

# The Native Training Institute: A Place of Holistic Learning and Health

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*This article examines the holistic educational philosophy of the Native Training Institute (NTI) and its effect on the health of students. The article reviews the elements of cultural pedagogy that were foundational to the development of a holistic model of learning at the NTI based on Medicine Wheel teachings. In addition, the article reviews the interviews of students who received a Native human service worker social work certificate at the NTI and records some of the significant healing that occurred as a result of a healing-learning approach to education. Finally, the seven elements of transformational healing and learning used at the NTI are articulated.*

## *Introduction*

I had the pleasure of being an instructor at the Native Training Institute (NTI) in Kamloops, British Columbia from 1981 to 1987. During the short life of the NTI, approximately 250 Aboriginal people employed by First Nations in the interior of British Columbia attended it. The NTI developed a holistic curriculum of education that allowed Aboriginal knowledge and emotion into the classroom. Central to this process was the development of a cultural pedagogy that was transformational and healing that included: the presence of Indigenous knowledge; the use of a holistic model of education; and the development and strengthening of identity in relation to values, competences, ideals, and vision. This article explores the elements of this pedagogy and its healing influence on students.

## *History of the Native Training Institute*

In October 2002, I traveled with Marie Anderson, the former director of the Native Training Institute, to the Cooks Ferry First Nation to collect the NTI documents for study and analysis. The NTI was chosen as the site of my doctoral research because of the desire to examine a successfully designed educational process that included an aspect of emotional development in the curriculum. The NTI was established in 1979 through the efforts of four Aboriginal women: Norma Kenoris Manuel (Secwepemc), Elaine Hebert (Secwepemc), Marilyn Napoleon (Lillooet), and Marie Anderson (Thompson). They formed a society to assist in the development of a Native human service worker social work certificate program through an administrative affiliation with Cariboo College. This program was developed to meet the educational needs of social service workers who were deluged with problems and felt the need for advanced

education. Anderson said that there were two essential foci in the initial creation of the institute: first, the desire to help the community, and second, the desire to help human service workers because, as she says, "Everybody was feeling kind of lost in their jobs because there was no training ... Or feeling frustrated because they didn't know how to help people really" (Anderson, interview, May 27, 2003).

#### *The Elements of Cultural Pedagogy at the NTI*

The gap in educational needs identified by the founders of the NTI resulted in a search toward a "multidisciplinary, culturally relevant social service training" curriculum that would "meet the needs of a cross-section of people in the First Nations social services sector" (Herbert, interview, May 23, 2003). The program development included meetings and workshops with community representatives that produced an expanded understanding of what the curriculum must contain to create a "basic foundation" for all community service workers. Anderson and Hebert identified seven founding philosophical principles of the NTI.

1. It must address the whole notion of culture
2. It must be meaningful, relevant, and effective in the workplace.
3. It must include an element of Aboriginal knowledge.
4. It must be relevant to the experience of the students.
5. It must include more than just the mental aspect of being.
6. It must include emotional, physical, and spiritual elements in addition to the mental.
7. It must be accommodating to the educational levels of social service workers in the communities.

#### *The Development of a Holistic Model of Cultural Pedagogy*

Education is based on a philosophical conceptualization of what a human being is that provides a vision of academic potential and defines the process through which that potential can manifest in a transformational process. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) comment on the need for a philosophical base for education.

Living a human life is a philosophical endeavour. Every thought we have, every decision we make, and every act we perform is based on philosophical assumptions ... Such questions arise out of our daily concerns, for the metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics, and so on. (p. 9)

Indeed, Phil Lane Jr., an instructor at the NTI, said, "It is impossible for any enterprise to promote human well-being unless it has a clear vision of what a human being is, and how a state of well-being comes about" (Lane, Bopp, & Bopp, 1984, p. 2).

