledge Keepers shared a similar viewpoint. In traditional Indigenous teaching and learning, as indicated in the previous chapters there is emphasis on apprenticeship and spending time with Elders in service to community. The story above, together with the comments shared by other participants, seems to suggest

that both of these can be accommodated in an online environment. However there is a vital difference. Adding a computer network to a personal engagement is convoluted and serves to separate the physical presence that is elemental in relationship building. I have heard some of the Elders saying that the kids need to ‘get unplugged to reconnect’. While this does serve to illustrate the message from Mno-Jichaag Nswi, in her story above, the participants in this study seem to hold a perception of the link between social isolation and computer usage as a common experience in their respective communities. This phenomenon will warrant further additional research and consideration as teachers and learners embark on developing virtual Teaching Circles.

Another opportunity for cultural repatriation is the restoration of the role of Elders in education. A number of the Mno-Jichaags shared that the Elders should be the conductors of the Circles as they are often the Wisdom Keepers in the community. In many current education practices Elders are brought in to open and close a meeting or to provide a minimal service to the event. While these particular activities are important and may be seen as respectful it seems contradictory to the long held view of the venerated position of Elders in Indigenous societies as outlined in Chapter Three.

Inculcating Indigenous knowledge into online instructional design could be another way to continue the global efforts of cultural repatriation. Indigenous Teaching Circles would then become a new way of learning with established and recognized protocols. A suitable term to describe this phenomenon is “sui

generis” which was a term used by the National Council on Indian Education in the early eighties (Hampton, 1983). Sui generis means “a thing of its own kind.” Hampton explains that it also refers to education as self-determining as structured and taught by Indigenous People. Hampton’s notion could be further developed, for example, I have begun to identify online Teaching Circle methodology as Indigigogy or Indigenous Digital Pedagogy which in Hampton’s notion of sui generis could be defined as a thing – or concept - of its own kind. Educators, returning to original Indigenous language, would identify Online Teaching Circles as Waanishkang which roughly translates into a new kind of Circle. From the discussion so far, it seems that computer mediated environments can provide numerous ways to reclaim and restore cultural knowledge, skills and practices that could be expedited through the use of computer mediated support.

### **Teaching Circles as a healing process**

The participants in the study identified that the inclusion of Indigenous spiritual practice applicable to the People in the Circle would assist to facilitate the healing process. They specifically addressed the healing possibilities that could take place within a discrete Teaching Circle and did not differentiate between healing as it happens within in face-to-face or online learning spaces. Mno-Jichaag Nswi sums it up by saying, “I believe each step we take through hearing a teaching, being able to share and given the opportunity to hear another’s perspective on an issue...it’s all healing...it is about evolving into something whole...holistic and that is healing.” Hampton (1995) Calliou (1995) Archibald

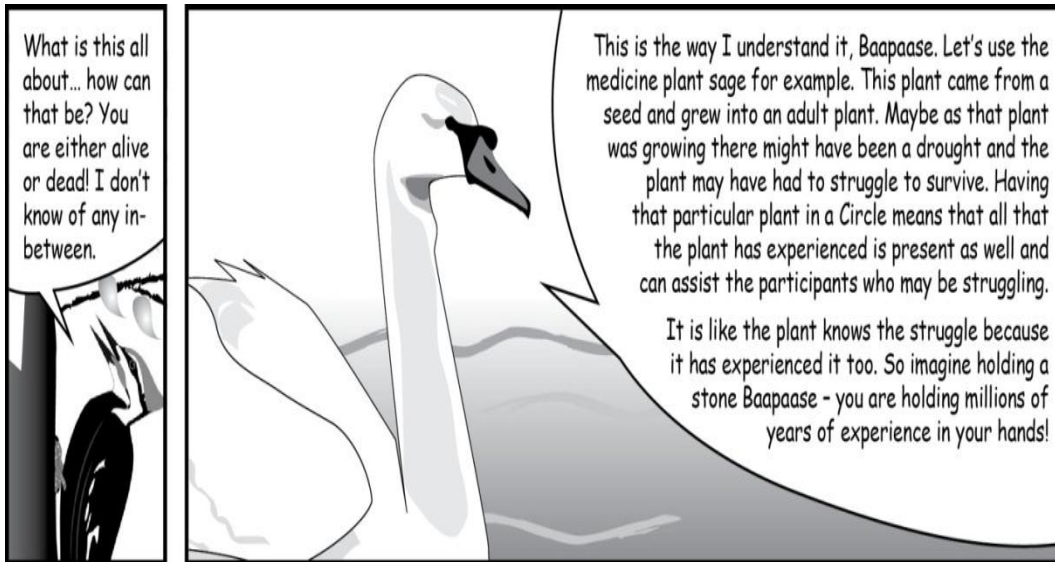


(1995) and Stirling (1995) all agree that, “narratives grounded in nature, philosophized in the Sacred Circle...emphasizes the recognition of responsibilities, the perception of internal strength...and circular movement in both the natural and spiritual worlds.”

### **Life and death shared the same Circle**

Another important factor that aids in healing is another cyclical process element – life and death. This notion, like my story at the beginning of my journey about the day coming alive is integral to healing in Teaching Circles whether they are conducted in a face-to-face or virtual environment. In my Circle experience in the last Chapter I was given a small stone to hold as the Circle progressed. As previously noted, in Chapter Five and Table 2, items such as rocks or feathers are used to empower and facilitate each individual’s contribution. One Knowledge Keeper shared, “what we are told about a stone is that when you are working with a stone and you are learning something the stone is going to help you remember the new knowledge because the stone and rocks are the oldest aspect of our world.” Another aspect to consider is the personally held belief that everything has spirit and that each element that is part of the process has lived. For example, once plant medicines or feathers have been harvested metaphorically they have experienced death. The inherent knowledge contained in each of these items remains present to provide needed energies to assist the individual in possession of the object. Mno-Jichaag Niiwin says that, “when you are working with a stone and your are learning something the stone is going to

help you to remember the new knowledge because the stone and rocks are the oldest aspect of our world – our physical world and they are very very ancient and wise.”



