Ethical Space in a Secondary School: A Case Study

Catherine Longboat, B.ED.

Adult Education

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

Discourse in the provincial education system that includes Aboriginal peoples is a convoluted one-sided affair. This has contributed to the limited academic success for Aboriginal secondary students in the provincial school system. The Office of the Auditor General (2004) announced a 27-28 year gap in Academic success compared to non-Aboriginal students (p.1). Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders are frustrated and confused with the lack of support for long-term solutions to address academic success for Aboriginal students. The boundaries in education that exist between the dominant society of Canada and Aboriginal peoples in education are hindering the development of ethical space in which to negotiate and apply “concrete arguments and concepts” (Ermine, 2000, p. 140) for ‘best’ solutions across the cultural divide.

Recent literature suggests a gap in knowledge to address this cultural divide. This study reveals racism is still prevalent and the problem lies in the fallacy of Euro-Western pedagogical beliefs. There is a need to design ethical space that will assist transformation of cross-relations in education for inclusion of Aboriginal voices and content. I submit that ethical space involves physical and abstract space.

This report is a qualitative, exploratory, and single case study of one northern Ontario secondary school attended by First Nations and Métis peoples who comprise 35% of the school population. Twenty-six stakeholders volunteered to participate in six interviews. The volunteers in this study are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Aboriginal peoples are from two First Nations, and Métis peoples. It is an Aboriginal designed and delivered study that a) describes an Aboriginally-designed research method to gather data across cultural divides in a secondary school, b) reviews Tri-Council Policy Section 6
(TCPS) regarding ‘good practices’ in ethical research involving Aboriginal peoples, and
c) summarizes stakeholder perspectives of the ‘best educational environment’ for one
secondary school.
Acknowledgments

My place is between Earth and Sky. I am a human being on Turtle Island. I am grateful to my parents and grandparents for my identity as a person with a rich and diverse mix of heritage consisting of Ojibwa and Iroquois peoples. I trust they are looking from the Spirit world with my ancestors and know I have worked hard to pass on their vision of a good life.

I dedicate my work to the next generation of grandchildren and their children for seven generations to come. My strength, courage, and purpose are always renewed when I see your young, inquisitive, smiling faces.

To my children, Chris, Anastasia, and Clarence, I thank you for your support, encouragement, and assurance that I could follow my dream to reach higher in my education. I am a proud mother and I hope I have made you proud. I recognize your life partners in my extended family.

To my life partner, Morris, I have the greatest respect for your patience, understanding and helping me to keep a perspective on the importance of my work.

To the staff of the secondary school and the students I worked with. All of you are always on my mind. You worked hard and we had many exhilarating times as well as difficult times. I will always remember your courage and the many gifts you shared. I can only hope I have made an impact on your lives as much as you have on mine.

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My journey was intense. I hope I have given back as much as I have received. Thus, I humbly present the result of my work with my friends, family, and mentors in academia.

Miigwetch and Niyah:weh
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

A secondary school, located in a northern Ontario town setting, requested a study to create ‘The Best Educational Environment’ by “re-culturing” its activities (notes, March 20, 2005). There was a need for Aboriginal voice and content. Data was not available to track Aboriginal students living off the reserve who may identify as Métis and Aboriginal. The school lacked the Voluntary Self Identification exercise to identify Métis, off reserve or non-status Aboriginal peoples when considering the impact of its mainstream curriculum on all Aboriginal students. Actual, known numbers were restricted to First Nations students. The district school board is currently working on the processes and protocols to retrieve this information. Through activities of the Native Resource Room Program to identify a full Aboriginal student body, it was discovered that this school’s student population was approximately 35% Aboriginal. Aboriginal parents were not actively involved in the school. There were three initial questions concerning cultural expectations and standards for the education of students from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives (notes, April 14, 2006):

1. In what ways can all parties connect when there are two cultural ways of seeing education?
2. In what ways can two standards for education determine a process for an agreeable transformation of curriculum?
3. In what ways must the context be designed to encourage an exchange of information?

This study focused on one secondary school Native Resource Room Program that developed during the period beginning November 2003 until 2005. The position of Traditional Mentor Worker was new and I was the worker. I was involved in designing
partnering agreements developed between the school and Aboriginal students. I attributed the potential for student academic success to the creation of appropriate cultural space, mutual recognition of an effective strategy and demonstrated concrete arguments for ongoing need. This study describes the Native Resource Room as ethical space in the school.

**Ethical Space**

Ethical space is space recognized and supported as a place for Aboriginal cultural activity: a place for demonstration and observation of Aboriginal ways of being and learning; a place for Aboriginal student community; a place where observations of the cultural divide were discussed. This space provided a place for Aboriginal student voices to clarify abstract meanings of cultural epistemologies through question and debated. This space offered metaphysical space for cultural exchange: a place for interchange of knowledge and discussion between cultures; a place for deep reflections of epistemological differences that influence decisions in negotiation processes; a place where words were examined as the means to bridge cultural language differences in the design of mutually satisfying agreements; a place that involved subjective inner knowing that was beyond the spatial trappings of mainstream research objectives; a place for authentic dialogue; a place where a ‘language of possibility’ was encouraged and explored. This study examined the ethical space when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures met in one secondary school. This study is a qualitative, exploratory case study requested by one secondary school as the means to find the ‘Best Educational Environment.’ This study is culturally-designed research and delivered with Aboriginal intent.
Ethical space is a concept that demands attention and explanation in research that is conducted with, for, and most importantly, by Aboriginal peoples who have confidence in their cultural knowledge and respect for other cultures. Participants in the interviews were not questioned in advance about their knowledge of what ethical space means to them. I picture ethical space as existing on two levels: a physical location, such as the Native Resource Room, and a metaphysical, sacred, neutral plane or zone where emergent physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual layers of human senses are encouraged and holistically prepared to risk engagement in “critical conversations” (Ermine, 2005, p. 11). In this metaphysical space, the ambiguous is negotiated. It is an epistemological, abstract plane of space for “retreat, reflection and dialogue” (ibid, p. 10). It is a pre-designed safe place for emergent senses to position and address contentious issues, and admit to the unknown without interruption or judgement. It is an environment in which cultural confrontation is encouraged and cultural divides are examined.

Exploration of cultural boundaries and divides in ethical space has associated tensions and a centre or vortex in ethical space (Ermine, 2005). Ermine built his theory of ethical space on studies conducted by Roger Poole (1972, cited in Ermine):

Roger Poole (1972) coined the term ‘ethical space’ in his book *Towards Deep Subjectivity* to identify an abstract space that frames an area of encounter and interaction of two entities with different intentions. According to Poole (1972), “there are two sorts of space because there are two sorts of intentions. The intentions structure the space in two different ways. When the two sets of intentions...confront each other...then ethical space is set up instantaneously.” (p. 5)
Ermine's (2000) thesis on ethical space further explains

...the conceptualization of the ethical space as an abstract location that lends itself to the negotiation of ethics in any research that cross cultural borders. The construction of this ethical space, in theory, leads to the creation of new knowledge based on respectful relations and realigning knowledge through the new frontier of emancipated thought. (p. 140)

This case study of one secondary school revealed various intentions for the education of Aboriginal students. Both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal voices were heard. This study designed a method to document and analyzes the tensions between Aboriginal students and the school. This study, written as a story, presented the intents and knowledge held by each cultural group as a means to address the problems. This study was timely. There were conjectures in the education of Aboriginal students that are disconcerting. The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework document was a signal for change in delivery of education for Aboriginal peoples. Ermine suggested that the examination of ethical space is needed in advance of change and subsequent 'models of healing would assist...educational curricula.'

A further line of inquiry is the development of concrete arguments and concepts that articulate the need for Western society and institutions to commit to forms of healing from the ills of colonial thought. Models of healing would assist Western society in pursuing programs of rehabilitation and educational curricula that emancipate the human spirit from the confines of caged existence. This follows Freire's (1970) assertion that the colonizer cannot free himself and that his
freedom requires the guidance of alternate models of knowledge and emancipation. (Ermine, 2000, p. 140-141)

The Native Resource Room was an example of ethical space that was physical and where the ideas and thoughts collided between two cultures on the metaphysical plane. The school supported the creation of an environment that allowed risk-taking intercultural strategies to unfold. These strategies revealed clues for future planning that benefited not only Aboriginal students, but all cultures existing in the school. In the Native Resource Room, Aboriginal student cultural initiatives were purposeful and explicit. They gathered knowledge about themselves as First Nations (on and off reserve), Métis, and Inuit Aboriginal peoples. They invited willing school stakeholders to observe and practice Aboriginal cultural protocols and processes. The physical space of the Native Resource Room became metaphysical ethical space where reciprocal acknowledgments and transformations in relationships occurred, where participating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples felt free to voice and question agreements and disagreements about such issues as the school’s environment and teaching practices. A simple example was the greetings in the languages of the Aboriginal students or invitations to participate in traditional gatherings where prayers were in the Ojibwa language and then said in English. The Aboriginal students were under the guidance of a Traditional Mentor Worker who would caution them from time to time to accept and be patient when there were no agreeable reactions towards Aboriginal protocols and practices from non-Aboriginal stakeholders. There were stakeholders who were learning and trying to understand. Aboriginal students came to the Native Resource Room when their identities, beliefs, and values, were challenged and/or questioned. In Aboriginally-designed space
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the students were reaffirmed and given an understanding of their rights as human beings to be different and participate in cross cultural exchanges in any other physical space. Healing of their emotional beings was an active part of their learning. It was a place where any person had the choice to participate in Aboriginal formal ceremonial gatherings or not. This story is an examination of a school’s ethical space.

New knowledge became evident when a ‘language of possibility’ in ethical space was encouraged. Aboriginal students shared their thoughts and words about their academic success and their intents were voiced. The Aboriginal students were empowered to contribute in negotiation strategies by submitting cultural points of view and expecting responses to voiced intentions. The strategy to design the set-up of this space was substantial and challenging. The key was to acknowledge two ‘different systems.’ Ermine was quoted in the Kaplan-Myrth and Smylie (2006) Indigenous Knowledge Translation Summit report (2006): “Ethical space is acknowledging two different systems and that space between them. This is the space where everybody works together to see how knowledge works. No party becomes dominant and it is a matter of equal relationship” (p. 19).

The school saw Aboriginal students progress in their academic success. The struggle is not over. On an informal basis, certain knowledge was revealed. There is now a need for concrete and absolute statements about cultural intents to educate Aboriginal students.

My Story

This study is an exploration of ethical space. One aspect is to generate knowledge about the cultural divide. A noticeable feature of this study is about how the oppressive
nature of the educational system was challenged and about how a working cultural partnership reached across the cultural divides and affected Aboriginal student success. The design of ethical space in this school is a compelling story when presented from an Aboriginal perspective. I offer my story for the reader as one means to situate the complexities of the cultural divide in this school.

My background credentials did not include an Ontario Teaching Certificate. I am a certified Life Skills Coach and a Trainer with a B.A. I completed a B.Ed. in Adult Education during my placement at the secondary school. My role in the culmination of events that led to the Native Resource Room was as a Traditional Mentor Worker (TMW) for one First Nation. This position was federally-funded through New Paths under INAC (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada). I began my duties at the end of October 2003 and left in June 2005 to participate in higher education with the following direction:

The purpose of the Traditional Mentor Program is to provide secondary students with an improved quality of life and a vision, to improve their communication skills, the ability to express themselves, learn cultural relevant activities, and team building skills. The program will introduce and promote cultural identity and traditional teachings while promoting healthy life styles and choices. (Job Posting September, 2003)

I conducted informal fieldwork and data collection as I worked with the students. I interwove these documents to create a background picture to the issues in the secondary school that was part of my story.

Under the leadership of the school’s Vice Principal and with mentoring from me as the Traditional Mentor Worker regarding cultural approaches to Aboriginal students,
and inevitably with permission of superiors, this school under study opened itself and allowed risk-taking strategies to unfold. I believe in a “holistic and integrated approach for improving Aboriginal student outcomes....It is essential that Aboriginal students are engaged and feel welcome in school, and that they see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community” (Aboriginal Education Office, 2007, p. 6). The boundary of the ethical space is the door to the Native Resource Room. The Aboriginal students can leave this room with the understanding of the terms to be involved in mainstream education. They understand they can return anytime, unlike their grandparents and parents who were often prevented from returning from residential school to their homes. Unconsciously, I was applying certain strategies to avoid assimilative tactics in education. I reviewed my work with reflective and critical lenses. I developed relational trust (Bell et al, 2004, p. 38) not just with the Aboriginal students. I sought to build relations with teachers and staff. In ethical space, there is no fear of being assimilated.

The Aboriginal Education Office (2006) report connected the issues of “poverty, low self-esteem, lack of parental support, substance abuse and discrimination” (p. 1) as problems amongst Aboriginal students. I found the data from the school reflected these factors: “low Aboriginal student outcomes include high absenteeism, low student engagement, a lack of awareness among teachers of the learning styles of Aboriginal students, and a lack of understanding within schools and school boards of Aboriginal cultures, histories and perspectives” (ibid, p. 1).

My story became inextricably linked to the school through life events that were grounded in Aboriginal experience and knowledge. The education I received from family
elders guided me in my work as a Traditional Mentor Worker at a secondary school. My internal questions, beliefs, ideas, and assumptions throughout this study were connected to how Aboriginal students were enabled and, then, empowered to realize their personal academic successes. I shared my grounding theories and assessed their usefulness against the academic successes of the Aboriginal student body.

First, I expressed my internal dialogue with Aboriginal elders, Aboriginal teachers, family, and community regarding schooling. I provided a background that created my views for being in education. My values, beliefs, and assumptions existed within six key areas of reflection: (a) manners in teaching and learning; (b) residential school - the Mohawk Institute; (c) grounding principles; (d) elementary and high school experiences; (e) higher education; and (f) developing theory. The Aboriginal theories that guided me to design a Native Resource Room program around an Aboriginally-designed tool is found in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel (see Figure 1) that consists of four analytical quadrants: Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action. A brief explanation of the process I used was as follows:

1. determine the vision of education from all parties: the District School Board, the First Nation, and Aboriginal students
2. recognize the relationships within the community and school,
3. analyze the history, demographics, geography, economics, and educational outcomes of the community and determine the extent of traditional knowledge and practice,
4. design a program for action in the school to address Aboriginal student internal motivations.
I found that the Medicine Wheel in Figure 1 was a useful analytical tool in gaining a fair perspective for understanding the contextual situation of the school and assessing direction, such as: the form of vision; identifying the extent of current relationships to understand the strength of the potential vision; determining knowledge sets; and setting a stage for activity. In my own experience, I found that, too often, groups have a vision but lack the knowledge about relationships that will lead to sharing knowledge and putting together a plan for action. When two cultural groups meet in ethical space, their relationships are tested. Through First Nation community newsletters, First Nations communities were informed of student progress, and that provided a link for one set of Aboriginal students and their parents. In my role as a Traditional Mentor Worker, I did not work or meet formally with the Aboriginal parents in either the school or their communities. There was not enough time in a school day. The academic success of the students and the development of relationships across cultures needed to be established in the school.

In an agreement with the school, my role evolved to address the needs of all Aboriginal students in the school for the 2004-2005 year on a temporary basis. In the Native Resource Room, Aboriginal students demonstrated their cultural need for space to advance their academic success. The school leadership acknowledged the need for curriculum with Aboriginal voice and content with Aboriginal partnering agreements when funding for the Traditional Mentor Worker position was halted. There were some reservations. Although the Native Resource Room had relatively high success in meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, not all school staff would admit there was a need for relational changes with Aboriginal students and their communities within renewed
curriculum. The school leadership requested ‘reculturing’ efforts to define the inferences when two cultures meet. Discussion about ethical space evolved to address this conundrum.

_Manners in Teaching and Learning_

I examined the past half-century of personal history to seek the enigmas that created my understanding of education. I was born of mixed ancestry. My mother identified herself as Chippewa and my father’s matrilineal status was Mohawk. My first educators were five great-grandparents, four grandparents, three extended grandparents, and many great-aunts and great-uncles. I was under the tutelage of a Wolf Clan Mother who was my great-aunt. In later years I was under the influential teachings of two more elders. These people were carriers of history, translators of current events, visionaries, and fiercely proud of being self-sufficient peoples. They spoke to me about who I am. They implanted their perceptions of life changes and demonstrated their tenacity to uphold a value system that existed centuries before newcomers set forth on this land. Two of my ancestors were hereditary Chiefs: one was ousted from the Council House by the R.C.M.P. through the federal government. That time was known as the “deposition of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy by a Canadian Order of Council in 1924. I was told the story but advised not to ‘dwell’ on it. I understand today that this meant not to be angry. Another Ojibwa ancestor stood before the Queen to plead for Aboriginal women’s rights to hold title to land in the face of colonial law. My ancestors fought in wars, made treaties with other sovereign nations, designed wampum belts, and established links for amicable agreements that had the impact of a “brotherhood” with mutual rules of behaviour between nations. This understanding
From the Direction of the West

From the Direction of the North

Figure 1. An Aboriginal medicine or teaching wheel used in analysis.
among nations is symbolically conveyed as a Covenant Chain and recited with Wampum Belts (see Chapter 2, p. 37). The stories were told in everyday language to a little girl who often asked too many questions. I was fascinated with the answers of knowledgeable people. They would ask me what I thought about what I was told. Some of my answers must have been either what they wanted me to say or comical because I remember hearing their chuckles after I shared my thoughts. In the manner of tradition, I was always hugged before I left them. As I grew older, I was taught to shake hands with my teachers to show respect and appreciation for what they had to share. I learned to pay attention to my teachers as they did to me. I understood education to be a mutual teaching and learning relationship. I expected that all individuals who had knowledge taught in this manner.

My father prohibited me from continuing to learn the language of his grandparents. I was less than five years old when he explained to me that I could learn the language later if I wanted to. Many years later I discovered I had retained understanding of the language. I remembered the rhythms and applied the correct accents when I took a community course to study the language of my father’s people.

I attended schools off reserve, at the age of 10, with a firm grounding of what was expected of me in relation to the teachings of my grandparents, parents, siblings, and community. My life path was set when I received the messages that I was to go to school, do well, and learn about ‘the white man’s way of doing things.’ Living in the city demanded new understandings, alternate ways of living, and coping without Aboriginal community. My safety net with family elders was broken when my parents separated. The effects of alcohol on my father and his father created havoc. The family became nuclear
without extended relations except for one great-grandmother who came under our care. Dealing with racism by neighbours and teachers, and living in poverty became added stresses. My strength was in remembering my role to learn in mainstream education.

Residential School – the Mohawk Institute

The Mohawk Institute was still a residential school when I was growing up. I remember three of my 16-year-old uncles coming into our home. I knew they came from that dreaded place we called the ‘mush-hole.’ However, I cannot recall hearing any discussions on their experiences. Their narratives came decades later when their children were grown and my uncles talked about how they lost their wives and children due to their inability to relate to or understand family needs. They had fallen into the grips of alcohol related activities. My uncles were the unfortunate children who did not have parents able to afford their care. I was sensitive to the generational impacts of residential schools and subsequent irrational events that I attributed to the excessive drinking of alcohol. Many of my relatives were cousins whose parents suffered the humiliations of emotionally repressed and culturally oppressive education.

I did not attend or live in residential school, nor did my parents or their parents except my dad’s father who spent time in the Mohawk Institute and my grandmother who attended as a day student. My Aboriginal grandparents and great grandparents passed on to me the visions of their ancestors that did not include the interruptions of another culture. I can report that none of the Elders who affected my experiences in being educated were residential school students. Federally-funded schools from grade 1 to grade 8 were operating in my home reserve community where I went to school from grade 1 to grade 4.
Grounding Educational Principles

My grounding educational experiences came from the many people of my home band/reserve community. My mind took in directives to go to school and be smart to “learn the ways of ‘white society’ but never forget who you are.” These words were indelibly imprinted on my young mind. The beliefs that were passed down to me were about how to make people happy, about how to fashion myself according to expectations of all my ancestors and relations, about how to be respectful and kind, about how to live according to the laws of the universe, and about how to be responsible for the knowledge passed on to me. I received these directives and more, on a daily basis. I saw how those principles worked by observing the behaviours of my elders. I lived the beliefs that I was to apply to my own life in this manner. I was taught that my ancestors had made certain sacrifices in order for me to enjoy the life I had. I was taught to discipline myself, to follow natural laws, and to make my ancestors happy. I embraced what I had been taught because I saw how my teachers lived. They had no enemies that I could see, they were welcomed wherever they went, and they seemed to be happy with me in their lives. Thus, I learned by example the grounding principles on how to educate others. I expected that all teachers would behave in the same manner. My experiences did not support my hypothesis. I was in grade 5 when my mother left for the city and my elderly teachers passed away one by one. I was to experience a world without my elderly teachers.

Elementary and High School Experiences

I was not an honour student in high school, although I completed each school year in elementary school at the top of my class. Those preparatory years for higher education were a struggle for me. I spent many hours poring over textbooks and writing and
rewriting the events I was expected to know. I remember feeling anxious, confused, stressed, and ignorant. I made requests to stay after school and lunch hours to grasp what was expected of me in my assignments. I tried conversing with my teachers to discover their expectations and could find no insightful middle ground. My grounded theories about being educated would not allow transformational enlightenment about Euro-western education. It seemed I was incapable of regaining status as a top student in high school. My Aboriginal based knowledge that I was anxious to share, seemed worthless.

I worked at several jobs during my high school years. A sales supervisor, who was aware of the cultural differences in education, guided me through some of my studies and I met the requirements for a secondary school diploma in 4 years.

I applied for College in 1972. As a part-time College student, I could not find common ground with the other non-Aboriginal students, nor did I understand the partisan nature of society. The issues with which I was confronted in high school were more complex in College. Poverty was still a reality for my nuclear family. My grounded theories about education were useless in the College context. I quit. I imagined the disappointment of my family. Years later they made me realize I was the first in the family to finish high school and then to apply and be accepted in the College system. It was not until 1952 that Aboriginal students were allowed entry into higher education without being disenfranchised of their Aboriginal heritage. In this manner, many Aboriginal peoples sacrificed their ancestral heritage by denying their status as a Treaty Indian in order to achieve a good education, be accepted by mainstream, and attain a career. There is a nominal roll through Indian Affairs that the federal government used to
produce evidence that First Nations people exist in limited numbers, thereby, gradually relinquishing federally funded treaty responsibilities.

*Higher Education*

After my failed experience in College, I spent several decades observing and helping children, teenagers, young adults, other elders, and teachers, under the tutelage of my Aboriginal teachers whose ancestral teachings came from beyond the 15th century. I became a member of an elite group in Aboriginal society. I had no need for mainstream higher education. I was engaged in my role as a parent and then a grandparent in whatever community I lived. I travelled, worked, and learned, reported to my elders - my Aboriginal teachers. I became recognized as a Teacher in the Aboriginal ways of knowing through ceremony and community support. I experienced life cycles according to Aboriginal relational knowledge and theories. I was preparing to become an interpreter, translator, and servant-leader (Sergiovanni, 1992) for the younger Aboriginal generation.

Today I am meeting the challenges of taking my place as a candidate in mainstream higher education. I do not desire to be a proponent of mainstream education. I seek interrelationships with the belief that a system can be designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. Mainstream education with its one-sided design is failing Aboriginal students. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2005) states:

5.2 We remain concerned that a significant education gap exists between First Nations people living on reserves and the Canadian population as a whole and that the time estimated to close this gap has increased slightly, from about 27 to 28 years. (p. 1)
Many young people have not had the grounded teachings of times past. The knowledge that was available to maintain earth harmony and balance is not theirs. However, it is obvious that ancestral ways are at the centers of their beings. Aboriginal students struggle to understand their intuitive connections to thoughts and feelings in their longing for an Aboriginally-designed education. The journey into adulthood for many Aboriginal youth is fraught with inexperience and confusion. I share stories with them, but I have to be careful that my stories are not overshadowing their experiences. Many Aboriginal students do not have memories of great-grandparents or great-aunts and great-uncles as teachers and advisors. Many Aboriginal students do not have the grounding knowledge of ancestors who greeted the newcomers. Many Aboriginal students have been grounded within their community culture, but lack the transforming knowledge sets to compete in mainstream education. I believe that two systems of thought can be enabled to meet in space that will respect the ethical differences of values and beliefs.

Developing Theory

My interests are to acknowledge the implications of mainstream education for Aboriginal peoples and persuade the educational system to evolve with Aboriginal input. In my work I strive to apply concepts of unconditional love and respect for students as human beings first and then as beings within a culture. Perceiving the needs of Aboriginal students based on my own experiences and creating contextual interpretations for mainstream education agents have been powerful tools in my work. Feedback from influential administrative teachers indicates I have been successful (J. Hodson, personal communication, March 20, 2006).
I shunned the educational path promoted with the Ontario Teaching Certificate and sought spaces outside the public system to work with students of all ages. I was brought up to believe that Aboriginal peoples are self-determining and sovereign peoples. My theory is that Aboriginal students must self-develop under the tutelage of knowledgeable Aboriginal mentors and teachers in partnership with the educational system. To enable this process, Aboriginal students require a particular space where their words and experiences are understood without intruding curiosities and questions of those who lack similar knowledge. With this history, I came to work as a Traditional Mentor Worker.

Application of Theory in the Native Resource Room

The Native Resource Room evolved from a 10’ by 14’ windowless office used by three counsellors at various times during the week. The events were many. In this section, I attempt to capture the highlights.

Initially, I was one of four counsellors who occupied the small resource room. I was called by the Vice-Principal to deal with students from one First Nation, whose attendance and behaviours were defined as “at risk.” I found support from the First Nation education supervisor and the Vice-Principal to be in the school all day on Fridays and then three days a week. My role expanded to address any Aboriginal student who requested my services in the school five days a week. I was immersed in Aboriginal student life and led them through their difficulties, sharing their frustrations and successes, while serving as mediator, and offering my knowledge for both Aboriginal student and teachers. The little counseling room was used for strategic time-out sessions rather than suspension, an informal and formal place to meet to express concerns with
groups of Aboriginal students and teachers, a resourceful place to plan events, and a quiet place to study during spares. The little room became a gathering place to ask questions, conduct debates, share stories, and post notices. At times, the students were so numerous that they overflowed into the hallway.

Within three months into the second year, the Aboriginal students were given a choice of several rooms to move into. A Native Alliance group formed. The support and attention given to these students was overwhelming. Nine new computers with connections to the school internet and a laser printer were provided for their use. Seven original Aboriginal paintings were donated. Chairs and tables were refurbished. Later, the room was furnished with new round tables and chairs. A tiipii was set up by the Vice-Principal to enable students to conduct circle talks around a small fire. The students and I settled in to demonstrate their capabilities to achieve academic status. An example of that success is in the data of a power point presentation made by the Vice-Principal of the Secondary School (2005) about the students from the First Nation community that sponsored the Traditional Mentor Worker position: 84% increase on Honour Roll; graduation went up 82%; suspensions dropped by 78%. Data on all Aboriginal students to include off reserve, Métis, and Inuit students were not available as the formal school Voluntary Self-Identification forms had not yet been developed.

Aboriginal student leadership steps were small and faltering, but hopeful. There were not enough resources of time, persons, or funding to give them the assistance they desired to demonstrate the needs of the Aboriginal student population. They were not able to carry on without consistent guidance.
Statement of the Problem

The school leadership was determined to revise curriculum to meet the cultural needs of the school. The problem was whether all parties in the school and those within the native community were prepared to be involved. A number of meetings and telephone conversations conducted between the involved parties, including myself, resulted in a plan to address the question. The Principal and Vice-Principal determined the situation required a “community strategist to improve relationships” in order to ‘reculture’ the way “we think” (J. Hodson, personal communications, March 2006) about education for their students. A research initiative with staff, students, and Aboriginal community was discussed. Discussions were based on the following insight: “An education that does not critique the connections or lack of connections in knowledge is not education but indoctrination. Indigenous peoples must participate in educational decision-making; they must be allowed to transform the existing crisis” (Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000, p. 15). This quote illustrates the oppressive nature of education practices on past and current realities of Euro-Western, colonial practices, and applications. Historically, Aboriginal peoples were not invited to participate in educational decision making or assert contributions of their own knowledge sets.

Ermine (2005) determined that a certain design of ethical space is required where participants are invited and empowered to speak a ‘language of possibility’ in intercultural and cross-cultural discussion. Examining ethical space must be a step before Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders can gather to consider curriculum development with aboriginal voice and content included. Education is fraught with Euro-western authority that could over ride the voice of another culture (see page 3). This
school is determined to establish the required ethical space in anticipation of further
successful dialogue. Physical ethical space for the students is one aspect of the problem.

Richards and Vining (2003) discuss the impact of “good schools” and the need for
Aboriginal students to have a sense of place in the school.

Some have concluded that expanding best practices within the public school
system is not enough. They want, in addition, schools that engage Aboriginal families more intimately, and that make more extensive use of Aboriginal culture
within the school curriculum. The rationale for such structural innovation is to
replicate in an urban environment what former Premier Allan Blakeney has termed
the “cultural comfort” of the reserve. (p. 210)

Cultural dialogue is needed before a transformation of relationships can occur in this
school’s search for the Best ‘Educational Environment.’ Thus, this school requested a
study to explore its ethical space.

**Purpose of the Study**

The initial design for ethical space in this secondary school was found in the
physical aspects of the Native Resource Room and the metaphysical domains where
successful intercultural negotiations between two cultures were conducted. In this school
there was a belief that Aboriginal stakeholders must be involved in the delivery of
curriculum to determine the ‘Best Educational Environment’ for their students as they
prepare for higher education. There was belief that by drawing out values, beliefs, and
assumptions of voluntary cultural participants in ethical space, stakeholders would gain
knowledge about the cultural divide in the school, and this would educate the
stakeholders about teaching Aboriginal students and incorporating Aboriginal
involvement in curriculum and its delivery. Stakeholder interview groups were divided according to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subcultures: secondary school students, secondary school teachers, Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal leaders, and individuals who are administrators, decision makers, and resource people in education.

It was expected that the data would reveal conflicts of ideas between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. The nagging issue for both cultures was about how to embrace Aboriginal knowledge in the school's curriculum. There were including and concluding statements. There were agreements and disagreements that required adjustments and reciprocal understanding according to individual cultural stance in ethical space. Dialogue revealed values, beliefs and assumptions about education, standards, guidelines, and curriculum and indicators of need for change.

This study contributes to empirical evidence of need for Aboriginally-designed and delivered research. It incorporates Tri-Council Policy Guidelines Section 6—Research Involving Aboriginal peoples (TCPS-6) (Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics, 2005). This research design has implications for intercultural and cross-research that is designed and delivered with Aboriginal protocols and procedures. It demonstrated two examples of expectations voiced by Aboriginal peoples in research.

1. Develop a style of research engagement to “respect the culture, traditions and knowledge of the Aboriginal group” (TCPS-6). “They have ways of knowing, ways of socializing, non-verbal communication” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 13).

2. Recognize and develop a direct relationship with Aboriginal peoples: Be highly participatory and respectful (McNaughton & Rock, 2003) of “processes that stress
The text on the page is not legible due to the image quality. It appears to be a page with multiple paragraphs of text, but the content cannot be accurately transcribed.
interaction, reciprocity, non-interference” (Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000, p. 133).

Research Questions

There were four overall questions in this study:

- What values, beliefs, and assumptions amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures are evident in the secondary school environment?
- Where does ethical space fit in the school environment?
- What are the indicators that ethical space has, or has not, been established?
- What might be the conflicts between two cultures that need to be negotiated in ethical space?

In this document, definitions of key terms used, such as ethical space, ‘language of possibility,’ curriculum, covenant chain, are found in Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Importance of the Study

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2005) reported that the Aboriginal school population will continue to grow.

5.8 About 40 percent of Registered Indian population is under the age of 19, compared with 25 percent for the overall Canadian population. The Department [Indian and Northern Affairs] projects that on-reserve Registered Indian population will grow from about 445,000 in 2003 to about 700,000 by 2021. (p. 2)

There was a sense of urgency for this school to maintain a reputation for delivery of quality education for schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students. On one First Nation, students had the option of attending another provincial school in the district. Implementing a process to demonstrate fairness and equity of Aboriginal design and with
Aboriginal involvement might not be easy. One-sided cultural perceptions have hindered Aboriginal academic success in provincial education delivery systems. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2005) highlighted the issues that addressed one quadrant of Aboriginal peoples identified in The Constitution Act (1982) as First Nation:

Education is critical to improving the social and economic strength of First Nations individuals and communities to a level enjoyed by other Canadians. All parties, including the Department, First Nations, provinces, school boards, parents, and the students, need to work together to improve results. (p. 2)

The focus of these statements was with First Nations peoples who were federally-funded. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who lived off reserve fell under the jurisdiction of provincial mandates and were precluded from the address of the Auditor General.