During the first year of operation, the NTI staff was introduced to the Medicine Wheel as a holistic model of education. Anderson comments that as soon as they came into contact with the Medicine Wheel, they realized that it fulfilled the elements of an appropriate educational pro-

gram that provided a methodology of education that included all seven philosophical requirements mentioned above by addressing issues of Aboriginal knowledge in a culturally relevant pedagogy and relevant to the personal and professional lives of the students (Anderson, interview, May 27, 2003).

The Medicine Wheel provided the NTI with a holistic philosophy for education that addressed the cognitive as well as the physical, emotional, and spiritual realms while respecting local culture and traditional knowledge. The Medicine Wheel philosophy developed into a theory of growth and development at the Native Training Institute that was used to organize Native and non-Native knowledge into a holistic pedagogy. This philosophy helped develop knowledge, skills, and values usable in confronting the many “kinds of social problems” that existed in the communities for which the NTI was providing training (Anderson, interview, 2003). And most important, it provided the balance and harmony necessary to create a foundation for healing and learning in a classroom setting as illustrated in Figure 1.

#### *The Dual Process of Healing and Learning*

As the doctoral research unfolded through the interviewing of 10 students, two staff, and an Elder, it became apparent that a dual process was at work in the curriculum of the NTI: a process of healing and a process of learning. At the NTI these two processes worked hand in hand. The qualitative data analysis identified the healing aspects and learning blockages for each of the 10 students interviewed. Healing aspects are defined as the experiences that promoted healing during the learning process. Learning blockages are defined as those qualities, personal and systematic, that prevented the students from learning. The use of healing aspects to remove learning blockages in the classroom are referred to as healing-learning. Indeed, for learning to occur healing is often necessary to address

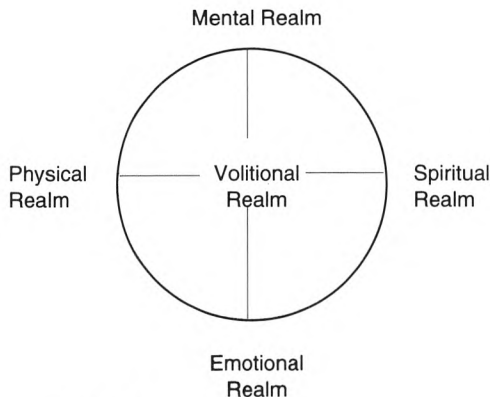


Figure 1. *The Medicine Wheel.*

the multigenerational trauma of colonization existent in Aboriginal students. In fact, Elaine Hebert, an administrator and co-founder of the NTI, commented that the trauma of past historical events and the nature of colonialism in Canada can retraumatize Aboriginal students during the learning process, and this necessitates the presence of healing in the curriculum to enable academic success. (E. Hebert, interview, May 23, 2003).

Although each of the students spoke of the need for healing as part of the learning process, not all students experienced a need for a healing process in every realm of the Medicine Wheel. Nevertheless, all students had learning blockages in at least one realm that required removal through experiences in the process curriculum before learning could be acquired through the content curriculum.

### *Summary of Learning Blockages*

The learning blockages that prevented students from achieving optimal learning before their attendance at the NTI can be organized into four major categories: negative school effects, negative identity, emotional hurt, and inner conflict. In the physical realm, negative experiences and teachings about the Aboriginal physical presence combined to create a negative body awareness and feelings of physical shame. In the mental realm, the invalidation of Aboriginal knowledge created a negative view of Aboriginal intelligence that contributed to a negative self-concept. This created mental anxiety and left students conflicted about the validity of Aboriginal knowledge and doubting their own intelligence and academic ability. The conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge belied feelings of cultural shame and fears that non-Aboriginal education was cultural suicide because of the lack of Aboriginal content. In the spiritual realm, residential and public school experiences invalidated Aboriginal culture and spirituality, creating a negative self-image filled with spiritual/cultural pain arising from the conflict between Native spirituality and Christianity. Interviewees commented that they felt a loss of balance resulting from the disconnection from their spirituality. In the emotional realm, learning blockages created negative self-esteem based on the experience of emotional pain. This created a conflict between the positive emotions of love and hope and the negative emotions of hate and fear. Students commented that when they entered the NTI, they felt emotionally stunted; that their emotional growth was at a standstill. In the volitional realm, the will was negated through messages invalidating Native potential that created a negative sense of personal self-determination based on self-hatred and fear. The messages resulted in a will conflicted between a desire to achieve academically and feelings of worthlessness and unworthiness (see Table 1).