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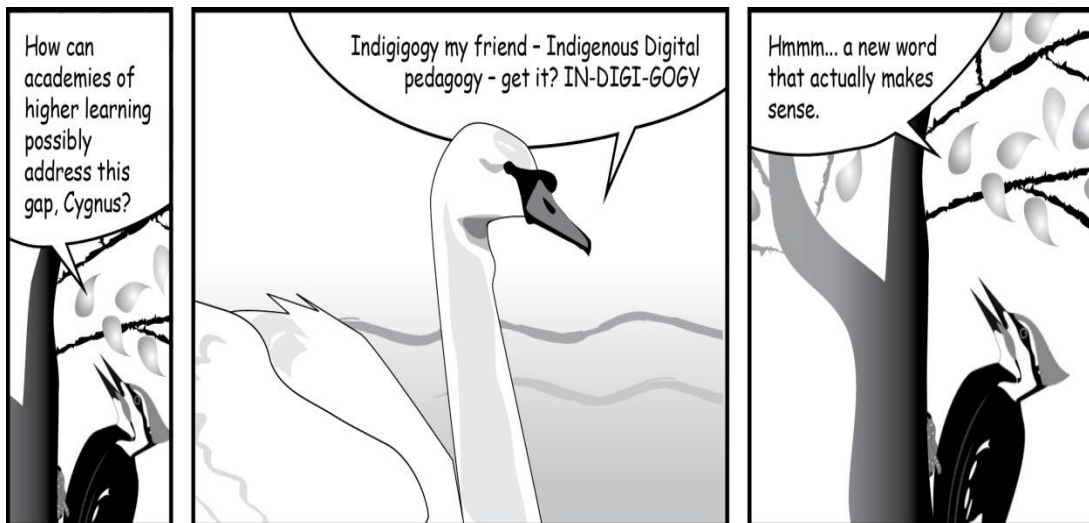
### **Institutional limitations**

The battle for Indian children will be won in the classroom, not on the streets or on horses. The students of today are our warriors of tomorrow. The world is constantly changing. One of the strengths of Indian people has been our adapt-ability. In today's world, education is what we need to survive. We need doctors, lawyers, teachers and scientists. We can become these things and still live in a cultural way. We need to live in two worlds; the educated world and the Indian cultural world. Education will help protect our land, our people's health, and provide knowledge for our people. We must teach reading, writing and arithmetic. Also, we must teach the language, the culture, the ceremony and the tradition of our people. (Coyhis, 2007. p. 280)

This quote exemplifies the tensions evident in contemporary society with regard to continuity of cultural knowledge and adherence to change. The educational institutions are in a constant state of change attempting to adapt to new technological advances while Indigenous Peoples are determined to retain cultural distinction within the Western world. Along with the other specific factors regarding educational challenges identified in the literature outlined in Chapter Two were additional challenges related to carrying out Indigenous Teaching Circles in Western academies. Mno-Jichaag Bezhig noted that:

In the big institution in Sudbury there were restrictions when a student would come to look for that other part [spiritual] that they needed. We could only go so far with them and then had to close them off and send them off. If the staff working in an educational system are open to healing and holistic ways of educating this always includes the spirit.

The question becomes how to support individuals to enact the Indigenous Teaching Circle approach described when many people may not have the knowledge or experience to initiate it and the institution does not have the mechanisms in place to afford such opportunities



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Firstly, consideration must be provided to what help facilitators and teachers may need to integrate Indigenous Circles in a respectful, authentic and effective manner. Additional consideration will be required to address the paradigm shift to alternative ways of delivery to incorporate computer mediated systems that take on a unique shape based on the rural and remote context of Northeastern Ontario. Educators need to know what happens in the lives of their learners. They need to know what language and strategies Indigenous people employ to survive in their bi-cultural world. They also need to know how the learners know what they know.

Secondly, the Indigenous educational community along with the academy would need to consider who should have a say in how the integration of this pedagogy is developed. This means that the Western academy, as a colonial system could only achieve a certain level of credibility from their etic perspective.

There would have to be some consciousness expansion moving towards concrete pragmatic Indigenous instruction design inclusion. Marx (1845) states, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” As Cygnus has so aptly described it Anishinaabe ‘Indigigogy’ as a practice does not focus on subjects or content but is primarily learner-centered and subjective and relies on personal engagement. As verified by the Mno-Jichaags Indigenous pedagogy as it is known and practiced today has a more humanistic focus which aims at exploring the inter-relationships of all of Creation – or All my Relations in a model rich with personal reflection. In my experience, the Teaching Circles account for feelings, attitudes and values that are not as obvious to me in Western instructional design approaches.

As described in Chapter One, sharing stories is a foundation of Indigenous pedagogy and are naturally integrated into the Circle approach. Hearing the stories of the Circle participants whether face-to-face or online is not the same as reading from a book. Hearing stories creates a context in which we can move back and forth between the world of the storyteller and our own experience. While perhaps not unique to Indigenous culture I see storytelling as the primary focus - the heart and spirit of Indigenous teaching and learning. Throughout this dissertation I have included short stories that relate to personal explicit and tacit knowledge gained in both institutional learning environments and formal teachings from Elders, family and the natural world. The sharing within each Circle provides perspectives, histories and teachings that are the lived experience of the participants that cannot be found in quite the same way in print based

material. Personal blogs and other social networking media can provide some element of this phenomenon but often do so without the guidance of one individual knowledgeable, skilled and experienced facilitator. So great is the challenge to integrate this Indigenous approach that it is left to a few Indigenous people to try to integrate into their own teaching practice. With the pressure to comply with operational convenience and fiscal accountability it would be a huge commitment of time, energy and willingness to infuse an Indigigological method into well established Western constructed teaching repertoire.

The medicine wheel, which is considered by Indigenous People as a holistic framework includes the four aspects of humanity as being the physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual elements. The participants in this study identified these elements as critical to integrate into a much broader curriculum as a subject centered one. Mni-Jichaag Bezhig states, “When you go into a Teaching Circle to learn about something it is going to affect your spirit, your emotional aspect – also mental and physical of the person.” From what the participants have shared it would seem that a holistic approach assists the learners with creating meaning for themselves rather than memorizing a method that may or may not be applicable to their reality. In my experience in the education system Western educators are often required to work from a framework, curriculum guidelines or at the very least a list of intended learning outcomes to assist them to integrate different teaching and learning methods. There is no officially prescribed approach or formula for how best to include authentic, original Indigenous pedagogy.