One question was whether two cultural groups could design space in which to address educational reform within a mainstream secondary setting. Empirical studies focused on the design of curriculum by Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal students and the successes of its implementation for Aboriginal communities (Bell, et al., 2004; Fairies, 2004; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Reignier & Archibald, 1997). There is no study of processes and protocols to involve two cultural groups and their representatives in a secondary school setting. There is a need for reciprocal agreements between educational staff, teachers, school council, and the Aboriginal community of students and parents and decision makers that requires identification of specific space to allow expressions of values, beliefs, and assumptions without judgment and with reciprocity.

The secondary school in this case study took initial steps to provide ethical space for Aboriginal students that included First Nations, Métis and Inuit living off and on
reserve. The outcomes demonstrated how to attract and hasten involvement of both the school and Aboriginal community. It has informed other mainstream schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students. It is serving as a motivational template for school leaders to initiate successful strategies to ‘reculture’ activities with inclusive results to meet the needs of the school population (notes: August, 2007; January, 2008). This case study informs research about ethical space when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures meet in an educational setting.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

At this time, Aboriginal research is an emerging discipline. The Tri-Council Policy- Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples, Section 6 is a recent development within the past 5 years (McNaughton & Rock, 2003). Recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty is less than 25 years old (Constitution, 1982). The battle for jurisdiction over education in First Nations communities is an ongoing issue (Assembly of First Nations, 2005; Hill, 2004). Aboriginal students attending provincial schools have no benefit of treaty agreements under the federal government. Racism is still evident in curriculum that does not reflect the stories of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal students are expected to understand colonial settlement strategies to implement governing structures. First Nations peoples have a history and political realities of their own that are not recognized, and Métis peoples are struggling to have recognized rights as an Aboriginal group. The Ministry of Ontario established an education policy framework to address Aboriginal issues in its mainstream schools (Aboriginal Education Office, 2007). The policy expects those issues to be addressed inclusively within the context of the provincial school system.
The secondary school was determined to overcome political delineations and invite Aboriginal parents, students, and communities to join in a project to create cultural space in which to meet, to create new ideas; and to implement a design of curriculum that includes its delivery for the benefit of both parties. This project required an understanding of rules for engagement in ethical space between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Their narratives required an impartial and sensitive investigation to transform the implied strategies for discussion, negotiation, and collaboration with care. There was concern in the school that other groups of students would be overlooked while the Aboriginal students were being serviced in the Native Resource Room. Some felt that there was an unfair application of attention to the Aboriginal students despite the growing numbers of non-Aboriginal students were requesting involvement in the Native Resource Room program.

There were a number of issues to consider. A shift in the research paradigm demanded focus in research involving Aboriginal peoples (McNaughton & Rock, 2003). At the March 2002 meeting of SSHRC’s (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) Board of Directors, the discussion focused on the need for ethical research to protect Indigenous knowledge. In May 2002, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, known since 2003 as First Nations University of Canada, presented a brief to indicate a "paradigm shift in Aboriginal Research" (McNaughton & Rock, 2003, p.5) and a list of characteristics associated with it. This step encouraged revisions and additions to the TCPS-6. This study is guided by the principles and protocols indicated by Aboriginal peoples.
This is the first known combined intercultural and cross-cultural research conducted for the school by an Aboriginal and with an Aboriginal design. Ethical space in research was a concept unknown to the school. Volunteer participants were not questioned in advance about their knowledge of ethical space. It was obvious that a language of cultures was emerging in this school under study. There were indications of an enriched sphere of renewed unknown possibilities and potentials. First Nations peoples living in reserves or as community bands were pursuing jurisdiction of education for their people. First Nation political influence is limited to their Band Members. Their battle for funding is with the federal government. First Nations students are identified as a federal responsibility under the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs through a negotiated tuition agreement. Off-reserve status, Non-status, Inuit, and Métis Aboriginals are under the umbrella of the provincial school boards and funded through a combination of funds from the province and the municipality. All schools attended by Aboriginal groups are under provincial authority for approval of curriculum design. I explored the literature and determined the impacts this division of jurisdiction has on student classrooms. Students were not required to identify their cultural status in this secondary school. There were no official school forms to identify Off-reserve, Non-status, and Métis peoples. Aboriginal students were mostly of Ojibwa descent. The teachers in this school who worked under the school board did not identify themselves as Aboriginal. One Ojibwa Language Instructor delivered classes on a part-time basis according to a tuition agreement with one of the First Nations Bands. The choice was made to design an exploratory, qualitative, single case study. It was designed to capture a snapshot for understanding the ethical space in one secondary school. This study includes a focus on relationship building in
research for intercultural and cross cultural approaches with Aboriginal peoples in one school. "Key discussions of issues revolve around relationships between Researcher, Community and Individual for partnership and collaboration. Aboriginal people assert that relationship-building and Aboriginal styles of research need to be reflected in ethics reviews and community research protocols" (Longboat, 2006, p. 9).

I immersed myself in my work with secondary school Aboriginal students in the capacity of a Traditional Mentor Worker. I had confidential knowledge of student aspirations, struggles, and successes. I did not work with Aboriginal parents although they voluntarily participated in the interviews in this study. I was accepted by the school and often referred to as one of their ‘staff.’ I was a familiar face and known by name amongst the school community and First Nations. I was returning to the community in the capacity of researcher after an absence of one year. In this role I was aware of the key players, the history, the geography, and the socioeconomic situations within the communities. I developed a high respect for each cultural group and may have influenced responses of all interviewed participants in this study.

The study was not intended to be a political document to highlight Aboriginal needs in education. First Nation Leaders are advancing their needs for jurisdiction in education. This is a study about ethical space in research, about the reactions to an event when two cultures were given the opportunity to work together, and about one secondary school’s concern to ‘reculture’ the educational environment with Aboriginal voice and content. It requested voices of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents, and Aboriginal leaders, the teachers, and individuals with decision-making capacities in administration and resources. Aboriginal Elders and individuals who attended Residential schools have
been purposely left out of this study with the intent to access their knowledge at a later date.

The school voiced its need to find ‘The Best Educational Environment’ and it had the support of the school community and the Aboriginal people.

**Organization of Study**

Chapter One presented a background to a study that outlined the cumulative aspects of my involvement. Chapter Two presents the expressed concerns of participants at one secondary school within the wider education contexts in North America and internationally. The object of this discussion was to create understanding of ethical space and its importance in the context of this study. Chapter Three describes the method chosen for this explorative case study. Chapter Four provides a discussion of transcribed data and results. Chapter Five offers analytical conclusions to discover paths of resolution and suggests recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER TWO: RECLAIMING ABORIGINAL CULTURE, KNOWLEDGE, AND EDUCATION

Who wants a crowd of secure, focused, determined, and knowledgeable Aboriginals looking at treaties, land claims, damage suits, and the like?

(Chrisjohn & Young, 2006, p. 122).

There are specific realities in addressing Aboriginal student needs in education. In this work, I do not attempt to cover the many times Aboriginal peoples have been disappointed by government initiatives to deliver its agreements. It is enough to relate the idea of the inequalities and the current situation of Indigenous peoples the world over who are struggling to convey their rights through public demonstrations, blockades, media, and colonial legal systems.

Treaty documents reveal original understandings of reciprocal agreements between two sovereign nations: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. I have provided a short introduction to introduce the 27-year gap described in the report of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and the idea of addressing ethical space in one secondary school.

I submit that the idea of words is important in this study. I believe that words have meanings peculiar to different cultures and their subcultures. Through interviews, I listened to and analyzed words spoken in the English language but from two cultures: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. I used the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) as a tool to review original understandings of Aboriginal peoples and to analyze data. I present a review of original understandings of Aboriginal peoples about their Vision on establishing relations with non-Aboriginal peoples. In the next quadrant I connect Relationships in ethical space
through Aboriginal-designed symbols and through the pedagogical issues of racism and teaching. The third quadrant addresses Knowledge. I examined what is known and not known as a means to present ethical space and present the ‘language of possibility’ and tensions that are obvious in the secondary school. The final quadrant encouraged me to search for the events that led to the current situation and the need for this study. I examined the school environment, curriculum, classroom, administration, and Aboriginal stakeholders. This section includes questions for assessing direction of the study.

**Inequalities: Addressing the 27-year Gap**

The current literature contains many responses to the dilemmas faced by Aboriginal peoples in their education. The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) followed the announcement by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2005) to meet the needs of all Aboriginal students: First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

A focus on meeting two primary challenges by the year 2016 — to improve achievement among First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies. The ministry recognizes that, to achieve these goals, effective strategies must be developed to meet the particular needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. (p. 5)

**Pursuing Partnerships**

The secondary school involved in this study pursued short-term funding for the position of a Traditional Mentor Worker in partnership with two First Nations and the Aboriginal Education Office for the 2005-2006 school year. The Vice-Principal, with the
backing of the Principal, requested this study on ethical space in the spring of 2006. Their dilemma was how to involve the Aboriginal population in implementing curriculum with Aboriginal voice and content. The central issue of curriculum is about gathering and sorting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voices. Aboriginal researchers recognize how language and culture impact processing of information differently from one culture to another (Brant, 1990; Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000; Ermine, 2000, 2005; Piquemal, 2004). There was concern that the teaching staff might not embrace this initiative and the teachers might require convincing data to become involved. Thus, the ethical space in this school was challenged.

Provincial curriculum follows mainstream directives, which are implemented at this secondary school. There is little to no Aboriginal parental involvement in the school, although there is an Aboriginal parent representative on the School Council. This study suggests a design of physical and metaphysical ethical space and how it can accommodate the involvement of Aboriginal peoples on an equal and level ground: “there seems to be little research into how this can be accomplished” (White, Maxim & Spence, 2004. p. 133). The Native Resource Room with its current cross-cultural search began with an intercultural search. Brant-Castellano (2004) expressed the challenge that exists in intercultural research and communications.

If validating intercultural research and communication seems labour-intensive, time-consuming and expensive, it is because the integrity of knowledge transfer has received too little attention in the past. Aboriginal communities, political organizations and scholars are insisting that the integrity and validity of research cannot be assured by western methodologies alone. They must be tempered by
methodologies that are compatible with Aboriginal methods of investigation and validation. (p. 106)

In the Native Resource Room the students “are not proposing to go back to igloos and teepees and a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. They are talking about restoring order to daily living in conformity with ancient and enduring values that affirm life.” (Brant-Castellano, 2005, p.100) and “they are proving that traditional teachings offer a sturdy ethical framework for restoring vitality to community life” (ibid, p. 112). I relate to Smith (1999) comments that “The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope” (p. 4). This study of ethical space can add pertinent knowledge towards the difficulties of addressing cultural divides.

**Words**

Richard Hill, Jr. (2004) in a document submitted to the Chiefs of Ontario, *A Manifesto for Education in Ontario (the Manifesto)* suggests that: “The clearer First Nations are, the easier it is for the external agencies to understand and have empathy with what they are proposing.” (p. 5). Ermine (2000) suggests that it is in ethical space that two cultures can come to an understanding as there is a process to follow: “creation of new knowledge,” alignment of this new knowledge, and activity to “develop concrete arguments and concepts that articulate” (p. 140, 141). The inherent difficulty in this study is that two English-speaking cultural groups address the school’s ethical space (see p. 1-6). Even harder is the effort to convey attributed definitions and meanings of words expressed by Aboriginal individuals in the English language without exposing the delicate lines of privacy in their lives. The final analysis of words from group
conversations and discussions without exacting shifts to increase mainstream derivations will be a challenge. I struggle with Ermine’s (2005) question: “What knowledge base or archive am I feeding?” (¶19). Mainstream education has a history of asserting its authority over Aboriginal voices and not recognizing attributed cultural meanings of certain words.

The studied words from voices must be presented carefully. The final report is to be presented to the secondary school. I am concerned how spoken words, when read ambiguously, are changed in meaning. Battiste and Youngblood-Henderson (2000) question whether a word can be translated with its own set of ideas and then understood in another language (p. 25). They suggest intended communication to be “communicative code” (p. 200) and as a “point of differing modes of communication and differing worldviews” (ibid). Nathalie Piquemal (2004) refers to the TCPS and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’ Report (1996) within her discussion to enlighten researchers on intercultural interactions that must be seen as a partnership relationship. Words in cross-cultural dialogue might be a study of its own. I seriously contemplated Ermine’s (2005) words that “The act of dialogue is the act of resolving the confrontation and is in itself an ethical act” (¶15).

McNaughton and Rock (2003) referred to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and other studies concerning the need to “shift the research paradigm.” My perspective in this study is to maintain the intention of wording by Aboriginal peoples without ‘shifting’ them to fit within mainstream understandings. Aboriginal peoples have endured with patience the shifts that occur in conversations. As an Aboriginal person, I choose not to lend my voice within some meetings where there are
two cultures, whether it is with one other person or in groups. I am aware that as experiences are translated from one culture to another, the moral tensions are revealed.

_A Personal Glimpse into Meaning of Words_

One personal example happened recently in August 2006. I was born in Southern Ontario. I lived in Northern Ontario for nearly 30 years and learned many of the customs and teachings of Ojibwa peoples starting in my young adult years. Their teachings confirmed my Iroquois teachers. In speaking with a non-Aboriginal colleague, I expressed my disappointment that I missed picking blueberries and walking the hills and valleys this year. This person questioned why I would not just go to the grocery store and buy blueberries. My point was missed. I tried to express the importance of the wild blueberry: that it is valued as a sufficient food. I hoped to gain an invitation to share my teaching. My point was missed as the listener interrupted and suggested that my experience was about going into the bush and getting something for free. I felt not understood and decided not to continue the conversation. It was not the time or place to share my particular knowledge. I associated my comments with a particular season: being in harmony with places I was acquainted with and collecting medicine. Blueberries have a symbolic place in my life: blueberries are used in many ceremonies I attend. Further, I associate roaming the hills and valleys as practicing Indigenous rights to know the land. I try to take my grandchildren with me to show them where the berries are and to teach them stories in the same manner passed to me (notes, August, 2006). Although we both speak the English language, we had different sets of associating experiences to our words. Thus, the word _blueberry_ has a special cultural and symbolic meaning for me. The activity of picking blueberries invokes another set of values and ideas. I agree with
Ermine’s (2005) interpretation: “The schism continually reminds us of the anguished legacy of the Indigenous/West confluence that festers a convoluted entanglement between the two worlds leading to the failure of arriving at a mutual and amiable meeting of minds” (¶1). Alfred (1999) delivers a concise solution: “Among non-indigenous people there has been little movement towards understanding or even recognizing the indigenous tradition…many seemingly intractable problems could be resolved by bringing traditional ideas and values back to life” (p. 6).

Symbolic Meanings

Symbolic meanings of words are entwined with ideas and values when they are spoken from one culture to another. The Two Row Wampum Belt and the Covenant Chain are ideal symbols to represent my arguments about ethical space. Ermine (2005) promotes the need for Aboriginally-designed and delivered research. “Reclaiming voice and reclaiming vision through community models become necessary processes for Indigenous Peoples to re-establish a sense of true identity and to be able to assert the Indigenous mind and discourse in ways that bring honor to the community” (¶12).

There are many traditional ideas and values that are not part of the current educational curriculum. I present a picture of the issues and boundaries that are addressed in this study. It is a simple version of a complex picture involving federal and provincial mandates but affect Aboriginal determined visions and outcomes for education. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2000) reminds us that:

Governments, international organizations and private institutions should: provide the necessary financial resources and institutional support to ensure that every indigenous child has the opportunity to know, develop and exercise the
manifestation of his/her heritage, especially to achieve full fluency and literacy in his/her own language, as well as an official language. (16d)

I support the spoken word of the trained mind of memory as the means of retaining history and ceremony amongst the First Nations People on Turtle Island. Memory aids, such as symbols, were carefully preserved on birch bark, notches on reeds and sticks and wampum beads, strings, and belts and with colours. The careful recitation of these symbols were entrenched with messages for peace of the personal, social, and political (Council Fire, 1989). Joanna Bedard (1989) reasoned that “dominant groups have been able to present ... from their perspective ... in terms of the British perception of manifest destiny, and the Protestant work ethic ideology” (Introduction). The Two Row Wampum Belt and the Covenant Chain are two visionary concepts, symbolically understood by First Nations people, and addressed throughout history as part of Treaty agreements. The Two Row Wampum Belt presents compelling evidence of respect for alternate cultural vision while the Covenant Chain demonstrates the ethics of relationships. These two symbols provide significant insights when presented within the Aboriginal path to process solutions about ethical space. The four directions of the Medicine Wheel (see p. 9-11; Figure 1) represented as vision, relationships, knowledge, and doing, is a useful paradigm to engage participants within the research interview process. When combined with certain realities of spirit, emotion, physiology, and reason, there evolves the expectation for reason to understand processes in ethical space. I use the symbolic meanings of the Two Row Wampum Belt (see Figure 2, p.3 9), the Covenant Chain, and the Medicine Wheel (see p. 9-11; Figure 1) as an attempt to unravel some of the perplexities that have hindered understanding symbolism and words between
...
Secondary School – Provincial Mainstream Directives

CONCERNS:
- Education Criteria must meet Board of Education Standards i.e through testing, school attendance, teaching qualifications or as Educational Assistant
- Setting of Goals for Student Success i.e. Lighthouse Funding expects results of graduation target of 85% by 2010 but students are not identified as Aboriginal
- Teachers lack Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge
- Vision from Aboriginal Peoples not clearly expressed within school
- Aboriginal Peoples are not involved in school related activities, i.e student-parent interviews
- Desires Partnerships and Collaboration with Aboriginal Peoples but lacks cultural relational knowledge
- Lacks full time Aboriginal Educator with Ontario Certified Teaching Qualifications on staff

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(Politics: Provincial and Local)

Sacred, Cultural Space of Non-Aboriginal Peoples

Ethical Space for Negotiation: Confluent, Metaphysical
- Temporal, Spatial Understandings
- Tensions/Unknowns
- Faith, Peace, Friendship, Respect
- Vision, Knowledge, Relationships, Action

Native Resource Room
(Current, Ongoing Negotiations)

Best Educational Environment
(Study of Ethical Space and Future)

Curriculum Development
(Future negotiations)

Sacred, Cultural Space of Aboriginal Peoples

Politics: Federal, Provincial and Local (Traditional Rights vs. Rights under Indian Act)

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First Nations Communities

CONCERNS:
- Students under Federal funding
- Criteria must meet community standards
- Education Department sets goals for Student Success
- Excellence in Community Sports i.e Hockey, Baseball, Golf
- Vision for Education; not clear to School
- Elders are Teachers in the community with sacred knowledge and traditions

Métis, Non-Status, and Off-Reserve First Nation Communities

CONCERNS:
- Students fall under Provincial Funding
- Lack organization for rights to funding for cultural education
- Unable to negotiate agreements to educate students
- Numbers are not formally gathered, students self-identify
- May be dependent on Friendship Centre and their locations for membership and negotiation

Figure 2. Symbiotic application of the Two Row Wampum Belt.
Aboriginal peoples’ and mainstream prerogatives.

Vision: Bringing Forward Original Understandings

There is untold Aboriginal history and vision tucked away in recesses waiting to be recovered, shared, and investigated. The Wampum Belt might seem to be an interesting relic by mainstream terms. A deeper look into its meaning highlights the impact of reciprocal and symbiotic agreement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples that are entrenched in the Wampum belts.

Two Row Wampum Belt

There are many, many known Wampum belts used in ceremonial gatherings amongst Aboriginal peoples of North America (Council Fire, 1989). There are at least four original Two Row Wampum Belts in existence today. Iroquois People created many of the belts when they were commissioned and still hold them in their ceremonial Longhouses. The spirit of these pacts was to maintain peaceful co-existence.

The Two Row Wampum or Gus-weh-tah Belt as known by the Iroquois is one of the symbols used to demonstrate “the basic difference between the cultures” (Council Fire, 1989, p. 7). Historically, the beads used to make Wampum belts hold a history as being a treasured form of trade with Aboriginal peoples. There is an intriguing account of relationship building related to the beads that is, unfortunately, virtually unknown by the majority, and perhaps by all, in the provincial education system. Wampum belts were designed in physical symbolic form as lasting negotiated agreements and recognized as Treaties. Woodward (1878) related the use of “the hard parts of shells as an assurance of welcome” (p. 1) extended to Christopher Columbus in Cuba, and further informs us that wampum beads were found in “the ancient mounds of the west” (p. 14).
The Two Row Wampum Belt consists of 13 rows of beads. The three outer and three centre rows of beads are white. Woodward interpreted the white beads to represent purity and faith (p. 36), and Wallace (1946) indicated they “signified purity or peace” (p. 38). There are two parallel rows of purple beads separated by three middle rows. The two purple strips of beads consist of two rows each. Each strip represents the course of one of two cultures. The middle three rows of white beads represent peace, friendship, and respect (Council Fire: A Resource Guide, 1989, p. 7). The symbolism of this belt depicts the course of two vessels traveling a river with neither interfering with the other. I associate the space in between them as the ethical place for negotiation. This ideal environment holds significant values of purity, faith, peace, friendship, and respect (see Figure 2). Further meaning is derived when there is understanding of the construction and meaning of the two vessels and their purpose on the water. The European ships are big and cumbersome. The birch bark canoe (although fragile) is lightweight, portable, and could be repaired using immediate resources. A letter written to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1872 explained Indigenous political boundaries in symbolic words: “If you enter in my birch canoe it will upset” (Council Fire, 1989, p. 8).

The Two Row Wampum Belt represents many peaceful events that led to peaceful agreements. It was recognized during the forming of the Treaty of Fort Albany in September 1664. The parties agreed that the British and Five Nations would have peaceful trade relations and there would be “separate personal criminal jurisdiction” (Council Fire, 1989, p. 7). Powless (2004) recounts the deliberations which led to the 1764 Treaty of Niagara. The Covenant Chain was renewed by 24 First Nations that included Ojibwas and Iroquois peoples and involved 2,000 chiefs and headmen. The Two
Row Wampum Belt and gifts were exchanged to solemnize the historic event. It was Orcarta, an Anishinabe speaker, who held the Belt and acknowledged the purpose for the gathering. One might assume the belt was made by Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Sir William Johnson. Powless presents Orcarta’s voice as he reiterated the Agent’s call to Aboriginal peoples:

You sent word to your red children to assemble at the crooked place (Niagara)... touch this Belt of Peace. I touch it myself, that we may be all brethren united, and hope our friendship will never cease; and your families shall never be in want... if you should ever require my assistance, send this Belt, and my hand will be immediately stretched forth to assist you (p. 5).

Suffice to say, at this point in my study, that Wampum belts were an extension of the need to inform and remind recipients of agreements.

**Relationships: The Connection Between the Past and Realities of the Present**

Investigating the events in history that were related to education helps the researcher to understand the protocols and processes when two cultures met in ethical space. A review of the Covenant Chain and the Wampum Belt reveals such intents to create agreed culturally relevant ethical space. When there are no agreements between cultures to enter ethical space in education, there can be unaddressed issues, such as racism, and culturally inappropriate teaching methods in education.

**Covenant Chain**

Aboriginal peoples formed their alliances according to the strength of a leader’s personal traits and reputation. In current terms, we might understand that leadership was by empowerment of the people. This process considered an individual’s ability to resolve
confrontation through dialogue and promote 'language of possibility.' The successful pursuit of engagement is the central point of agreement to pursue cross-cultural symmetrical relations. A common symbol was to link arms to demonstrate successful alliance. The Five Nations of the Confederacy holds a broad purple Wampum Belt with five white figures holding hands high but with their elbows bent as a symbol of achieved peaceful relationships. The Covenant Chain is not a Wampum Belt but is often spoken congruently with the Two Row Wampum Belt. The Covenant Chain is a spiritual symbol of good faith and respect. The symbolism of this recounting is as strong as the binding of brothers. I suggest that deliberations to reculture the secondary school embrace the intent of the Covenant Chain for friendship, good minds, and peace.

The covenant chain with governments began in 1677 at a conference in Albany, New York. Benjamin Franklin was in attendance at this meeting, where the 11 colonies agreed to become one body of British Government in order to deal with the Aboriginal peoples. These alliances were recognized as covenant chains. The symbolism of good kin ties was important. The social gatherings for gift exchanges and recitation of the Wampum Belts were important to maintain alliance networks and prevent warfare. Jake Thomas (1989) describes this relationship:

The Whiteman suggested that they use a three link chain, a symbol of joining hands, a covenant to bind their friendship. The first link would represent friendship, the second link would stand for good minds, and the third link shall mean that they will always have peace. They shall smoke the pipe of peace to confirm their agreement. This is the way it shall be as long as there is Mother Earth. They shall renew their agreement from time to time, to dust off, clean and
polish the covenant chain. They shall have interpreters when they renew their friendship. (p. 5)

The role of the Traditional Mentor Worker in this secondary school under study included conducting cultural interpretations for the students and the school leadership with knowledge of symbiotic relationships.

Understanding the Tensions in the Secondary School

Ethical space was a thin line in the beginning. Through negotiating activities, that ethical space has opened to accommodate the Native Resource Room. The school now desires to implement curriculum to include Aboriginal knowledge and voice. The work of widening that space was the product of many meetings. The Vice-Principal and I met from time to time in the beginning to address ‘at risk behaviours’ of Aboriginal students. With permission, I collected the information I needed: I inquired about the possibilities and tensions in the school through informal interviews with school staff and students; I observed classroom environments, and movement of students in hallways and outside surroundings of the school. Aboriginal students appeared divided into sub-cultural groups: First Nations, off reserve, non-status and Métis (see Figure 3, p. 46). A process of relationship building began with mutual and respectful discussions that clarified our roles. The Vice-Principal and I explained to each other the cultures which we represented. In this space we found we could negotiate strategies that would involve the Aboriginal students. In this arena we extrapolated knowledge from one another about politics, policies, protocols, processes, and procedures. We derived conclusions and took them back to our respective groups for further contemplations, support, discussion, and/or criticism. In this manner we were enabled to design projects and activities that permitted
the Aboriginal students to assert their right to an education, to be within an institution with their culture intact, and to offer their knowledge and teachings with growing confidence. School leadership was the key for building the first paradigm of relationship building with Aboriginal students.

Our discussions followed the path of the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1, p. 12) of vision, relations, knowledge, and action. Topics included racism, teachers and students, and the classroom environments. We speculated on the positive changes in the school environment. Our last conversations centered in on curriculum and goals to include Aboriginal knowledge by Aboriginal voices. I was invited from time to time to make presentations in classrooms to demonstrate this value. Our focus was to develop space that involved the development of relational trust with each other. The Vice-Principal is not an Aboriginal person and had an intense desire to learn and understand concepts of Aboriginal cultural ways as they existed in the past, as they are now, and what they might look like in the future. I had extended a gift of Northern sage on behalf of the students to recognize the efforts of this individual. I can smell the sweet scent from its place in this person’s office. I believe it has helped draw Aboriginal students towards this central figure of the school.

From time to time, neither the Vice-Principal nor I was understood by our communities. We each found refuge in alternate spaces in the school. My alternate space was in the Vice-Principal’s office or the supporting student counsellor’s office in the school. Where I retreated depended on the issue with which I was struggling. Most often I would withdraw further into the Native Resource Room to connect more intensely within the reflective spaces of my self.
The Connection of the Wampum Belt, Covenant Chain, and Education

Aboriginal people tried to convey their ideas and understandings of space and trust as colonial settlers encroached on Aboriginal land. They hoped to negotiate better conditions for co-existence and intuited the need to become knowledgeable in the ways of the colonial settlers through education. The tensions in education came as a result of the methods or ways that education was delivered. Throughout that process, relational trust deteriorated.

As a result of the Covenant Treaty relationship, First Nations expected that the Crown would help them in their times of need. The desperation of Aboriginal peoples to learn about the newcomers is portrayed in such stories as Shinguaconse (c. 1773-1854), or ‘Little Pine,’ from Garden River near Sault Ste. Marie. He fought alongside Brock in the War of 1812 (Petrone, 1985, p. 59) at Beaver Dam in the Niagara Peninsula. In 1836 (at the age of 63), Shinguaconse was so concerned about the welfare of his people that he walked to Toronto (some 700 kilometres) to ask the Governor for teachers (Powless, 2004, p. 7). Eventually, Residential schools were built without the input of Aboriginal peoples for their design and purpose. The methods used to gather the students and then the daily lack of concern for their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual welfare with
Figure 3. First diagram of relationship building with Aboriginal students – 2003.
knowledge of Aboriginal culture have been exposed in many research documents. Between 1873 and 1971, these Residential schools operated in this northern area under the colonizer’s oppressive hand and became symbolic of a political agenda to annihilate a culture (Chrisjohn & Young 2006; Miller, 1996).

There were parents who sent their children willingly to these institutions. They believed and trusted that education would provide the knowledge required to face the future with equal designs for harmony and balance. This period in history became a time of grieving for Aboriginal parents as control over the education of their children was denied to them. Many children did not go home because they died and were buried on the grounds of the school; others returned home with unknown sicknesses or returned as grown strangers speaking English and not able to find themselves in the cultural space in which they were born. At the time of this study, the extent of the social and psychological damage created by attending the Residential schools is unknown. It has impacted the parents of students who attend the secondary school. I do not know how many family members attended Residential school. Chrisjohn and Young (2006) are writers who addressed the isolation of Aboriginal children from their parents and connected lack of cultural teachings for everyday living within their societies. The impact of Residential schooling created a void with dire after-effects.

As space for negotiating was cut, Aboriginal peoples began to express the assimilative focus. Aboriginal peoples became familiar with the colonizer’s purposeful tactics. They took steps to define their cultural and political boundaries to protect their Indigenous knowledge and to develop renewed processes and strategies to gain level negotiating ground. Native people gathered to form their own political, lobbying, and
administrative organizations. In effect, Aboriginal people “created spaces of resistance and hope” (Smith, 1999, p.4). The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) created an impact in education with the submission and acceptance of their paper “Indian Control of Education” in 1972. Today, there are many First Nations organizations at the local, regional, provincial, and national level that work together to provide clear definitions of needs in Aboriginal life, such as the Union of Ontario Indians (provincial), the Assembly of First Nations (national and formerly the NIB) and Tribal Councils (regional) that work for First Nations Chiefs and Councils (local). First Nations Councils (local) represent their individual respective communities according to the recommendations of their various departments. The Métis peoples and off reserve First Nations peoples are organized as separate entities under provincial funding.

I designed an interpretation of the situation at the secondary school by using the Two Row Wampum Belt and the Covenant Chain to demonstrate spaces (see Figure 2, p. ). The secondary school and Aboriginal peoples are symbolized in the two lines of purple. The middle beads represent the attempts to create ethical space which is the topic of my inquiries. Historically, cultural lines of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students separate one from the other. Each community has their culture of language, history, values, beliefs, assumptions, politics, and ways of doing research.

Neither culture crossed over the political lines to learn about the other for long. It was not an acceptable practice. To cross that line meant to be open to harassment. Subtle whispers of racism were heard amongst the Aboriginal students. Such was the situation when I first started work in the secondary school. Aboriginal students found spaces in the school where they could recede without being noticed. They were accused of being
“Indians” and “brown” but they were not sure what the problem was, nor did they know how to respond to racist remarks.

Racism

In November 2005, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada listed the issues and challenges in First Nation Education. In the list was racism. Other indicators were: jurisdiction, parental involvement, health problems, and economic conditions. Susan Black (2006) addressed the impact of racism on minority students in the American school system. She based her arguments on the results of the Harris Poll for the Committee for Economic Development and the Metropolitan Life Foundation. There is an existing national crisis amongst students identified as minority. The following are four points taken from her study.

1. 70 percent of minority students have high hopes for their future, but only 40 percent of their teachers believe these students will succeed.

2. 56 percent of high school principals believe the teachers in their schools have high expectations for students, but only 25 percent of students agree.

3. The gap is greater in high-minority schools. 66 percent of high school principals say their schools have high academic standards, but only 38 percent of their students agree.