*Table 1*  
*The Effects of Learning Blockages*

	<i>School Effects</i>	<i>Negative Identity</i>	<i>Emotional Hurt</i>	<i>Inner Conflict</i>
Physical	Negative physical awareness	Negative body awareness	Physical shame	Physical presence vs. White image
Mental	Negative view of intelligence	Negative self-concept	Mental pain	Validity of Aboriginal knowledge
Spiritual	Invalidation of culture and spirituality	Negative self-image	Spiritual pain	Traditional knowledge vs. Christianity
Emotional	Self-hatred	Negative self-esteem	Emotional pain	Self-caring and hope vs. self-hatred and fear
Volitional	Negated will	Negative self-determination	Volitional conflict	Positive goals vs. sense of worthlessness

*Summary of Healing Aspects*

The healing aspects identified by the students can also be organized into four major categories: holistic education, strengthening identity, emotional healing, and the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in the curriculum. In the physical realm, teachings about the body, physical education (including exercise), and the release of negative emotions about the physical self (including physical shame) developed a healthy body awareness. In the mental realm, cognitive education included the validation of Aboriginal knowledge (and the structuring of that knowledge in an Aboriginal model) combined with the release of negative emotions about Aboriginal intelligence (including the release of feelings about not being intelligent) to strengthen self-concept. In the spiritual realm, cultural education containing Aboriginal cultural/spiritual knowledge (including the process experiences that involved the practice of this knowledge as ceremony) combined to strengthen the self-image of the students. In the emotional realm, affective education (counseling skills, talking circles, knowledge of emotions and values) developed emotional skills that combined with the release of negative emotion to strengthen self-esteem. The identities of the students were strengthened through the healing of negative emotional energy and the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in all the courses taught at the NTI. In the volitional realm, education about the processes of learning contained in the will created a conscious awareness of the process of creating goals and objectives that combined with the release of negative emotions to strengthen the self-determination of the

students. The strengthening of all five aspects of learning identity increased the learning energy available to the students (see Table 2).

*Education as a Healing Process*

Healing was not the primary aim of the Native Training Institute, and it is important to note that the students learned sociology, psychology, human services, political science, and English as content materials required for the Human Service worker certification (see Table 3). Healing was possible in the curriculum because the cognitive content in the course materials was combined with process experiences that ensured that knowledge was learned in a healthy manner.

The combination of knowledge (content) with process experiences in the holistic curriculum created a healthy, balanced, and integrated classroom where healing emerged as a by-product of learning. The classroom became a healthy place. The following are a few examples of healing that occurred through the curriculum design at the NTI.

*Table 2  
Summary of Healing Aspects*

<i>Medicine Wheel</i>	<i>Holistic Education</i>	<i>Strengthened Learning Identity</i>	<i>Emotional Healing</i>	<i>Aboriginal Knowledge</i>	<i>Process Curriculum</i>
Physical	Physical education	Body awareness	Release of negative emotions about physical self	Physical teachings	Exercise
Mental	Cognitive education	Self-concept	Release of negative emotions about mental self	Validation of Aboriginal knowledge	Academic learning
Spiritual	Cultural education	Self-image	Release of negative emotions about spiritual self	Cultural spiritual knowledge	Ceremony
Emotional	Affective education	Self-esteem	Release of negative emotions about emotional self	Development of emotional skills	Talking circles Counseling practice
Volitional	Volitional education	Self-determination	Release of negative emotions about will and potential	Consciousness of will	Ceremony Talking circles