The philosophy and art of facilitating Indigenous Teaching Circles is a liberating approach for both conductors and learners. The Circle methodology is a learner-focused method and can ideally provide the best opportunity for release of both creative expressions and human experience. The inclusion of Indigenous Teaching Circles would be both pragmatic and transformative to academic education. While perhaps viewed differently in the Western academy, I propose that including Indigenous Teaching Circles in formal education will support individual personal growth, and will be socially empowering and culturally inclusive where learners can be productive, creative, and socially progressive and express their life world in a safe space. Mno-Jichaag Nswi says that, “If the staff working in an educational system are open to healing and wholistic ways of educating this always includes the spirit.” She goes on to say that, “in the big institution in Sudbury there was restrictions when a student would come to look for that other part (emotional, physical and spiritual) that they needed. We could only go so far with them and then we would have to close them off and send them off.” Indigenous Teaching Circles can be part of a substantial contribution to Indigenous life, Indigenous education and by extension Indigenous society. Freire (1972) substantiates this notion of wholistic learning as discussed above in relation to Indigenous Teaching Circles and Western learning experiences by saying that:

To think that such work can be realized when the theoretical context is separated in such a way from the learners' concrete experiences is only possible for one who judges that the content is taught without reference to and independently from what the learners already know from their experiences prior to entering school.... Content cannot be taught, except in

an authoritarian, vanguardist way, as if it was a set of things, pieces of knowledge that can be superimposed on or juxtaposed to the conscious body of the learners. Teaching, learning, and knowing have nothing to do with this mechanistic practice.

### **Hollow Bone Hunter takes stock**

This part of the journey allowed time for meaningful reflection on four main topics. The notion of Sacred Space in cyberspace provided some insights into the “physiology” of the Circle pedagogy; cultural repatriation described some possible efforts to integrate cultural teaching into educational practice; the concept of healing provided additional information and awareness of its role in education; and the tensions that serve to limit Indigenous pedagogy within the institutional educational system was critiqued.

My journey is coming to an end. Weavers would say that it is time to weave in the ends and story tellers say it is time to wrap it up. The final Chapter of this dissertation, based on the contributions of the Knowledge Keepers in study will provide some practical instructional design advice to further develop the notion of Waanishkang (a new kind of Circle).



## **Chapter Seven: Braiding the Voices**

One of the [Indigenous] universal laws makes reference to the understanding that... In time, everything has a purpose. We may not comprehend what is right there in front of us at any given time but that unseen 99% I spoke of previously may have significance 5 years down the road. It may be something that is life changing for someone (Mino-Jichaag Bezhig, 2010)

My purpose starting out on this journey was twofold: (1) to study Indigenous Teaching Circles as a means of addressing the lack of culturally appropriate teaching methods in Western education, and (2) to investigate the translatability of the Indigenous Teaching Circle method in an online environment. I learned that all seven of the Elder Knowledge Keeper research partners - the Mno-Jichaags - said the Indigenous Teaching Circles were an appropriate teaching method in an online environment and further defined the ways and means to facilitate them. Clear direction was provided to mitigate any cultural misunderstandings regarding the curriculum content for Indigenous Teaching Circles. There were also very few specific defining elements of Indigigological process that differed from face-to-face delivery methods other than the electronic conduit.

### **Life changing scholarship**

This following story is an experience that I had as a very young girl. As I came to a natural conclusion to finding the answers to my research questions, I worked to make sense of the information that was shared. I came to the realization

that there are helpers everywhere. Sometimes helpers can be in unexpected places and I now have a better appreciation of how this can manifest itself in my educational practice. Reflecting on this early childhood experience brought this idea to life.



### ***The story about a new kind of circle***

*Once upon a time a little girl with shaggy bangs and two long brown hair braids wandered into the bush and became very lost. She decided to curl up under a spruce tree and wait until it was morning to find her way out. The little girl quickly fell asleep because she had walked a long way. While she slept, the tree, feeling very honoured that this little girl would seek comfort under her boughs needed to stand guard and keep her safe until someone came to find her. Tree tried to stretch her boughs downward to the ground to completely cover her up but was worried that the little girl would be too scared of the closed in space. Tree called to the other trees around her to tell them about this great responsibility that she had been given on this night. She asked for help to protect the little girl. Beaver, who usually came out at night to work on his house said, “Spruce, you never offer any of your limbs to help me but I will help you because I know this little girl. Just use that sticky gum that runs down your body and drip some of it on the little girl’s braid – that will help you to hold her close and she won’t be scared.” The tree was very thankful to the Beaver and felt sorry that she had never been able to provide any wood for the Beaver’s house. Tree gently began to place drops of gum on the girl’s braids and the girl slept on not even realizing that this was happening. In the morning, the girl woke up refreshed and ready to find her way back home. Tree raised her branches as high as she could to allow Grandfather Sun to warm the gum and release the little girl from the tree.*

*The little girl began to unbraid her hair – as was her usual morning practice. Slowly and gently, beginning at the bottom, she began to untangle the three strands of hair in her braid thinking about how refreshed she was feeling and how happy she was because she knew exactly how to get home.*

As I traveled over these last few years I became more and more aware of the substantial divide that exists between Indigenous and Western worlds. This is such a delicate topic because it manifests itself in every thought, word and deed in

my life experience. Walking in two worlds, seeing through two different lenses, often struggling on the fringes of each is a very challenging place from which to endure in any context. Walking with two cultural influences can also be the most beautiful, rich and elaborate experience as well because I get to choose my path for each situation I face. Unfortunately, my life experience has demonstrated that intersection between the two is not easy and often very convoluted which was demonstrated as you travelled along with me on this journey.