4. 46 percent of elementary teachers say instructors in their schools “believe that all students can learn.” However, only 28 percent of high school teachers make the same statement.
5. These dark statistics are an indication of racism felt by minority students but denied by teachers. Ryan and Joong (2005) suggested that teachers and students need to work together as partners in order to succeed at the secondary school level:

Together, teachers and students form a partnership at the secondary level and it is this dualism that needs attention. Past studies have surveyed teachers, one half of the partnership; however, until student perceptions are included, a study may only capture one side of the reality. (¶18)

Stairs (2004) sets out an attitude that indicates she is part of the problem and willing to become part of the solution:

An indigenous community, for me, is the growing consciousness that I am being studied as I study; that I am being taught as I teach; that whatever we are doing together is hermeneutic, or, in an indigenous colleague's term, synergistic, a human activity; that we are both-all-Other to each other, even as we build deep and long relationships in the spirit of the two-row wampum. (p. 114)

Charges of racism were frequent when I first started working with the students at the secondary school under study. The minimum number of four to six Aboriginal students on the Honour Roll list was an indication that this was the case or that students lacked the tools and skills to meet the challenges expected of them in mainstream education. In my role as Traditional Mentor Worker I challenged students to meet in their personal clan groups. Those students who did not know their clans were given the adoptive Marten clan. Students examined strengths and weaknesses symbolized by the creatures found in creation. Students determined how this Aboriginal strategy permitted collaborative activity and belief in their ability to work cooperatively towards a common
goal. This method of meeting challenges worked to a great extent. There were 24 Aboriginal students on the Honour Roll during the school year 2004-2005. Teachers cautiously dropped into the Native Resource Room and non-Aboriginal students used the services offered. One teacher fitted traditional drum-making with story and song into a senior music curriculum that involved the woodworking class. Relationship building was a promoted focus. The leadership of the school encouraged the teachers to ‘check’ out the room and ask questions. The door to the Native Resource Room was always open and activity could be observed from the hallway.

Figure 4 (p. 54) demonstrates the two strong links of relationships (a) Vice-Principal, Aboriginal students, and Traditional Mentor Worker, and (b) Teachers willing to change curriculum, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Students, and Traditional Mentor Worker. The weaker link with Aboriginal students was with the teachers who were unwilling to change mainstream curriculum. The diagram represents the idea that the Vice-Principal and teachers who were willing to change curriculum took risks to enter ethical space.

The following new school year began without a Traditional Mentor Worker in place. Despite the improvements made regarding relational trust between teacher and students and with the existence of the Native Resource Room, the numbers of Aboriginal students on the Honour Roll fell to 12 during 2005-2006. I was informed by the students that they missed the challenges. Their culturally designed ethical space was no longer in place. The Native Resource Room was mostly unused.
Teaching

I understand the dilemma of teachers who are challenged to teach Aboriginal students who resist the assimilative nature of Ontario’s education program. The prospect of delivering new curriculum could create teacher-resistant behaviours. Elizabeth Bigwin shared her curriculum writing experiences in a newspaper interview with Taillon (2003) and bluntly stated that Aboriginal voice was needed with curriculum written by Aboriginal peoples. “The important piece to this is the voice. We thought if people are learning about Beausoleil First Nation, for examples, then they should be hearing it from us, not someone else” (¶13).

I am aware of the 10 limiting processes for teachers as identified by Mitchell and Sackney (2000): time; support; relevance; management consistency and clarity; fear and anxiety; assessment of progress; isolation and arrogance; governance structure; diffusion and transfer; and strategy and purpose. Solutions will need to be sought to alleviate any dilemmas caused that might upset the current day to day expectations of the teachers in their work. A shift in focus of mainstream curriculum would require many changes in teaching culture, attitudes, and sensitivity. The final solution is not limited to employing Aboriginal teachers. There are Aboriginal teachers who have conformed to mainstream methods of teaching. Teachers complain that although they understand multicultural issues, they lack the knowledge to deal with Aboriginal student issues. (notes, October 30, 2005).

A study by Marsh concerning Aboriginal curriculum for preservice teachers determined that “mandatory subjects can have a powerful positive effect on desirable educational outcomes” (Marsh 1998, p. 2). His study demonstrates that:
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<thead>
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<th>Principal</th>
<th>Teachers And Mainstream Curriculum</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal Students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vice-Principal</td>
<td>Teachers willing to change curriculum</td>
<td>Non-Aboriginal Students using Native Resource Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Mentor</td>
<td>Aboriginal Students</td>
<td>Native Resource Room A physical ethical space for intercultural sharing and discoveries for academic success</td>
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*Figure 4. Second diagram of relationship building with Aboriginal students.*
Teachers who have undertaken Aboriginal studies pre-service teacher education courses have statistically significant higher self-concepts in relation to their ability to teach Aboriginal students and their enjoyment thereof. Results of path analyses demonstrated that teachers' self-concepts have an important relation to what teachers actually teach, the knowledge that teachers perceive their students acquire, and teachers' perceptions of their ability to implement and appreciate departmental policy. (p. 2)

Although Marsh’s study was conducted in Australia, it suggests a valid approach to implementing curriculum to meet Aboriginal student needs. Marsh has indicated that any teacher can provide the modeling body requirements. His study does not promote the ideal of an Aboriginal teacher, but rather a teacher who is taught to be sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal students. A teacher who has high self-concept in his/her own ability to teach to a specific group of students is enabled to assist in the adjustment of Aboriginal student self-concept.

I conclude that there is a connection between perceived racism, self-concept, and knowledge generation that influences Aboriginal student success. Young (2004) addresses steps for change to determine appropriate preparation in preservice programs. For now, an educator who consistently demonstrates empathy and understanding is vital for Aboriginal student success.

Knowledge: Experiences Known by a Person

Aboriginal knowledge arise from a different school of thought and are not always easy to explain. It is difficult to express meaning from one culture to another without giving the impression of being disrespectful. There are many contradictions in education.
The tensions these contradictions create flow over into limitations of expression and choice. Aboriginal peoples desire to express their own knowledge sets, but when their experiences are nullified, ethical space is limited by unspoken and unshared values, beliefs and assumptions.

Residential School Students

The historical spaces of schooling for the parents and grandparents of many of the current Aboriginal students resided in residential schools. The memories of these students were varied. Many claims of various tragic abuses are presented by Chrisjohn and Young (2006, revised) and Miller, (1996) in their less than poignant historical review of the catastrophic cultural collisions in education through Residential schools.

Elders

The word Elders, with a capital E, identifies peoples in Aboriginal societies who carry the wisdom and knowledge of previous ancestors. They are supported by their communities by virtue of their skills and talents to add to the wholeness of their communities, and by their willingness to conduct themselves as models and examples of the old ways of knowing into the future.

Brant-Castellano (2004, p. 9) shares a rule of protocol understood amongst Elders that their words are not to be recorded in print or videotaped. Elders communicate directly in person. The connotation of this ethic is the moral use of knowledge. Elders are considered to have a high degree of knowledge: their teachings are given according to the ability of the listener to absorb the wisdom of their words. Thus, dissemination of the Elder’s words in media is a signal of the limitations placed within allowable and predefined space. Davis (2004) explains how “the public sphere is often hostile terrain” (p. 9).
The public sphere is a realm of debate, critique, and challenge. Truths and ideas from different knowledge sources come together using a variety of ideological lenses...Consistent with the idea of public debate, the university promotes the idea that academics have a responsibility to publish and have their work read and debated by peers. (p. 9)

Symbolisms of Ethical Space

The Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre (IPHC, 2004) provides a very strong and lengthy description of ethical space from Noel (1994), Kushner and Norris, (1980), Friere (1970), Benhabib (1986) and Foucault (1988). I have taken their words and attempted to compress their intended interpretations as space between two worlds signified through the Wampum Belt (Figure 2). I identify the Native Resource Room in this space and connect further understandings as a chain of agreed negotiated projects amongst two willing groups. I challenged myself to interpret how the parallel symbolism of two parallel boats traveling the same river and in the same direction, can be expressed with new avenues of thought and perspectives, how to express different worldviews seeking equality in education. The space between the two parallel beaded lines consisting of three white beaded lines of the Wampum Belt is that area where the two cultures can meet to discuss and explore the needs of the other without giving up their freedoms or losing sight of their own beginnings and responsibilities.

In this sacred space there must be ethical processes and protocols for cooperative engagement, negotiation, and encouragement to solicit the words of Aboriginal peoples to the extent of freedom that existed prior to the arrival of the colonists. This research was about exploring the voices to renew understandings of sacred space in the current English
language as spoken by Aboriginal peoples without shifting intended meanings to suit mainstream understanding. Their words were presented alongside non-Aboriginal voices to discover the "tensions and discover the concerns for temporal and spatial understandings" (Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2004). I was aware of Battiste and Youngblood-Henderson's (2000) presentations of knowledge as a commodity and their position that ethical implications are often overlooked. The IPHRC (2004) states that there is a new and evolving language: it is about possibility and tension. This study of ethical space attempted to take into account the words of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults and Aboriginal students found in one secondary school. I assumed that participant words would flow according to past and recent historical experiences and that these would cohere with future understandings for potential developments as participants' thoughts take them around the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) to address Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action in their discussions.

Possibility and Tension in Ethical Space

The most recent and publicly transparent scenes of Aboriginal struggles with the provinces include Oka, Ipperwash, and the Six Nations struggle with Caledonia. The First Nations involved in this study underwent struggles for affirmation as sovereign nations over land. These tensions are political and evolved from final decisions to protect Indigenous space and sovereign rights. These types of tensions are currently solved through dominant legal courses for action. How can Aboriginal peoples protect physical and metaphysical ethical space in education? The first task must be to understand the issues as more than subtle and disturbing intrusions of cultural space. The deeper
meanings are unaddressed ethical issues that are interlaced with beliefs, values, and assumptions in teaching and learning paradigms.

I saw similarities with the case studies of Bell, et al (2004), Haig-Brown et al (1997), and Haig-Brown (1995). I found common words in their documents that can be used to clarify ‘ethical space’. David Bell et al use the word tension to describe “a rigorous academic program and the necessity to provide culturally relevant learning experiences” (p. 14). Aboriginal students are pressed to be involved in two forms of education: mainstream and their own traditional and inherent knowledge as oppressed people within the mainstream. Haig-Brown et al. (1997) used the word ‘tension’ as a never-ending process to address an urban school environment where healing and academic requirements are met. Haig-Brown’s (1995) description of the Native Education Centre in British Columbia includes words such as belonging, tension and contradiction. She describes contradiction as “the awkward movement towards justice – a movement which takes place while one has one foot in mainstream Canadian society and one foot in traditional First Nations culture” (p. 237). Ermine (2000) speaks of the need for healing in Aboriginal and Euro-Western relations. Can this secondary school include a healing process in the curriculum it hopes to establish as a result of negotiations in ethical space?

Bell et al (2004) addresses schools as having “asymmetric power relations such as those existing between school professionals and parents of low economic status” (p. 38). Stelmach (2004) provides a realistic picture of conflicting relations:

Examining who the powerful actors are in an organization highlights the constraints and rules that guide organizational behavior (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) providing insight into how to negotiate these organizational constraints.
toward more collaborative structures. Lubeck, Jessup, and DeVries (2001) suggest that "culture is a complex and contested social space" (p. 504) which must be brought to the conscious level in order for change initiatives to be successful. Attempts to engage parents in schools may falter without consideration of the social distance between parents and teachers, and the fact that discrepant power relations inhibit authentic partnership. (¶40)

Tension at this Secondary school is vividly illustrated by one student who walked into the Native Resource Room and exclaimed that the room was “Heaven” and then turned and walked back into the hallway and exclaimed “This is Hell.” Another student walked into the Native Resource Room and loudly expressed “Thank heavens for the Native Resource Room, I can be my Self now” (Notes, February 3, 2004).

Haig-Brown (1995) and Haig-Brown et al. (1997) suggest that the element of choice within ethical space is pivotal for success in negotiating with students. Choice must be mutually understood to accommodate and integrate potential benefits. Past experiences of Aboriginal peoples at secondary schools in education have been to have no choice but learn mainstream curriculum in mainstream-mandated environments. The Native Resource Room gave room to interrelate cultural knowledge with mainstream curriculum without succumbing to a foreign knowledge set that offered no alternative perspective. The students were encouraged and expected to express themselves in their cultural language about possibilities as well as relieve the daily cultural tensions.

**Action: Events Forming the Plot of the Story**

My examination of the context of the secondary school leads to understanding the deeper story of what is possible. I focus on curriculum to discover the credentials of
teachers in educating Aboriginal peoples and discover the expected Aboriginal student views and behaviours in the classroom. The hierarchy of administration for the delivery of education has had a repressive effect on Aboriginal student, parent, and leader expectancies.

The Position of Curriculum

One of the tensions at the secondary school under study concerns the juxtaposition of several Aboriginal groups and a dominant culture in one provincial secondary school. This school is not supporting a call for curriculum to accommodate Aboriginal knowledge until at least one set of values, beliefs, and assumptions are examined. It is expected that the ethical space (physical and metaphysical) required to include Aboriginal people and their voices, will be examined. The document entitled Indian Control of Education (NIB, 1972) calls for an integration of curriculum “to include children of all races to learn the history of the country” (p. 2) as well as “customs and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens” (ibid). The particular essence of this study is to expose the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by representing stakeholder voices.

There are common and opposite ideological definitions formed with codified beliefs retained by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals associated with this secondary school. This study discloses a clear format of committed study, commitment to conduct respectful negotiation, and informed decisions for further activity, such as curriculum development. Chrisjohn and Young (2006) cautioned the reader to be cognizant of how curriculum to benefit Aboriginal educational initiatives becomes indistinguishable from the current provincial curriculum. Eber Hampton (1998) clarifies the issue stating that "Indian education defined as non-Indian education of Indians has a long and conclusive history of
failure” (p. 7). Historically, assimilative tactics in education disallowed choices in education. Bell et al (2004) provides some detail on the effects of these tactics. Four points are raised in Bell et al’s study that affect school climates for minority groups and are related to concerns raised by Hampton and Chrisjohn and Young. Each point offers clear conclusions when Aboriginal voice is not included in education.

1. Relational trust. Bell, et al presented this concept as developed by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002, p. 21, 22) in his discussion of this theory as professional behaviours and actions that are interpreted according to how the client perceives the relationship. This interpretation is based on personal history with the organization that includes the client’s personal and cultural beliefs developed from family and community experiences and is a result of socialization experiences (Bell et al., p. 38). This concept of relational trust is relevant to the stories of Aboriginal residential school experiences and could explain noninvolvement of Aboriginal parents. Relational trust between the school’s administration and teachers was not an expected concept for setting successful goals.

2. Education viewed as an oppressive system. Students who do not believe that education will improve their chances to gain equal opportunities for better job prospects will not become positively involved in their education. Rather, the system is seen as a place where there is an exchange or loss of identity. The obvious exchange is that to improve chances of success to financially advance requires leaving the home cultural community and its supports (Bell et al., p. 36) and adapting to an outside and foreign culture. This view could be one explanation of the complexities surrounding Aboriginal student reluctance to initiate academic endeavours towards further and higher education.
This belief has become an intergenerational conundrum that began with children removed from their homes to attend residential schools.

3. Institutionalized alienation. Bell et al. (2004) quotes Kramer (1991) to explain the after psycho-social effects of ignoring the cultural identity and experiences of Ute children. Schools forced “children to protect their identity and integrity” (p. 36). What can be the educated responses of students when they are accused of being ‘brown’ or ‘Indian’? Aboriginal parents are cultural teachers of their own children. A deeper revelation is that the teachers are not enabled to teach Aboriginal culture. Their training is to promote mainstream prerogatives that do not include negotiation to benefit or even acknowledge a particular culture.

4. The classroom as a battleground. When the Aboriginal community believes the school system is at fault and is the source of poor education and assimilative tactics for their children, a battle ensues in the classroom to defeat the school system. Bell et al. (2004) refers to Darnell’s (1985) study of interactive communications between Cree students and their non-Aboriginal teachers, which revealed specific misunderstandings and how silence became a defense mechanism by the students (p. 38, 39).

Demmert (2001) summarizes his own findings:

School curriculum that promotes the language and culture of the community or tribe served – adopted in partnership with that community – holds significant promise for improving academic performance of Native children. This finding has been reported in both policy studies and research and evaluation studies for many years. (p. 9)
Demmert lists researchers who have made the link between Aboriginal students and curriculum that includes language and culture. The results are conclusive: students have increased self esteem, strong academic performance, decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behaviour (ibid, p. 9).

In Haig-Brown et al., (1997), a description of a successful school, Joe Duquette High School in Saskatchewan found balance in its dealing with tensions. It identified itself as an ‘extended family’ with a strong attribute for ‘collective caring’ that comes through in curriculum and with a healing affect with expectations that cultural and spiritual dimensions are addressed. Ermine (2000, 2005) determined that articulations of arguments and concepts in ethical space when two cultures meet have healing outcomes.

School Administration

This secondary school leader in this case study determined the need for a “community strategist to improve relationships” in order to reculture the way “we think” about education for Aboriginal students (J. Hodson, personal communication 2006). Staff, Aboriginal students, and community were involved. Curriculum designed to meet the needs of the high population of Aboriginal students was identified as necessary. This secondary school had a goal to encourage higher academic expectations for Aboriginal students. The 2003 Ontario School Trustees Handbook (p. 37) provides direction that “the board has a general obligation to provide”:

- an educational environment and teaching staff that are sensitive to Native cultures
- Native cultural-specific programs and instruction
- First Nation community involvement in schools attended by First Nation students
School boards can play a significant role in developing education programs suited to their First Nations students at both the elementary and secondary levels, and in promoting Aboriginal culture with all students.

The District School Board (2005) posted its mission, vision, and values on its website: there is no indication of a focused intent to meet its obligations to all Aboriginal peoples. There is an assumption that the offerings within the school are equal to accommodate “the needs of all learners” (¶1). It is understood that curriculum is applied according to mainstream prerogatives. Aboriginal protocols and practices for inclusion are not given the required attention to gain the confidence of Aboriginal peoples for competently delivered curriculum. A very brief statement found in the Ontario School Trustees Handbook (2003) suggests limited capacity to deliver inclusive curriculum that will be conducive toward Aboriginal student success and will integrate Aboriginal issues and concerns. First Nations peoples are mentioned, but there is neglect to recognize Métis and Inuit students. The perspective is to accommodate in selective segments: “The Ontario Curriculum integrates Native education, anti-discrimination and violence prevention, where relevant [italics added] in the expectations for every course” (p. 37). The current Ontario School Trustees Handbook 2006 recognizes First Nations, Métis and Inuit students: “an educational environment and teaching staff that are sensitive to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures” (p. 41); “First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultural-specific programs”(p. 41). The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework and its goals are mentioned (p. 44). There are positive indications for change in mainstream education institutions but no sign of integrating Aboriginal supported cultural teachers.
**Aboriginal Students**

In comparing words within various documents as submitted by Aboriginal peoples there appear to be differences in perspectives in comparison to the District School Board within which this study is located about instilling educational goals for their Aboriginal students, such as this statement by the Assembly of First Nations (2005):

First Nations must have the *capacity to coordinate* an effective interface with provincial systems. First Nation learners must be able to take advantage of the *best education* opportunities wherever they exist, and be confident that their learning will be *recognized and accepted* by other education systems. First Nations communities and leaders must have an appropriate and real interface with regional school boards in order to influence the *quality and appropriateness* of First Nations educational programming [italics added]. (p. 8)

In this secondary school, Aboriginal students undertook a number of initiatives once goals were explained. Self identification of heritage occurred voluntarily when the Native Resource Room became an open ethical space based on Aboriginal student principles and need. My work began with 39 First Nations students. As I monitored and responded to requests for assistance, I found First Nations peoples living off reserve and Métis students without a home reserve community and at the mercy of provincial school plans. They were all in need of daily cultural assistance. Students openly posed questions about legal and cultural definitions of being Aboriginal and relationships based on ancestral bloodlines. Aboriginal students made their own historical landmark when they formed a Native Alliance “as a capacity building student body” (C. Longboat, Draft of
Proposal to UMAYC, November 12, 2004). The students were connecting with their past and developing their stories.

A number of Aboriginal students did not have band-funded supports as did the First Nations. The problem was presented to the student body and it was determined that a Council of students was needed to demonstrate a unified front and eliminate the political and funding divisions among Aboriginal students. The students realized that this was a real dilemma in their attempts to create a healthy, united Aboriginal student body.

(Draft of Proposal to UMAYC, November 12, 2004).

By the end of the school year in 2005, the list of confirmed students voluntarily claiming their rights to be recognized as Aboriginal had reached 35% of the total school population (Notes, May, 2005). The implications of this movement suggested inclusion of curriculum designed by Aboriginal peoples, should be, at least, equal to the percentage of Aboriginal student population in the school. The students understood the impact of negotiations in ethical space to meet their needs when the school leadership accepted Aboriginal initiatives to be recognized as a student body with applicable solutions for their academic success.

The District School Board (2005) posted a Vision:

Our schools will provide a welcoming environment where the focus is the well-being of each student. In preparation for the future, students are encouraged to reach their potential through quality programs delivered by highly trained, caring staff in an atmosphere of respect for individual needs of each learner. To enhance learning experiences, we will work collaboratively with the community at large to ensure effective use of all available resources [Italics added] (p.1).
I contemplated whether the words of mainstream documents have the same meaning and connotations from an Aboriginal perspective. When these words are each defined across ethical space, do they hold within them the intended reach to include Aboriginal needs and goals?

_Aboriginal Parents_

I searched to find studies of schools that might have the same background and concerns to involve Aboriginal parents. In their discussion of the ignorance of educators towards Aboriginal students, Haig-Brown et al. (1997) describe how relationships are addressed amongst the Aboriginal students, school staff, and community in the school they observed. The majority of teachers and the Principals in the schools of their study are non-Aboriginal. Their study holds clues to involving the Aboriginal community with its concepts of extended family relationships. In the study conducted by Haig-Brown et al. in Joe Duquette High School, the school administration is guided by an Aboriginal Parent Council that does not narrow or limit its membership to parents of students in attendance. The extended family allows for communal practices when there is lack of parental involvement. The issues for parents are personal and would hinder their participation in giving student support. These issues are affirmed through the Office of the Auditor General: lack of parenting skills, negative perceptions of the school by parents who attended school in the 60s, 70s and 80s, and the high incidence of single parents (p. 29).

Parker and Leithwood’s (2000) study did not acknowledge the implications of different cultural groups, but there were indications that teachers would benefit from
parental involvement in the school if they were so directed. They refer to Wohlstetter et al.'s (1994) observation that:

Where there was a push for curriculum and instruction reform, teachers had more opportunities to meet and discuss educational issues. There was a greater interest in professional development (individually and collectively), continuous improvement, and training beyond district offerings. In these schools, staff generally had "more mechanisms for participation in the governance of the school, and a greater percentage of the faculty were involved" (Wohlstetter et al., p. 283). The involvement of teachers in school councils, through either their input or expressed support, also is in agreement with research by Sebring et al. (1995) on Chicago school councils: “Successful improvement efforts are highly unlikely unless teachers seriously engage the reform." (p. 55)

There is room for parents at the secondary school involved in this study. At the start of the new school year 2005, a room within the school next to the Native Resource Room was tastefully designed to invite parent meeting groups. Sadly, the room has not been used to date. One of the outcomes of this study is to understand the design of ethical space that Aboriginal parents require in order to encourage and accommodate their commitment. I suspect teacher support is crucial.

Aboriginal Leaders

An excerpt of the vision and mission statement of the Anishnawbek education system states: “Our education system will prepare our citizens for a quality of life based on the highest standards of Anishinaabe intellectual, holistic knowledge that supports the preservation and ongoing development of the Anishinaabe” (Union of Ontario Indians
Restoration of Jurisdiction Department. Is the educational system able to prepare Aboriginal citizens to meet their culturally relevant preferred lifestyle? The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) recommends that “provincial ministries require school boards serving Aboriginal students to implement a comprehensive Aboriginal education strategy, developed with Aboriginal parents, elders and educators” (p. 474).

The report further recommends that boards:

- Provide a curriculum for all subject areas that includes the perspectives, traditions, beliefs, and worldview of Aboriginal peoples;
- Provide teaching staff who are responsive to the needs of First Nations students (and seek teachers who are of First Nations ancestry, especially for secondary schools);
- Involve First Nation Elders in school programs (for example by inviting Elders to speak at the school and including Elders in the teaching of First Nation and non-First Nation students);
- Hire First Nation support staff for administrative and leadership positions, and hire a First Nations education counsellor or liaison officer;
- Provide mechanisms for family and community involvement;
- Provide mechanisms for accountability to parents and the First Nations community;
- Include education programs that combat stereotypes, racism, and prejudice.

These 7 points are reflective of the 1972 Indian Control of Education Report 35 years ago. There was hope that the Aboriginal Education Office (2006) would include these
solutions in their Aboriginal Education Policy Framework. How Aboriginal leaders present their voices to continue the intentions of the 1972 report and promote their points of interest is detrimental for positive relations with the school, district school board, and for renewing policy. I found the written directions to explain protocols and processes to invite Aboriginal peoples as leaders, elders, and resource people were not evident.

**Summary: Assessing Direction**

Residential schools in this area closed their doors 35 and 41 years ago. Aboriginal peoples do not intend to mirror the behaviours of dictators, oppressors, or subjugators of dysfunction. There is urgency to capture the interests of Aboriginal students today. Alcohol and drugs are a problem with every nation in the world. Aboriginal peoples have suffered colonial tactics just as every Indigenous person has around the world. Abuses, violence, and humiliation are experiences at the hands of oppressors. Aboriginal people are concerned that the next generation will be so far away from ancestral life teachings that they will be mired in delineated mainstream lifestyles that will, in turn, be passed to future generations.

I assert that Aboriginal peoples have had the opportunity to maintain threads of connection to inherent knowledge systems. The Residential school did not annihilate the memories of all their students. Aboriginal people are not poised to self-destruct. There is evidence that more than ever, Aboriginal people are learning, thriving, and practicing their cultural inheritances. Aboriginal peoples are seeking to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge sets and seeking opportunities to explore results of Aboriginal-designed assessments and tests based on significant culturally derived criteria. The problem in this study has underlying currents: How will a provincial school system that mandates
provincially prescribed curriculum and standards implement Aboriginal voice and content? What strategies are necessary to integrate authentic identity, epistemology, and voice that will enable a parallel Aboriginally-designed paradigm of secondary school success? This secondary school is poised to meet the challenges it has set. The next step is to find the ways to bring forward Aboriginal peoples willing to contribute their voice and understanding of educational content. This case study provides answers to questions about ethical space in one secondary school.
CHAPTER THREE: APPLIED ABORIGINALLY-DESIGNED RESEARCH METHOD

These approaches allow Indigenous scholars to make visible what is special and needed, what is meaningful and logical in respect of indigenous peoples’ own understanding of themselves and the world... The main aim of indigenous methodologies is to ensure that research on indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples. (Porsanger, 2004, p. 107-108)

The task of defining and situating ethical space between cultures in this school laid the groundwork for organizational change and enabled effective interrelations to determine applications of Aboriginal culture and voice in its curriculum. The method is a design for cooperative, collaborative, and corroborative participant involvement. This method proved successful for gathering data that revealed values, beliefs, and assumptions for intercultural understandings amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal protocol in procedures and processes, analysis, reflections on the process, and limitations is described as a means to encourage dialogue in metaphysical space. The chosen interview design is influenced by the assumptions in Aboriginally-designed research. The physical space of the \native \resource \room is symbolic of the cultural divide.

A Discussion of Assumptions in Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples

This section identifies the assumptions that led to the method chosen for this study. It begins with a discussion of objectivities and subjectivities, the setting where the
interviews took place, situated and authentic responses in ethical space, and the analysis process.

Objectivities and Subjectivities

In proclaiming the goal to establish ‘The Best Educational Environment,’ the Principal of the secondary school under study courageously supported a search for “the affirmation for the existence of two objectivities, each claiming their own distinct and autonomous views of the world, and each holding a different account of what they are seeing across the cultural border” (Ermine, 2005, ¶13). The emotional, subjective views of Aboriginal peoples are usually neglected, and more often ignored in the negotiation process, leaving little to no opportunity to create true ethical space. Perceptions of meanings concerning ethical practices can be a confusing point in discussions amongst cultures. Marshall and Batten (2003) identified that

Researchers must recognize that almost all marginalized and minority groups have shared undesirable experiences in common such as prejudice and stereotyping, socioeconomic and career disadvantages; and struggling to maintain their own ethnic identity while adapting to life in the dominant culture (p. 147)

I considered salient issues in choosing a method of study that include values, ethics, worldviews, definitions, research design, informed consent, entry into the field, approaches to data collection, participant roles, ownership of data, and dissemination of results. “Researchers need to work with community members to help ensure appropriate and representative portrayals in their discussion” (ibid, p.146). The final outcome had to be reciprocal, respectful, synergetic, and collaborative research. It had to involve two
cultures: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal. The final aim had to benefit the school community with corroborative results.

*Description of the Secondary School*

The school lacked a description of values, beliefs, and assumptions for desirable change to its current ethical space. It requested a cultural focus to include Aboriginal voice and content. This study employed a co-operative, collaborative, and corroborative research practice with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in one school where the Aboriginal student population is approximately 35% as identified in 2004. The total school population was approximately 350. The Aboriginal peoples were primarily of Ojibwa descent. Métis and status and non-status Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve were included in this study. The principal investigator was of Aboriginal descent but was not a member of the First Nations of the area. Interviews included both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, and encouraged situated, authentic responses. In initial discussions with the Vice-Principal, assumptions were clarified about school policy, timing, participant involvement, equality, design, and delivery. We discussed universal cultural understandings that were not restricted to separate environs of the school property. We agreed that Aboriginal students carried with them knowledge that was not encouraged for open discussions in the classroom.

I left to undertake higher education but maintained my connections with the leadership of the school. There were a series of meetings and telephone calls to establish that the need for Aboriginal voice and content were a necessary part of a ‘reculturing’ process to discover the ‘Best Educational Environment.’ It was assumed that the timing was appropriate and that there was general agreement amongst all affected bodies. It was
assumed that answers to the mitigating circumstances that historically hindered equal involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the education of their students exist within the various knowledge sets of each target group. The intents were reflected in curriculum: Aboriginal voice and content for design and delivery was missing. It was assumed that participant groups were prepared to be equally involved in a case study designed and delivered by an Aboriginal researcher. During the course of discussions for this study, the Vice-Principal moved into the position of Principal of the school under study and a Memorandum of Agreement (2006) was designed to guide the intent to find the “best educational environment” for the school.

This case study was presented as applied research: as an exploratory, qualitative study, that was Aboriginally-designed, and was part of a logical sequence to explore the context of the school, its setting, and the phenomenon of Aboriginal student success prior to and after the design of the Native Resource Room. The Native Resource Room in the secondary school was the physical and metaphysical layout for ethical space. This is where Aboriginal students undertook “critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation, freedom, and community” (Ermine, 2005, ¶15). It was in the Native Resource Room that I felt most comfortable with my role as an Aboriginal person conducting research with, for, and by Aboriginal peoples. I chose the Native Resource Room to conduct the interviews and examine voices with cultural intents in metaphysical ethical space.

**Situated, Authentic Responses in Ethical Space**

Transcribed words of 7 males and 16 females were collected through voice recordings of Talking Circles with Aboriginal students, teachers, Aboriginal parents,
Aboriginal leaders, and Administrative/Decision Maker/Resource groups (ADR). Interview recordings were reviewed for accuracy and erased upon approval for transcribed authentic words of individuals in their respective groups.

The methods in the design of this study are reflective of ethical Aboriginal research (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Bishop, 1998; Brant-Castellano; 2004; Hermes, 1998; Kanu, 2005; Kenny, 2004; McNaughton & Rock, 2003; Porsanger, 2005; Smith, 1999; Inter-Agency Secretariat on Research Ethics (2005) and may be unique in the application of the design to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. The approach of this study was ethical, respectful, reciprocal, responsible, accountable, collaborative, and sensitive to participants, community, and the provincial secondary school that consists of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The context of this study included Ojibwa relationships, culture, and values that ultimately accommodated "time, attention, thought, and sometimes actions to areas that are defined as problematic to the community itself" (Hermes, p.164). Rather than accommodating cultural responses of Ojibwa subjects from a Eurocentric praxis, the method of this study "situated" (Hermes, 156,164-166) the needs of one secondary school by using an Aboriginally-designed and delivered case study.