Table 3  
Native Training Institute Curriculum Content

Content Learning Curriculum		Process Healing Curriculum
Year one	Year two	
Sociology 101	Sociology 201	Talking Circles
Sociology 102	Psychology 202	Ceremonies
Sociology 103	Psychology 203	Sweatlodge
Sociology 104	Psychology 204	Pipe ceremony
Psychology 101	Human Services 201	Smudging ceremony
Psychology 102	Human Services 202	Counseling techniques
Psychology 103	Human Services 203	Individual sessions
Human Services 101	Human Services 204	Group sessions
Human Services 102	English 220	Peer counseling
Human Services 103	English 221	
Political Science 101	Political Science 201	
Political Science 102	Political Science 202	

*Case Study One. Aiona Anderson: A Portrait of  
Emotional Healing and Acceptance*

Aiona was raised in a healthy manner by her parents, Jacob and Mary Anderson, with Nle?kepmxcin as her first language. However, her residential school experience was a process of shaming that included emotional and psychological abuse including the denial of her language. Aiona needed a resolution of the physical shame created by the residential school to progress toward her educational goals. In order for her to learn, she needed to remove the blockage of negative self-judgment and achieve self-acceptance (Interview, November 15, 2002). Her healing journey was a path toward physical acceptance that included the realization that the acceptance of her physical self was necessary for her to be a whole being (Interview, November 15, 2002). She says,

I was as a dark-skinned Indian woman, or whatever, that was supposedly not good (at the residential school) and [at the NTI] I started to feel like I was a whole being ... I started realizing my whole being not just the physical, I mean the physical is important but that was just one part of who I was as well. So I could actually look at my skin and not think that it was bad or dirty. Because at boarding school they made us scrub our skin and our elbows till they hurt. Because they said they were dirty and made us scrub with these brushes and try to get rid of the dark, you know, the brown. And so (at the NTI) I started accepting who I was. (Interview, November 15, 2002)

The emotional processes used at the NTI, in combination with Aboriginal knowledge, history, and culture, were all necessary to create and assist physical healing. Aiona says, "I think, first of all, that is was an emotional and spiritual healing, once I had more of that I could feel better about my physical being" (Interview, November 15, 2002).

Aiona commented that before the NTI she was missing her identity because her ancestral heritage had been denied at residential school (Interview, November, 15, 2002). Ceremonies including the talking circles helped to heal the shame, low self-esteem, emotional trauma, and negative self-judgment that were created for her at the residential school.

I think that a lot of the talking circles that we had ... being able to share without fear of being judged ... Just learning about the emotional being and the psychological being ... of us as human beings. Learning about all of that and how it works how to start to heal those hurts was so beneficial. (Interview, November 15, 2002)

Aiona's most important observation was that holistic education, combined with a healing component, freed her learning energies to enable learning. The key element to her healing-learning was the holistic context and the ability to use the emotional realm to release the pain of Aboriginal history. Aiona believes that if learning at the NTI had been attempted without healing, the learning would have been greatly mitigated. After the NTI, Aiona completed a degree in Waldorf education, which recognizes and honors the whole child/human being spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally through the pedagogy and methodology of the curriculum.

The tears are not the pain; the tears are the release of the pain. (Phil Lane, Jr., Yankton Dakota/Chickasaw, Bopp & Bopp, 2001, p. 63)

*Case Study Two. Fred John: A Reclaiming of Aboriginal Voice*

Fred John was raised on the Fountain First Nation in Lillooet, British Columbia. His mother and father both died of tuberculosis before he was 4 years old. Shortly thereafter, Fred contracted the illness and spent five years in hospital, after which he attended a Catholic residential school. Fred said that the residential school damaged his way of thinking about himself and that he came to believe that he was not capable of academic achievement. Fred said that the trauma of residential school left him with a stutter:

