

# Relationships: An Indigenous Transnational Research Paradigm

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*What meanings can be made from an eight-week intense diverse cultural experience? In every community-based research experience are consistent tensions around creating, negotiating, and establishing solid, trusting relationships in an accelerated and constrained time frame. Four common elements have been identified in the dynamics of these relationships: trust, intimacy, mutuality, and responsibility. It is critical to note how this research team worked through these tensions, and not the dynamics of these tensions. My engagement with Indigenous community-based research meant that I was not simply immersed in an experience, I was the experience; I was not an objective observer, but became the observed. It was a process of continually contesting my own perceptions of reality and ways of generating meaning.*

When you have recovered from the adrenaline rush and jet lag; when the last suitcase is unpacked, the laundry has been dried and put away, and the last gift has been given; when the pictures have all been shown and stories told and retold; when you have sorted through the emotions of traveling abroad for the first time and leaving your family behind; when the rising star of your experience has reached its apex and you are face to face with your former reality: What is left behind? What meanings are to be made out of the experience as you sift through, manage, and negotiate eight weeks of an intense diverse cultural experience?

In fulfillment of my graduate work, I was privileged to participate in an international internship to Aotearoa (New Zealand) and to work with and observe Celia Haig-Brown of York University, the Te Kotahitanga<sup>1</sup> Project<sup>2</sup> team (a more detailed description of the project is provided below) at the University of Waikato, and the manager of the New Zealand Ministry of Education's GSE (Group Special Education) Poutama<sup>3</sup> Pounamu<sup>4</sup> Education Research and Development Centre<sup>5</sup> (Poutama Pounamu). Immediately on my return I was asked several times to define one aspect of my internship experience that stood head and shoulders above all other learning experiences. I was dumbfounded and unable to articulate even one intelligible aspect of my entire experience. I could discuss my experiences under various subheadings such as reflexively, with Te Kotahitanga, the interviews I conducted and the oral language assessment tools I observed while I was working with Poutama Pounamu. However, I felt alarmed at my seeming inability to tease out of eight weeks of experiences even one clear, lucid learning experience. I was completing some minor task at

home that was allowing me simultaneously to ponder and examine the various aspects of my experiences, searching for an overarching and emerging common theme that would enable me to weave the threads of my experiences together. It suddenly occurred to me that this internship experience was always first and foremost about relationships: in every interview of which I had the privilege of being a part, in every observation that I made, and in all my various interactions, there were always these tensions. The tensions were around creating, negotiating, and establishing solid, trusting relationships within an accelerated and constrained time.

Perhaps it is even more important to focus on how we worked through these tensions, and neither their absence nor presence in the experience. In this way, I began to realize that I was not only immersed *in an experience*, I *was the experience*; I was not only a researcher, I *was the researched*. It is not my intention that this statement sound arrogant or narcissistic in describing the internship experience, but I believe that the recounting of this internship experience shows, as Smith (1999) has aptly pointed out, "that indigenous research is [indeed] a humble and humbling activity" (p. 5).

I identified four common elements in all these relationships: intimacy,<sup>6</sup> mutuality,<sup>7</sup> responsibility,<sup>8</sup> and trust.<sup>9</sup> In order to conceptualize these elements as an iterative model in progress, that is, repetitions and convergences, I turn to the circle format to situate these various elements of relationships contextually. Many Indigenous groups use the circle as an embodiment for life journeys, life cycles, and an understanding of one's place in the cosmos. The medicine wheel of the Plains and Anishinabe culture-sharing groups is one such model. Bishop (1996), Bishop and Glynn (1999), and Smith (1999), well-known New Zealand researchers and scholars, adapted the circle as a conceptual model for their research. I wish to ensure that in using the circle as a conceptual model, it is not seen as merely another linear and positivist theoretical framework or as a *fait accompli*. The philosophy or ontology of the circle as a model in the scope of this article is not a noun-based static descriptive with a set entry and exit point in the process, but is organic in nature.<sup>10</sup> According to Hampton (1995), the circle is "iterative rather than linear. It progresses in a spiral that adds a little with each thematic repetition" (p. 6). In other words, the term *circle* as it is used in this context is a verb-based model that is organic, overlapping, dynamic, and indicative of action, convergences, motion, and movement both around and within the circle model.