Authentic research that includes both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal participants should not "create a new or "artificial" relationship solely for the purpose of extracting information" (Hermes, 1998, p. 165). Understanding the concept of relational trust is an important element in this study. Like Hermes, my methods were enacted to encourage situated responses and might not be easily replicated in other studies. The study did strive to "bring together different perspectives, side by side, without resolving tensions or
making sweeping generalizations... attempt to bring together different perspectives, different voices, in hopes of forming an imaginary meeting ground among them” (Hermes, p. 156). Unspoken intents create tension among cultures. This study will encourage participants to reveal their understanding of intents across the cultural divides in the school. The ‘imaginary’ meeting ground in the development of my thesis is metaphysical ethical space. Prior studies to understand the school’s context involved demographics, geography, economics, and educational outcomes of the involved communities and the school in comparison to national studies. These data sets helped situate this study and stimulated my confidence in its design.

A Discussion of Case Study Research: Aboriginally-Designed Research Methods

Yin (2003) asserts that “Case study research is remarkably hard” (p.17). It is an all-encompassing method that allows the investigation of a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin p. 13). The phenomena in this secondary school were the prior lack of Aboriginal student success, the use of the Native Resource Room as the physical and metaphysical design of ethical space for academic success, and then the disruption of success when funding was cut for a Traditional Mentor Worker. This mainstream school experienced a certain design for success in the education of Aboriginal students. To understand the phenomenon, I conducted a comparison of regional and national statistics. Chapter Two highlighted that data. Ermine (2000, 2005) suggested that the study of ethical space required a prior investigation of phenomenon and context.

Pilot Study
Once the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB) had reviewed and provided ethical clearance for my study (Appendix B), I conducted a 3 hour pilot study to check the use of the proposed interview questions I had designed. I called together a diverse group of Aboriginals of Ojibwa heritage who were familiar with the northern area where the school under study is located. They represented grade 9 to second year College students and parents age 22 to 53. They assisted me in assessing the comprehensiveness of the research packages that were to be equally distributed to all potential participants of the Focus/Group Talking Circle: Year Four/grade 12 Aboriginal students, Teachers, Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal leaders, and Administrative Decision makers/Resource peoples (ADR). I treated participants in the pilot study to a pizza and tea at their request. They gathered around a table of their preference and reenacted the Focus Group/Talking Circle. I posed five main questions to elicit their responses about their knowledge of education in a secondary school and their personal reactions to their experiences. Participants were invited to speak freely and ask for clarification if they did not understand how to respond. I then redesigned the questions upon their suggestion. In this manner, participants provided a sequence of alternate questions that different age groups might respond to with greater ease of understanding. I used the questions as a guide to initiate responses from the actual group of participants and to encourage smoother conversations. The members of the group furthered my awareness of potential emotional responses. As a result of this pilot study, five main questions were designed:

1. How do you define Education?
2. What meaning does Education have for you?
3. What standards or guidelines must be in place for an effective education program that will meet the needs of Aboriginal students?

4. What would encourage you to participate in curriculum design at/with the school?

5. What suggestions do you have for the school and the Aboriginal community on this issue of curriculum design?

*The Talking Circle as the Forum for Data Collection*

In this research, I wanted to demonstrate the ethical process of the Talking Circle with which I was familiar. I needed to cross the cultural divide to invite non-Aboriginal peoples to participate in an Aboriginally-designed study. I associated the Talking Circle as an Aboriginal visual concept of the mainstream definition for ‘Focus Group.’ The Talking Circle used in this study suggests certain protocols and procedures as acceptable practice for its conduct. Thus, Focus Group/Talking Circle became the conduit for understanding the purposes and intents in ethical space.

In Talking Circles, each person is given the opportunity to speak without interruption. No one individual has authoritative information. No one individual is seen to have lesser or greater knowledge than another. Each participant takes his/her turn in the direction within the culture of the researched. For example, Iroquois people conduct their activities in a circle to their right or counter-clockwise. In this study, the circle follows Ojibwa protocol with one person speaking without interruption until finished. In this manner, participants engage in ‘language of possibility.’ A person sitting in the East direction of the circle is expected to start a response and will usually volunteer to begin. Following a clockwise pattern, the next participant to the left exercises his/her opportunity to speak and so on, until all the cardinal points of the circle, east, south, west,
and north have been addressed. Aboriginal participants cannot speak on behalf of these directions as in time past: the teachings that proclaimed such subjectivity is mostly lost. It is the protocol that is important in this study. Once the circle is complete, participants are given the opportunity to speak again: A second round to speak without interruption or invite a response in reaction to their statements. In any round of the talks, participants may choose to speak or not and be respected for their choice. This process is important. One needs to wade through shallow shores to become familiar with temperature changes before gaining confidence to explore deeper waters. This information is included in the introductions prior to recording of the interviews.

The process of the Talking Circle is not linear in nature. Topics evolve and layers of new perspectives and deeper meanings are added with each turn of participants in a circle. Participants add new information as each takes a turn to respond to the posed guiding question rather than the previous person’s response. A person may choose not to respond to any question until after each participant in the circle responds and the question is asked again.

When participants were ready, they were led through ceremony. Ceremony is important prior to approaching a sacred activity. Through ceremony, all parts of a human being are addressed and invited to become involved in harmonious, balanced discussion and discourse. It is a personal process that cannot be recorded or analyzed. These are the elements, the processes, and protocols of Aboriginal research conducted by this Aboriginal researcher. Other Aboriginal researchers may have their own directives based on specific community knowledge.
The invitation to participants to gather was associated with some preparation, understanding, and ceremony. In documents submitted to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures of the school, I addressed the Focus Group/Talking Circle as a gathering to be conducted according to the ways of the Ojibwa people. Preparation and cultural understanding were required to conduct a successful Talking Circle. A brief description follows:

**Preparing the ground.** Participants in this study are presented as informants, as co-participants and co-constructivists of a story, rather than as objects or colonial subjects of research. Hermes (1998) uses the term “intellectual sovereigns [Robert Allen Warrior, 1995, p. 165].” In education, Aboriginal peoples have vested interests that affect their children for generations to come. Their interests are not just for the future, but how today’s decisions and actions will affect the future, seven generations from now.

In my position as a Traditional Mentor Worker I exercised the qualities of a trustful and trusting character prepared to be a “servant leader” (Sergiovanni, 1992) for both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal populations within the school. I conducted the ground work to be an Aboriginal Principal Investigator and conduct a Talking Circle:

1. Develop relational trust with teachers, students, school staff and administration, and community members

2. Promote participants as co-participants rather than as objects or subjects

3. Relate my position as an Aboriginal person with “a bias and a purpose” (Hermes 1998, p. 161).

I fulfilled the role of co-participant in the Talking Circle and became a member of this co-constructivist group. The discussions of each group reflected their own communicative
styles that could become a future subject for study. I demonstrated the required respect that enabled participants to freely divulge their words and knowledge: I encouraged a ‘language of possibility.’

The Native Resource Room contained round tables with enough room to sit in a circle of chairs or sit at the same table where they had their meal. I created the informal atmosphere of participants gathering to make conversations and presented alternate questions for a smooth flow of discussions.

**Impact of Talking Circle.** The Aboriginal Talking Circle is a cultural discipline from which to collect data with appropriate ethical expectations. I associate sacred space with ethical space. Conducting interviews in the sacred space of a Talking Circle must conform to established ethical protocols and processes in Aboriginally-designed and delivered research. Speaking without preprepared notes requires oral skill. It takes courage to divulge values, beliefs, and assumptions. Respect is required in the sacred space of the Aboriginal Talking Circle. It takes controlled patience for participants to listen without interrupting.

*Ceremony: preparing the collective voice.* Hodson (2004) determined the importance of ceremony when gathering Aboriginal voices in research:

The co-constructivist approach includes the researcher as an active participant in the process that seeks to reveal a shared understanding as a group rather than as a researcher and subject. This experience is further enhanced through the inclusion of ceremony, prayer, and other cultural protocols. (p. 53)

In Aboriginal ceremony, there must be a formal welcome and greeting (smudging and prayer), food, and gifts. Food was provided according to the time of day when the
interviews took place (i.e., students were fed lunch after their morning interviews and parents were fed supper prior to the interviews). The interview process introduced the problem solving steps of the Medicine or Teaching Wheel (see Figure 1; Appendix A). The Medicine Wheel guided participants to answer questions and discuss conclusions. The steps were a means to encourage “gathering a collective voice” (Bishop, 1998, p. 425).

Participants were not formally provided with financial reimbursement through an honorarium. Travel and meals were taken care of through set-aside funds. Participants were self-motivated to be involved in this study.

As part of the introduction and welcome, and before the interviews began, I briefly explained the process of ceremony and explained the associated protocol as I demonstrated and invited participants to be involved if they wished. I offered smudging with sage and shared how I taught students what I knew about the use of plants that Aboriginal people know to be sacred. I appealed for forgiveness if I conducted the ceremony in a way different from their understandings. I explained the meaning of prayer in Aboriginal ceremony and invited participants to quietly offer their own. Sage was lit with a match, offered as a smudge, and passed around to participants. The act is symbolic of cleansing oneself: to be prepared to contribute with clear thoughts and speak from a good heart and mind. I explained to participants that they were welcome to pray as they smudged. Thus, the ceremony was completed for the collective voice in a Talking Circle.

I gave the interview participants handmade deer hide pouches as gifts to remind them of their involvement, and as formal symbols of gratitude for their participation. Each pouch contained tobacco and sweetgrass, which are two of five medicines that have
symbolic meanings and teachings in Ojibwa culture. I explained to the participants how Aboriginal students came to the school without a full pouch and without all their traditional teachings: the students were removed from their traditional teachers and traditional learning environment.

The giving of tobacco is required Aboriginal protocol in asking. I explained the solemn offering of tobacco and acknowledged participants and all spirit helpers involved in the serious undertaking that will affect the futures of Aboriginal peoples and all peoples who are concerned with education at this school. A braid of sweetgrass hung in the Native Resource Room and symbolized kindness and relational trust upon which the students governed themselves on a daily basis. A silver horse hung from the flap of the pouch. Before this study was done, all participants had the medicines from the four directions and deeper meanings of the pouch. The Otago Maori of New Zealand expected similar protocols: “Powhiri, haruru, and kai (formal welcome, greeting, and food)” and “poroporoaki (formal farewells)” (Bishop, 1998, p. 425).

**Accountability**

According to agreement of this study, participants’ words spoken and recorded in each Talking Circle were transcribed with their individual approval. One participant verbally requested, through telephone, that words be removed from the transcript. This participant received a copy of the transcript and First Draft document. The interpretation and quotes of participant approved words were gathered into one document that were mailed or emailed for participant review. Participants had the choice of contacting me with their comments by mail, email, or in person. I arranged a room in the school to meet individuals who chose to meet me in person during the month that followed the
distribution of the final written transcription. I called participants to affirm they had received their documents and informed them that they could return responses through the school or we could arrange to meet in their homes. Thirteen participants met me in the school. Two participants met with me at their place of work. One participant returned a formal response by email. I met five participants in their homes. One participant did not respond to calls to meet. I talked to one participant over the phone.

The First Draft with the translation and quotes from the transcripts were mailed with a prepaid envelope, and a gift to participants, who were given the choice to return the documents with their written comments and/or changes. Participants were again contacted by phone to affirm they had received the document and reminded that they could contact me by phone or email or leave the document at the school. I received four documents by mail with participant comments; no comments were received by email. Six documents were received at the school. There was one response objecting to the impact of words quoted by another participant. I discussed the wording with the participant and made notes. One participant wrote a comment regarding the word racism: “Racism is soon to be an outdated word for documents of this nature. Consider ‘cultural discrimination’, “sub-cultural discrimination” since race is a term covered by Euro-centric anthropologists and its ideas are steeped in cultural hegemony. hierarchical notions of supremacy and ignore the device of closely-matched genomes among all homosapiens (participant correspondence July 30/07). Outside of requests to correct formatting errors, there were no other requests for changes or deletions. Final comments were positive and with varying length of wording that indicated approval.
Confidentiality and anonymity were addressed prior to the interviews and participants were invited to question any aspect of the study. It was imperative for participants to have ownership of the study from the beginning to concede this study a reputable review with community input.

Knowledge. Sharing knowledge is an important aspect of ethically accountable research expected by Aboriginal peoples (Brant-Castellano, 2004; Bishop, 1998; Kanu, 2005; Kenny, 2004; McNaughton & Rock, 2004; Porsanger, 2002; Smith, 1999). I sought a layer of agreement across subcultures to meet in separate groups. The leaders of the two cultural groups of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal were identified. The two First Nations were contacted through their respective Chief and Council for their support and involvement. The Chiefs and Council members were invited to participate in the Aboriginal leaders group. The Principal of the school considered the exercise to be educational, fully supported the case study, and provided administrative support and direction. The school Principal did not participate in the interviews but was invited to review the documents.

Anonymity and ownership. Group activities were held in the Native Resource Room where anonymity was not possible. Individual identification was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Audio recorded words were returned through a transcript for comments, changes, confirmations and deletions. Participants requested that certain forms of speech, such as “ah” and “ahm,” “you know” and “like,” be removed when they were quoted.

Participants had the opportunity to comment and request changes to the First and Final Draft of Chapters Four and Five of the thesis study where their words are included.
The school will receive a copy of the completed thesis study during a presentation of the results. I initiated forums for checks and balances for participant corroboration to verify their stories and to ensure participants had collaborative ownership of the study.

Bishop (1998, p. 420, 421) discussed the idea of ownership in Aboriginally-designed research, in the form of four questions:

- Who is responsible for processing information?
- Who has authority over the sense-making processes and the means of constructing meaning and seeking explanations?
- Who writes the account of the research process?
- Who judges it to be fair?

I understood I did not own the data, although I authored their meanings. The data came from participants of the school community. I was accountable to respond to these questions.

In my presentation of words in the final report, I sought to avoid evoking prejudicial responses to the facts in this study by avoiding participant identification as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, male or female, parent, teacher, student. It is my hope that knowledge created in ethical space does not encourage prejudicial or racist responses by readers.

References were made to transcripts and page number in examining specific conversations rather than position, title, or name.

T1: Transcript 1 – Aboriginal Students
T2: Transcript 2 – Teachers
T3: Transcript 3 – Aboriginal Parents
Data Collection Procedures

The school leadership acknowledged willingness to present an Aboriginal design for this study. My confidence in addressing its peculiar complexity to encourage Aboriginal voice in a mainstream secondary school setting within a specific timeframe needed to be explicit. I am an Aboriginal person with certain knowledge and understandings of cultural protocols and processes. I am familiar with the geographic setting. It can influence final outcomes in interview designs.

The school’s students come from seven communities. Two of the communities involved were Ojibwa First Nations. Cultural affiliations were identified through the personal identifiers sheet collected from volunteer participants. I was aware participants might not be known one to another or be able to claim the area as their first community. I was aware of the impact this may have on level of comfort amongst participants during the recording of their voices. I sought to design a study that would encourage participants to reach deep into their reflections and reveal their values, beliefs, and assumptions as a means of expressing their intents. I submit that in my evolving role as a researcher, I may have influenced participant responses through my prior involvement in the school. I end this section with observations that I believe have impact on the data.

The Setting

An important consideration for this study is the time of season for travel. Participants gathered in the school for the interviews. Freezing rain, snow, fog, and
highway shut-downs were realities of life in the late fall, after the month of October in this northern area along the north shore of one Great Lake. Travel for participants was on the one winding highway that stretches from one community to the other on either side of the high school and between 7 km and 50 km distances one way. Night travel was not an anticipated event. Buses and taxis were expensive and were not usual forms of transportation outside respective communities. Participants were offered reimbursement for their travel through set-aside funds. The majority of participants declined this offer, with a submission that they felt ownership of the study and required no reimbursement.

I was living in southern Ontario at the time of this study and spent a day in travel to reach the site at the end of October. After an absence of one year, I reestablished my presence and reconnected my position as a member of the school community and introduced my role as the principal investigator of the research project. I devoted a period of 5 days: to renew my relationships, to talk about the research project, distribute information, and seek potential research participants. My second visit was prior to the actual interviews to ensure participants were prepared and would be in attendance.

Student volunteer participants handed in their application and consent forms to me in the Native Resource Room. Anonymity is not totally possible in this environment as Aboriginal students from all grades are present at various times throughout the day. I placed information packages in teachers’ boxes as a means of contact. I was assigned a message box in the school and called the secretaries to determine messages. I collected applications and consent forms, and responded to questions from teachers and students. Other administrative details were completed, such as determining food costs and how to reserve the Native Resource Room.
Two weeks later, in November, I arrived at the secondary school 2 days before interviews to fill out an application to use the Native Resource Room after school hours. I signed in and out for after school hours. One of the school secretaries took care of the booking. I was available to answer questions about the study.

Interviews were held in the Native Resource Room, the place from which this study evolved. The memories and marks of student success and struggle are imprinted in various artifacts left by the students, in the furniture and computer equipment given by the school board, in original paintings by Aboriginal artists; and community donations. Each item reflected the tremendous support for this project. Teachers and students dwelled on the meanings of the room over the past 3 years and gave their renditions of associated experiences. Individuals new to this room observed the many symbols to try to understand and to connect what they heard from students and others in the community. This is the place where context and phenomenon met.

The Interviews

This section provides a description of the selection of participants, a brief description of interview sessions, and the recording process.

Selection of participants. In every culture, there are subcultures. I questioned the ease of crossing cultural space. I could not envision this possibility without examining the diversity of cultures created by age, nationality, profession, etc. I segregated voices into groups according to subcultures of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal leaders, and non-Aboriginal Teachers, and the final group a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Administrators/Decision Makers/Resources (ADR). I determined perceptions of the cultural divide in ethical space from each set of voices.
All participants in this study were recognized as volunteer informants. The community understood I left to undertake Master studies in education and that I would be returning to conduct research in the school. My first visit to the school was to talk about my study and to distribute information packages. I took applications from the first three male and first three females from each group who volunteered and qualified to participate in the study. There were six groups of people. An exception to this was the parents’ group that consisted of four females. Two of the groups were parents. One group consisted of one parent. I decided to conduct the protocols and processes of the Talking Circle upon the participant’s request when other parents did not arrive. The participant words did not represent their community groups but served to situate responses to determine the need for further study. Students are grouped as grade 12- Year 4 - Aboriginal students. The student participants experienced the Native Resource Room as a vibrant functional atmosphere with a supportive, full time Traditional Mentor Worker for 2 years, and then the difficulties of the following years in trying to establish a schedule of community resource people to monitor the room. Teachers who took advantage of the Native Resource Room and referred students for various reasons according to established and ongoing negotiations were encouraged to participate in the study. Teachers work full-time in the high school and do not identify themselves as Aboriginal. Aboriginal leaders are First Nations and Métis peoples. The Administrative/Decision Maker/Resource group (ADR) are a mix of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal Elders and individuals who have attended Residential school have been purposely left out of this study with the intent of accessing their knowledge at a later date. A profile of each group gathered through an application form, is as follows
1. Secondary school Aboriginal students – three males and three females, two respondents each from two First Nations, and two respondents affiliated as Métis

2. Secondary School Teachers – three males and three females, various affiliation, one participant did not respond to affiliation

3. Aboriginal parents – four females, all respondents from one First Nation

4. Aboriginal Leaders – one male and two females, two with affiliation as Métis and one from a First Nation

5. Administrative/Decision Makers/Resource (ADR) - four females, two with Non-Aboriginal affiliation, two affiliated as Métis

The cultural affiliation of respondents is as follows:

- First Nations – 8
- Métis – 6
- Non-Aboriginal – 8
- Unknown 1

I sought participants with knowledge and involvement in the Native Resource Room over the period of 3 years between 2003 and 2006. Potential participants were identified with a list of Aboriginal Grade 12 and Year 4 students provided by the secondary school, First Nation education organizations, and through word of mouth. One First Nations staff member contacted potential participants and referred them to the next meeting of participants. Despite the directions they were given to call me in advance, none of these participants communicated with me until the evening of the meeting.

Interview sessions. The interviews took place over a period of 3 weeks. The student group met with me on one school morning. They had Principal and teacher
support. The Teachers’ group met as part of a Professional Development morning session. Evening sessions were with three other target groups: Aboriginal parents and Administration/Decision Making/Resource (ADR) Groups, met in the evenings between 4:00 pm to 8:00 p.m. during the school week. Each meeting was allowed 3 hours. Despite efforts to establish an agreed schedule with participants in the evenings, there were cancellations due to weather and road closures and no arrivals of Aboriginal participants.

I did not expect explanations of non-attendance by Aboriginal participants. Non-interference was an accepted and expected ethic of Aboriginal culture (Brant, 1990). Rearranging interview dates, checking for transportation support, or inviting additional participants was an expected part of the process.

**Recording.** The recording of interviews did not progress until introductions were completed. During meals, I briefly pointed out aspects of the Native Resource Room (NRR) and responded to participant questions. After the meal, I provided a quick tour of the Parent’s meeting room that was next door to the NRR and that was unused over the past year. I explained the purpose of the Talking Circle. I explained the use of tobacco, the medicine pouch offered, and smudging. They were assured of their rights as participants as well as respect if they decided not to participate in the research process at any time. There was a 15-minute break during the interview. I reviewed the terms of the study with the participants, assured them of their rights in research, inquired if they had any questions to ask, and checked consent forms before the recorder(s) was turned on and the Talking Circle began.

I was familiar with my personal IC recorder (Panasonic RR-US050) but not comfortable with the Sony Minidisk Recorder provided by the Tecumseh Aboriginal
Research and Education Centre at Brock University. To insure I had a successful recording, I simultaneously operated both recorders during the student and teacher group. By the third group, I was confident in the Sony and did not require my personal recorder which is limited in the number of hours I can record.

**Observations**

I submit my observations as a “living research methodology.” During my 1-year absence from the secondary school, I had time to reflect on my experiences with the students and the creation of the Native Resource Room. I viewed the Native Resource Room as an example of one space in the school in which cultural norms of the students were allowed within the environs of mainstream education. I had brief conversations with the Vice-Principal to assess the impact of this ethical space and the cultural knowledge sets that encouraged its viability to promote educational success amongst the Aboriginal student population. This section talks about the connections with data extracted from the interviews.

There is a story of ethical space in Aboriginal education at this secondary school. Hodson (2004) quotes Strauss and Corbin (1990) in their description of grounded theory: it “provides a procedure for developing categories of information, interconnecting the categories, building a “story” that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (p. 15). In reflection, I see how my past experiences and training from both the traditional teachings of my childhood and my understanding of the interactions (or lack of) in mainstream public school systems influenced my position as a Traditional Mentor Worker and ultimately the identification of ethical space at the school. I was new to the community so my focus was to understand the students and learn their
stories. My first step was to confer with the elders in the community. I gained their support and was enabled to continue my investigative work. The elements of this study comprise a continuation of the story that belongs to the affected communities.

In this story, I was accepted as a member of each cultural group: I was considered a staff member of the mainstream secondary school who worked with Aboriginal students and who extended relationships with the non-Aboriginal students; I was an employee of one First Nation with experience in the ceremonies of Aboriginal culture. I was accepted as one who could lead the processes and teach the protocols. I was an accepted observer throughout the school. I made mental and written notes and honed my ability to remember details and facts that were verbally or behaviourally expressed. It was part of my training as a child to sit quietly on a chair, sitting on my hands, while my teachers, who might be a parent, or a relative, would carry out their daily routine and ask me questions as they worked. I learned that this process is called ‘Bisahnyah’ in the Ojibwa language. It was referred to by two group participants during one group interview.

My observations, or ‘living research methodology,’ were captured from my personal notes contained in community newsletters, newspapers, letters, emails, verbal communications, and a document I prepared to trace the events of my involvement as a Traditional Mentor Worker, entitled Designing New Paths In Traditional Teachings For Aboriginal Students - Eighteen Months: Seven Stages in a Secondary School Setting (2003-2005). The reliability of my observations was found in student files, written agreements between the students and teachers, and photos. A revealing record was a power point presentation made by the students and the teachers when the Native Resource Room was threatened with closure and reduced hours. It contained pictures and
supporting data. A petition locked the signatures of the concerned student body. The method employed to document these observations employed may have been simple but they are now a record in time that expressed a positive frame within this case study. I anticipate students who were involved in this activity will appreciate this study of the ethical space created in the Native Resource Room. I cannot help but associate their intensity of purpose with the current struggles of Aboriginal peoples in land claims.

In my role as Aboriginal Traditional Mentor Worker, I encouraged all Aboriginal students to stay in school. I explained that without them, there would be no change in the education system. I encouraged students to find their place within their communities, to understand their roles to create healthy and progressive communities. When students expressed their fears and concerns about failing, I assured them that in our culture we do not fail. It is our right to demand an education in the ways we understand. I associated the terms of our culture and how we learn within our culture. I explained that when Aboriginal presence is not visible, Aboriginal peoples and their needs are forgotten. The student was my focus. Their needs and concerns were also mine.

One of my concerns in my role as Traditional Mentor Worker was the institutionalized alienation that students were feeling when I first began to work with them. Through steps taken to involve them in negotiating efforts, those feeling were generally overcome. Agreements were reached after a number of steps and roles were clarified. Workable points were negotiated so that a written document might be produced based on feedback about the wording to benefit Aboriginal student intents. The documents were not policy but open to review and revision. There was evidence that negotiation in a school setting is possible. The students and I related our similar
experiences in a high school system. I took note of their dreams and aspirations and interpreted their intentions and revelations when they could not. Together, we explored cultural angles within the school to meet the people who held traditional knowledge and words commonly understood for cultural meanings, and who could address educational, health, and social needs with cultural knowledge and sensitivity. The Vice-Principal accepted and supported change based on concrete arguments that explained cultural concepts. The students were cautioned not to take advantage of the offerings in the school but to extend relational trust by approaching members of the school with respect and thankfulness for the open leadership that supported Aboriginal initiatives. Despite the short periods to meet and carry on the social aspects familiar to Aboriginal peoples, students were mindful of their schedules and the reciprocal agreements made between the Vice-Principal and me on behalf of students and teachers. The resulting effort was observable: meeting rooms overflowed, the students kept the areas of their meetings clean, students were on time to the meetings and their classes, their attendance was up, their marks went up, swearing incidents were down, and signs of alcohol and drug abuses were almost unknown. The students invited teachers to attend their meetings and gave the same respect as they would give to their traditional teachers. Native representation in the form of a Native Alliance was born. The teachers saw the students differently. The students defined their intents to meet academic landmarks, and, to their surprise, the school began to acknowledge, respect, and support them. The point of success was in the design of ethical space at this school that included an Aboriginal worker and the daily opening of the Native Resource Room.
On my return to the school as a researcher, I looked for signs that Aboriginal student experiences were positive and carried forward. I found the same students with whom I had carried on discussions when I was the Traditional Mentor Worker and was happy to sit with them again as they voluntarily shared their educational experiences and progress. Some of these students continued to offer their views in the Aboriginal student interview groups. My personal values, ideas, and beliefs about education were revealed in the words of my messages to Aboriginal students and may have had some influence on their responses in the interviews of the study.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

Processing and analyzing context data was an esoteric experience and an isolating task. In this case study, I worked with words of both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples. The names and backgrounds of each contributor were known only to me. I was grateful for the exercise I completed to understand each community from various perspectives, such as Statistics Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, political documents generated by both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal groups, individual communities, and individuals. This investigation helped to clarify the cultural differences in perceptions regarding context and phenomenon of student success and the connection with the Native Resource Room.

The next section is a review of ethical considerations in research with Aboriginal peoples. There is a discussion on transcribing data and asking questions that include the tools and words, and fluidity of the Talking Circle. Responses of participants from the pilot study provided the trial to anticipate how I might proceed with the analysis. This
section ends with a brief discussion of the analysis with reflections on the process and my involvement as co-investigator, co-constructivist, and facilitator.

*Ethical Considerations*

This study followed the TCPS-6 guidelines of ethical practices and was reviewed by the Research Ethics Board. I received clearance to conduct the research before gaining the letters of support from the two First Nations communities. An official letter from the general Métis community was lacking due to their lack of formal organization in the area. Letters were received from the District School Board and the secondary school Principal for my study to proceed with the students and teachers according to their requirements. Participant words were important and were given voluntarily in this study. Explanations regarding rights and use of voiced words were provided in advance of the study in information packages. Participants were given the choice to have their words deleted in the Draft Summary Report. The Executive Summary Report is intended to be presented during Professional Development days at the secondary school at a later date without reference to names of participants. Actual names of individuals, communities, school, and school boards are not revealed in this thesis. At the time of this writing, the school has gained some recognition for its successful establishment of ethical space within its school board and beyond.

*Transcribing Data and Asking Questions*

The examination of participant data revealed an outstanding number of solutions and recommendations for negotiation. As I transcribed and reviewed the data, I asked myself a series of questions and searched for strategies that might alleviate the consuming task of how to present the audio-taped data. How do I present ethical space in this
mainstream secondary school? How do I trace transcript words to present a theoretical proposition as a ‘landscape of convergent possibilities,’ and address the ‘vortex’ of ethical space that Willie Ermine (2000, 2005) speaks of in his study? How do I protect participant identities and their spoken words? How might I react and then interpret data with my own biased perceptions?

*Tools and words.* I transcribed all manuscripts from approximately 30 hours of digital tapes. I researched qualitative software programs including Ethnograph v50 at Brock University and Atlas.ti 5.2 Demo through the internet. I preferred Atlas.ti but I was unable to purchase the full program. Atlas provided a Word Cruncher and a side margin from which to make notes or highlight quotes. I searched to find the commonalities of words and understand the implications of the word counts. The software sample did not allow me to save data. I decided not to use either software. I transcribed and saved the words of participants in Microsoft Word. I used the Find feature to search for the groups of words revealed in Word Cruncher to refine my analysis for each transcript. Based on the dialogue held in the Teachers’ group, I first addressed my own questions as to how each group revealed their sense of ownership in the educational setting or as a cultural perspective. I conducted searches to determine presentation of words, such as how “our” and “yours” were distinctively used in each group to indicate ownership. There are cultural differences.

*Fluidity of the talking circle.* I made mental and written notes as I read and worked with the data. I examined participant words for flow and repetition. Participants responded to the five guiding questions in fluid order. The flow of words in each group was tentative at first. The participants referred to previous volunteered information and
provided an increasing measure of knowledge, or deeper insights and new information. Obvious shifts of awareness occurred and participants asked their own questions. Creative solutions were discussed and assumptions were tested as the cultural divides in ethical space defined themselves through the words of each group. There were optimum opportunities to respond with 'language of possibility.' This, in turn, created confidence in each participant to bring forward deeper reflections that included important and relevant private thoughts and experiences. My role as facilitator was most often not required except as gatekeeper. I reminded them of the timeframe for each section of questions. Five of the six groups indicated they could not believe how fast the time went.

Methods of Analysis

My initial approach to analyse data was to examine words of the six respective Talking Circles. My conclusions suggest focus on recommendations that are drawn from my initial organization of data gathered into two main headings: 'Inequality and Racism' and 'Recommendations from the Medicine Wheel.' I compared statements from the interviews with Ministry of Education, School, Board, and First Nations documents as well as other documented research conducted in secondary schools. I arranged the data onto a Medicine Wheel to prepare the final analysis and formulate recommendations.

I conducted a content analysis to understand participant values, beliefs, and assumptions. I conducted a constant comparison analysis to find the commonalities and differences across six transcripts. I experienced emotions from disbelief of what I was hearing to anger that such assumptions existed. I reminded myself that I heard words from my personal Aboriginal perspective and I worked harder to understand words within the 'objectivities' of this study. I examined participant voices through transcripts and
searched for meaning and description of ethical space. I discovered the schisms in this secondary school that separated Aboriginal involvement from mainstream perimeters. Each transcript demonstrated unique communication styles, responses, ideas, and approaches for solutions of its participants.

The Native Resource Room was not in operation at the beginning of this study. Before this investigation was completed a new worker came into place. Thus, references by the participants relate to the activities and events that took place prior to reopening of this room in the secondary school.

This section continues with more detail and is presented as reflections on the process and the role of the researcher.