I used to stutter so much. I remember that stuttering so much because of the beatings I took in residential school. I couldn't speak anymore. I got beat for stuttering (at the residential school) but I overcame that by working with myself through (the NTI) program and the teachings they taught me. (Interview, January 20, 2003)

Through the process of healing-learning (without any work directly related to the stuttering), Fred was able to overcome and totally eliminate his stuttering. The teachings in the mental realm combined with ceremonial spiritual knowledge (i.e., the sweatlodge, traditional teachings) and emotional counseling helped Fred change the negative concepts about himself. He developed a positive self-concept that was in harmony with traditional ways. He said that the presence of spiritual/cultural teachings in the curriculum was important. The style of teaching at the NTI had a sig-



nificant healing influence on him, and the institute encouraged a change in his way of thinking to a more positive, traditional style of thought.

The talking circles used at the NTI created an environment of safety where Fred was able to release his trauma, grief, and pain. However, it was not an easy journey; it was a challenge to face the need for emotional healing as part of the educational process.

My emotional was, that was quite a challenge on my part where I had to face my inner self [and] ... go ahead and work on things that I did not want to talk about ... When I was able to deal with that I felt so much better and people were able to listen to me. I remember trying to speak about it before I went to the program and people said, they would tell me, nobody is going to help me, just be quiet. Nobody is going to listen to you, just don't talk about [the residential school experience]. *Talking about it is where the healing starts.* (Interview, January 20, 2003, p. 8, emphasis added)

Fred's healing experience reveals the interdependence of the mental, emotional, and spiritual realms and the effect they can have on the physical realm. Fred achieved his goal of being a spiritual worker for the community and has been employed as a cultural resource person for many years. He was able to use the learning-healing environment at the NTI to reawaken his Aboriginal spirituality and use it for the benefit and blessing of those around him.

#### *Case Study Three. Marie Anderson: Riding a Double Horse*

Marie is a member of the Cooks Ferry First Nation who had a stable childhood filled with strong family values and teachings from her father and mother. Marie was conflicted about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge and spirituality. She said, "Growing up over the years it felt like we were turned, you know we you would almost say assimilated; we had turned into non-Native people" (Interview, January 30, 2003). This perception created the feeling that it was necessary to give up oneself to become educated: "It was in me to think that I have to forsake my being to be educated." Marie believed that education based on "white is right learning" could be "cultural suicide." This conflict created a block to learning that was resolved when she realized that both forms of knowledge could be learned and incorporated into a strong Aboriginal self:

Somehow through this process of the Native Training Institute I realized that I could be in both worlds. I could do both and not give up on myself or my Native self and be part of another learning institution. (Interview, January 30, 2003)

Marie shared a story about riding a double horse that represented the resolution of this conflict for her.

To live in this world you have like two horses that are galloping. One is the mainstream horse and one is your own horse, your traditional horse. You have a leg on each one and you are going and you are going fast. You can do it, but the thing you need is balance. You need balance on all four areas. You can ride that horse and you can gallop wherever you want because you have the reins to steer to. It is like riding a double horse. (Interview, January 30, 2003)

Marie healed the disconnection from her culture through the reestablishment of strong cultural connections. She said, "Up to then I didn't know what a smudge was. I didn't know what a pipe ceremony was. I didn't know what a sweat was. I remember going to my first sweat and that was really special because I did go in with my mom" (Interview, January 30, 2003). Marie regained the "feeling of connectedness by learning about ceremony and cultural history." In addition, Marie argues that the culture connection is still important in learning situations today. Marie regained her cultural confidence, identity, and sense of self. The combination of emotional release and cultural teachings developed the sense of belonging, the feeling of connectedness necessary for learning to occur. She commented that the sacredness, affirmation, and security of Aboriginal knowledge returned her ability to learn. After the NTI, Marie completed a master's degree in social work and is currently the administrative head of Hey wey Noqu Aboriginal Healing Centre in Vancouver.