In my view the ontological circle is experientially complete in and of itself; therefore, I am not seeking to complete the circle in writing this article, but rather seeking to consummate my experiences in a transformative and empowering process whereby I allow the circle to re-form and reshape my constructs and assumptions each time I revisit my graduate internship experiences, adding layers and dimension with each thematic repetition. Hampton (1995) describes the circle as having four distinct

directional components (north, south, east, west), with further fifth and sixth directional elements being spirit (sense of being) and earth (sense of place), which he places outside the circle, that is, they are described as distinct elements above and below the circle. According to Hampton, the circle itself is a conceptual paradigm for organizing, clarifying, and situating our thoughts and ideas contextually, with each of the directions providing "a way of thinking about existing in the universe" (p. 16). Hampton further asserts that each of the directions presents to him "a complex set of meanings, feelings, relationships, and movements" (p. 16), which also "implies circular movement in both the natural and spiritual worlds" (p. 6). Each of the directions has a purpose and/or function. As noted by Hampton, facing east is a traditional way for many North American Indigenous culture-sharing groups to pray, and so it seems the appropriate place from which to begin. The east is the springtime, the time of newness, growth, and development. From the east we move to the south, the place of summer where maturity begins to ripen. We then move to the west, represented by the fall season, the harvest, a time of plenty and mutuality. From there we come full circle to the place of the north where we have winter. Winter is traditionally indicative of storytelling, relational constructs, and connectedness. It is a time of introspection, reflexivity, and profound communication. Situating the four directions in the four above-mentioned relational elements of intimacy, mutuality, responsibility, and trust, we can see that entering through the eastern direction of intimacy, connections are made and relationships are established; proceeding through to the southern direction of mutuality whereby power differentials in relationships are equalized and reciprocity is normalized; we move through to the western direction of responsibility wherein accountability, dependability, and commitments are mutually shared relational elements; all these relational elements lead us to the northern direction where trust has been developed and deepened, resulting in a firm, confident trust and hope in the relationship that contributes to profound, challenging, and penetrating conversations. This in turn leads back into the eastern direction of renewed intimacy that with each repetition of the circle adds depth and dimension to the ongoing relationship.

In contrast to Hampton's (1995) model, I have placed the fifth and sixth directional elements (spirit and earth) in the center of the circle rather than labeled separately outside the circle (see Figure 1), because in my view, and as I demonstrate, the process itself is synchronously spiritual (sense of being) and earthy (sense of place), and further, these elements are interconnected and convergent in the four elements of intimacy, mutuality, responsibility, and trust. It is within the scope of intimacy, mutuality, responsibility, and trust that I discuss the following three aspects of my interning experience: mentorship, Te Kotahitanga program, and community-based research.

My field mentor and I developed and connected in a student-teacher relationship when I had taken a course that she was instructing at York University entitled (De)colonizing Methodologies. My field mentor's connection to the Indigenous community as a whole spans over 30 years, and she is a well-known and highly respected researcher and educator in that community. My connections to the Indigenous community at large stem from my multiracial background (Mohawk, French, and English), my previous work as a youth program coordinator in my own First Nations community, my academic research in language-shifting, and a community-driven research project seeking to examine chronic absenteeism in the early primary grades. Furthermore, I am involved with a local organization with the mandate of focusing on the preservation and revitalization of the region's First Nations languages.

When I conducted a literature review in preparation for my thesis work on language-shifting,<sup>11</sup> among the Hodenosaunee<sup>12</sup> of southern Ontario, I noted that a collaborative relationship seemed to have been established between various Maori scholars in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in Canada about Indigenous language revitalization initiatives. Furthermore, I felt it prudent to examine the success of *te reo* (the language) achieved by the Maori. It became clear to me that I would greatly benefit my community by going to Aotearoa to build transnational<sup>13</sup> relationships and to learn from the Maori scholars and Kaumatua (Maori Elders) and to bring back the acquired skills and knowledge base from which to assist my community (both specifically and as a whole) in furthering the work around Indigenous language issues.

I became aware that my former professor was going to Aotearoa to work on the Te Kotahitanga Project at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. Celia Haig-Brown had previously been to Aotearoa and had worked collaboratively with the project team during the first

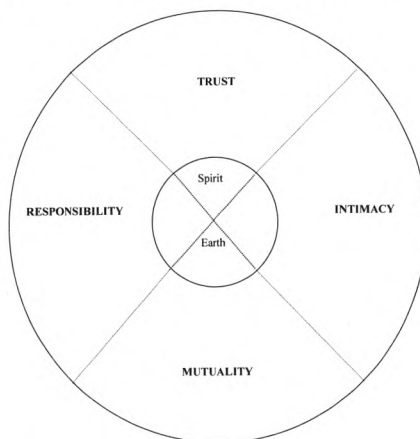


Figure 1. Relationships.

phase of Te Kotahitanga. I made contact with Dr. Haig-Brown to ascertain if she would be interested in taking me with her as a research intern based on the principles of the mentoring relationship as outlined below. She agreed, and thus began our journey together in Aotearoa.