As a bi-cultural citizen trying to conduct this study it became apparent very early on that this was going to a long, arduous process with the bulk of the work not the research itself but the constant clarifying, verifying, and justifying, validating and personal adapting that is a required to demonstrate Western academic rigour. While the Western academy touts the efforts being made at integrating or including Indigenous knowledge into their systems, sadly, in my opinion, this is really not happening at any rate that has made any significant difference from my perspective as a long-time educator. The burden of inclusion still falls directly on the shoulders of the Indigenous learners. They are the ones who are expected to be the ‘experts’ in all things Indigenous.

In other research journeys I had always assumed that I was part of Indigenous community and this particular quest confirmed and reinforced that I did belong and do have role, responsibilities and privileges as a result. It was quite clear that much of the specific details around energy and Spirit Helpers were shared because of who I was as Anishinaabe-Kwe and the trust that was

engendered because of this relationship. As a result of this new knowing, I believe that it is important to note for those Western researchers who do engage, or want to engage with Indigenous communities that some information may not be available from your etic perspectives. Non-Indigenous researchers may want to include, in their research reporting, a caveat stating their positionality with respect to the Indigenous community that they are carrying out their studies. Failure to identify who they are and what their relationship is to the Indigenous Peoples they are studying would be equivalent to not inflating a balloon. The balloon is still a balloon it just doesn't have much substance that will help to provide any stimulation for progress within Indigenous communities. The Knowledge Keepers were clear that the information they shared was full and complete and shared their perspectives without reservation because I had an ancestral connection and would interpret the information differently from others without this vital link. As a result, I was able to inflate the balloon fully because of my relationship to the Elder Knowledge Keepers and the ancestors and helpers guiding me.

In Chapter Six I introduced the concept of Waanishkang, a new kind of Circle. This concept can be expanded to also include the integration of cognitive and spiritual elements into the planning process. This trinity of physical, cognitive and spiritual elements are often referred to in Indigenous community as body, mind and spirit. This body, mind and spirit concept is the premise behind a braid, a braid of hair or a braid of sweet grass – any braid.

## **Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang (Braided Circle)**

I have learned throughout this research process that it is critical if one is to engage in Indigenous knowledge, that everything be grounded in Indigenous processes. In Ojibwe, the word Waanishkang means Circle and Kaaden'gan ni means braid. The concept of Circle as mentioned previously is a well known symbol to the Anishinaabe People in this Tribal area. One of the sacred medicines used in many of the Circle ceremonies is braided sweet grass and is often described as the hair of Mother Earth. My journey as the storyteller, the Hollow Bone Hunter, was an effort to braid life worlds to create meaningful and considerate text to describe this research study.

It would seem reasonable and plausible, based on the data presented here, that a new kind of Circle can be created to address Indigenous ways of being, learning and knowing. In this study there was a clear indication that Sacred Space could be created within a Cyberspace world. While no specific software, programs and platforms were identified by the Knowledge Keepers, there was information provided to begin to look at the creation of a Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang (Braided Circle) that would better describe a virtual Indigenous Teaching Circle design, process and implementation. The notion of braiding, whether three strands, as mentioned above, or more create a specific model in the context of the Teaching Circle, which encompasses the weaving together of the space (Sacred Space in cyberspace); the learners (from their respective locations); the conductors with the learners (in a co-created environment); the physical

beings with the Spiritual helpers (seen and unseen); the medicines and the sacred items (rocks, feathers, sage). Each of the various strands weaves together in a plethora of configurations and combinations to create a unique learning environment that privileges Indigenous epistemology and could comprise elements of a unique model.

The notion of a Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang as a specific pedagogical model or approach has been shown by the Elder Knowledge Keepers of this study to be possible, useful and relevant to today's educational milieu. The Knowledge Keepers provided elements that have not been previously captured in the existing literature. Elements that can serve as a new beginning for instructional designers to initiate the integration of Indigenous methods into the planning and development of Indigenous course work.

### **The Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang Indigigological Model (Braided Circle Model)**

Many of the important learning principles that scaffold good teaching methods are evident in the Braided Circle model and as current components of contemporary Indigenous Teaching Circles. These include: building collaborative skills, promoting robust discussion, and allowing for participants to be learners and teachers. It would be possible in the Braided Circle Model to utilize different software applications to meet diverse learning needs which may address computer engagement inhibitions. For example, Chapter Six discussed the use of web cameras to better appreciate personal physical space boundaries. Also outlined,

was the suggestion regarding the use of a virtual software platform such as Second Life to further enhance a visual effect. The Braided Circle model could extend what happens in Indigenous Teaching Circles as described in this study, to also support diverse educational methodologies such as case study development, simulation, role playing, mentorship and modeling. Reflective journals and additional social networking opportunities could also be built in as pre - and post - Circle activities. Learners could create personal blogs to share additional learning and continue dialoguing with the participants of the Circle and others. Opportunities to co-create activities and presentations would be available via shared and social networking platforms.

As in face-to-face Indigenous Teaching Circles, this model could also encourage substantive academic discourse and provide a rigorous platform for continued discussion. The use of technology adds an additional component that is not available in the face-to-face setting. The Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang literally allows the learners to make many more virtual connections with their colleagues thereby increasing the learning opportunities. In addition, and much like face-to-face Indigenous Teaching Circles, Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang would enhance the promotion of continuous learning, encourage empowerment through individual problem solving and expose learners to multiple perspectives on any given topic.

## **Considerations of Kaaden’gan ni Waanishkang for instructional designers**

There are a number of areas for consideration that instructional designers need to be cognizant of when planning to utilize the Kaaden’gan ni Waanishkang model. This is not an exhaustive list but some general guiding considerations that warrant contemplation. Considerations include context, content, conductors, audience, and virtual environments. Evaluation is not included as it was not within the purview of the study but I would suggest this be included in further investigations. The intent for this model is that it is part of the overall broader teaching strategy and not “an add-on” or additional approach to be tried out to authenticate those components of a curriculum that address Indigenous content.

I started out this journey with a number of questions about whether Indigenous Teaching Circles could be facilitated in a computer mediated environment. I wondered about the Circle process and how it would work – or if it could work – as seamlessly in an online environment. I wondered if there were any specific elements of the face-to-face Circle model, as I understood it that would or could be utilized in virtual settings. This questioning led to the development of specific guidelines that will provide some suggested fundamentals for each of the considerations listed above.