*Case Study Four. Ross Albert: A Journey to Identity, Learning, and Sobriety*

Ross is also a member of the Cooks Ferry First Nation. His earliest memory was going to the residential school at age 5. He ran away in grade 8 and did not return. When he came to the NTI he was a practicing alcoholic and had brought a bottle of whiskey to drink during the first week of classes. His introduction to Aboriginal knowledge had such a strong effect that at the end of the first day of instruction, Ross decided to save the bottle until the next day. By the end of the first week of instruction, a transformation had occurred that has continued to this day; he did not open his bottle that week and has never taken another drink of alcohol. Such is the healing power of returning to wholeness in a cultural learning context that allows healing-learning through the release of negative emotions. He says,

There was a lot of pain. I wasn't the only one that had all of this pain and yet when we were sitting around laughing and talking you would think that they were okay, but really when you got to know (the students) there was a lot of hurt there. That was one of the things that I learned but I had to get past that before we could do anything. (Interview, February 7, 2003)

Ross said that not only did he have a low self-concept, but would go so far as to say he had no self-concept. The residential school experience had completely eliminated any clear visualization of himself in his mind as if he were nothing, floating in space.

I don't think I had one (self-concept). I think I was lost. Yeah, I think if I had some concept of who I was I probably wouldn't have gotten into all the trouble I was in. Meaning the alcohol and the jail and all of those things. I think I was trying to pass as white because that was the in thing back then. (Interview, February 7, 2003)

Ross identified learning the legends, history, and teachings of the Medicine Wheel as all contributing to the positive reconstruction of his self-concept. The discharge of the pain combined with Aboriginal know-

ledge and affirmations in a holistic learning curriculum allowed healing to occur.

The self-acceptance of his physical self was accompanied by the cultural/spiritual acceptance of being a First Nations person. The essence of this process for Ross, was “getting back to culture” and creating a reconnection with his family (Interview, February 7, 2003).

The sage ceremony, the sweetgrass ceremony, the drum, all of those things. That was for me what kind of connected. I guess in the spiritual part that is what connected me. (LB: connected you to what?) I guess to my higher being, to my higher power, to my Great Spirit. (Interview, February 7, 2003)

Ross identified the emotional experiences in the curriculum as the key element in his process of healing-learning, with the spiritual content as a close second. For him the emotional and the spiritual combined to support the process of learning in a way that enabled him to trust and to feel in the classroom. Ross made a decision during his study at the NTI to become an educated person. He accomplished this by acquiring a master’s degree in social work.

*Case Study Five. Deb Draney: Overcoming the Cognitive*

Deb Draney is a Metis person who was born in Edson, Alberta. Deb’s parents were Cree-speaking members of an active Metis community that gave her strong values. Deb was raised with a strong work ethic, of spiritual values, and the message that she could accomplish more through education. Sadly, her family became increasingly dysfunctional because of alcoholism.

Deb was struggling with an eating disorder and alcoholism when she started the NTI. The safety of the classroom environment at the NTI helped her to resolve these conditions through the inclusion of emotional processing with learning.

We sat in circles sometimes all day. I thought, whoa, is this all we did today was sit in circle? Because I am still thinking of the intellect and not maybe the emotional, but that is what helped me to change was that cellular emotional/spiritual connection. That is what I needed and I was hungry for it. (Interview, February 14, 2003)

For Deb it was the emotional release of the pain that allowed healing-learning to heal her eating disorder and alcoholism. She attributes her ability to quit drinking and change her eating habits to the emotional/spiritual aspect of the program that enabled her to seek professional help.