According to Stanley and Clinton (1992), "mentoring is as old as civilization itself" (p. 17). It has its roots in ancient cultures and civilizations, "from Greek philosophers to sailors" (p. 17) and in the oral history of the Hodenosaunee people. Mentored learning has been the traditional method for passing on oral history, traditions, and skills in many cultures. In fact, the Peacemaker<sup>14</sup> and Hayanwatah (Hiawatha), an Onondaga, entered into a mentoring relationship. Hayanwatah was highly respected by his community and considered a great orator and a good leader. The Peacemaker "was united with Hayanwatah" (Lyons, 1992, p. 36) as they made their journey together throughout the rest of the five nations in pursuit of their mission of peace and unification.

Mentoring relationships can occur either as a natural result of familial or kinship ties and responsibilities or can arise out of a need and a request to fulfill that need; the latter experience is that to which I draw attention. According to Stanley and Clinton (1992), mentoring is a relationship entered into based on need and may be initiated by either the mentor or the mentoree.

Mentoring is a relational process in which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentoree, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment. (p. 40)

Stanley and Clinton further assert that there are three levels or groupings of mentoring relationships: intensive, occasional, and passive. Passive mentoring refers to inspirational life role models that as individuals we seek to emulate, but with whom we have no personal relationship. Because this internship required that my mentor and I live in Aotearoa, thousands of miles away from home, for eight weeks in consistent, specific, and deliberate interaction, we were continually aware of the depth of the effort and commitment in our mentoring relationship, and it is, therefore, on this intense mentoring relationship that I focus my discussion.

According to Stanley and Clinton (1992), the following principles are vital to the mentoring relationship: attraction, responsiveness, and accountability. The starting point in any mentoring relationship is that both the mentor and the mentoree be drawn to each other based on several factors including aspects of personal characteristics, the demonstration of certain skill sets, knowledge base, experiences, and the ability to influence and be influenced. This creates a sense of chemistry in the mentoring relationship. Further, as this attraction/chemistry increases, it provides an environment where trust and intimacy can be nurtured and developed.

Trust and intimacy are strong spiritual elements that ground and strengthen the developing relationship and ensure empowerment. "The stronger the relationship, the greater the empowerment.... relationships are vital" (p. 198).

Another crucial component of the initial attraction is to ensure that expectations are clearly "expressed, negotiated, and agreed upon at the beginning" (Stanley & Clinton, 1992, p. 198). Elements of trust and safety need to be somewhat developed for the mentoree to feel confident in openly negotiating his or her expectations fully. It is also crucial to determine the type or level of interaction that is expected, that is, the amount and quality of time that will be spent together; also, what the roles and responsibilities of the relationship will be. This will also be determined largely by whether the relationship is intensive, occasional, or passive. Because our mentoring relationship was intensive, we expected that we would be spending a great deal of our time together building intimacy and safety in our discussions. Thus we were able to work through the various challenges and tensions together with attitudes of mutuality and respect for each other as well as our own sense of self.

According to Stanley and Clinton (1992), responsiveness is an indication that the mentoree is ready and willing to receive the knowledge and skills that the mentor will impart during the process (empowerment). Therefore, the attitude of the mentoree is crucial for empowerment. The mentor must also be attentive to those teachable moments<sup>15</sup> and to use them effectively in order to enhance empowerment. The responsibility of the mentoree is to be responsive and open to receiving knowledge, and the mentor must be attentive to the teachable moments so as to ensure effective impartation. However, when the mentor finds teachable moments that require the need to challenge the mentoree's taken-for-granted assumptions or biases, it is important to have clarified ahead of time, during the formative period in the relationship, how and when such challenges will arise. It is imperative to come into this relationship with the expectation that such challenges are an inevitable part of the process, and as such to have a frank discussion on the "timing and procedure [for challenge] so that when the opportunity comes ... (and it will!), we are ready for it and can anticipate a mature response" (p. 204). It is important to note that the mentoree can also take on the responsibility of initiating the prime opportunity for challenge as he or she learns to trust in the intimacy and mutuality in the relationship.