**Reflections on the process.** I struggled with my applications for clearance from the authoritative bodies about detailing in advance what I could not know about how my approach, immersed in cultural experiences and understandings, would be conceived by the participants. Not all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are familiar with Aboriginal processes and protocols. Brock University did not have an Aboriginal research advisory circle. Research involving Aboriginal Peoples falls under the governing decisions of Brock Research Ethics Board comprised of non-Aboriginal academics. Documentation that determined the need for an Aboriginal member on the University’s Research Ethics Board was presented to the Office of Research along with additional recommendations to recognize research conducted for and by Aboriginal peoples (Longboat, 2006). Aboriginal methods in research follow the guidelines of ethical practices that the TCPS-6 outlined. There is little detail about this cultural realm as ethical space in need of policy for its protection and evolution, although reasons have been
extensively expressed by Canadian Aboriginal researchers and authors, such as: Battiste and Youngblood-Henderson (2000), Brant-Castellano (2004), Ermine (2000, 2005), and internationally by, Bishop (1998), Smith (1999).

I was worried that the governing ethics board of the University would negate my intuitive submission as a culturally immersed Aboriginal researcher. I endured a preconceived accounting of activities based on mainstream perceptions of outcomes. I cannot be just an observer and listener. My role within the walls of the particular institution where the research takes place is as an accepted and deeply involved Aboriginal participant. I had a personal investment in the research. The educational future of my grandchildren for generations was at stake. I believed that the design of ethical space as a method of investigation requires a simultaneous and crucial understanding of the involved cultures, of approaches to knowledge systems and the underlying intents when two cultures are involved. This study involved Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. Respect had to be my foundation. I was determined to take a case study approach to situate context and phenomenon of student success relative to the Native Resource Room in one secondary school. I could not predict the outcomes of this Aboriginally-designed and delivered study nor the reactions of those authorities, such as the University’s review board, the First Nations Chief and Councils, or the school board, who could accept or reject it. I was not sure to what extent Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders of the study would simultaneously support or not support. However, I was encouraged by the fact that, prior to the study, various individual stakeholders asked questions and indicated positive and supportive feedback.
Researcher involvement: Co-investigator, co-constructivist, facilitator. My critical examination of ethical space in the secondary school concluded with a study of six transcripts of group dialogues. My involvement was as co-participant, co-investigator, and facilitator to conduct a co-constructivist study with participants. I expected my skills would be tested. I suggest that my background training as an Aboriginal Life Skills Coach, my lived experiences as an Aboriginal community member, and as a student of Aboriginal Elders prepared me for these roles. “Researchers will not only be required to deal with people, but also be required to take sensitivity training, learn protocols and traditions and establish a culturally relevant process in research” (IPHRC, 2004, p. 42).

Limitations
This study intended to seek out participants who did not attend residential school and participants who were not Elders. I distinctly remembered a comment made by one student about how she wanted her education to proceed. She knew what Residential school did to her Grandmother and how it affected her mother to not have the feelings associated with warm and loving parental guidance. This student announced she did not want any more of the baggage created by Residential school. She was not part of the Residential schooling and she wanted to get on with her education – to learn to be a healthy and successful student. I considered the reasoning behind this student’s remarks. Aboriginal Elders and individuals who attended Residential school have been purposely left out of this study. Their words might be accessed through another study.

Other voices not in this study are members of the Board of Education, and one Aboriginal Leader. This is not by intent. Potential participants were invited. They sent messages of regret due to their work and personal schedules. There were no presentations
made in advance as to what ethical space might mean in connection with the Native Resource Room.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented a qualitative case study design for exploratory research in a secondary school concerning its ethical space. It was Aboriginally-designed and delivered. It included a study of context and phenomenon, a living research methodology, and gathered data from interviews. This design built on work promoted by the Indigenous People’s Health Research Committee (2004), Ermine (2000, 2005) and other researchers (Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000; Bell et al., 2004; Bishop, 1998; Brant-Castellano, 2004; Haig-Brown, 1995; Hermes, 1998; Smith, 1999). The methods to address ethical space according to Aboriginal culture were applied to each target group. The ethical space of the Aboriginal Talking Circle was presented as sacred. The importance of gift giving, reference to symbolic knowledge sets, smudging, and offering food are Aboriginal procedures and processes that encourage reciprocity and ethical responses, such as respect.

The exploration of the ‘Best Educational Environment’ needed to include cultural norms of the area the school serves. The study of ethical space required links to past and present context and phenomena of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences. Transcriptions revealed the eminent vortex of ethical space when two cultures meet. The results based on the participant approved transcripts are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this chapter I present data as a selection of words provided by volunteer participants. Their words were categorized and then analyzed as the ‘language of possibility.’ Their words revealed descriptions of context and phenomena. A picture of ethical space emerged and revealed contentious references to inequalities of education as values, beliefs, and assumptions were uncovered and displayed. I then discovered the vortex of ethical space in this school as that point where two cultures worked to recognize the inequalities and intents. The data were originally analyzed with a content analysis lens and organized into two main categories: “References to Inequality and Racism” and “Recommendations Based on the Medicine Wheel” (see Figure 1; Appendix A). This last reference was further divided into the areas of Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action. There were indicators of resistance due to cultural conflicts related to power, control, and authority. Each group determined solutions. In their own subgroup, the Aboriginal students identified six areas needing to be addressed in curriculum. Students are impacted by the cultural divide. The tensions for these students outside their cultural comfort zone are affecting their academic success.

- the classroom environment (T1, p. 40 - 42)
- teacher relationships and rules (T1, 39 - 41)
- relationships with non-Aboriginal peers (T1, p. 29 )
- lack of choices in assignments and curriculum (T1, p. 5, 12, 15, 31, 36)
- generally not being understood or listened to (T1, p. 36 ), and
- being stereotyped (T1, p. 41).
I direct the reader to appreciate the authentic voices of participants as they expose personal values, beliefs, and assumptions in the ethical space of the Native Resource Room. Their responses were enriching, empowering, and honest about their knowledge bases. I expected biased responses. My own personal biases are revealed in this exploration which I refer to as the pathology of the current education of Aboriginal students.

This chapter provides a review of responses in education when ethical space is explored. None of the participants are identified by name. Pseudonyms are used to differentiate the speakers. I have mainly avoided the use of titles in order to present authentic voices and to avoid reader bias. The intent is to invite the reader to clearly see the tensions and vortex of ethical space. The reality that education is a market and that this study is timely is an important consideration. I present a contextual perspective from the eyes of Aboriginal peoples about teaching, the curriculum, and the importance of the word ‘Bisahnyah’ and the place of Elders.

I conclude this chapter with the suggestion to learn the meaning of the Ojibwa word: N’Suhtuhmodiwin.

The ‘Language of Possibility’

Language is more than words in ethical space. It is a sincere and open way of talking that illuminates the listener’s capacity to listen and respond with reciprocal sincerity. The questions used in this study were designed with the intent to guide participants in ethical space. The preparation of participants to be involved in deeper reflection about the ‘language of possibility’ in ethical space is a prerequisite to find the
‘Best Educational Environment.’ Participant responses to the questions revealed how knowledge was shared and how relationships were affected by power structures.

My first consideration was the preparatory steps to extend an invitation to participants to enter and participate in the conversations that exist in ethical space. Although not directed to do so in the invitations, a few participants came prepared with notes scribbled on their papers or wrote notes as reminders to themselves when their time came around to speak according to the guidelines of the Aboriginal Talking Circle. Events found in the Aboriginal Talking Circle include ceremonial practices, such as smudging, giving tobacco, and gifts. These are embraced as the accepted protocols and processes of the Ojibwa peoples in this area of the study. One participant pointed out “the sacredness of the Talking Circle, the direction of the Talking Circle, all these things, not everybody knows those things” (T2, p. 28). An example of how the medicine pouch is referred to for understanding is found in one participant’s words:

And I think: Are they [Aboriginal students sic] getting the education they require to be a whole person – to be really, really, really, who they are with that component or are they kind of like this bag that Catherine gave us? They don’t have all the components. They just have what an old structure says is important.

(T6, p. 7)

This participant delved into deeper reflections by asking questions about the meaning of the symbolic medicine pouch which led to recognizing the limitations placed on Aboriginal students by “an old structure” and led participants to do the same. The “old structure” is about mainstream prerogatives.
Although another participant did not specifically make reference to the medicine pouch, a concurrent idea is expressed: “But I personally never lose sight of the fact that they came with these tools that I may be not aware of and that I may never be able to use myself” (T2, p. 8). Tools in this study are symbolic of student skills and abilities of students and associated with the knowledge of their use. The intent of education to use these tools is expressed: “to get over the hurdles that we come to in life” (T2, p. 2). A solution is offered early in one group interview: “We have to encourage ourselves and all students to pull those tools and use them and then practice what we know” and “you can design your curriculum to incorporate traditional teachings” (T2, p. 25).

I was assured of my role and purpose when one participant revealed a personal intent for involvement in the study that she perceived would create her own ‘discomfort.’ This participant expressed a personal belief that her contributions would be validated and taken forward (T2, p. 25).

So I need to confess the concern I have with hidden curriculum, especially in light of recent events. You know, I am going to be a proponent for making changes at my own discomfort but maybe that will come across in ensuing conversations that I know First Nations students are often at the losing end of the curriculum. (T2, p. 9)

I became the trusted figure, a mediator and symbol of assurance that a ‘language of possibility’ could be expressed in metaphysical ethical space. I conclude that the symbolic opening of ethical space with the Talking Circle and an explanation provided a visual connect with participants to reach across the cultural divide that might create some discomfort but offered opportunity to create tentative solutions. The use and explanations
of the protocols and processes to participate in the Focus/Talking Circle assisted participants to enter both the physical and metaphysical ethical space.

Adult participants guided themselves around the table and rarely requested my involvement. I became one of the participants and I sensed the same respect to speak or not as questions were addressed. At times, I made inquiries to clarify certain responses or encouraged additional detail to connect information. The co-constructivist approach allowed me to be informant as well as active participant. I found that my overall knowledge of events, activities, community members, and transitory relationships that occurred as the Native Resource Room developed and expanded, helped me to alternately assist and guide participants so that further discussion and/or clarification of events would occur.

My words guided, directed, inquired, encouraged, clarified, informed, and interpreted. I would have preferred to be in the role as a participant and at various times I added my voice, raised my questions, or made suggestions. At times my words were rejected, ignored, or accepted. I was the trusted Principal Informant and I became used by the participants to assist or to listen. I was at their disposal. I did not become the fully involved Co-Investigator with each group as I had envisioned at the outset of my proposal. I reached into my experiences as an Aboriginal facilitator/mentor and worked with each group to meet their needs to discover their “language of possibility” (Ermine, 2005, ¶4) and monitor dialogue. My background training fulfilled the needs for participant involvement and trust in the process of meeting in physical and metaphysical space.
The Medicine Wheel for Design of Research Questions

The questions encouraged responses to sensitive dialogue to reveal personal values, beliefs, and assumptions. The questions were managed through the culturally described procedures contained within the protocols and processes of the Aboriginal Talking Circle. The questions were ordered in the nonlinear response required within the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1). The processes and procedures of the Talking Circle encouraged equality of words in response to the questions. When equality is lacking, there is room for fear and negative experiences which limits ‘language of possibility’ (Ermine, 2000, 2005).

I have quietly used the analytical tool of the Medicine Wheel in my personal life and education. I appreciated the basis of reason within its equation that has helped me to think with required empathy throughout this study. I applied this model of reason to Brock University Research Ethics Board to recognize Section 6 – Research involving Aboriginal peoples - and my document was received with reciprocal agreement (Longboat, 2006). There was an expectation that values, beliefs, and assumptions would be expressed in each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1). There are many, many ‘slices’ of the Medicine Wheel. Within it are teachings, such as the seasons, the stages of human beings, power, control, equality, and opposites. In this study, it was useful for designing questions and sorting and preparing data into four quadrants of Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action.

In designing the research questions, I followed the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. Vision, experience, language, relationships, knowledge, and action are all examples of equations found in an Aboriginal analytical Medicine Wheel (Figure 1). This
study demonstrated how these elements can be approached and interpreted in ethical research when two cultures meet. In this chapter, I wove the analysis of qualitative data into a story line to describe and assess the responses to questions used in this exploratory case study. Questions were prepared to elicit meaning and to build fluid responses rather than linear answers.

1. How do you define education?

2. What meaning does education have for you?

3. What standards or guidelines must be in place for an effective education program that will meet the needs of Aboriginal students?

4. What would encourage you to participate in curriculum design at/with this [secondary school]?

5. What suggestions do you have for this school and the Aboriginal community on this issue of curriculum design?

The questions encouraged discussion of context and revealed support of the current Aboriginal student success.

_Aboriginally-designed Talking Circle: A Culturally Designed Vehicle_

In ethical space when Aboriginal cultures are involved, there must be culturally described procedures that will assure their voices will be heard and honoured for equity of voice. In this study, the Aboriginal Talking Circle was used. It reflected the accepted protocols of the Ojibwa people who are involved in this school.

The Aboriginal Talking Circle was used as the cultural vehicle for participants who have inherent objectivities, subjectivities, and intents and are, subsequently, engaged in the 'language of possibility.' The two objectives in this mainstream setting are about
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal purpose, destination, and meeting needs in a secondary school setting. The teachers talked about jobs, satisfying an employer, and being a dependable member of society. The Aboriginal leaders, students, and parents addressed subjectivities: spirituality, preparing students to enter the work world, dealing with problems they are going to have both on and off reserve to “make them stronger people to stand up for their rights that they should have” (T5, p. 17) and “to correct what is going wrong” (T5, p. 17). One participant suggested “if a student hasn’t learned, the teacher hasn’t taught” (T5, p. 5, 6). One participant expressed a significant concern in education: “Hopefully we haven’t done anything to hold them back in making those transitions from following directives to making healthy choices” (T2, p. 12). In their conversations, the Aboriginal students expressed the ways they are being held back that includes teachers not understanding their needs.

The theory by Kushner and Norris (1980) reminds us that “negotiation, particularly in politically sensitive areas of study, can be thought of as taking place across ethical space...there is then an argument for using control procedures to equalize the relations and to encourage unfettered interaction” (cited in IPHRC, 2004, p. 43 ). There were politically sensitive areas in this study. It involved provision of a funding base to include all Aboriginal students. First Nations can negotiate education of their students with federally-based funds, but Métis and off reserve First Nations peoples were under the umbrella of the school’s provincial funding and without equal opportunity to negotiate educational needs.

I searched for paths of resolution in each group for signs of willingness to adjust and make reciprocal agreements. Participant responses to the fourth question, “What
would encourage you to participate in curriculum design at/with the secondary school?” is where I heard dialogue concerning relationships and recognition of skills, abilities, and talents. The fifth question “What suggestions do you have for this secondary school and the Aboriginal community on this issue of curriculum design?” set the arena for contributions and discussions that evolved into the ‘language of possibility.’ This last of the five questions was important, but difficult. It assumed the school would seriously examine the possibilities of participant words.

Each participant received a copy of “Introducing The Medicine Wheel as a Model to Encourage Discussion” (Appendix A) with samples of questions that they might ask themselves in each quadrant regarding their personal and individual perspectives of Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action in education before participating in their respective groups. The questions contained in this document were intended to prepare participants and guide them towards deeper reflections in building the “act of dialogue” (Ermine, 2005, ¶14), to present a “language of possibility” (ibid, ¶4). There was success in gathering voices for dialogue in ethical space.

Engaging in the ‘Language of Possibility’: Opportunity to Speak

Dialogue in ethical space enables exploration across divides and search for resolutions towards negotiation. The students were enabled to address their beliefs, their knowledge and intents, within their own cultural space knowing they were contributing to understanding ethical space as were each group of participants. There are indications of knowledge gaps, such as the following:

I don’t know what all the standards or guidelines are in place right now but my guess is not too many are developed – maybe in this school, well I am sure in this
school there are more but my guess in other schools, my guess there aren’t very many (T4, p. 4) … “I don’t know how all that works. But to have it so that they are aware of it. You know what it is. Even curriculum.” (T4, p. 6) The Board of Education and the Ministry of Education have documents that determine Aboriginal students as First Nations peoples, thereby addressing one segment of the Aboriginal population. Not all Aboriginal students are under negotiated federal dollars. Aboriginal students who are not First Nations are under provincial funding guidelines and are overlooked in the planning equation for equality of services.

There is a connection between fluidity of responses in ethical space and quality of relationships in power structures when oppressed voices are given the opportunity to speak (Ermine 2000, 2005). An analysis of transcripts determined that the teachers, decision makers, and Aboriginal leaders controlled the Talking Circles without prodding. They had the most combined confidence of knowledge and were most inclined to offer responses to the questions with limited guidance. They shared personal knowledge of the educational system as well as beliefs, values, and assumptions. The Aboriginal students and one set of Aboriginal parents did not have the same advantages. The words of the latter group were interspersed with long pauses and I found myself offering examples of scenarios and information to assist their responses, particularly to Question #3, “What standards, or guidelines, must be in place for an effective education program that will meet the needs of Aboriginal students?” The oppressive nature of the education system was ingrained through historical acts of a dominating culture whose intent was to assimilate. I connected with participant confusion and lack of understanding about the implications of this question. The history of provincial education lacks an inclusive
community design without input of Aboriginal peoples. Residential school experiences suppressed the ability of Aboriginal peoples to believe their contributions were valid against mainstream initiatives. There was consistent participant reference to the Native Resource Room as an accepted cultural design and perhaps a signal of hope for change.

Aboriginal parent fears. In this study there were no respondents who experienced residential school attendance. Not all parents experienced residential school. One participant explained the dilemma of Aboriginal parents who did attend residential school and the generational impact: they do not have intrinsic motivation to be involved in the education of their students:

Just living the whole time there, they lost so much. They lost examples of parenting. They lost examples of choices options ... You have to do this. You have to do it this way. It’s not that they can’t think. It’s just hard to make the jump for some, in some situations. (T4, p. 16)

Participating Aboriginal parents had fears about the education of their students. They had a level of confidence in this school that was revealed through their discussion on the programs of study and services for their students in the school under study.

This is one of the better places to come with a parent or I’ve heard that they’re more comfortable in this school. So that’s a good thing, I think part of it is they know what they lost and they’re trying to reclaim that back because of these services and because they have the Native studies here – language and history. (T4, p. 8)

Parents were undergoing a transition and their students were “exposed to that trauma and that when you are exposed to that it starts to affect you” (T4, p. 14).
But I mean with the parents themselves, if they were raised in the Residential schools could they come here and tell them what would work? I’m not saying they don’t know about that. It’s just because they were raised in that system and lived in it. (T4, p. 17)

I am reminded of one student’s comment and the choice not to include the voice of residential school students. There are more clues about how the parents perceived the Native Resource Room:

I’m sure they feel just like: “You are here! Thank God!” Yeah, that whole business and then coming up with solutions about working these things out and then you have someone in the school who can keep an eye on how things are going or if its there - discouragement? It’s just like: “Okay, remember this is what we’re doing.”

The parent does that too, but sometimes a person [who is] not related helps. (T4, p. 7)

Parents have been affected by the foreign system of residential school that exacted a price in return for education: confidence in parenting and sharing knowledge and skill.

The questions encouraged responses to sensitive dialogue to reveal knowledge. The questions were managed through the culturally described procedures contained within the protocols and processes of the Aboriginal Talking Circle. The order of the questions was addressed in the nonlinear response required within the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1). When equality is lacking, there is room for fear and negative experiences, such as experienced by a segment of the Aboriginal population who were in residential schools and were conflicted with being traditional or following the ways of the “Church.”
This conflict created a fear that is slowly being resolved as young people are reviving traditions that were nearly lost by talking and going to Pow Wows.

But, they know what they lost and they’re trying to reclaim that back. Yeah, I guess. Yeah. It might be. I think what’s happening is the youth are trying to encourage the parents and the Elders by being... they’re happy to see. It’s like a flame being lit again and they’re happy for that. But see in our First Nation there was a big fear between the Church and the traditional. Some of them still have a lot of that fear. On one hand they are very happy that young people are learning that but they don’t want to say too much because all this: “You’re going to burn in hell.” So, it’s like their struggle what’s going on and yet on the sidelines they’re very happy. You may speak to other parents. They may be a bit leery of other elders. So, we’re still like in transition although they’re getting past that... It’s very strongly based on the church before and you really didn’t talk about any of this stuff. Like, that was in the 80s. Now you got these young people. They didn’t live that. They’re coming out. They’re talking. They want to go to Pow Wows. They want to do this stuff. (T4, p. 14)

The teachers discussed their general assumption about why parents did not visit the school: “because some of them had a bad experience at school” (T2, p. 31). They did not connect Aboriginal experiences with Residential school, but admitted “Teachers have done a poor job of connecting with parents of Aboriginal students – we don’t see enough at parent/teacher interviews” (T2, p. 30). Their solutions were to avoid confrontational events. Parents would be invited to share in student success rather than shortcomings in a
student's studies (T2, p. 31 - 33). It was noted that the newly furnished parent meeting room was not being used (T2, p. 31).

**Aboriginal student experience.** I felt the frustration of the Aboriginal students as they asked the question why the Native Resource Room was closed. They were challenged to succeed and they met those challenges with outstanding success when they had the supports they needed. How could they answer questions that would affect their future when they had worked hard to demonstrate what they needed and then these resources were taken away? Prior to the interview questions, the students pointed out that a number of computers, tables, and chairs that were originally in the room were missing when they returned in the new school year. They questioned why the furniture that was provided for their use was removed without their knowing. It was difficult for Aboriginal students to express their feelings knowing that they were being recorded. I used clarifying statements to understand what the students were expressing. They shared their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences knowing there "would be someone who might know the words" (T1, p. 38) and "translate them back" (T1, p. 38). The term used was "sugar-coat it" (T1, p. 39). Aboriginal student discourse was a convoluted exercise in ethical space. They designed their words carefully. It was important that their needs and their views about teachers and the school environment were clearly understood. Their contributions were important as they desired change to the school curriculum.

With student participants, I took on more of the role of co-constructivist than of principal investigator. I lived with the students in the Native Resource Room and together we approached the interview as an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of events. The following is an example of one student discursive dialogue involving parents and
Elders. I used the word complain to express how students brought forward their concerns. The students and I worked through a pedagogical exercise to co-construct succinct meaning to the word 'complain'.

**Vandek:** But maybe encouraged to complain

**Catherine:** Well, not so much complain, but learn how to...

**Mader:** Speak up.

**Catherine:** How to speak up, how to make a point.

**Mader:** Use the freedom of speech

*Pause*

**Catherine:** Cause you's would know how to talk to parents, how to talk to Elders, eh?

**Student:** Ah huh (nodding)

**Catherine:** Think your teachers would be able to... could help you to do that, to go back to talk to parents, back to Elders, back to the Education Directors?

**Mader:** Uhmmmm...teachers? It's like... these teachers?

**All:** hih (smiling)

**Mader:** Well, they would probably have to. Well, not have to. But, some of them, well, they would.

**Vandek:** They would probably only communicate, like, on a professional level. Whereas if you have students they could connect with, like, the Elders on a personal level because they would know them and their parents. So you might get your point across better if you know them personally, 'cause you would know how to get it across.
I rejected the word complain and the students followed suit as it was not the appropriate route to reach parents and elders. The students know the cultural formula for personal communications. They have an understanding of themselves and the meaning of specific words in the wrong mouths could wrongly fail to reflect who they are. I wonder how evaluations of special needs and tests added to this confusion of words to label certain students.

*The Native Resource Room.* The Native Resource Room filled a void for Aboriginal students. It was supported by Aboriginal parents. In this room, the Aboriginal students conducted social activities that included community meals, arts, crafts, and ceremony. Resource peoples from the Aboriginal community were invited to conduct presentations on issues that concerned Aboriginal peoples. Is this concept of need understood by the educational system?

The students agreed that the Native Resource Room addressed several needs and allowed cultural expression as they did their work. They admitted they were monitored and expected to complete their daily classwork. Their discussions suggested that in the Native Resource Room they had a sense of belonging and equality. They doubted that the same atmosphere of the Native Resource Room could be created in the classroom (T1, p. 24-27).

Miss, the one thing feels like it’s yours. Like when you come in here. You feel like you’re, like not in your classes. Like it’s awful sometimes, like it just gets on your nerves. It’s [pause] you don’t feel the same. Like you come to one of your other classes. Like in here it’s just quiet. (T1, p. 25)
Specifically, what was in the Native Resource Room that allowed students to feel at ease? Some of the basics were covered: an Aboriginal understanding figure in the room who understood where the student came from, who knew the background of their community, what it had been through, as well as the parents, so that the students did not have to do a lot of explaining (T4, p. 10). This role model allowed a slow build up of trust with gentle questioning, and understanding that student realities involved events before they left home and which affected them when they were in school. Some of those events involved their parents and the students not being able to talk to them. Aboriginal students have issues where they do not require typical, mainstream, formal solutions, but require a place to drop in and work at solutions in a different way and in relation to their culture. It might be by burning sage, sitting quietly, or observing other activities. The student feels support and decides: “Okay. I’m going to stay in school. I’m going to do all right” (T4, p. 10).

*Native resources.* Solutions were offered in participant responses, such as the use of the Native Resource Room as a means of reaching across the cultural divide. I suggest caution needs to be exercised in expecting the Native Resource Room Worker to deliver services beyond the intended purpose and being all things to the school, Aboriginal community, and students. “This room, the liaison person or the coordinator of this room, could also be very key in implementing that, or having the information so the teachers know if they have a question about this, to go here” (T6, p. 18). The capacity of the Native Resource Room should not be assumed but be evaluatived activity to determine its future against such statements as:
So, this room when it opens is not to be just for Aboriginals but for all students to come to feel secure if they need a place to talk, and whatever, and other programs could – this could be used as another program for, any one, to be able to come and just feel comfortable. (T6, p. 20)

**Context**

In each respective group, education was explored with the initial guiding question: How do you define education? It was an important question for an opening or evocation where feelings and thoughts are opened to express the values, beliefs, and assumptions in education. This question helped open dialogue about the context of the school.

Definitions were not opposed. Participants built on one another’s words. The second question asked: “What meaning does education have for you?” Experiences were shared and relationships described. A picture of educational space emerged as history was revisited and compared. These first two questions were the easy questions. They established the context of each person’s realities, and revealed parameters, values, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge based on experience. The visions and meanings were revisited throughout the Talking Circle. Participants revealed frustration and confusion about the education system without prejudicial statements about the secondary school. Their dialogue was focused on the conditions of the school’s educational context.

What does the word ‘school’ mean to the participants in the study? All groups referenced it in their definitions as ‘one place where education took place’. In essence, it was the focus of this study to understand the school’s ethical space and there was not enough time in this study to fully describe the varied responses to question one: “How do you define education?” or question two: “What meaning does education have for you.”
There have been changes in the school. This study revealed an air of confidence and hope for more progress: to extend the ethical space. The words of the students qualified the extent of needs met and provided indications of the current description of ethical space. "We even [have] come a long way since grade 9 for...Natives. We have even bigger...we have more understanding of us... throughout the school. There’s almost more respect" (T1, p. 5).

Respect is one of the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers of the Ojibwa people. The value of respect was addressed often by participants of this study. How students were listened to and how they interpreted respect affected their suggestions for the school on how to strategically incorporate cultural perspectives. The participants evaluated respect by the way students were listened to, the way permission was granted, and how they were included and provided opportunities for involvement. When they were not listened to, they felt "frustrated" and "inferior" (T1, p. 30). The students associated respect with being listened to. Teachers were listened to and had "more say than you" (T1, p. 30). Students were sent to the office to "sit down and write on the green sheet" (T1, p. 30) and might not be given the opportunity to talk to someone. In the Native Resource Room, students were listened to without judgment (T1, p. 30). Students suggested that overall in the school, there was "almost more respect" (T1, p. 5). They admitted "there is more understanding of us throughout the school" (T1, p. 5). They expressed the need to feel "comfortable where we learn" (T1, p. 4) and "not feel trapped" (T1, p. 4). An example of feeling ‘trapped’ is "when you have to put your hand up and ask to go to the washroom" (T1, p. 4). This issue was also raised by the teachers (T2, p. 9, 10, 12).
Inclusion is a form of respect. In writing renewed curriculum, or designing new programs at the school, the students should be. “And that respect comes by involving them. And not having it fed down to them, but having them included in the creation of it” (T6, p. 16). Involvement of all groups of students is important. Students need an opportunity to verbalize what is important to them and express themselves no matter what group they are affiliated with.

I think that this idea of them making the distinctions between you know who’s who and-and all that kind of stuff. That’s self-perpetuated and that’s an important part of them understanding who they are. It’s that affiliation with a group. I don’t think that is a negative thing because their purpose in doing that has nothing to do with writing curriculum. Like that serves a different purpose I think that [is] what they do in terms of how they associate with different groups...But I think that even if we had a more inclusive curriculum, that “other” that other thing would still exist. (T6, p. 16)

It is important to demonstrate respect by involving Aboriginal peoples and identifying their experience and skills to understand the environment of their culture (T6, p. 13-19), and “what’s important to them” (T6, p. 13).

**The Market of Education**

The Aboriginal population is increasing and, therefore, school boards, employees, the province - everyone is trying to look at ways in how to tap into that market.

And it is a market (T5, p. 10)

Teachers have the role of teaching and delivering curriculum. One Aboriginal leader expressed the belief that “there’s a lot of guidelines in place that prevent the
teachers from teaching” (T5, p. 5). The teachers referenced past success of programs that implemented Aboriginal cultural programming: the Native Resource Room Program (T2, p. 24), Ojibwa language and Native Studies credits (T2, p. 24), excursions (T2, p. 19), hand drum making and its traditions as part of the music curriculum. This initiative was a collaborative activity with the wood shop class and First Nations peoples (T2, p. 24). Remembrance Day was another activity that involves First Nations Peoples (T2, p. 15). None of the participant groups refuted the value of these activities. Rather, there was hope that they would continue despite the understanding that funding issues with First Nations federal dollars and provincial dollars might not be continuous (T1, p. 25; T2, p. 18; T4, 1, 6, 9, 20; T5, p. 18). The hesitancy to make a reasonable statement was stated as a question. “I think it’s important we find solid on-going funding at this point? I don’t think anything does well that’s on temporary funding because then there’s no commitment” (T6, p. 18). From the point of provincial funding, a comment was made: “There’s less money now for certain things than there ever was before, so it’s about where are you putting the money” (T2, p. 13). One participant revealed one of the changes that occurred when extra dollars were available to promote equalizing opportunities:

Because I got funding [donations] for a Native person very easily, I am going to take the Native person. If a non-Native person might not have the money, I would have to go to a sponsor to ask for [matched] funding. So I decided that excursions will be half native and half mainstream from now on. And just to have that sense of inclusivity and sense of belonging is nice … that way there will be nice intercultural connections that will hopefully have impact. I am very careful now
that excursions cannot show unfair treatment – cross cultural experiences are
important ways for students to spend quality time together. (T2, p. 21)

First Nations Peoples negotiate with the Board of Education about the education of their
students. The market of education to address the needs of Aboriginal peoples is exposed.
Under the current political atmosphere, Aboriginal students are in the limelight of
education. I suspect Aboriginal students will feel a measure of discomfort.

The Ministry of Education and Training (M.E.T.) has identified Aboriginal
education as one of its key priorities, with a focus on meeting two primary
challenges by the year 2016 – to improve achievement among First Nation, Métis,
and Inuit students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
students in the areas of literacy, numeracy, retention of students in the school,
graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies. The Ministry
recognizes that, to achieve these goals, effective strategies must be developed to
meet the particular educational needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students.
(Aboriginal Education Office, 2007, p. 5)

One teacher questioned societal expectations: “What does society expect because
the expectations amongst different cultures are very different” (T2, p. 10). A teacher
explained the purpose of education through history “to train good little workers. And
then, they change them to good little citizens” (T2, p. 8). The Ministry of Education and
Training (1993) has addressed the dilemma: “Ontario’s school system has been and
continues to be mainly European in perspective. The prevalence of one cultural tradition
limits students’ opportunities to benefit from the contributions of people from a variety of
backgrounds” (p. 5).
Aboriginal student needs were discussed within the limitations of general needs of students of the school population or as individual mainstream needs (T2, p. 14). I sensed frustration of one teacher: “What the Ministry say,s we have to do as a formal institution and then try and adapt that to our needs as a smaller community that we are” (T2, p. 14). Another teacher produced the 1993 Ministry of Education and Training Guidelines and Policy document concerning Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equality and announced:

Learning for all is mandated in this antiracism document. MANDATED. So as professionals we should be reading them and reminding ourselves that WE don’t have a choice. So we have some belonging going on in the classroom? We actually do have to make sure there is that sense of belonging. (T2, p. 14)

There was an indication that there were not enough resources available to the school to deliver the mandates in education to meet the needs of all the students. There was a sense of frustration by the teachers as they attempted to grasp the realities of Aboriginal student need. “We are in this formal education that says ‘Thou shalt do this’ comes from the top down...so we have standards that were given... that we’re supposed to follow. Do they necessarily address everyone’s needs?” (T2, p. 12).