Well, it was like touching into an ancient part of myself and just a real pride. Because, again, coming [to NTI] with I guess you call it, cultural self-hatred, but coming in like that and knowing that those were our ancestral ways and we had those in place. That we were all born highly creative and highly intelligent and there was a purpose for us in this life. Those words stay with me. (Interview, February 14, 2003)

An important aspect of Deb's learning was the use of affirmations. These enabled Deb to resolve the old messages she had received about herself that told her she was not good enough to achieve academically. The negative messages Deb had received from society and public schools about not being good enough to learn were tied to "cultural shame" (Interview, February 14, 2003). The cultural and emotional processes used at NTI assisted her to resolve her "cultural self-hatred" by returning a sacred part of herself. Deb went on to finish a teaching degree and was able to incorporate the NTI philosophy into her teaching style.

True education is the bringing together of the heart and mind. (Kevin Locke, Dakota, Bopp & Bopp, 2001, p. 92)

*Case Study Six. Verna Billy: Compassion and Fortitude*

Verna is the second child in a family of six biological brothers and 17 adopted brothers. Verna was raised on the Bonaparte reserve with her mother and father and spent a great deal of time with her great-grandmother.

Verna said that by the time she began the NTI she had lost "the ability and the drive to learn" that she had as a youth as a result of an abusive marriage. Verna had developed a negative self-identity that had become a block to her learning. She attributes the removal of this blockage to the dual healing-learning process of instruction that emphasized both emotional healing and academic learning.

That ability to push at that level when people were going through all the healing, the hurt and the pain and still the instructors had the compassion and the fortitude to push you to learn, to write good, to do well, to expand your concepts, to think about those concepts in relationship to your own life. (Interview, February 10, 2003)

In the physical realm, Verna's healing-learning (like Deb Draney's above) centered on weight and eating. At the start of the NTI program, Verna weighed 310 pounds; two years later she weighed a 165 without dieting. She commented that she remembers crying through entire meals before the NTI, but that the NTI program gave her "the permission to heal and learn at the same time" (Interview, February 10, 2003). This developed a security of identity based on hope.

The healing-learning for Verna in the spiritual realm involved the healing of the conflict between Christianity and traditional teachings. Verna had attended a Catholic church for some time during her childhood, but had not been able totally to accept Christian teachings or reconcile them with the teachings of her grandmothers. Through the NTI teachings about the importance of ancestors and tradition, Verna was able to reconnect to her spirituality in a way that was supportive of learning. She notes that an important aspect of this process was the permission and safety to explore freely her culture and the related emotions.

For Verna, the dual process of learning-healing involved release of anger, abandonment issues, and hatred for men while developing trust, love, and the ability to express feelings positively through the learning of counseling techniques.

We need to allow people who have that ability to acknowledge and to cherish and to accept the healing.... That is what NTI did. I can't explain how that happened, but I know that from class to class I had the ability to do that. (Interview, February 10, 2003)

She says that her hope was returned through the reestablishment in the hope for the future of Aboriginal people that was taught at the NTI. Verna comments that the development of feelings of self-worth were necessary. She also commented, "the Medicine Wheel allowed [her] to see holistic patterns and it allowed [her] to integrate those patterns" into her life and work (Interview, February 10, 2003). This process returned strength to her learning identity and allowed her to achieve her goals. She is currently completing her doctorate and is the Dean of Academic and Partnership Development at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

The development of emotional capacities for love, loyalty, generosity, compassion and kindness ... are important lessons to be learned. (Lane et al., 1984, *The Sacred Tree*)

*Case Study Seven. Walter Leech: From Prison to Leadership*

Walter says that he was lucky he did not start residential school until he was 8 years old. He was born into a close family of 10 children on the Lillooet reserve. Eventually, he attended residential school at St. Mary's in Mission, BC. At age 15, he was expelled for stealing food. He began to work and experiment with alcohol, and the day he turned 21 he was sentenced to two years in prison for stealing alcohol. Walter made the amazing statement that prison was a step up from residential school. Walter said that he had spent eight and a half years in prison between the ages of 21 and 30 because of the low self-esteem and low self-confidence that he developed in residential school. He said that he had become negative in his thinking and was hiding and refusing to deal with life issues. Then at age 36, Walter made his seventh suicide attempt by shooting himself in the stomach.