### **Context**

1. Indigenous Teaching Circles are process-oriented teaching methods which should therefore have a significant focus on procedures as well as content.

It is essential to work closely with the conductor of the Teaching Circles to



facilitate process, protocols and suggestions for questions to stimulate content.

2. Identify if the curriculum affords opportunities to enlist this method of instruction based on the list of suggested topics presented in Chapter Five, Theme Six.
3. Clearly outline the Indigenous Teaching Circle with its proposed intent. From the findings of this study, it may be useful to differentiate between the Talking, Sharing and Healing Circle to further set parameters.

### **Content**

1. Ensure that the content is appropriate for a Teaching Circle and that it is in fact that specific Circle process that is required – rather than a Sharing, Talking or Healing Circle. Build in possible questions or foci for the facilitator to initiate and the learners to speak about. Expect the learners and the conductors to be co-creators in the learning experience so activities need to reflect this level of engagement.
2. Expect that the learners will be self-directed and will participate in the Circle – keeping in mind that their presence is a form of participation.
3. Build in sufficient time to allow for personal storytelling to occur as it is central to Indigenous modes of learning. Avoid over-planning of content at the expense of participant engagement.
4. Clearly indicate what will be private and what will be public content. If sessions are taped and archived, ensure that learners and facilitators are

aware of archiving classes and taping sessions. Build in a discussion of the fact that this will be taking place and create a process of consent to contribute to the public knowledge network.

5. In Indigenous Teaching Circles the conductor establishes the discussion guidelines so it is important to be less prescriptive in lesson planning to allow for the conductor to create guidelines specific to each group of learners. A statement that identifies the task would be sufficient.
6. Suggest or include a list of Ceremonies and Indigenous cultural, social or historical activities available in their Tribal area during the time the course is being offered. This suggestion is meant as a proposition for the instructional designer and is meant to be included as an experiential activity.
7. Include activities that encourage learners to meet with an Elder or Knowledge Keeper in person to enhance and extend their online learning.
8. Print based material such as assigned readings should be authored by local, national or international Indigenous scholars.

### **Facilitators or Conductors**

1. Facilitators must be carefully chosen based on their knowledge of the subject or topic; their experience and acceptance within the Indigenous community being served; facilitation skills; and experience participating in and conducting Circles.

2. Opportunities for facilitators to convene to address the possible inclusion of Sacred items and the appropriate approaches to be facilitated.
3. Indigenous Teaching Circle facilitators must have access to technology related continuing professional development opportunities.

### **Audience**

1. It is important to understand the needs, backgrounds, characteristics, and expectations of the intended learners. Not everyone follows Traditional cultural practices or holds Sacred items so caution is necessary in deciding whether to include these elements into your design. The creation of ‘placeholders’ throughout the curriculum would allow for some flexibility for the conductors to include diverse linguistic groups, geographic location and cultural practice. For example, a number of the participants mentioned that the Circle discussion could proceed either clockwise or counterclockwise depending on the Indigenous People attending that Teaching Circle. A placeholder or note to identify this possibility would alert the facilitator to check with the participants before beginning the Circle. Inserting placeholders or notes allow for differences in beliefs, values and practices to emerge from the learners.

### **Virtual Environments**

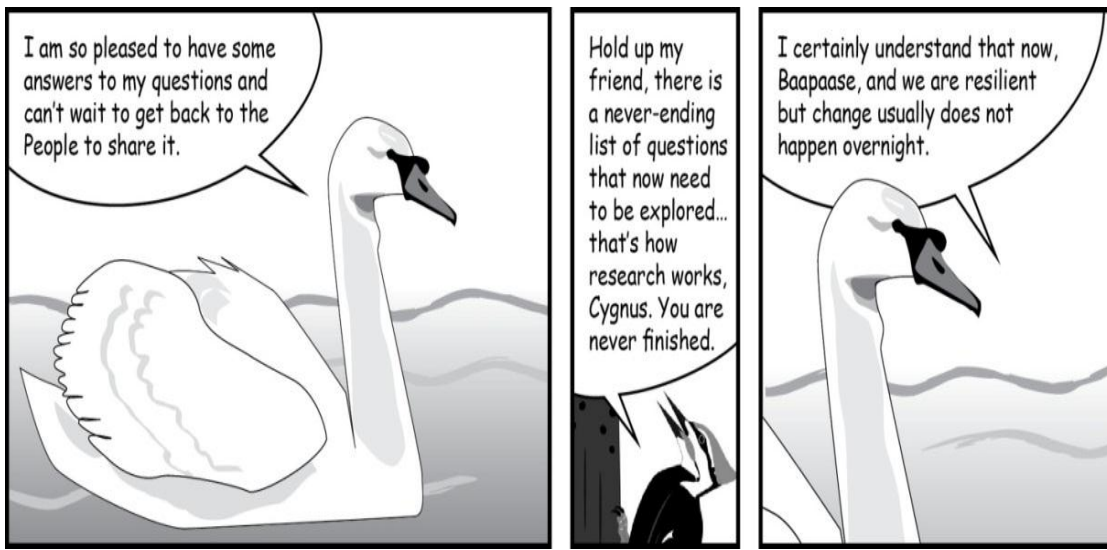
1. Allow time for the creation and evolution of the learning space. An introductory activity could be included that specifically addresses this. For

example, a question related to well-being could be posed at the beginning of each Teaching Circle that allows the participants to share whatever they are comfortable sharing. This would provide the learners with an opportunity to identify themselves to all those within the Circle; to check their audio and to practice using the learning platform.

2. Accommodate different levels of computer literacy, access to computers and/or various platforms that may be used in the specific design.
3. Ensure that there is adequate connectivity available to the learners and conductors.
4. The inclusion of Spirit Helpers in the absence of physical presence in virtual worlds needs to be accommodated in other ways. Suggest approaches or activities, such as the introduction of personal Sacred items, that will help to establish the emotional expression within the virtual Circle. In addition, providing dedicated time for prayer and smudging may assist individual learners by present with their respective Helpers, in their individual sites. Build in process opportunities to acknowledge these components. In the Circle introduction and check-in adequate time needs to be set aside for participants to verbally acknowledge their Helpers.
5. Consider which interactions would best suit the topic under discussion and the best virtual environment to accommodate those interactions. For instance some of the content suggestions would be best suited to software Second Life, others to videoconferencing and others to simply audio platforms.