There was a definite gap in relationships with Aboriginal peoples and understanding expectations to meet Aboriginal student needs in the school. The doors needed to be opened more to invite Aboriginal peoples. One participant announced support: “They [Aboriginal parents] have a preservational duty” (T2, p. 28) to be involved with the education of their students. The rhetorical question was how can Aboriginal peoples overcome their restrictive beliefs in a top down education that mandates dominant culture directives? The teachers were trained to deliver a provincial
form of education that lacks the knowledge and historical experience to determine Aboriginal student needs. Can one school find solutions to its own situation and intent to ‘reculture’ itself to include Aboriginal voice and content? The reality is that many Aboriginal peoples see school as an institution and a place of authority where there is no choice (T3, p. 2, 5; T4, p. 3, 5, 6, 9). However, there are indications that teachers desire to meet the cultural divide. There are physical signs such as posters, books, photos and resource peoples that identify the presence of Aboriginal culture throughout the school in various locations at various times. The presence of a culture expressing specific needs and desire to learn is beyond the morals or principles of dominant culture. Ethical space demands transparency of a cultural divide to acknowledge intents and needs.

The bottom line is there are no promises for dollars to continue the demonstrated program of success initiated by this one school to simultaneously address all Aboriginal students. The only Aboriginal group who could negotiate funding and involvement for the education of their students were First Nations. Métis, Non-status, and Off-reserve peoples were expected to conform under mainstream initiatives. It was not difficult to see how the market was affecting Aboriginal student success for this school. The Aboriginal population in Canada comprised approximately 4%. At the time of writing this report, a formal voluntary self-identification project was underway. The numbers of Aboriginal students in provincial schools will reveal exponential expectations for Aboriginal communities across School Boards and Districts in Ontario. The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework document mentioned Aboriginal student needs but lacked knowledge of a workable paradigm or attached dollars to meet those needs.
Teaching: Bisahnyah and Elders

The connection for Aboriginal students from high school to higher education is not clear. Mader eluded to concerns that “Education in the future. I think we could do better. I mean if we want to educate, we have to get people to understand that it is easier to [educate] than learn” (T1, p. 3) and “You’re learning in school what you’re prepared to do at home” (T1, p. 13). There is a certain reality for Aboriginal students that speak of the limitations to go beyond what their community has to offer. Aboriginal student belief and confidence to enter and succeed in higher education is not impressive, as one participant relates:

I think the students should have the opportunity to work in a summer time some time and figure out, you know. Like on reserves you’re only limited to certain jobs and can’t get to know what other jobs are out there. And so, you know, they just hit what little jobs that they have there on the reserve anyhow. But that doesn’t give them a variety of work experience for something that they might want to do like forestry or fishing or computer tech you know. (T3, p. 4)


I come from a background of overt racism where ah the opportunities weren’t there. They are presented here, you know in grade 8 meetings. We ask the teachers to consult with parents about where, which level your child will be placed at the secondary level and their parents are coming from a tradition of where they’ve been corralled into this spot right? It’s tough to help them break
out... You’re not seeing them because there isn’t that deep rooted break out yet.

(T2, p. 17)

Further study in this area would give this school an advantage to understand how Aboriginal parent belief impacts student success.

Bisahnyah and leadership. The concept of the Ojibwa word ‘Bisahnyah’ was spoken by two Aboriginal leaders (T5, p. 2, 3). Briefly, it is about a manner of being told to stop, watch, and listen; it is a verbal command given by a respected teacher to students. ‘Bisahnyah’ is an important teaching in Ojibwa culture that has been lost. The question is how to revive its purpose and meaning into curriculum so that teachers can teach, gain the attention of Aboriginal students, and deliver the content that students need according to cultural understanding and importance. Through story, one participant shared this understanding of ‘Bisahnyah.’

I have to reflect back and maybe share a little story. I was recently at an assembly and I was speaking with this older woman, an Elder woman. We were talking about the things we need to do in our communities as leaders: how to get people to understand, how to get people to learn, and how to guide us along with the challenges that we’re faced with. We started talking about the young people and how they need to be a part of this whole process. How do we prepare them to become leaders in our community? I said “But our young people don’t listen anymore, they don’t hear.” She said: “Remember when you were a little girl? What did your Mom and Dad tell you? What did your grandma tell you?” And then, I couldn’t remember. She said: “Bisahnyah.” I started to laugh. I said: “That means ‘listen and just be quiet and listen’. Just sit there, be quiet, listen.” I
remember those words because I remember being told that many, many times when I was a little girl. If you acted out or if you got fidgety or whatever, it was, "Bisahnyah!" That meant be quiet, listen'. So time went on and when those older people seen that you were listening, then, you were allowed to do things. You were given that instruction to start doing things, and given that responsibility to do things. So .... that's what we learned as Aboriginal people... we had teachers back then. We had our parents, we had grandparents, we had aunties, we had Elders that taught us.... How do we teach Bisahnyah? ... To listen? How do we teach our young people to listen and to be able to speak at the right time instead of all the time just blurt out things without thinking? So I think we are at a stage in our life in our communities, maybe in this whole setting [which] maybe includes awareness so I reflect back on those times where I can remember being told, "Bisahnyah." And it isn’t done in a bad way you know. That was just the way it was. That’s just the way we were taught. (T5, p. 2, 3)

Another participant provided a clue as to what happened when the teachers of 'Bisahnyah' were replaced with a teacher from another culture and the traditional teachers were shut out from the educational system.

And it made it difficult and later on when you went to speak because you don’t have the right words when you went to school. I didn’t have the words to tell the teacher what I was feeling. Because I had this watch, learn, listen. (T5, p. 3)

I connected with this teaching about 'Bisahnyah' when the students struggled to make clear how they interacted with me in the Native Resource Room. The students agreed, “We were told to be quiet” (T1, p. 27) and they were quick to seek affirmation:
"But we listened, right" (T1, p. 27)? When I pressed them to explain more about what made them listen when they were told to be quiet, their responses were “Probably just you” (T1, p. 27); “If I seen you were teaching English, and that, I would listen. But I don’t know what it is. It’s probably…” (T1, p. 27); “I think it’s like your personality. It made us listen and…I don’t know” (T1, p. 28). I used another line of questioning to gain a clearer picture of what they were trying to express: “Do you think maybe the teachers need to learn something more, yet? More than what… they already have?” (T1, p. 28). This produced quick responses: “They need to have to understand like… how we think!” (T1, p. 28); “They can’t be so judgmental” (T1, p. 28). I associate Aboriginal people who have the necessary respect and ability to apply the cultural command to listen with ‘Bisahnyah’ as being endowed with cultural leadership skills that enable them to teach and be respected. The art of demonstrating reason is exemplified in the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) within the fourth quadrant. Can teachers learn the model to teach with ‘Bisahnyah’?

Elders. Elders are mentioned in every group as having a place in this school. “Elders are willing to teach the old way” (T1, p. 16). “They know what to teach…they know how to teach what they’re teaching…the teachers learn how to teach but the Elders know how to teach. They [Elders] know what they’re teaching” (T1, p. 17). The students suggested Elders would be useful to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students for discussion groups comprised of approximately six members. The need to discuss maturity and obstacles in learning, personal hobbies, and priorities (T1, p. 5) was indicated as a way to connect with Elder knowledge. The words of Elders are needed in curriculum (T2, p. 12; T3, p. 15; T4, p. 7, 14).
Elders have been through a lot. They have a lot of knowledge. We could come up with all kinds of ideas and then they see something and “Wow, we forgot about that!” So I think sometimes in terms of hiring...and that whole thing...curriculum, it’s important that Elders are involved somehow. (T4, p. 7)

The connection between ‘Bisahnyah’ and the Elders begs responses to another question needing to be asked: Would teachers consider learning ‘Bisahnyah’ from Aboriginal Elders as a means of learning how and what to teach Aboriginal students?

Curriculum

The Ministry of Education and Training Document (1993) provided a definition of the word curriculum. It suggests the need for inclusive and participatory approaches in its development.

The term “curriculum” encompasses all learning experiences the student will have in school. These include such aspects of school life as the general school environment, interactions among students, staff, and the community, and the values, attitudes and behaviours conveyed by the school. (p. 13)

According to the M.E.T. (1993) document, community is a component of curriculum as well as the interactions which must include personal ideals of teachers as matched with school. The implication of this understanding is revealed when the teachers shared an exercise they were involved in about the concept of ‘enduring learning’: “things I think are going to be long lasting. That is the enduring learning. There might be conflicts in our educational ideas” (T2, p. 2).

There may be a gap between institutionalized and personalized education (T2, p. 13), but there must be encouragement for students to understand and deal with their
exposed experiences. Are there values, attitudes, and behaviours in the school that do not correlate with Aboriginal student aspirations? One teacher spoke passionately of her disappointment to see Aboriginal students not involved in the academic classes, and a number of questions were raised:

Which cohort should a student be with? What standard for excellence relating to knowledge and skills will a student have to show? What responsibility for their education should a student assume – which classroom will have the atmosphere regarding behaviour that will allow a student to be in the environment that suits those best? (T2, p. 17)

Arguments for and against applied and academic levels of learning suggest paths of success to meet requirements for higher learning. Should cohorts be culturally focused as Aboriginal or with specific goals and requirements regardless of cultural background?

- “The cohort is strong, and they’re learning a whole bunch of other skills like time management and organization, how to use resources effectively. Spending intellectual time with students who think deeply, who think beyond themselves.” (T2, p. 17)

- “In applied classes, teachers often waste sacred class time dealing with behavioural issues…not expecting homework to be done, or accepting an artificially low-standard of work from these students.” (T2, p. 17)

- “The curriculum and teaching assessment strategies are so different in applied compared to academic. In applied do we really give them as much homework? Are we as rigorous – are we really preparing them for College or are we just giving them a brick wall when they get there?” (T2, p. 19)
Aboriginal leaders are aware that Aboriginal students are not challenged or invited to reach their potential in academics and sciences (T5, p. 4). The concern is not an isolated or unknown issue. The school staff is aware that students are not taking routes in higher education:

I come from a background of overt racism where the opportunities weren’t there. They are presented here in grade 8 meetings. We ask the teachers to consult with parents about which level your child will be placed at the secondary level and their parents are coming from a tradition of where they’ve been corralled into this spot. (T2, p. 18)

If Aboriginal parents have no experience in academic levels of education, how can they advise their students? Who can help Aboriginal students with cultural, social, emotional, and financial support?

It has been 14 years since the Ministry of Education and Training (1993) released their document on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards. It connected exclusion as cause for student low self-esteem and inappropriate placement. The following statements exemplify the inequities:

Moreover, exclusion of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups constitutes a systemic barrier to success for students from those groups and often produces inequitable outcomes for them. Such inequities have been linked to student’s low self-esteem, placement in inappropriate academic programs, low career expectations, and a high dropout rate. (p. 5)

Teachers at this secondary school took a number of initiatives to creatively incorporate Aboriginal interests in curriculum and have supported Aboriginal student initiatives. In
one year of activity, the Native Resource Room demonstrated the capacity to address issues with Aboriginally-designed solutions and lent support to teachers desiring to increase Aboriginal voice and content in curriculum. However, a cautionary note was presented in recognition of the education system's historic approaches to dominant cultural curriculum: "I think it's really important to get a lot of this information across via a culture bearer," (T2, p. 25) and

As long as it is genuine experiences. We have to guard against tokenism and the 'Pan Indianism' and all these superficial things that say "Okay, Good. Done." We’ve covered that in 5 whole minutes. There has to be culture there...someone who is incredibly wise regarding culture and knowledgeable and not just anyone because they could do much more damage. You should just leave it alone if the right teacher is not available. (T2, p. 28)

There was highly satisfying success in improving low self-esteem and decreasing dropout rates at this secondary school level that was described as phenomenal by the school's leadership. However, career expectations and placement in academic programs still needed to be addressed. There was recognition that an expanding partnership with stakeholders that include Aboriginal community, Elders, and parents could address the additional knowledge required to assist students to address long-term career opportunities.

**Phenomenon**

A phenomenon is an occurrence which is unusual. When two cultures look across a cultural divide they will find phenomena that cannot be explained from their perspective. The power struggles between the two cultures affects relationships in
education. Participants revealed sensitivities in this school that were not addressed and that were rooted in history. Aboriginal students in this study assumed their only role was to attend school (T1, p. 35). Despite the inadequacies in addressing Aboriginal student needs, the school leadership determined a ‘phenomenal’ achievement in increased attendance and marks. This section discusses the school’s artificial environment, the Native Resource Room and provides a meaning of community from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples. This section seeks to create greater meaning of the investments Aboriginal peoples have in education.

_Educating Students in an Artificial Environment_

“Why do we still have to be so regimented in order for our education to give us all the nice things that we said we’d like it to do? Freedom, empowerment, and reaching our potential” (T2, p. 10). The environment of the school is a reflection of its purpose.

“Education means to me learning all about the hidden curriculum in a very artificial environment that is a very small scale world” (T2, p. 9) and “sometimes it’s been very box like and that’s been difficult” (T2, p. 9). Is education about “preparing them for what the expectations will be from an employer … in contributing members of the workforce… and of our society” (T2, p. 9), the needs of higher learning institutions (T6, p. 5), or teachers’ needs as they work within their own confines of “cost and time issues” (T1, p. 11)?

What are the messages of intent when discourses and scholarship are grounded in Euro-western policy and the English language? It would be a revealing and, perhaps, a contentious prospect if Aboriginal students were given permission to assess their realities of their education. The art of analysis and debate is consistent with higher learning
initiatives. However, teachers who lack teaching experience to address cultural realities may already be unqualified to lead Aboriginal students beyond the walls of the secondary school. It is then assumed that the educational system as a top down mandated enterprise will not easily give in to the demands of Aboriginal peoples for an education to meet their needs. The exchange for knowledge is dangerous when the grasping hold is about Aboriginal claims as first inhabitants.

Individuals within the society may recognize the systemic flaws latent in the body of Western knowledge and aspire to check the inequities that colonial discourse creates, but the forged systems that uphold the knowledge system have an embedded doctrine that is largely resistant to resistance itself...These discourses portray Indigenous Peoples as impervious to the processes of colonialization and imperialism. The danger with such messages of Indigenous acquiescence portrayed by dominant discourses is that they derail larger issues of Indigenous People’s political, economic, and historical claims to identity, land, and intellectual and cultural property rights. (IPHRC, 2004, p. 19)

Aboriginal students determined knowledge sets that have been passed down through the ages. Their ancestors designed a way of living that complemented the harmony and balance of the Earth’s existence (T1, p. 2, 8, 13, 14). The silent battle was to maintain a preferred way of life but understand and use the educational system as offered through mainstream society. How the system delivered education, how knowledge was used, and how Aboriginal students were perceived as learners, were contentious issues. There was the sense that the system did not reflect equality across cultures and the students talked about their acts of resistance to the curriculum. Resistance to be involved
in education was a useful tactic to maneuver through an ‘artificial’ context that was deemed foreign and unrealistic. Aboriginal students in this school found a place in the heart of the school through the Native Resource Room Program where they could be themselves, have a sense of belonging, and seek strategies for success in academics.

*The Native Resource Room*

This room has been a phenomenal start. I think the support of the room had been a phenomenal support. Because it’s come from so many different places. The support came from some unexpected places. You know, and it came together. I think it came together for purpose and reason. (T6, p. 18)

The school’s struggle was to establish funding for the Native Resource Room:

Everyone knows about this room. The Ministry [of Education] does I know through [the Principal’s] efforts, through the Tribal Council’s lobbying with the Aboriginal branch. That would be all the way up and prior to the Aboriginal branch. It was like the Ministry of Education regular branch. The FN [First Nations] Chiefs know about this room. It’s been promoted at a lot of functions. The Board Trustees are aware of this room and how wonderful it is and trying to secure the funding. (T6, p. 19)

A parent shared her belief that the service found in the Native Resource Room was beneficial.

It’s been a real benefit to my three children that have come to the school… I think just feeling a *part of* the school… cause my children have gone to other schools too. They felt really comfortable here too. So, I think that was part of the reason – big part of the reason, and to be able to talk with you Catherine, too. I know my
daughter mentioned that...just to have that peace, where they feel comfortable. I just hope it continues. This whole program – this service continues. (T4, p. 9)

The Native Resource Room served the purpose of establishing freedom of expression and generating ideas and strategies that were encouraged in education. When Aboriginal students did not feel free to express their perspectives, with cultural initiative, throughout the school environment, with peers and teachers alike, there were inequities. The students referred to the Native Resource Room as a place where they felt comfortable (T1, p. 4, 12, 26). When parents discussed the room in relation to the question “What meaning does education have for you?”, they used the words: “comfortable.” “being at ease” (T3, p. 3), and having “a sense of peace” (T4, p. 9). The words they used were evidence of having a sense of place and ‘belonging.’

Well, what meaning does education have for Aboriginal students? I think for my children...I think having this Resource Room. Like, they’re coming in the school and they’re feeling more comfortable you know, like, they’re more at ease. They can go to their classes and they’re doing excellent in school. (T3, p. 3)

Vandek experienced the room as ‘comfortable.’ “It doesn’t feel like you are at school.” and then clarified: “Well it does. But it doesn’t have that feeling like the classrooms” (T1, p. 26). One student expressed the idea of belonging as “You are more at home. [There is a] more ‘at home feeling’ in this room - more than the other rooms” (T1, p. 28). Home is expressed not as an individual’s place of residence but as the collective feeling of being in a place where there is that sense of belonging.

The Native Reserve Room had symbolic meaning for the students. It was a place familiar to them where they could look outward from themselves, collect and exchange
their thoughts from one to another, discuss the school environment, determine learning strategies, and examine their right to express their cultural knowledge, educational goals in their own language, and atmosphere preference: “There’s no other room in the school like this one” (T1, p. 26). Guadalupe’s (1996) case study on diversity reflects cultural group gatherings as a search: “understanding about other ways of looking at the world and about other definitions of success” (p. 65). Ermine (2005) is more specific:

The indigenous concept of community and its epistemological underpinnings represent spaces from which it is possible to re-theorize the universal and legitimize models for ethical social relationships that are inclusive... These are spaces constituted by discourses in Indigenous languages, worldviews, and community aspirations for an ethical order in society. (¶11)

There was evidence of discomfort at the point of the cultural divide. Mader compared the Native Resource Room with the school classrooms and explained: “You wouldn’t be able to speak freely, like the average Aboriginal person says, in there” (T1, p. 26). Students worked at explaining the difficulties they had in expressing themselves outside the room.

Student: I don’t know. When I am with my Native friends we just like... talk about - I don’t know- anything. With my other friends, it’s just like weird. You can’t talk to them about stuff like that because it’s like you got “Oh my God! That is so brown!” I mean, sure. (T1, p. 28)

Vandek: Like you’re kinda crazy or something. (T1, p. 28)

The students felt the cultural divide. The impact of being labeled and then to try to understand the meaning of the label from the perspective of another culture had students
believing they were less than ‘average’ and ‘crazy’, unable to “speak freely” and that conversations across cultures is ‘weird.’ I empathize with these students. My experiences in education at their age were similar and it hurt my identity as a ‘thinking and social human being’: to think I was not capable of proving myself with equality in mainstream education. I sensed the student’s frustration that their contributions left them feeling they had nothing to offer in their mainstream environment.

The Native Resource Room is an extension of home and community. It is an authentic environment in the middle of this secondary school. Community is a term analogous to home and is a piece of the puzzle to understand Aboriginal resistance in education when feelings of belonging do not exist. One participant expressed an understanding of this conflict: “What we are talking about relates to an intercultural conflict, a cross-cultural conflict. People of two cultures are liminal, at the threshold, and learned early that there are two different ways to behave: one at school, another at home” (T2, p. 18). There are discomforts that Aboriginal students experience in the classrooms and hallways of the school outside of the Native Resource Room.

Aboriginal community

To better understand collective ownership, clarity about “community” in the Indigenous context is helpful. The Indigenous community represents the synthesis of many peoples’ search for knowledge at the juncture of physical and metaphysical realities. The knowledge of many people developed through this process of experiencing totality, wholeness, and inwardness, effectively created a unified consciousness that transformed the collective into a participatory organism known as community. In doing so, the community, through its
membership, became empowered as the ‘culture’ of accumulated knowledge. The people became the community, and the community became the worldview. The knowledge of the people was the glue that held the community together and molded the ethos that the people would live by. (IPHRC, 2004, p. 29)

The school was described as just an “institution” (T2, p. 2, 4) with “walls” (T6, p. 9) where authority exists. Another teacher suggested the school as being a building – a technical aspect in which education occurs. “The building is just a vehicle for their journey. It’s just a place they come” (T2, p. 12). Maslowe’s Heirarchy of Needs include food, shelter, love, acceptance, and belonging. “If that [sense of belonging in the building] doesn’t exist, I don’t think we are gonna meet their [Aboriginal student] needs (T2, p. 14). “How can we ever set standards and guidelines to meet a need of we don’t know what the need was?” (p. 14). A belief was shared that was based on research by Hallowel (2002) that students who have a strong sense of connection simultaneously at home and at school, tend to lead happier adult lives (T2, p. 13). The story concerning Cree students established connections about experiences of Aboriginal students who were not afforded a place to belong in their environment of study:

I went to elementary school across the field from Shingwauk Residential School which is now Algoma College and I remember those - there was two or three or four kids in every class. They split them up, alright? And some went to one school and others went to different schools and they were from the far North of Northern Ontario. And I think the big failure was that there wasn’t a sense of belonging. They were plunked in, dropped in. We saw those kids from 9 until 4 o’clock in the
afternoon and then they went back to Shingwauk College. There was never a sense of belonging at our school. (T2, p. 19)

When concerns were raised about Aboriginal culture, one participant reminded the group that Aboriginal students spent the greater amount of their day in school:

Just because you move off the reserve doesn’t mean you will lose your teaching or practice all your traditions. But if it is going to be discouraged in the place where you live most of your day! I think we have a problem. (T2, p. 17)

The majority of the Aboriginal students were bused to school. One group of First Nations students were bused exclusively for their students. Other students were bused along with non-Aboriginals. At times, there were conflicts between the two cultures. For some students, the trip was an hour long. When figuring the time it takes for students to struggle with homework assessed with mainstream evaluations, the days are long. What intrinsic motivations were instilled in Aboriginal students to succeed in their education when they are dealing with suspected racism of teachers and students against Aboriginal students?

There are consensual, accepted, and inclusive processes in building Aboriginal community. I assert that Aboriginal participants could not predict what standards and guidelines were needed in the education environment because they could not envision the whole school as a ‘community.’ Knowledge ‘of the people’ holds a community together. Ermine (2000, 2005) suggests knowledge as ‘participatory’ and of the people rather than several, “individual” (T2, p. 14) or “top down” (T2, p. 12). It would make sense then that the first step is to “reexamine again what needs need to be met” (T2, p. 14).
One participant reflected on education as a Métis describing the importance of identity:

I grew up knowing that I was Métis, and that was important in my house. It was important to my mother and I knew some of that versus... my father, whose parents were first generation from Scotland. And it was important that I know I was Scottish and it was important that I knew *those* traditions. When I went to school that didn’t matter. It didn’t matter that I was Métis. It didn’t matter that I was Scottish. It didn’t matter, how I celebrated some of those traditions as a person...that didn’t matter as a student. And sometimes I wonder had it mattered and had I learned more about it then, outside my home, if it would have changed who I was as a person. If it would have changed my values... or changed who I was... or how I related to things...It just... it never came up at school. It just didn’t come up at school. It just didn’t. There wasn’t a place in school for that. And so when I started looking at these questions, I thought, I wondered, if it would have been different, if I would have learned more as I was growing, about what it meant to be Métis, or what it meant to be Scottish...if that would have made a difference. (T T6, p. 7)

Insight about the difficulties Métis people have to assert their culture as viable and active was shared:

But it’s really hard to get your Métis community to come together as one if you don’t have a huge organization to help them because they’re so spread out. They’re more competitive with each other, with the community that they’re living in. So that’s how the Métis children when they’re coming into the school have an
altogether different problem because they’re segregated from the non-native and from the Native and they just don’t fit!...I think I spent my whole life walking that proverbial fence between two cultures and not fitting on either side of it. I’m that peg that just didn’t fit. I’ve been on that fence! I know who I am and proud of whom I am as an Aboriginal person. But I was mainstreamed at a very young age and I don’t know my culture as well as I should. And where do I fit in? In the whole scheme of it – and most Métis people don’t. Because they follow that mainstream path and they feel like they’re swimming upstream all the time. They never get a break. It’s never an even flow. They’re fighting that flow all the time. (T5, p. 14)

This school community required inclusive, participatory, and supportive planning to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples. The ideal voices in ethical space might announce “This is their school. This is their program; you know it’s everybody’s place and, I think that has to be conveyed on a number of different levels” (T6, p. 14). The Native Resource Room embraced all cultures and identified First Nations, Metis, Inuit peoples as Aboriginal peoples in education.

**Resistance: Scaling Schism Tensions**

There were signs of resistance at this secondary school that affected relationships. Participants raised concerns about student options, about Aboriginal student behaviour, about words and their meaning, about power, control, authority, and ownership. I listened across the cultural divide with my own insights and perceptions. Aboriginal secondary students and their parents have grown accustomed to not being involved in the delivery of education or to aspire to higher levels. The effects of overt racism are embedded in the
history of education. It has been less than 60 years since Aboriginal peoples were allowed in the halls of higher education without loss of rights to inherent heritage. One participant expressed the impact of racism in education.

You’re not seeing them because there isn’t that deep rooted break out yet. This is your only option. This is your option. If you like that and that works for you... if that worked for you and that’s your path, cause, like, if you know you want to be a mechanic, then you don’t have to take the academic level. (T2, p. 17)

Ermine (2005) has his own words to describe the confusion and frustration for Aboriginal peoples who have grown accustomed to expecting inequalities in their lives.

"Eurocentrism, as a privileged and established consciousness, is the undercurrent that undermines and engulfs any attempts to build bridges for the effect of cross cultural understanding and ethical relations between Indigenous Peoples and the West" (¶9).

Black’s (2006) study implies the need for teachers to resolve the tensions of the cultural divide: “70 percent of minority students have high hopes for their future, but only 40 percent of their teachers believe these students will succeed” (¶7). How Aboriginal student behaviours are interpreted creates tension. When Aboriginal students resist curriculum it might be interpreted as defiance. Could the effort to engage in the ‘language of possibility’ and cross the ‘cultural divide’ offer alternative solutions to disciplinary action?

The Native student will do this part but he’s not going to do this other part. Well, my back goes up right away with that. Yeah, because if it’s a sense of defiance? That’s one thing. But if it’s not defiance, maybe it’s this culture. We don’t recognize the difference. (T6, p. 6)
Signs of resistance to address Aboriginal student needs are evident. The idea of implementing “the double standard, you know, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and a completely different set of needs on that basis alone” (T6, p.6), meeting needs beyond “the walls of the institution between specific hours of the day” (T6, p. 9)…“complicates things” (T6, p. 9). One participant provided an overriding argument based on facts:

The fact that one half of our population needs to feel as successful as the other two thirds, and I’m recognizing that they don’t feel that they have that equity? And space? Then, they need to design things – redesign things so that everyone feels that this is a space for them. (T6, p. 12)

**Dialogue and Discourse**

During the course of this study I discovered the words that have impacted resistance to develop relationships and suggest that changes can begin with being aware of the clues held in dialogue. To understand the dialogue of participants, it is necessary to explain the words in dialogue. “Dialogue is essentially a ‘conversation’ between equals and is therefore concerned with exploring the social constructs and inhibitions that affect communications” (IPHRC, 2004, p. 42). Dialogue consists of words and associated meanings. In research, a report of words requires an effective interpreter with cross-cultural interpersonal skills. I understand that discourse across cultures can be an intense and convoluted exercise. I have experienced how energy, respect, and willingness to investigate and relate the meaning of words can be a latent process. The students feel the negative impact when their contributions in the educational setting are rejected and disrespected not only by their peers, but also by their teachers. The usual learned response
by Aboriginal peoples is to not respond. Bell et al. (2004) determined Cree students used silence as a “defense mechanism” (p. 39) in response to assimilative tactics.

Dialogue is a subjective process that will be necessary in the successful creation of collaboration and partnerships within the ethical space. The successful creation of these endeavors will largely be determined by the participant’s interpersonal skills in the cross-cultural interaction. (IPRHC, 2004, p. 42)

There were words in this study that held clues about Aboriginal student resistance and their concerns about assimilative tactics.

**Words**

Specific words can be a clue to behaviours that resist action and thought. Words have a power of their own and can hinder intended meanings. Words are useful marks in research to exploring feelings of resentment, power, control, authority, and empowerment. The students identified situations related to negative feelings, such as feeling “trapped” (T1, p. 39), “frustrated” (T1, p. 39), “inferior” (T1, p. 39), being ignored and “not involved any more in your learnings” (T1, p. 39). “It makes me not want to come to school” (T1, p. 29); “That’s why I don’t like to go to school but I come everyday” (T1, p. 39). The students determined they should “feel comfortable where you learn and not trapped” (T1, p. 4). A participant from another group made this affirming statement “That’s what I do all day at this school is deal with feelings” (T2, p. 9). Other words that have connotations of power, control, and authority: ‘White’, ‘Indian’, and ‘our.’

Early in the group Talking Circle, one Aboriginal student explained the perceived situation for students: “White people have the power to erase any native or anyone else
for that matter. Erase our history. So couldn’t they erase our future? Either we do it and have no future?” (T1, p. 6). Other voices spoke the word ‘White’ with signs of discomfort: “right now we don’t fully adapt to... our...this learning style that the (throat clearing) White man...I guess... has (T1, p. 9). It’s like we too are being assimilated to learning the “White man’s way (T1, p. 32); “Sometimes that is such a bad word” (T2, p. 30). In another group, the word ‘Indian’ as used in the past history was understood by an Aboriginal participant as having current negative connotations (T6, p. 17).

The use of ‘our’ revealed that teachers have a deeper sense of ownership over all aspects of the school, education, work, and citizenship. References were made by the teachers to ‘our’ Aboriginal students (T2, p. 21), ‘our’ Aboriginal community (T2, p. 22), ‘our ‘Aboriginal heritage’ (T2, p. 39), and ‘our’ Aboriginal peoples’ (T2, p. 38). I was intrigued by the debate that followed one participant’s attempt to express a concern over the intended usage of the word ‘our.’ I recalled Ermine’s (2005) description of “cultural narcissism” as the “outward looking searching for power and control of what is other to it” (¶7) and “is largely incapable of envisioning and transforming beyond the confines of its constructed context” (ibid). An attempt to discuss the issue of the word ‘our’ was verified by other participants in the group, and a defending debate followed (T2, p. 29, 30).

I mean it’s about language you know. It’s about this school, you know. I mean language even...I just noticed today, too. The word OUR, I find is so colonial speaking about OUR Native students. OUR Aboriginal.... I hate that term. It’s very colonial as opposed to THE Aboriginal students of our – of this school-you
know. Just small little things like that – it ripples out, so... decolonization – call that reculturing our education. (T2, p. 29)

There was no conclusion, although the voice was accused of “mothering” (T2, p. 30). “I think we have to take ownership. And I think they are OUR students” (T2, p. 31).

I was the consistent and trusted figure in each group and needed to promote a ‘no judging’ stance in order to report the current landscape of ethical space. However, I questioned my own sensitivity to certain sets of words and realized they can be an indication of skill to participate in cross cultural interaction. As an Aboriginal person, I felt my own resistance to the conclusion of statements such as “We have to know what they want. We have to find a way to meet their needs within this society, because this is the society, rightly or wrongly, that they’re going to live in” (T2, p. 16). I decided to listen in quiet contemplation while I recalled my own initiatives to present myself as capable of working with children of another culture: I asked for an audience amongst the elders of their community and gained permission to work with their children. I found that understanding words in dialogue was helpful in understanding the ‘language of possibility.’