Walter had to resolve health issues in the physical realm. First, he had to wrestle with issues of eating healthy and being overweight; and second, he had to come to terms with diabetes. He said that the physical aspects of the program brought him more in tune with his feelings. He was able to attain a freer state of being with regard to his physical body and come out of the hiding personality that he had developed during the residential school and prison years through discharging feelings.

The NTI replaced the negative knowledge with validations of his intelligence and identity as an Aboriginal person. Walter says that the NTI reaffirmed and validated the positive knowledge he had acquired from

Aboriginal teachings through the use of positive textbooks and Aboriginal facilitators. The dual healing-learning process created a positive identity for Walter. He says,

I got to know myself, I had an identity. I knew who Walter was, I knew where Walter wanted to go, and I guess in the back of the mind I knew a lot of these resource people would be my support system. (Interview, February 26, 2003)

Walter said that the resolution brought about at the NTI through accepting and validating his Nativeness created an increased interest in learning. The validation of his intelligence opened the doors to the realization of his potential as a human being and healed the previous message of *I can't* that he had received about himself.

The resolution process for Walter was through ceremony, release of the hurt, and validation. He says that these processes were primary for him and that the content aspects of the program, the formal learning, were secondary. Walter commented that the sage ceremonies, talking circles, and the Medicine Wheel were healing because they helped him create confidence in himself, thereby developing the capacity to communicate better with family and community members. The ceremonies, circles, and concepts of the Medicine Wheel helped Walter create a sense of comfort with himself as well as his immediate and extended family. This sense of comfort extended to all four areas of the Wheel (spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual), as he was able to embrace teachings from the Medicine Wheel. After the NTI, Walter became a leader and helper in his home community.

#### *Elements of Transformational Healing*

What were the elements in the cultural pedagogy of the NTI that created a healing classroom? The interviewees identified seven key elements that were critical to their educational transformation and healing: First was the presence of Aboriginal knowledge including ceremonial and oral knowledge. Second was the use of the Medicine Wheel as a model of holistic education. Third was the development and strengthening of identity, including the creation of positive self-esteem, self-concept, self-image, body awareness, and a sense of self-determination. Fourth was the acceptance, strengthening, and integration of Aboriginal values throughout the curriculum. Fifth was the development of competences relevant to the lives and employment of the students, including emotional competence. Sixth was the presence of personal and community ideals in the curriculum. Finally, the seventh element was the orientation of the curriculum toward a higher level of personal and community vision. Even more important than the presence of the seven elements was the integration of balance and harmony in the curricula that was reflected in the students' work, culture, and personal identities.

### Conclusion

Courageous Native people whose vision was far ahead of its time developed the Native Training Institute. The institute developed a holistic and healing approach to education based on traditional knowledge that has had a great effect on the Indigenous world. The NTI was able to create classrooms where invalidation was replaced by validation; negative educational emotional experiences were replaced with emotional competence; the painful negative teachings, messages, and countless put-downs of the residential and public schools were released and replaced with ceremonial and counseling methodologies. In the NTI classroom, Aboriginal identity was strengthened, learning increased, and healing was made possible. The energy once used to hold the pain in place was now released and used for the positive goals of learning and leadership. The now unblocked intelligence could be directed toward both personal and community vision that worked toward higher ideals and goals. The students felt a sense of rebirth in their Aboriginal knowledge, and this helped them to reconnect with their cultures. The classroom was and could be a safe place, and the realization that the long, hard night of Aboriginal suffering was at an end. The dawning of new morning light had come into the classroom.

There are four dimensions of "true learning." These four aspects of every person's nature are reflected in the four cardinal points of the Medicine Wheel ... It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process. (Lane et al., 1984, *The Sacred Tree*)

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