6. In conjunction with the conductors, design a tip sheet for learners with suggestions to create their own Sacred learning space which would include technical requirements such as computer hardware and software as well as other requirements such as comfortable seating and Sacred items of importance to them such as a stone or feather.

### A new story emerges



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Baapaase is right as there are numerous areas of enquiry that have surfaced as a result of this initial exploration. Being foundational, this search was limited to overarching themes that provided a basic skeleton from which to build. While the idea of Kaaden'gan ni Waanishkang seems plausible, a series of pilot studies will refine the process and identify elements critical to enhancement of instructional design techniques. Also warranted is a discussion, among the

instructional design personnel and some experienced service users, about the appropriate software and learning management systems to facilitate this type of learning. The participants in this study offered specific knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for conducting Indigenous Teaching Circle. A more substantive exploration and documentation of these requirements would provide clarity and focus to the specific roles and responsibilities that the Indigenous facilitators carry out. An extension of this study, to interview other Knowledge Keepers, youth and educators would also be informative. Longitudinal studies could provide more information on the cultural repatriation issue, as discussed in Chapter Two, and whether or not youth would return to face-to-face Teaching Circles and other ceremonial practices as a result of attending computer mediated ones.

### **Hollow Bone Hunter Takes Stock**

As my journey ends I believe that the critical element at this stage of the expedition is to share the knowledge and demonstrate the possibility for a different way of teaching and learning. It will be important to seek out some feedback from educators and learners on how this integration could be facilitated in a thoughtful manner. As always, I will return to the People with a Journal full of stories and ideas.

The final story in this dissertation speaks to the patience, and humility that is required to effect change. The story is a reminder to me that I am one researcher with some ideas that seem reasonable to me and my enthusiasm may not be

received as I think it should. The story told in both English and Anishinaabe is a reflection of this journey and the journeys to come.



***Aandek the Crow: A story about not getting what you want***

*A long time ago the birds were all one colour. Not one bird stood out from the others. So one day they talked amongst themselves and they decided that they should do something about their predicament.*

*It was decided that they approach Kizhe Manido to see if he could do something about this. A delegation was chosen to go up and talk to Kizhe Manido. They flew up to the sky and eventually they arrived at the home of Kizhe Manido. He asked the birds what was the reason for their visit.*

*The birds told Kizhe Manido their concerns. They said that they were all just one colour. They would like to be able to distinguish one another.*

*Kizhe Manido pondered for a while then he came up with a solution. He told the birds to go and see his helper Paakwiias. He told them, "I will let him know and to expect you."*

*The birds were very excited as they went back down to the Earth. Three days later they went to the home of Paakwiias. He told the birds that Kizhe Manido had told him of their situation. Then he told them to give him a little more time to prepare, also to tell the other birds.*

*The birds were all excited as they went to Paakwiias' home. Paakwiias told them to line up and he will paint them one after the other.*

*Now the crow decided that he was going to stand at the very end of the line, because he was going to be the most beautiful bird than all the rest.*

*The first to enter was Blue jay. Paakwiias took his brush and carefully painted all the feathers then he let him go. Blue jay was so proud of his colours. He cheerfully sang as he flew away. Next one to enter was Robin; after Paakwiias was done he flew away singing, so proud of his new colours.*

*The crow could see these birds as each one flew out of the lodge. He just kept thinking that he was going to be the most beautiful bird.*

*Paakwiias kept on painting the birds' one after the other. Each one sang as they flew out of the lodge: Bald Eagle, Loon, Woodpecker, and so on.*

*The line was coming to an end and soon it will be the crows turn. He stood proud that he was going to be the most beautiful bird than all the rest.*

*Finally, it was his turn. As he entered the lodge, he requested that he be painted in the most brilliant colours that Paakwiias had. Paakwiias told him that all he had left was one colour. The Crow looked at the paint and asked Paakwiias to make some, but Paakwiias would not. The Crow was getting annoyed and he demanded that Paakwiias make some more.*

*The more the Crow demanded, the angrier the Paakwiias became. Finally becoming frustrated, he grabbed the Crow and just dunked him into the black paint. As he was being dunked the Crow kept yelling 'caw, caw, caw' and to this day, the Crow is not happy with his colour. He announces it for everybody to know. (Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, 2007)*



### **Aandek the Crow: A story about not getting what you want (Ojibwe)**

*Kitchi mewzha kina gwa bezhigonang gwonda bineshiinhak gii naazoog. Gaayii gwa beshig owa memdage gii maamninaamjigaassii. Miisa ngoding gii nbwaachidowaad, miidash gii giishendamawaad ji nda zhichigewaad owisa oonji ezhibaataazhiwebziwaad.*



*Gii giizhendamoog dash ji zhaamaawaad Kizhe Manidoon wii ndagkendamowaad endigwenh ji ndazhichigegbane owa. Miisa gii wenaabmaawaad ge zhaanhjin ode ji ow ginoonaawaad newen Kizhe Manidoon. Mii gii gizikewaad kitchi shpiming nikeyaa. Gmaapiich gii nidigoshinoog ode endaanid newen. Mii gii gwenmindawaa aaniin bebaazikaawaad.*

*Mii-sa gii wiin-da-mo-waa 'aad ezhi-mgo-shkaa den-da-maa-waad. Kina gwa be-shi-go-nong di-naaz-mi, ki-doog dash ii-dig. Nan-da-wen-daa-naa jin-sid-waam-di-mang-ba aa-nii ezhi-beb-kaan-zii-yaang.*

*Giin kawe nanaagdawendam maabe Kizhe Manido mii dash giigkendang zhichigan. Gii wiindamowaan newen bineshiinhan ji ow waabmaawaad newen donodaaginan Paakwiias ezhnikaazod. Ngaa wiindamowaa ezhwebiziyyeg miinwaa ji nidigoshneg dinaan newen bineshiinhan.*