Dialogue is concerned with providing space for exploring the field of thought and attention is given to understanding how thought functions in governing our cross-cultural behaviour. It is a way of observing collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviours, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without realizing what is occurring. (IPRHC, 2004, p. 42)
Assimilate or Adapt

Historically, Aboriginal Peoples made attempts to design an educational partnership to meet their needs and to be involved in the future development of education. The meaning and understanding of the Two Row Wampum Belt (see Figure 2) and Covenant Chain failed as mainstream sought to apply assimilative tactics as a method to claim the land they discovered. The students, in their heightened awareness, questioned why they were expected to ‘adapt’ in order to meet mainstream’s guidelines for success. Driftwood raised an issue about a traditional way of learning. The ensuing discussion eventually led to the question “Why do we have to adapt? Is it because we are in the minority?” (T1, p. 9). One student explained that Aboriginal people were expected to adapt in order to get jobs. However, this student’s insight into the types of jobs available (i.e., cooking KFC chicken with a grade 12 diploma) did not match the culturally relevant education that he felt he should be receiving (T1, p. 10). Driftwood explained:

Like, go back to our culture and ways. I mean, traditionally, I think they said that the parents would let the children learn whatever they want. I mean, the children usually chose to learn from their Elders and everything....just walk off into the bush and learn how to survive and stuff. And why can’t we do that anymore? (T1, p. 8)

Driftwood’s query was based on the knowledge that “the teachers learn how to teach but the Elders know how to teach. They know what they’re teaching” (T1, p. 17). Another student asserted:

Say we are done school. Then we could go out in the real world as they like to call it these days, like cities, and skyscrapers and everything working in those
kinds of places and just want to get away and go live in the bush. At least you know how to catch animals: eat them; use them like, sell, trade, use the furs for goods, I guess... All that kind of stuff. (T1, p. 14)

This student talked about learning how to cook traditional foods that would be healthy for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal leaders related to the change of lifestyles and the health concerns, such as diabetes that are a result of adopting mainstream living (T5, p. 4, 5).

Mader voiced a sobering paradoxical question about the freedom enjoyed by Aboriginal students as a result of living in two worlds. “Wouldn’t it be considered a threat when we would have so much skill than we know what to do with? Democracy [is something that] turns on us” (T1, p. 14). A comment from another group suggested: “we’re expected to keep our culture to the side” (T2, p. 17).

Based on their experience in the school system, Aboriginal students had answers about how to make the educational experience better. They wanted to be involved in that process but needed to be assured of their equal voice. They were aware of the distractions of modern life and its technology. They were aware of conflicts in the school and the expectations that they adapt to an educational system that catered to the learning styles of the prevailing majority. They were aware of being a minority group due to their culture (T1, p. 9). Ethical space enables participants to become engaged in an empowering process. Dialogue in the classroom could become the conduit for cultural equity or the transmitter of archaic messages inviting resistive and negative clashes with claims for racism.
Impact of the Systematic Structure

Historically, Aboriginal students were not invited to provide input into strategies for their educational success. The Aboriginal students in this study would have preferred to make their suggestions for teaching improvements after they finished high school as they felt they might be treated differently in their current classrooms: “They [teachers] would probably be different in class... it would depend what you said about them, about improvement ’cause it would be a touchy subject, like, they will be all offended and mad at you” (T1, p. 38). The students desired not to offend or “insult” (T1, p. 37) their teachers by telling them what needs to be done to deliver a better education. Relationships were viewed by the students as a hierarchy of power. Teachers were the professionals, “authority figures” (T1, p. 37; T2, p. 16), with knowledge about teaching “You’ve been seeing them here for 5 years and you’ve seen them as authority figures. Like some people. I think it would be kind of weird just telling them what they should do. Like, they’re the professionals” (T1, p. 37). One student hinted that because of attempts to speak up, “I have gotten kicked out of all my classes this year and [now] I am in Oasis. The only one [class] I am in is with Mr. O [the Ojibwa language teacher]” (T1, p. 38).

I determined that relationships based on authority are sources of tension in this school. The intensity of relationships in this school depended on cultural interpretations of the spoken and unspoken word. However, there was progress to improve relations at different levels, such as between the School Board and the First Nations. There was no indication in this study that Métis peoples had the same intent of focus of education as a market. Métis people had no funding of their own. They fall under the provincial umbrella. The following comment establishes differences when First Nations people
apply their rights for funding with the federal government to access services from a provincially funded school.

For the past year and a half it's been really focused with increasing school board ties, relationships and just being a whole understanding of how they work, how we work. And now, we're almost at the point of having a look at success – student success prior to now it's been more [about] billing, getting the small details out of the way. But the partnership is there and, I think, the ties. (T6, p. 15)

Aboriginal leaders talked about how Aboriginal peoples need to be patient with the teachers as they are adults and it may take a while for them to relearn and teach Aboriginal students effectively. A long-term commitment was indicated through story: “When you are trying to teach adults. We're saying to teach children when they don't understand these children” (T5, p. 8). What might be the implications if Aboriginal peoples demanded all teachers to participate in an additional program of study in order to teach their children? Discussion in ethical space was about empowerment as “the new, previously oppressed or silenced voices enter the discourse” (Ermine, 2005, ¶17).

If people don't have access to education then they are really at a loss or cannot offer any control over their own life, their own destiny. If they had education they could continue to seek and take that journey. I think they may empower themselves...empowerment gives you empowerment” (T2, p. 5).

The paradox was Aboriginal peoples were unaware of their rights in education as a cultural group. It was obvious that the students were not connecting with the design of mainstream education, as one student proclaimed: “I don’t know why we need that education...it's not like you need grade 12 to do it ...you don’t need that education” (T1,
I
There was a definite level of dissatisfaction of education for Aboriginal peoples that appears in delivery of the curriculum.

**Determining the Paths to Resolution**

"I think we need a set of standards and guidelines that everyone can live with, that everyone understands, and I think that is missing. That’s one of the key components that’s missing in our education right now" (T5, p. 6). It was clear that participants were unaware of the standards, guidelines, and policies in education or the recent discussions for an Aboriginal Education Policy Framework in 2006 that led to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Education Policy Framework 2007. However, they did understand that funding to secure Aboriginal solutions in the successful education of their children was scarce. Funding was necessary to continue the Native Resource Program (T5, p. 15). There were parents who were "very fearful and very doubtful that anything would happen" (T4, p. 7) if they went to the school with concerns about their children. The teachers recognized this in their own discussions (T2, p. 29). The presence of the Native Resource Room Program has alleviated fears and assured Aboriginal Peoples that their students are progressing. Once the self-identification policy is implemented and completed, there should be data to devise a formula to study the extent of success for all Aboriginal students in this school. Formal reporting data was possible for First Nations students through the nominal role as a negotiation exercise with the school. What data was extrapolated was another concern. Will future data be another reflection of the pathologies in education for Aboriginal students? Will they be tested according to mainstream prerogatives or with Aboriginal concerns and initiatives for cultural derivations?
First Nations Peoples had concerns that their language, history, and rights would be asserted (T5, p. 7, 9, 12, 17, 18). They had the financial leverage to address their concerns. There is a First Nation seat on the District School Board and its committees: Special Education Advisory Committee and the Parent Council. There was no Métis or off-reserve First Nation seat (see Educating Together, 2003: A Handbook of Trustees, School Boards and Communities). Métis and off reserve status and non-status First Nation people felt they were lacking advocacy for their students (T5, p. 7). A clear picture of the educational experience of Aboriginal students was expressed:

When you talk about being educated at the community level, when you work with the Métis community they’re very widespread and most of them have been mainstreamed. So that’s a whole other different problem because even though they’ve sort of followed in the mainstream, we still don’t … still aren’t educated the same way as mainstream people. I had to follow a mainstream education - living off the reserve and having been educated in mainstream, I still am a visual learner. I didn’t change because I was in the mainstream education. And, our parents weren’t encouraged, when I was growing up to be involved. I found when my children went to school they had the same problem. They are being educated in the mainstream but they still have the visual learning experiences that I needed to learn. And, so my children and I, think it’s probably something part of who we are as Natives, as Aboriginal peoples, in the country that we have a different learning ability or a different learning curve, if you want to call it that. And so we learned from being visual. But it’s really hard to get your Métis community to come together as one if you don’t have a huge organization to help them because they’re
so spread out. Like, you know, they’re more competitive with each other, with the community that they’re living in. So that’s how the Métis children when, they’re coming into the school, have an altogether different problem because they’re segregated from the non-native and from the Native and… they just don’t fit! (T5, p. 15)

This participant relayed the organizational difficulties for Aboriginal peoples who live off reserve. These people are not addressed along with First Nations peoples, despite the same struggles to be recognized with the same needs for an education. Rather, they are placed in a position of being in competition. The problems of inequalities are not just between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, there is inequality among Aboriginal peoples.

Curriculum

This section highlights areas to be addressed in further dialogue: curriculum; reaching the Aboriginal community; addressing inequity; learning styles; and promoting Aboriginal people as resources and recognizable leadership.

There are concerns that speak of inequities of Indigenous knowledge that is not agreeable with Euro-Western beliefs, discourse, and strategies. There are Ministry guidelines that participants are unaware of: culture incorporated in curriculum (T6, p. 5); guidelines that include language (T6, p. 11); Aboriginal people to contribute to curriculum (T6, p. 11, 13, 18); and curriculum to match the need (T6, p. 18). The “inequities in the treatment of members of some cultures and races that have occurred as a result of inequities of power and privilege have often tended to be ignored” (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993, p. 7). When Aboriginal people are not included in
curriculum, there are inequities. The Ministry of Education and Training document includes curriculum in the following 10 major areas of focus on policies and implementation: Board policies, guidelines, and practices; Leadership; School-community partnership; Curriculum; Student languages; Student evaluation, assessment, and placement; Guidance and counseling; Racial and ethnocultural harassment; Employment practices; Staff development.

The arguments for equality in education that meets the needs of Aboriginal students at this secondary school are based on realities such as this participant testimony:

I think I spent my whole life walking that proverbial fence between the two cultures and not fitting on either side of it. I’m that peg that just doesn’t fit. So I’ve been on that fence! I know who I am and proud of who I am as an Aboriginal person. But, I was mainstreamed at a very young age and I don’t know my culture as well as I should. And where do I fit in? In the whole scheme of it - and most Métis people don’t. Because they follow that mainstream path and they feel like they’re swimming upstream all the time. They never get a break. It’s never an even flow. They’re going – they’re fighting that flow all the time. (T5, p. 14)

Three different approaches to address student needs were discussed: Compare needs with “all those other” and “assess compositional needs” (T6, p. 6, 8), connect needs to culture (T6, p. 6), search history for awareness and understand who had the most need (T6, p. 10). A final statement came from the Aboriginal leaders group:

So, let me design a curriculum, look at the students, they are the ones that know what they want and then see how we can make what their needs are to fit the
Which is going to take them further in their education rather than leave them struggling? (T5, p. 18)

**Reaching the Aboriginal Community**

Many parents lost decision-making and problem solving skills as a result of their attendance at residential schools. The students understand the complex value system of their parents and grandparents. The students understand the underlying emotions of their parents' struggles in residential school under a religious order. The students are the children and grandchildren seeking to revive the traditional values and lifestyles that were relegated as devilish and deserving of banishment to hell. The students know they would be the most logical choice to approach Elders and parents to attend interviews at the school (T1, p. 34). There are problems in Aboriginal communities. Transportation issues are a reality so that “even a visit once in a while from the school” (T3, p. 7) would be appreciated. There are benefits to understanding more about parents, Elders, First Nation, and Métis communities towards understanding Aboriginal student needs. Aboriginal parents and community members have knowledge of their students, their community, job prospects for the future, and ways of communicating. However, there are a few steps that need to be designed prior to sending school invitations to parents. One participant related that the school is “like some machine is out there just grinding” (T4, p. 19). This myth needs to be dispelled. Parents will need training and awareness of the system with its lines of authority, standards, guidelines, and policies, as well as funding realities. To begin this process, students will require the information to enable them to speak with their parents, elders, and other community members.
Addressing Inequities

I suspected Aboriginal students needed to be addressed as young adult learners. This study indicated support for this perspective from various participants. The students observed partisan treatment of themselves from their non-Aboriginal peers. The scenarios they presented were a reflection of questionable ethnocultural practices in the classroom and application of rules. Aboriginal students were unsure of how to raise their issues because teachers were seen as authority figures. Their stories indicated reasons for lack of attendance (Tl, p. 39, 40) such as: stereotyping, racism, disrespect for diversity, lack of participation, and inconsistencies in addressing racial conflicts. I examined the scenarios presented in the transcripts and suggested outcomes.

1. Language, words, and teacher response were three main concerns discussed by the Aboriginal students and their parents. Language was one element through which students expressed themselves (Tl, p. 29). In the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, when activity is lacking within a mixed group, there may be reluctance by Aboriginal students to share for fear of being judged by their peers.

2. Personal teaching and authoritative behaviours affect the generations of responses from Aboriginal students in front of non-Aboriginal students. “Cause all the Natives just sit in the back. And we put our hands up and we’re ignored. We’d yell at him [the teacher]...then he’d [teacher] come back” (Tl, p. 40). In this scenario, students gathered for support in order to gain the attention of the teacher. It sends the message to other students that Aboriginal students are aggressive when they are in groups and, when sitting apart, they lack assertive contributions.
3. Aboriginal students are the minority in this school. The students shared instances when a teacher stereotyped a student in front of other students. Where does the Aboriginal student go to address stereotypical remarks by an authority figure? The statements are short and given as off handed remarks: "[Name of Aboriginal student] is gonna go off on you cause I guess that’s how Natives are" (T1, p. 41). This scenario sends the definite message of cultural dominance to judge another culture and gives non-Aboriginal students confidence that this type of conversation is acceptable.

4. Stereotyping has a generating impact, such as this experience, when a teacher was present and the Aboriginal student was sure the teacher could hear the conversation and did not address it:

   And I have had a student that stereotyped me as well. I don’t do drugs and I don’t drink on weekends and one of the students said to me “I thought all Natives do that. [Name of aboriginal student talking] does drugs and stuff like that.” And I am like, “No, I don’t” and they’re, like, “Well, you’re Native. All Natives do drugs” and I was, like, “I don’t, though” and we had an argument. I don’t do drugs. And it was just frustrating for me because I am not like that type of person. (T1, p. 41)

5. Teachers who are not in control of the classroom but have authority. Sending an Aboriginal student to the office is an example of authority. The Aboriginal student senses that teachers have favourites and it is not the Aboriginal student. This Aboriginal student felt he was ‘kicked’ out of class for the wrong reason.

   Didn’t do anything. Like always, the [teachers] get you in trouble. That’s not worth getting into trouble for but what realizes what’s happens. There I go. Right
on. Good job. They [teachers] play favourites. It's stupid man. I'll be, everybody, whole class will be talking. I'll be in that class talking as well, but I'll be the only one to get kicked out. Everybody, the whole class will be yelling their whole heads off. Like, if I ask somebody for help in my work [the teacher says] “Get the hell out of here.” It's like [I say] “Hey, whatever, man.” (T1, p. 41, 42)

Being heard is a sign of engagement. A classroom that fosters a safe environment for learning is a sign that the authority figure in it, is respected.

6. Being heard and listened to are signs of engagement. Students objected to being sent to the office to fill out a 'green sheet' without opportunity to discuss the situation. The students questioned why teachers get to talk with someone and explain themselves but the students did not. The students associate respect with being listened to. The additional comment made was that in the Native Resource Room someone was always there just to listen and without judgment (T1, p. 30).

Learning Styles

“Everybody learns different and those needs need to be met differently” (T6, p. 4). There were questions such as the differences in the postsecondary setting, for Aboriginal students that might affect their education in high school (T6, p. 5), where they come from (T6, p. 6), their culture (T6, p. 6), and determining current success of Aboriginal peoples in their education (T6, p. 12). Aboriginal student learning styles are addressed differently in the community setting. Parental input might offer valuable insights.

My daughter was a hands-on learner and going into the school system that doesn’t always fit very well. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn’t but being able to
learn hands on and switch tasks without being reprimanded because styles of learning or the way things are taught. She couldn’t sit and listen to a teacher for a half hour straight because that was not her style of learning. She would doodle and then she would get in trouble for doing that. So, there’s got to be some accommodation or some more understanding about different styles of learning and nowadays with all the research that people have done... well surely to goodness they’re aware that there are different styles of learning. (T4, p. 2)

Further study is needed to understand and address the learning styles of Aboriginal students. This study opened discussion about the unknowns concerning ‘special needs’ and how the education system outlined its process and procedure when a teacher suspected a student was in ‘special need.’ Aboriginal peoples were unaware of their rights to be involved or how to assert their rights in a school board process to question the system that labeled their children as ‘special needs’ when they were not succeeding.

Utilizing Aboriginal Peoples as Resources

Aboriginal Peoples have a wealth of experiences to share. Throughout all transcripts, participants clarified their roles, identified themselves as resources, and demonstrated capacity to understand problems and determine solutions. They shared their experiences on teaching and offered their insights as Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents, and grandparents. In all transcripts there were suggestions that Aboriginal peoples held key answers about Aboriginal student needs in education. Those responses have been recorded and indicate the continued services offered through a Native Resource Program and an Aboriginal Traditional Mentor. Additional resources addressed were
Aboriginal Elders with traditional knowledge and recognized as Teachers by Aboriginal peoples. The arguments have been put forward to demonstrate the need for hiring of another Aboriginal staff person.

The students suggested a Native Planner for the district to help other schools implement what was started at this secondary school, and to ensure Aboriginal language was maintained (T1, p. 22, 23). This person can ensure "more input in the curriculum as to how it could be delivered to identify Elders, speakers, particular speakers or parents" (T1, p. 22). The students determined this might require a lot of work. They determined that the Native Alliance and First Nations communities need to be involved in planning details for this initiative (T1, p. 22, 23). Parents anticipated the need for a "trusted figure." a "Native person with status as a teacher or with the teachings" (T3, p. 11) such as a Traditional Teacher to be on staff and to assist with the process of curriculum development. There were guidelines in place by the Tribal Council to recognize and accept Traditional Healers (T4, p. 14) that the school may want to examine. It would be an asset if this person could lead in the manner of "Bisahnyah" as in the stories shared by Aboriginal leaders and alluded to by the students (T5, p. 2, 3; T1, 27, 28).

Aboriginal peoples were recognized as resources but they were not integrated into the school classroom because of the rules and regulations for entry as dictated by the provincial school certification process and Teacher's Union. Both of these barriers can and should be addressed by writing allies and/or Aboriginal organizations.

Leadership

There is a need for a process that will keep the spirit of engagement open as well as the doors of the school. Communications will be an important key in this endeavor. A
...
sensitive, trusting, and acknowledging partnership is required to continually set the design of inclusion to benefit all students with cultural needs. The school had the leader required to extend that type of relationship. Reference was made to the current Principal. There was hope and trust in that person: “So, now we are seeing some...more positive changes, like more, more positive for Natives because [of the Principal]” (T1, p. 5).

I’m involved in this focus group because I know this discussion is going to go somewhere. I am confident that our leader is going to take Catherine’s information and use it. This is not going to be snubbed or snuffed; otherwise, I wouldn’t spend these 3 hours. We can move mountains and also convince First Nations students and mainstream students. (T2, p. 25)

[The secondary school] should definitely be complimented on it – the staff and the Principal for sure be commended on where they’ve gone. And I think it is a big step forward – in combining the Aboriginal people whether they, be, Métis or whether they be First Nation, or Inuit. I think that the changes they’ve made are just fantastic...But you know, [the Principal] can honestly say, “We’ve been kinda dumb about this and we didn’t involve, you know, the Aboriginal people” Like, he can honestly say that. (T5, p. 18)

We have a very strong role model in [the Principal]. We know that if we wanted to get on board with this, that he would be a great supporter of it. And it’s not something that we would like to be starting one month and then have the rug pulled out from under our feet the next. There would be some follow through. That would encourage me to be a part of it and that is already in place. (T6, p. 17)
“We’re thankful that we have [the Principal] who is passionate you know, about seeing that this moves forward in the school. So, I think we’re on the right path” (T6, p. 18). The next step is to identify the leaders of Aboriginal stakeholders who will take on the roles to establish, maintain, and address the issues for ongoing partnerships and planning to integrate Aboriginal educators into the system.

Conclusions: N’Suhtuhmodiwin and Bisahnyah

This study permitted participants to speak about the unknowns without interruption or judgment. It was the contentious unknowns that became the tension and ultimately defined quality of ethical space. The act of courageous dialogue became the opportunity to examine exposed values, beliefs, and assumptions for a renewed vision. It was a risky epistemological plane where participants accepted the unknowns and were willing to relinquish control in exchange for synergy: to accept new ideas and concepts in co-operation.

In my personal contemplations to understand what influenced my Aboriginal approach as an Aboriginal researcher to conduct this case study, I realized I applied a concept that has an age old design and label that I did not clearly understand until the completion of this study. Years ago, I was given a word by an Aboriginal Ojibwa Elder (now passed on to the spirit world) to describe a method or way of working with people. It was called N’Suhtuhmodiwin. The word loosely means: ‘creating awareness as a group.’ I address the conclusion of this study with this word and Bisahnyah.

The method of this study was dependent on the interpersonal skills of the researcher to reach across cultures with knowledge and understanding. For this study, I needed previous experience and acceptance to deliver the Ojibwa Talking Circle to both
aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultures. I am not a member of an aboriginal community which the school serves, although I am a first nations’ member. I understand the protocols and processes of both cultures and I believe I reached my aspired place as a respected and accepted member within the school prior to asserting my request to conduct a study of ethical space. The evidence was suggested by student participant words in my one to one meetings with them after the study: I was addressed as traditional elder rather than as ‘principal investigator.’

I assert that the perspective of the aboriginal researcher who has conducted an internal examination and has an understanding of personal ancestry, history, and awareness of current realities is an important first step. This establishes the researcher as having a place within ethical space and qualifies the researcher as a potential driver of this new enterprise (ermine, 2005, ¶17). The ‘new enterprise’ is the idea of ethical space when two cultures meet.

Voluntary participants in this study were treated as stakeholders with knowledge and capacity to address their educational environment and to explore possibilities outside its perimeters. The native resource room was recognized as the physical ethical space where aboriginal students were drawn by virtue of their cultural being. Metaphysical space evolved with the aboriginal talking circle as the cultural vehicle to elucidate dialogue amongst participants. Symbols of protocols and process were respectfully demonstrated and explained to participants with invitations to participate in the talking circle. In this manner, physical and metaphysical ethical spaces were connected. I deduce that metaphysical space does not exist without a cross-cultural mediator.
Aboriginal researchers are needed to be drivers of this 'new enterprise' in education when their culture and another culture meet. Researchers need to be prepared to admit their own heritage and culture and then learn and demonstrate empathy with another culture. I challenge researchers to practice with permission the given cultural protocols and processes and design the ideal approach for a given situation when two cultures meet. I admit that an ethical expectation in research designs that is reciprocal, cooperative, collaborative, and corroborative is ultimately time-consuming but comes with unexpected rewards. At the conclusion of this study, the District School Board has directed schools in the area to design 'ethical spaces' to address and include Aboriginal students.

In ethical space, participants require a sense of permission to speak openly, to feel the refuge of safety to express feelings and thoughts about personal values, beliefs, and assumptions. Feelings and thoughts must be encouraged and allowed with respectful reflection in ethical space. This process can bring about trusted feelings of belonging and understanding within one’s cultural group. The focus is intensified when participants believe they are making a personal investment of their time, wisdom, and experience for a better future.

In essence, this study of physical and metaphysical ethical space was school community based interactive research for shared understandings. It was all about *N'Suhtuhmodiwin*: ‘creating awareness as a group’ and the connections between ways of learning and respect for the teacher who can command attention with “*Bisahnyah*.”

The Talking Circle was the cultural vehicle for all groups. The Talking Circle in this study was conducted with the protocols and procedures for its delivery and
application according to the understandings I had learned, but with associated respect that I might not have learned it exactly according to expectations of the cultural groups involved.

This school under study provided services to all Aboriginal students who include, First Nation, Métis, and off reserve First Nations students. Non-Aboriginal students were welcomed and invited to participate in the Native Resource Room. Ethical space was examined. There was agreement that services needed to continue. Regarding the possibility that there would be a meeting based on results of this study to gather Aboriginal voice and content in curriculum, one participant repeatedly and openly expressed her doubts. I present that dialogue in its entirety.

If they were to invite us to sit at a table and come up with a really great curriculum, I would have to say they have opened a door for us but would they meet us with an open mind? Because it’s really hard to go through an open door and meet with closed minds. So they might invite you in there but they have already decided before you even came through that open door that this is what they’re going to do and they’re not going to change it, no matter what our suggestions are.

It would be really hard to go into that kind of environment and expect your voice to be heard if they are dealing with you and they’ve already decided. So their minds are closed.

It’s really hard to go through that door and deal with a closed mind. So it would have to be that they would have to be open, and maybe not necessarily I would contribute a lot to the actual curriculum but maybe help them with ways to see
that there are different ways they could help to educate students and things, like, so you’d have to meet and be very open on both sides of the table to see what was going to happen. (T5, p. 11)

There were challenges. Ethical space was not an easy place to maintain when there were doubts. There were unresolved issues. Racism pervaded Aboriginal student experiences throughout its curriculum and from different directions: There were fallacies in the Euro-Western design of education that promotes pedagogical beliefs without Aboriginal voice and content; there was lack of support from federal and provincial governments for long-term funding and it was evident when the two financial authorities refused to devise partnering initiatives to service Aboriginal student needs in mainstream secondary school education.

A short-term solution is to place Aboriginal Educators in the school, such as Traditional Mentor Workers. A longer term solution is to place teachers with Ontario Teaching Certificates. An interim step for the longer term solution is to examine additional certified training to prepare teachers to teach Aboriginal students.

The ‘language of possibility’ in ethical space was tentatively suggested by each respondent in this case study. Each member of the various target groups has knowledge of themselves, their experiences, and perspectives. The tensions of the cultural divide were exposed through expressed intents for education of Aboriginal students. The vortex of the study is that point at which participants of two cultures worked to recognize the inequalities and intents. Until each group informs the other about intents and meanings of words that explain their expectations, opportunity to engage in ongoing critical conversations for inclusive cultural enlightenment will be stalemated.
There were words brought forward in this study: *N'Sutuhmodiwin* and *Bisahnyah*. These words are about a way of being and doing: ways that are culturally suited for ethical space in education for Aboriginal students, and ways that implicate further research guidelines in education.

In this school, physical space was established for Aboriginal students to gather and conduct their work. There were tensions and unexpressed intents. There was a cultural divide. Dialogue was needed to address ‘language of possibility’ from the cultural stakeholders of the school to demonstrate equality and respect of voices. The method to gather those voices and address the cultural divide was demonstrated in this study by “creating awareness as a group” (*N'Suhtuhmodiwin*). Voices spoke their intents and revealed their cultural knowledge with assistance of the protocols and processes of the Talking Circle and with guidance of five questions designed and then analyzed according to an Aboriginal Medicine Wheel. The principal researcher fulfilled various roles as participants discussed their understanding of the Native Resource Room as physical ethical space and related their deeper reflections in metaphysical space. In this case study, metaphysical ethical space did not exist without a cross-cultural mediator. The researcher’s concurrent knowledge of the Ojibwa meaning of *N'Suhtuhmodiwin* and *Bisahnyah* may have been key to drawing stakeholders from the realities and intents of physical space along the cultural divide, and onto the metaphysical place to reveal dialogue that promoted ‘language of possibility.’ Is there a possibility that the classroom and further research can be designed with these understandings?
CHAPTER FIVE: ‘THE BEST EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT’

This exploratory case study presents inclusive and conclusive participant statements that suggest reciprocal agreements for adjustments of values, beliefs, and relationships amongst the partnering cultures of one secondary school. This study identified two degrees of ethical space: physical and metaphysical. The physical space designed for Aboriginal student success was not successful without metaphysical ethical space dialogue that invites continuous explorative dialogue for a ‘language of possibility.’ There are benefits in operational engagements between two cultures in a secondary school environment.

This study identified the objectives and addressed assumptions at the outset of the study. It was assumed that one set of solutions for renewed curriculum (see Appendix A: Glossary of terms) at one secondary school could be found within the words of volunteer participants willing to enter ethical space. Curriculum involves the delivery of lesson plans as well as the experiences of students in the school and much more. Sound curriculum determines ethical space. The prestudied phenomenon is the academic success in the education of Aboriginal students after the mainstream secondary school established a Native Resource Room Program that included a Traditional Mentor Worker (TMW). Demographic data helped situate the geographical and cultural realities for a contextual review of the school and build the realities for participant interview attendance. A literature review revealed the common issues for minority groups in the education of cultural groups, such as racism, teacher needs, and funding struggles.

During the analysis, the vortex of ethical space was revealed as intents and inequities that affect the vision of Aboriginal students for their education. The conclusion
suggests further study of ethical space and its place in education to assist in transformations of relationships across cultures.

**Discussion**

This chapter concludes the case study results with a discussion about ‘the ‘language of possibility’; the intents revealed through participant beliefs, values, and assumptions and refers to a developing framework at one secondary school which is succeeding within its identified cultural perimeters. There are implications to design Additional Qualification courses for Teachers teaching Aboriginal students.

The struggles in education for Aboriginal peoples are not all different from other diverse cultures. The tensions lie in the approach of the systemic enterprise of education for the country’s first inhabitants. An historical investigation into the underlying causes revealed intents of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures and were reaffirmed in this study. Through participant interviews, a ‘language of possibility,’ was exposed as layers of intents to meet Aboriginal student needs in one school.

*Tri-Council Policy Section 6: Aboriginal Guidelines*

Assumptions, objectivities, context and phenomenon, and an examination of the researcher’s personal bias and knowledge for development of relational trust with participants, were the foundations in this study of ethical space with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders. In this study, particular care was taken to ensure that the cultural needs of Aboriginal peoples were addressed. This study required an intercultural and cross-cultural approach for an interview process with diverse Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples who were gathered in groups as subcultural stakeholders. Interview
questions and the analysis of data from the interviews were designed along the quadrant lines of an Aboriginal Medicine Wheel.

The setting of each group interview was the physical cultural space of the Native Resource Room. The Principal Investigator was the former Aboriginal Traditional Mentor Worker who worked in the school’s Native Resource Room and was familiar with the community in which the study took place. I believe this role initiated the open discussions and sharing of stories and experiences that led to the metaphysical stage of ethical space and the development of a ‘language of possibility.’ Non-Aboriginal volunteer participants engaged in the Aboriginally-designed Focus Group/Talking Circle process with curiosity and then with understanding as they were introduced to its cultural processes with appropriate ceremony and prayer according to Aboriginal protocols.

Participants received a copy of their group transcript and submitted approvals of their respective words. They were encouraged to respond two more times to written documents and offered a different gift wrapped and tied in cloth. In this manner, participants were invited to experience a cooperative, collaborative, and corroborative Aboriginally-designed and delivered study to produce a final document. There were no group meetings to address the final document at the time of this writing due to lack of time. At the time of this writing, the school is preparing a meeting of participants to review recommendations derived from participant words. In this study, the cultural processes in research involving Aboriginal Peoples were equally acceptable to the non-Aboriginal participants.
The Focus Group/Talking Circle

The ceremony of the Talking Circle became the cultural vehicle that encouraged participants to reveal their thoughts and observations of themselves and another culture with necessary clarity and respect in this study of ethical space.

The Aboriginal Talking Circle was based on the traditions of the Ojibwa people. As an Aboriginal researcher, I was familiar with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture. I was accepted as a trusted figure to demonstrate, explain, deliver, and invite participants to participate in the Ojibwa Talking Circle with each group of Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. The Talking Circle was addressed as a Focus/Talking Circle to assure participants that there was to be discussion and dialogue.