*Aapji gwa gwonda bineshiinhak gii maamiikziwog pii enipskaabiiwaad kiing. Eni nsognagok mii gii zhaawaad ode endaad own Paakwiias. Gii wiindamowaan dash Paakwiias zhaazhigo Kizhe Manidoon gii debaajmataagwad ezhwebiziwaad gewe. Geyaabi jinaa nkawebaabiishig ji zhiitaa 'aanh miinwaa wiindamowig gewe geyaabi aanind bineshiinhak.*

*Kina gwa gwonda beneshiinhak aapji gii maamiikziwog pii ezhaa 'aad ode. Paakwiias endaad. Gii gaanzmaan maabe Paakwiias wii niibdegaabwiinid mii dash enso bebezhiig ji shoosgawaad.*

*Maaba dash aanhdek aapji ekweyiing ode wii ow naaniibwe. Neyii shindawendam maabe wii maawnji gwanaajwiidenchiwaad.*

*Kwiinggwiiish gaa ntame biindiged. Miisa Paakwiias gii daapnang shoobiigigan, aapji gii aanggwaaamzi kina gii shoosgawaad newen miigwanan mii dash gii bigidnaad gaa giizhiitaa. Aapji gwa jii maamiikwendan gaa naazgaazod maaba kwiinggwiiish, minaagamoonswi pii enigziked.*

*Mii dash miinwa Pitchi gaa biindiget. Gaa mi giizhiitaad maaba Paakwiis mii gii ni giziked owa Pitchi, ni ngamawgwa geyii. Aapji gwana geyii maamiikwendam enaazod.*

*Waabmaan dash gwa maaba aanhdek newen bineshiinhan bebezhiig mi zaagijibzonid. Mii eta enendang wiin gwa ge maawnji gwanaajwiid.*

*Gii aabjita gwa Paakwiis bebezhiig shoosgawaad newen bineshiinhan. Enso bezhiig gwa minagamaw pii mi zaagjibizod: Mgizi- Baabaasenh, geyaabi gwe aanind.*

*Mii zhigwa jaagaawnidawaad mii dash gwa wiiba wiintam aanhdek. Aapji gwa kitchi zhiyaa naaniibawiid zhiwe mkwendang wiin enchiwaad wii maawnji gwanaajwiid.*

*Miisa gegpii wiintam. Pii gaa biindiged mii gii nookiid memaawnji wiisgaandegin gwa shoosgaganan ji nokaazad maaba Paakwiias. Mee eta geyaaby ngoding nandeg etemgak digoon dash newen. Gii gnawaamdaan owi shoosgagan maaba aanhdek mii dash gii gwejmaad newen Paakwiiasan jizhitoonid geyaabi aanind. Gaayii dash Paakwiias wii zhitoosiin. Eshkam dash gwa ninjshkaadizi maaba aanhdek. Zhitoon geyaabi aanind dizhigaandjinaazhkowan newen Paakwiiasan.*

*Eshkam gwa maaba aanhdek gii ninishkimaan newen Paakwiiasan enipiichi getnaamnaazhkowad gwa. Miisa gegpii aanoodendang maaba Paakwiias mii gii debibinaad, miisa giingndaa' aabiignaad zhiwe mkade shoosgaganing. Gii naanodaagozi dash maabe aanhdek pii enighndaa' aabiignind, "caw, caw, caw" nwedam dash. Gaayii gii nmanendizii owi gaa naazid, geyaabi gwa nongo gaayii nmanendizii. Mii dash meminjinaanoondaagzid geyaabi nongo mina' aapii. Kina gwaya wiigkendang. (Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, 2007)*

The struggle to change has been well documented in virtually every human arena. The tenacity to change has been demonstrated by Indigenous

Peoples' throughout history. As Aanhdek has demonstrated in this story and Mno-Jichaag Bezhig said at the beginning of this chapter, sometimes it isn't a good fit at the time but in time it may serve us well.

It is my hope that this study will provide Indigenous People with some fuel to continue to feed that fire of resiliency. This is my small effort to support the People.

## **Appendix A: Sacred Space and Cyberspace Survey Questions**

The following list of questions was utilized with the Elder Knowledge Keepers to guide this enquiry. Each participant was provided with these questions upon request to participate in the study. At each interview the following questions were used to facilitate the conversations.

1. What are teaching Circles?
2. Who can conduct Teaching Circles?
3. What is the process to conducting Teaching Circles?
4. Who participates in Teaching Circles?
5. Are there individuals who are not allowed to participate in Teaching Circles? Who or what determines this?
6. What are your experiences when you have conducted Teaching Circles?
7. What beliefs do Aboriginal people who conduct Teaching Circles have about teaching circles?
8. How do people become eligible to conduct Teaching Circles?
9. Where are Teaching Circles conducted? Are there reasons for a particular location?

10. When are Teaching Circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular times?
11. Why do people participate in Teaching Circles?
12. How many people can participate in Teaching Circles?
13. What do people need to know about Teaching Circles before they participate?
14. Are teaching circles similar to any other Aboriginal practices? If so, which ones?
15. Are there other ceremonies that can be included with Teaching Circles? If so which ones?
16. Do you use a computer? How?
17. Do you work with students or others that use a computer?
18. Can teaching circles be conducted using the computer? How?
19. What parts of the circle do you think can be replicated online?
20. What parts do you think cannot be used? Why?

## **Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire Guide**

Appendix B includes the interview questionnaire guide that I used to develop the questions for this study. The Appendix B questions were used by Dr. Michael Anthony Hart in his Master's thesis titled: An Ethnographic Study of Sharing Circles as a culturally appropriate practice approach with Aboriginal People (1997). Permission was granted from Dr. Hart to use, modify or adapt this questionnaire for the purposes of this Doctoral dissertation. I adapted the questions to reflect Teaching Circles instead of Sharing Circles and added a number of additional questions related to technology.

1. What are Sharing Circles?
2. What is the process for conducting Sharing Circles?
3. Who participates in Sharing Circles?
4. Are there individuals who are not allowed to participate in Sharing Circles? Who?
5. What have people experienced when they have conducted Sharing Circles?
6. What beliefs do Aboriginal people who conduct Sharing Circles have about Sharing Circles?
7. How do people become eligible to conduct Sharing Circles?

8. Where are Sharing Circles conducted? Are there reasons for a particular location?
9. When are Sharing Circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular times?
10. Why do people participate in Sharing Circles?
11. How many people can participate in Sharing Circles?
12. What do people need to know about Sharing Circles before they participate?
13. Are Sharing Circles similar to any other Aboriginal practices? Which ones?
14. Are there other ceremonies that can be included with Sharing Circles? Which ones?

## **Appendix C: Letter of Information**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I have been working in Aboriginal education in our communities for many years. I have come to recognize that teaching culture happens many different ways. I also understand that Elders are the knowledge keepers and help to guide decisions made that will affect change for the well being of the community. As a student in Doctoral studies from the Athabasca University I hope to visit with the Elder Knowledge Keepers to talk about how we can use technology to support and teach Anishinaabe culture; specifically the Teaching Circle and how we use it in formal education. This information will assist the community to better understand how to use technology to participate in Teaching Circles.

I am going to give you information and ask you to participate in this research project to share what you know about Teaching Circles, and if or how they can be conducted using electronic technology. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about this research project. If you are not sure of anything I will be happy to explain anything that you do not understand. You can ask any questions you have at any point during our time together.

### **Purpose of the research**

Technology is being used more and more by the youth in our communities. The use of culturally appropriate teaching methods is not evident in



our schools. I want to find a way to integrate our traditional Aboriginal Teaching Circle method with electronic technology to help Aboriginal students in our contemporary school environments to learn about cultural teachings. I want to understand what a Teaching Circle is and what the appropriate methods are to conduct one. I want to learn what the Elders, who work in education, understand about the use of electronic technology in teaching culture. I want to learn about the teachings that would be appropriate to include in our online school curriculums, and those teachings that should not be included.

My intention is to visit with Elders who are working, or have worked, in institutional education settings with Aboriginal students. The conversations will be recorded and transcribed by me. You will be given an opportunity to review the conversation either by listening to the tape recording or reviewing the notes that I have written out from the recording. I have not set a time limit, or a location for our visits. Each visit will be organized at your convenience.

You are being asked to take part in this research because I feel that you have experience as an Elder Knowledge Keeper, and an educator with Aboriginal people. Your contribution will help to provide information to enable us to integrate the Aboriginal Teaching method, our cultural teachings and technology to assist the future generations. I will be asking some questions about your understanding of teaching circles; for example, one of the questions is “What is your understanding of Teaching Circles?” Your participation is completely voluntary. It is your choice to participate or not. The choice that you make will

have no bearing on your job or any work-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind at any time and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. I can terminate the interview at any time without explanation also.

## **Procedures**

If you accept this invitation you will be asked to spend some time with me, at a time and location of your choice, talking about your understanding and experience with Teaching Circles and electronic technology. The questions will be open ended and you can refuse to answer if you choose to. There will be some questions related to your cultural understanding and experience and other questions related to your experience and understanding of learning using electronic technology. You do not have to share any knowledge that you are not comfortable sharing. The entire discussion will be tape-recorded, unless you indicate otherwise, but you will not be identified by name on the tape. The information will not be shared with anyone and the tapes will be destroyed upon completion of my Doctoral dissertation. While in use the tapes will be stored in my home office, in a locked file cabinet.

## **Duration**

This research will take place during the period from March 2010 – August 2010. During that time period I expect to visit with you at least once, but maybe two or three times, with each visit lasting about 1 hour – or until we have all the information. The initial visit will be slightly longer because it is the visit that I

will be asking you to share your knowledge. The next visits are set aside to review the research progress and to verify that I have all the information you want to share in the way that you want it represented. These follow up visits are optional and will be offered in the spirit of ethical Aboriginal research collaboration.

### **Risks**

There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance. However, we do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any question if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. You will also be given an opportunity to review the written transcripts at any time after the recorded interview.

### **Benefits**

As an Elder knowledge keeper and educator there will be direct benefits to your participation in this study. These include: 1) the findings will assist educators who work with Aboriginal learners to be better prepared with recognized cultural teaching methods; 2) the youth will have access to cultural teachings in an environment that is responsive to their reality today; and 3) the larger Aboriginal community will be able to integrate different approaches to teaching and learning about culture using electronic technology.

## **Reimbursements**

You will not be given any money for your participation, however, I will be providing an offering of sema and a small gift in appreciation of your time.

## **Confidentiality**

The research being done in the community may draw attention and if you participate you may be asked questions by other people in the community. The information will not be shared with anyone. The information I collect will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. I am the only one who will know what your number is and this information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. It will not be shared with or given to anyone.

## **Sharing the Results**

The knowledge that I gather from this research will be shared with you before it is handed into Athabasca University or made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. Once the Doctoral dissertation is completed, the document will be available to you and presented to other interested people.

## **Who to Contact**

If you have any question, you can ask now or later, if you wish to ask questions later, you may contact Joyce Helmer, (705) 523-1206, [joyce.helmer@sympatico.ca](mailto:joyce.helmer@sympatico.ca) or Dr. Debra Hoven, Dissertation Supervisor at Athabasca University. [dhoven@athabascau.ca](mailto:dhoven@athabascau.ca)

The proposal was reviewed and approved by the Athabasca Ethics Review Board (REB). This is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the Athabasca REB please contact Dr. Debra Hoven, [dhoven@athabascau.ca](mailto:dhoven@athabascau.ca)

## **Appendix D: Consent form**

Consent to participate in an interview regarding teaching circles and technology.

### **Elder Knowledge Keeper (Participant)**

I have been invited to participate in the research study about Aboriginal Teaching Circles and online learning. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have accepted the sema offered and consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study. I understand that it may take one or more sessions in order to share my understanding of and experiences with conducting teaching circles.

**Print Name of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

**Researcher:**

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. An interview will be conducted requesting information about Aboriginal teaching Circles and electronic technology
2. The time and place will be decided by the participant. Participation is voluntary.
3. No incentive will be provided other than a tobacco offering and a small gift.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and

voluntarily. A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

**Print Name of Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness**

I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

**Print name of witness** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of witness** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date**



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