Limitations

This study was exploratory and there were limitations: the study did not allow time to gather the words of all potential volunteer participants. Participants were not representative of their culture or their subcultural groups. They were volunteer informants. Aboriginal Elders and Aboriginal peoples who attended Residential school were purposely not selected for this study. Another study is needed to capture their words. Through the study it was suggested that non-Aboriginal student response needs to be gathered (T6, p. 16). I was disappointed that some invitations to this study were not accepted, due to scheduling conflicts, such as a superintendent of the School Board. However, a former Native trustee offered insights within the Administrative/Decision Maker/Resource Group (ADR).
'Language of Possibility'

The wealth of information and sharing from each group membership added detail for understanding ethical space in the secondary school. I foresee the implementation of the ‘Best Educational Environment’ if each set of suggestions for improvement are followed with discussion for action. The Ontario Public School Board’s Association (2006) quotes The Rainy River District School Board:

There is a need to focus on how to work together, rather than simply identifying weaknesses within a system; it needs to be a shared effort toward shared goals. An example would be attendance – discovering the root cause for a student’s poor attendance, rather than pointing out that a student has poor attendance, and then putting in place a plan to address the reason for the attendance issue. (p. 4)

With trusting courage, willingness, and conviction, participants exposed their values, beliefs, and assumptions to reveal the unknown spaces between their own individual culture and the ‘other.’ The ‘language of possibility’ is molded into the recommendations that I have organized into four steps of the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1).

This study demonstrated that when there is a collective and generating purpose of inquiry and common intent, the crucial maintenance and extension of ethical space for the improvement and development of environments for high quality education is possible. The education policies I examined included the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. It did not reference the Ministry of Education and Training (M.E.T., 1993) Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity document. This should signal a concern in the classroom, in the school, and in the surrounding communities of the school. Ethical space across cultures is not possible without ‘rules for engagement.’
Those rules must establish guidelines that include a review of affected stakeholders in the school environment. How can students express their cultural concerns about negative learning experiences?

Policies and implementation plans should respond to community needs and local conditions, while also recognizing the need to reflect wider society. Effective change can be achieved only through collective action by all those involved in the school system: trustees, superintendents, principals, teachers, support staff, parents [footnote: includes guardians and those other individuals who are representing and advocating on behalf of the students and/or parent or guardian], students, and the community. School boards need to devise a wide range of establishing partnerships with diverse local communities, particularly those that have traditionally not been involved in the life of the school. (M.E.T., p. 6)

I suggest that the 1993 M.E.T. document has designed the purpose for engagement in 'language of possibility.' How each school achieves its purpose in addressing Aboriginal student needs, will have unique approaches. In this school, a Native Resource Room program was established. There is a record of a 'language of possibility.' This study indicates additional steps for the continual success of the physical and metaphysical ethical space in this secondary school.

An Operational Framework: Inclusion of Two Row Wampum and Covenant Chain

There were motivational factors as well as risks in exposing self as part of the problem solving process that occurred within this study. I reviewed the questions, responses, and openness of participant experiences. As I read, wrote, and rewrote steps towards the successful conclusion of this study, a picture of the current physical and
metaphysical ethical space emerged. It was not an easy process. Weaving together words from one group to another necessitated personal checks of bias. I believe that my own growth was encapsulated in empathy, respect, and sensitivity for human beings seeking to address Aboriginal culture from the perspective of mainstream education. I believe that solutions were initiated and can be established with cultural respect. I believe that the intent of education as envisioned by leaders, such as Chief Shinguaconse and those Aboriginal leaders who came before him, can be reestablished through knowledge waiting to be brought forward. The designed intent and the latent understandings of the Two Row Wampum Belt (Figure 2) were painfully clear when one participant shared an understanding of the current dilemma at the school:

Here I sit, born and raised in the middle of Ojibwa country…never heard that expression before, never saw a smudge before let alone participated in one. And 2 or 3 years ago, the first time I even realized I was invited, I was allowed to go to a Pow Wow. So I don’t think I understand what the Aboriginal students needs might be because I don’t understand what the culture is. (T6, p. 6)

Aboriginal peoples have been practicing their culture for thousands of centuries, while Canadians have been designing their own for less than 200 years and with the intent of establishing a government over another culture. The proof of this is expressed by one participant who struggled to understand why Aboriginal peoples have different needs in education: “I don’t have any different – traditions! Maybe I am too far removed from that” (T6, p. 8).

The Silver Covenant Chain calls for friendship, good minds, and peace (Thomas, 1989, p. 5). It has a symbolic purpose in education that involves Aboriginal peoples. The
volunteer participants in this study courageously shared their understandings of the ongoing colonially-based conflicts and practices in education without knowledge of the Covenant Chain. Student behavioural responses as resistant participants in the current education system can provide clues for further insightful study about curriculum that includes the classroom environment, teaching, and racism. The Two Row Wampum Belt symbolizes the practice of respect across cultures. The idea that respect needs to be revisited was implicated many times throughout the transcripts. Respect was addressed in terms of understanding respective cultural protocol, acknowledgment, importance, inclusion, and expansion of ideas (T1, p.4, 5, 30; T2, p. 9, 10, 12; T4, p.1; T6, p. 13-19).

There is a voiced need for inclusion of history with current needs of Aboriginal peoples; professional development, training, and informational events for current stakeholders that include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and guided reflections of historical repercussions that form current responses from Aboriginal students. Sensitivity training that demonstrates the effect of education on Aboriginal secondary students can create empathetic and reflective responses such as: “I guess this is the aftermath of colonization, that’s self-deprecation. Being aware of that tendency, and to be willing to expect more from the [Aboriginal] students who are achieving below potential, despite the projection they insist upon giving” (T2, p. 23). Aboriginal students are capable of achieving academic success in mainstream environments when the school enables Aboriginal design of physical and metaphysical space.

Native Resource Room Program

The Native Resource Room Program developed from an examination of student needs of one First Nation community, with phenomenal success, grew to encompass all
Aboriginal students in the school. Discoveries amongst the students included their ability to become motivated in school when they were provided their own defined enabling, ethical space. This space encouraged Aboriginal students to build intercultural relationships and communications. In this space, the students linked cultural knowledge sets with mainstream expectations. In this space, they established trust, practiced skills as engaged and contributing students with cultural expectations intact. The ensuing debate should not be about whether this follows a plan for equity education that includes all Aboriginal students – First Nations, off-reserve, and Métis: “Therefore, in developing policies and implementation plans related to antiracist and ethnocultural equity education, school boards need to take into account the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal people, whether or not they live in a First Nations community” (M.E.T., 1993, p. 6).

Provincial and federal levels of government need to establish a policy in partnership that will encourage simultaneous focus of solutions, funding, and accountability that addresses Aboriginal student needs including First Nations who live on and off reserve, Métis, and Inuit. Creative solutions based on limited funding or nonexistent funding is not conducive for stable results as was demonstrated at this school when funding for the Traditional Mentor was cut. Aboriginal academic success faltered. The focus on bureaucratic barriers, as imposed by the federal and provincial hierarchal levels of government, impedes school leadership vision for true collaborative learning in ethical space.

Policy and Capacity Building Efforts

It is a good time to work in the education field with the development of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007). This school is
ready to proceed in its endeavors to create the ‘Best Educational Environment’ in partnership with Aboriginal peoples but it requires the support of both provincial and federal funding bodies. There are indications that this school may be in need of an additional and impartial staff support person. Aboriginal peoples in this study verbalized their arguments to maintain the current Native Resource Room with Aboriginal staff. They identified an additional Aboriginal person with certain qualities to work with students, teachers, administration, and the school board in development of curriculum (T1, p. 8, 13 – 17, 22 – 23, 31; T3, p.11; T4, p. 14; T5, p. 2- 5, 13, p. 17; T6, p. 6, 9, 13, 16 -18). This is a workable strategy.

According to the Aboriginal Education Office (2007) First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Goal 1: High Level of Student Achievement, the Ministry indicates “Strategy 1.1 – Build Capacity for effective teaching, assessment and evaluation practices” (p. 11), there will be an “increase internal capacity within the Ministry to support school boards and schools in their efforts to close the gap in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student’s academic achievement by hiring First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educators” (p.11). The expectation for an additional staff member is in line with the Ministry’s performance measures: “significant increase in the number of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff in school boards across Ontario” (p. 11). It remains to be seen how the policy will be approached to implement Aboriginal Educators who are knowledgeable of each Aboriginal subculture: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. I suspect positions for First Nations peoples will be formulated through negotiations of support for Aboriginal students.
At the date of this report, the school under study does not have an Aboriginal Teacher with an Ontario Secondary School Teaching Certification. It may be a number of years before an Aboriginal Teacher meets the qualifications expected by the provincial education system to teach at the secondary school level. Various timeframes could be examined, such as: (a) How long it might take to recruit secondary school students to complete higher education to become certified Teachers; (b) Are Aboriginal elementary teachers prepared to work at the secondary school level and participate in the Additional Qualifications process to meet the requirements, and (c) The determining factor in pursuing an Aboriginal teacher in the school board system depends on available openings.

There is an interim suggestion. There are approximately 30 teachers in the school under study who do not identify themselves as Aboriginal and who are teaching Aboriginal children. Would these teachers embrace Additional Qualifications in order to meet the demands of Aboriginal peoples to teach their children and become part of a design to improve academic success of Aboriginal students? What would an Additional Qualifications curriculum address? I believe these answers need to be addressed with further study to discover and succinctly describe the ‘juncture of misfit’ with cultural learning styles and knowledge of Aboriginal students and delivery of curriculum that meets their needs. This statement is presented with the understanding that all educators require Additional Qualifications whether they are of Aboriginal descent or not.

The qualifications for an additional staff member of Aboriginal descent are: sensitivity and knowledge to coordinate the activities implicated in this document: an Educator with skills and capabilities to act as a school community liaison worker, team leader, researcher, a traditional teacher, curriculum writer, and negotiator in ethical space
(T1, p. 22, 23, 27, 28; T3, p. 11; T4, p. 14; T5, p. 23). This person is in addition to the Native Resource Room Coordinator currently in place. Intents have been expressed:

1. Provide interpretations of Aboriginal culture and tradition and explain cultural behaviour as resistance rather than as ‘defiance. Teachers might not “recognize the difference” (T6, p. 6, 18).

2. Examine what it means to be a “whole person” within a culture (T6, p. 7).

3. Meet needs of staff for support and resources such as “Maybe suggest curriculum to match the needs” (T6, p. 18); “like a little in-service and that’s just more of an understanding and then to start about identifying key areas in that way” (T6, p. 18).

Leadership

I was fortunate to meet with the leadership of the school who patiently requested, questioned, and waited to hear my explanations from an Aboriginal view. Relational trust was important for cross-cultural understandings. Through ‘language of possibility’, new words and approaches were discovered to address an old problem: Aboriginal student success. Ermine explained this transformational process that occurred.

Dialogue is concerned with providing a space for exploring the field of thought and attention is given to understanding how thought functions in governing our behaviours (Bohm, 1996). It is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. Attentive work on these deeper level issues had not occurred in Indigenous/West relations nor has there been a framework that enables this discussion to happen (Ermine, 2005, p. 2).
In my role as Traditional Mentor Worker at the school, I silently observed the relationships amongst the various participants of the school. The situations I addressed were based on arguments that explanations were necessary when two cultures meet rather than determining convincing impositions on another. There is a need for deeper relationships when two cultures conscientiously meet to find common purpose. Non-Aboriginal leadership of a school with Aboriginal students needs to partner with the Aboriginal student community. An Aboriginal Educator to represent Aboriginal students in the Native Resource Room may be the first link for intercultural understanding of student needs in education. Cross-cultural educators in the classroom may be the next link needed.

**Overview of Recommendations**

The data uncovered Aboriginal student needs for respect, belonging, cultural representation, a renewed classroom and school environment; strategies for building relationships and sharing information with Aboriginal peoples. There are suggestions for teacher training and designing standards, guidelines, and curriculum with Aboriginal input. Recognition of planning, evaluation, and funding issues are included in the quadrant for action and evaluation strategies. An overview of those recommendations and the current situation is briefly provided as follows.

*Vision with Cultural Sensitivity*

There is a need to look into the overall endemic makeup of this school and inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples. First Nations peoples make up one component of the school and are usually addressed through First Nation political strategies to negotiate a financial base for their students. Off reserve, status, and Métis peoples are often
overlooked in the planning equation. Curriculum at this school must entail a wholistic prospect of inclusion rather than exclusion to meet its goal to find the ‘Best Educational Environment.’ This school has the opportunity to be at the forefront of creating a unique position to deliver a program of study that takes into account the history of all Aboriginal peoples: First Nations peoples, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. The geographic outlay along the North Shore was a trading route for many nations that included English, French, Scottish, German, etc. peoples. There were many other First Nations who travelled the route on which the school sits. Aboriginal peoples have a story to tell about their heritage, beliefs, and contributions to history. A collective review to address realities for all Aboriginal peoples whether they are First Nations, Métis, or off-reserve is necessary to consistently satisfy the requirements of the 1993 M.E.T. document. Métis Peoples and First Nations peoples living off-reserve need to be represented appropriately along with First Nations peoples, living on-reserve, with seats on boards, councils, committees, and special education so that schools in the district have adequate and equal reporting mechanisms.

*Relationship Building Towards Accountability and Communication*

There is a community spirit begging to be released for support of all students at this school. A policy of self-identification will be necessary to capture accurate data of Métis and off-reserve First Nations people. This may be the most difficult task. There are many cultural divisions in the school that can be brought together through accountability mechanisms. Reports through community media, websites, and through invitations to celebrate landmark events at the school and in First Nation communities are cost effective strategies that may require extra effort and time by staff, students, and volunteers but require specific skills. This school has managed to claim some success to bring forward
strategies for equitable schooling of all its students that is worth reporting. The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) suggests 3 year evaluation and reporting mechanisms. Through accountability measures on a yearly basis, this school can continue to demonstrate approaches to create the ‘Best Educational Environment’ for all students – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and any other culture that is fortunate to attend this school. Understanding Aboriginal history, culture, values, beliefs, learning strategies, and combining their knowledge base needs in education could become eventful landmarks of success to be celebrated by all members of the community the school serves.

**Knowledge in Information Sessions**

Respondents were not aware of the current documents in place that affect educational needs of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal leaders, parents, and students were not familiar with the documents that specifically discussed their rights and processes for advocacy in education. Teachers, administration, decision makers, and resource peoples involved in this study indicated a willingness to participate in ethical space to understand Aboriginal peoples. There are social, historical, political, and cultural realities for Aboriginal peoples that must be learned and understood before school stakeholders – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples- are ready to embark in true and ongoing dialogue for collaborative activities with Aboriginal peoples. This study revealed the need for ongoing dialogue to understand mainstream education as mandated in documents of the Ontario Ministry of Education, and delivered by provincial schools through School Boards. There is a concern as to how Aboriginal peoples and their issues are defined.

Generally, the interplay of tensions in an educational setting where Aboriginal students are in attendance is not often discussed in the current literature. Secondary
school students are not always included or identified in mainstream research studies (Ryan & Joong, 2005, ¶18). When there is a focus on Aboriginal students, it appears to be about the current outcomes of Aboriginal student success or failures with little to tell about the possibilities for reform from participants at the secondary school level (Ontario Public School Boards’ Association, 2006, p. 4). I promote the idea that ethical space in a school setting should be an inherent and central aspect of research when two cultures meet. It is about capacity of participants to move from the ambiguous aspects of their life and be involved in discovery of the realities that affect them personally and affect their future. It is more than physical space. It is about freedom to speak, confront, negotiate meaning, and reflect personal values, beliefs, and assumptions for intents, in a setting that expects equality of voice, presence, and environment. These are assumed to be affirmed rights in wider Canadian society that is labelled as mainstream. Metaphysical space addresses the cultural divide to include ‘language of possibility.’ It is assumed that mainstream ethical practices are succinct and distinctive for application in educational research settings.

How does one explain the cultural oppression under which Aboriginal peoples live and the need for sensitive research that involve Aboriginal peoples in their education? Chrisjohn and Young (2006) get to the heart of the current, political issue: “Who wants a crowd of secure, focused, determined, and knowledgeable Aboriginals looking at treaties, land claims, damage suits, and the like?” (p. 22). Aboriginal peoples everywhere are battling for a right to an education that will serve their cultural needs, maintain their strong connection to the land and the places they determine to be sacred. Inherent in every land claim are issues of knowledge and education in the background,
(i.e. Oka, Ipperwash, and Six Nations). I worked with the students in this secondary school of study as a Traditional Mentor Worker (2003-2005), to manage their ideas about how they assumed the educational system was oppressive and not suited to their needs. I demonstrated how education could be negotiated to meet their needs with respect for others. I may have provided some influence on participant responses, due to my past relationship with the volunteer participants. My influence has a history of knowledge about who I am as an Aboriginal person with distinct rights and inheritance. My teachers were the elderly and the Elders who carried incremental oral stories and who connected to a worldview not always understood by mainstream. I could see my own experiences in my mainstream education four decades ago, reflected in Aboriginal student words and I am saddened that it has not changed. The delivery of education for Aboriginal peoples needs to change.

The assumption that Aboriginal peoples will advance their agendas under the auspices of mainstream protocols and concepts is outdated (i.e., Battiste, & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000; Chiefs of Ontario, 2005; Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report, 1996; Smith, 1999, etcetera). This study determined that Aboriginal students’ needs in education must be identified, understood, and addressed. Equitable acceptance and respect of cultures needs to be reexamined. The context of the mainstream secondary school needs to be evaluated for capacity before curriculum can be revised. There will be signs of resistance by the teachers, but I believe that additional knowledge and training that teaches N’Suhtuhmodiwin and Bisahnyah will alleviate their gaps in knowledge. The provincial ministry designed a First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007) to encourage change. “The fact remains that curriculum design is still
a provincial matter and we have to know that it’s being supported elsewhere in the province too, so that our efforts are not made in vain when all is said and done” (T6, p. 19). Standards and guidelines involve educational policy but reference and knowledge of them is an issue that needs to be resolved before curriculum can be seriously addressed. In all groups, there were intensive discussions centered on issues of Aboriginal student need.

There were various approaches that participants took to understand Aboriginal student needs. Reference to theory, analytical processes, fact from Ministry documents, and personal bias are pedagogical issues and could be clues for approaches in professional development and training for educators (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who teach Aboriginal students. Descriptions and meaning of the Native Resource Room reveals ethical space from the Aboriginal view. All volunteer participants revealed their stories and experiences. Aboriginal students were enabled to implicate renewed practice of curriculum for their academic success.

*Action in Evaluation Strategies*

Evaluation strategies are part of the development of antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies and implementation plans (M.E.T., 1993, p. 18) and are required by the province. Racism is at risk of being hidden in new words, such as ‘intercultural conflict.’ This study encouraged a list of strategies that “include the perceptions and experiences of students, parents, and community members in the monitoring process” (M.E.T., p. 18). Ethical space that includes responses in cross-cultural dialogue will address the perimeters of the cultural divide. In this case, the five groups were interviewed as inter-cultural groups and one as a cross-cultural group to include Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal peoples, each in their own individual ethical space. Shared results of this study to all participants will enlighten and challenge, and, hopefully, change approaches to curriculum in this secondary school. A vision enables continuity and planning that will include an evaluation process to demonstrate equitable Aboriginal student satisfaction and parental support. One participant response suggested a cross-cultural evaluation:

In working with people, it’s the clients themselves that do a performance evaluation of the worker. I like that idea. They’re the ones who get the service or the students are the ones that receive the education. That doesn’t mean you go just by that. But I mean it’s a good idea. (T4, p. 7)

Standards and guidelines must be written in words that are designed to inform, are easy to understand, and are accessible for agreement and commitment across cultures.

Having something written and in place like this is what we’re doing. We agreed to it. Like something to measure it by. And I don’t know if they have work plans for the year. What we’re hoping to accomplish because we need some way to look at that whole or whatever your program is, we set up or curriculum...to have that – not haphazard when I’m trying to do this. To have something you know set up – planning – so other people can look at that too. Even parents and say “oh that’s what we’re doing”; Parents can ask or have discussions with the students when they come home. “What are you doing now? “Like,... “I see that you’re going to be starting that.” (T4, p. 7)

Historically, Aboriginal peoples lacked control of their education. How the leadership relinquished control for a relational partnership in this school for creation of new ethical space instigated an exciting and revealing study. The first step was necessary: expression
of willingness to invite Aboriginal voice and content to find the 'Best Educational Environment.' Belief in the authenticity of the invitation was incredibly hard as Aboriginal peoples struggle with their own beliefs about the educational system and what it has not offered for their success.

This study of ethical space exposed a solution for current government funding policies. It identified the promises in education to address Aboriginal concerns and demands in education. One participant identified the immediate concern: “I don’t know enough of the [Aboriginal] culture. I don’t have enough of the [Aboriginal] cultural awareness yet...So I don’t know how to begin that” (T6, p. 14). The solution appears clear. Aboriginal student success is dependent on Aboriginal designs for solutions. The application of any solution to simultaneously satisfy Aboriginal peoples and a systemic structure is muddied with mainstream prerogatives for the market of provincial education.

Conclusion

I assert that success of leadership and policy in the education of Aboriginal peoples depends on specific credentials to build collaborative and corroborative partnerships within the education system. The current situation in mainstream education for Aboriginal students does not foster success at the secondary level for successful entry and continual advancement into higher academics. There is a need for Aboriginal teachers, educators, and professors who can cross cultural divides and can concurrently deliver curriculum to meet the needs of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students. This reality is further demonstrated when teachers attempt to conduct research in the classroom without understanding potential repercussions (Piquemal, 2004). Knowledge of appropriate learning styles of Aboriginal students and the ability to culturally connect
knowledge with curriculum to serve the needs of Aboriginal community with cultural respect (Stairs, 2004) is not mandatory training. I suspect lack of trained Aboriginal educators and lack of knowledge by non-Aboriginal teaching staff is creating an unintended racist environment. This issue is festering. Schools should be scrambling to comply with the Ministry of Education's First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education Policy Framework (2007). The associated Voluntary Self-Identification Project to determine the numbers of Aboriginal students in provincial schools will reveal exponential expectations for Aboriginal communities across School Boards and Districts in Ontario. There is an unqualified presumption that teachers have the capacity to meet the up-and-coming demands. It appears that the application of ethical space theory (Ermine, 2000, 2005) has a relevant place in education leadership and policy building activities at the school and board level as teachers become the focus for Aboriginal student success.

This micro study of one northern secondary school examined its ethical space in preparation for ongoing discussions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders. The outcomes of this study suggest the need for teachers to undertake Additional Qualifications to teach Aboriginal students. There appears to be a miss in fit at the juncture of educational relationships between teachers and Aboriginal students.

Further studies are needed to determine other parameters of ethical space in provincial education. Too often, education is of a political design based on mainstream prerogatives. How one school board identifies and resolves its issues with Aboriginal peoples in education could become a framework for dealing with other cultures and offer a design for schools across the province and consider questions, such as:
• What are the protocols and processes to reciprocate understandings for cooperation, collaboration, willingness to negotiate, and to accept and recognize Aboriginal epistemologies without negatively disrupting affected cross-cultural relationships in physical ethical space?

• How can metaphysical ethical space be designed to influence participants to have the confidence to speak with deeper reflections of their values, beliefs, and assumptions without fear of reprisal and misunderstanding?

• What are the myriad of words spoken that need translation and how are they interpreted across the cultural divide when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples meet in the context of education to search for equitable agreements?

• Will new contextual words be created in this ethical space?

• Should it be mandatory or voluntary for Teachers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to acquire Additional Qualifications to teach Aboriginal students

The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) document for Indian Control of Indian Education recommended a study design for educating Aboriginal students. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Reports put forward recommendations that reflected the aforementioned document. Ermine (2005) discussed the need for healing as a result of knowledge generated in ethical space. Taiaiake (1999) presented solutions in response to the search for ‘peace, power, and righteousness.’ The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) mentions Aboriginal student needs but lacks knowledge of a workable paradigm in which to have those needs met. There are many questions such as: Who will relate curriculum, its implementation and assessments? Who has the skill to adjust the culture of the class for alignment with the needs of Aboriginal students?
Research Methodologies

CIHR (2005) outlined a design of ethical space that takes into account how to recognize and approach Aboriginal communities for equitable participation in research from its inception to the final document:

- The need to balance individual and collective interests
- Respect for Aboriginal values, knowledge, methodologies and decision making processes
- Commitment to an inclusive, participatory process that engages Aboriginal and research communities.

Aboriginally-designed and delivered research studies is still a developing method when conducted as an intercultural design for, by, and with Aboriginal peoples (Bishop, 1998; Brant-Castellano, 2004; McNaughton & Rock, 2003; Porsanger, 2004).

Dialogue between Aboriginal peoples and Euro-western peoples is convoluted. Broken treaties and subsequent interpretations and translations have left a series of begrudging relationships of both private and political groups in Canada that have attracted the attention of international summits (Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2000; Johnny, 2005; Smith, 1999; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000). Maori and Australian Aboriginal peoples appear to be further ahead in their researched solutions with commendable results. At the end of this spectrum, Aboriginal students in Ontario are seeking an education that will support their desire to be fully confident, happy, successful cultural beings within Canadian society on their own terms and within their own geographic communities (Burman & McLeod, 2006, Richards & Vining, 2004). The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2005) report has revealed a
28-year gap in academic success of First Nations students while disclosing their rapidly growing population. The Self-Identification Project to identify all Aboriginal students in provincial schools is not yet complete. There is no prediction of the outcomes. There is urgency to address the issue of cross-cultural education for Aboriginal peoples in mainstream schools. Cross-cultural research must include a careful, conscientious design of study that recognizes Aboriginal subcultures, stories, and ethics (Brant, 1990) that are inclusive and geographically understood.

This exploratory case study on ethical space took a story form. Documents were produced in collaboration with the participants for authenticity of words and translation and interpretation of draft and final documents. The study was mutually satisfying and offered a substantial foundation as a developing framework to understand the issues across cultural divides in one secondary school. I predict that Aboriginal researchers are needed who can design cross-cultural studies to meet mainstream inquiries about ethical space, and that such studies will be invaluable towards the design of a successful education framework. There is a current market for education of Aboriginal student success in the provincial schools. The Ministry of Ontario's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007) has established the urgency for Aboriginal peoples to meet their challenges in education on their own terms.
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Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

**Aboriginal** refers to all Indigenous Peoples living in Canada and includes First Nations (on and off reserve), Métis, and Inuit

**Anishinabe** singular use of the word that the Ojibwa people use to describe themselves.

**Anishnabek** plural use of the word Anishnabe

**Cooperate** (verb) work or act together

**Collaborate** (verb) work with one another on a project

**Corroborate** (verb) support (a fact or opinion) by giving proof

**Covenant Chain**
A symbol of understanding amongst Aboriginal Nations that has the impact of a “brotherhood” with mutual rules of behaviour.

**Curriculum** The term “curriculum encompasses all learning experiences the student will have in school. These include such aspects of school life as the general school environment, interactions among students, staff, and the community, and the values, attitudes and behaviours conveyed by the school (Ministry of Education, 1993. Anti-racism, and Ethnocultural Equity in school boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, p. 13).
The ten major areas of focus on policies and implementation are:

3.1 Board policies, guidelines, and practices
3.2 Leadership
3.3 School-community partnership
3.4 Curriculum
3.5 Student languages
3.6 Student evaluation, assessment, and placement
3.7 Guidance and counseling
3.8 Racial and ethnocultural harassment
3.9 Employment practices
3.10 Staff development

**Epistemology**
A study of the source, nature, and limitations of knowledge (Collins Essential Canadian English: Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2004)
**Ethical Space**
A theoretical term used to describe both physical and abstract or metaphysical space where reciprocal and mutually satisfying negotiations take place that involve two cultures with differing epistemologies.

**First Nation**
This term generally refers to those individuals who live on the lands set aside as reserves by the Federal Government. They are Aboriginal peoples who have 'status' and receive federal funding for education and other services.

**Indian**
Term used to identify First Nations Peoples under section 35 (2) of The Constitution Act, 1982 as “aboriginal peoples of Canada”

**Indigenous**
United Nations 1948 document uses the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous interchangeably, with a tendency to use Aboriginal when referring to Indigenous Peoples within Canada. A word to describe First Peoples of the Land from a global view

**‘Language of possibility’**
A phrase used to express the freedom in dialogue to speak words of meaning and explore differing cultural epistemologies in ethical space

**Métis**
In 1982 the Federal government amended the Constitution to include people of mixed heritage (the Métis) as one of the three Aboriginal groups in Canada. By virtue of their inheritance and historical relationships with fur traders, they have attributed rights but they have limited rights in comparison to First Nations peoples. They do not have reserved land.

**Phenomenal**
extraordinary

**Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples**
The Federally appointed Royal Commission produced a five volume review of the reality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including a 20-year plan to right the socioeconomic difficulties that have existed in Canada for over 100 years

**Sacred Medicines**
There are numerous plants considered to be sacred and as medicines with various healing properties of the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical realms of Aboriginal epistemology. They are usually gathered, cultivated and stored with sacred consideration and used with ceremonial care. The Medicines identified in this study are tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar
Subjective (adj.) based on personal feelings or prejudices

Tri-Council Three national research councils that work together to establish research policy.
CIHR – Canadian Institutes of Health Research
NSERC – Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
SSHRC – Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
These three agencies promote the ethical conduct of research involving humans and adopted a TCPS *Tri-Council Policy Statement in August 1998 and an Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics in November 2001.

Turtle Island This is the English translation of the traditional name for North America, which reflects both key aspects of many Aboriginal creation stories and the fact that a map of North America is shaped somewhat like a great turtle.
Appendix C

Introducing the Medicine Wheel as a Model to Encourage Discussion.

Vision: Direction of the East
Think about all the possibilities of what could be and how we would like things to be. It is our vision of the ideal place or program. This is where we define ideas and thoughts, discuss choices, identify obstacles, etc.

Relationships: Direction of the South
This is where we are reminded about our roles and responsibilities – what has been, where we are now, how we got to where we are and what is the affect we are creating on others. This where we can talk about behaviours and beliefs about power and where we perceive there is imbalance and lack of harmony. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the relationships in place? We also identify obstacles.

Knowledge: Direction of the West
We question our personal knowledge. What are the facts? What are the assumptions? We examine personal values, beliefs and assumptions. Who has the knowledge we need? Where do we find this knowledge? What have we learned so far? What are the questions we are asking and cannot find answers to? What are the problems? What are the obstacles?

Action/Doing: Direction of the North
What is in place now? What has been discussed so far? How can we put the past, present, future together? This is where we look back to see what has been done so far. This is where we examine how we might put into place what we know so far and how the future generations will be affected. Is there anything else to be done? Is there an area or areas needed to be revisited (look back on the Medicine Wheel – Vision, Relationships, Knowledge) Are we on the right track in plans so far? Can we put together a plan of action? Can the people work together to put forward a plan of action? What will be the effects if we try to put together an action plan now; that is how will an action plan affect four generations from now? Seven generations from now?

The Research Questions
Given an understanding of how the Medicine Wheel works, you are asked to bring forward your responses to five questions:

1. How do you define Education?
2. What meaning does Education have for you?
3. What standards and guidelines must be in place for an effective education program that will meet the needs of Aboriginal students?
4. What would encourage you to participate in curriculum design at/with Secondary school?
5. What suggestions do you have for Secondary school and the Aboriginal community on this issue of curriculum design?
Appendix D

Example of a Letter Sent to Volunteer Participants

Catherine Longboat
1169 Seneca Road
R.R. 1, Ohsweken, Ontario
NOA 1M0

July 10, 2007

Dear Volunteer Participant,

Re: Case Study: Ethical Space in a Secondary School

I wish to thank you for your patience in waiting for this package.

As indicated in the Informed Consent Agreements, I am submitting the First Draft of the final two chapters that are the summary of my research.

At this point, your input is important. Please review to find your words and determine the ways they have been used in the study. You have the right to disagree, or agree with any part of the Chapters.

I welcome your comments. Please do not hesitate to call me collect if you wish to discuss the document at 519-445-0485 or by email @ co04wz@brocku.ca or in writing to the address indicated above.

I expect the final draft of this document will be complete by August 1, 2007, and hope that you will respond before this date with your feedback.

I am sending a gift to add to your medicine bag. Sage is a plant held sacred by Aboriginal peoples and contains teachings about “encouraging communication” and remembering the words of our ancestors.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator, Catherine Longboat or Faculty Advisor (where applicable) Professor Manley-Casimir using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # 05-330). If you have any comments or concerns about participant rights in research, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

ChiMiigwetch/Many Thanks,

Catherine Longboat
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education