Stanley and Clinton (1992) determined that accountability in the mentoring relationship requires that both the mentor and mentoree be mutually responsible to one another in order to facilitate the journey on which both have agreed to embark. Accountability must be a planned and negotiated aspect of the relationship and not just happenstance. Although the mentor is responsible for this process, he or she needs to see that the



mentoree can initiate and take responsibility for being accountable in the relationship; this can be the turning point for equalization and mutuality. Accountability takes into consideration aspects of confidentiality, the expected level of confidentiality, and individual perceptions about issues of confidentiality. Trust and intimacy are taken to a higher level as personal details are shared. The ability to speak openly and freely allows the relationship to deepen and the individuals to connect and interact on a deeper, more spiritual level, as well as an evolving of responsibilities, to one another and to the process. This in turn opens and allows for authentic dialogue between the mentor and mentoree on issues of vulnerability, sensitivity, and transparency.

In this case, because for the first time I was thousands of miles from home in a foreign land with no kinship support, in an environment where I was completely dependent on my mentor for emotional and social support in an intensely diverse cultural experience, and because my mentor had had previous well-established relationships in the community, I struggled with feeling like an outsider. I felt disoriented, vulnerable, and emotionally saturated as I had never felt before. Honesty and transparency between us were crucial in working through these issues of vulnerability and sensitivity.

Relationship evaluation is an integral component of the accountability process. Both the mentor and mentoree determine the nature of the evaluation process during the formative state of their relationship, agreeing that the process can also be revisited and revised as the need occurs. Mentoring relationships are seldom perfect or expectations completely and fully realized. Periodic joint evaluations allow for checking to see how the relationship is progressing and what could or should happen in that relationship. It may not always be possible to fully realize the expectations that were established and negotiated at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. Conversely, the expectations may need to be adjusted for emergent or perhaps unforeseen situations and/or conditions. Evaluation, feedback, and feed-forward allow both the mentor and mentoree to adjust their respective expectations to ensure a long and rewarding mentoring experience. Although feedback is reflexive in nature and focuses on what has been said or done, feed-forward is more habitual in nature and is labor-intensive. Feed-forward considers the ontological place of *now* and flows forward in time indefinitely as it relates to praxis. The evaluative process also brings closure to the mentoring relationship and helps the mentoree identify areas of empowerment. The interconnected relationship circle (Figure 1) between the mentor and mentoree promotes the achievement of the outcomes of the mentoring relationship, which is imparting and sharing knowledge, skills, influence, and the empowerment of the mentoree. "Begin with the end in mind" (Stanley & Clinton, 1992, p. 207). A successfully completed mentorship is one where a solid, long-lasting

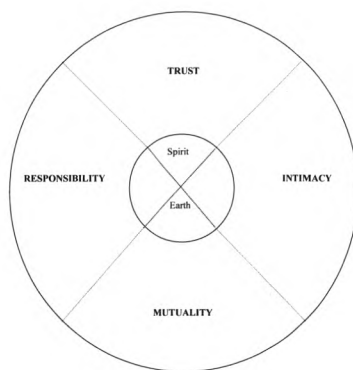
friendship is created and nurtured, and provides opportunities for further interactions as appropriate.

If the mentoring relationship is not ongoing and was initiated for a specified time, closure is a necessary aspect of the accountability process. Closure brings the relationship full circle and can take whatever form the mentor and mentoree agree on and are comfortable with. My field mentor and I on our return to Canada presented our discussion papers on our various experiences at an Indigenous research forum and conference in Winnipeg entitled *Shawane Dagosiwin*. This was an effective way to bring closure to our Aotearoa experience and to develop our relationship from mentor/mentoree and carry it forward as colleagues.

While interning with my mentor, who was conducting research in relation to the Te Kotahitanga project, I attended various meetings, workshops, and training sessions, learning and observing the processes and dynamics of the interactions between the teachers, the project team, and the Kaumatua as the teachers worked through the various issues relating to their praxis and the elements of the project. The relationship dynamics in the Te Kotahitanga project are not unlike the mentoring relationships described above. Te Kotahitanga is a research project that investigated through dialogue and collaborative storying with both engaged and non-engaged years 9 and 10 Maori students how their achievement levels in the mainstream school setting could be improved. The stories that came out of the initial scoping exercise formed the basis for how the project would be developed. The students' narratives clearly identified that the main influence for Maori student achievement was the teacher-student interaction and that if teachers could change how they related to and interacted with Maori students in their own classrooms, then the context could be created for improving Maori student achievement levels (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003).

The whole project itself is a system focused on self-learning at every level: whole schools, individual teachers, in classrooms, and even in the project team itself (see Figure 2). Each self-learning layer builds on and informs the previous in a dynamic spiral shape. The program comprises the following five elements: Hui Whakerara,<sup>16</sup> Observation Tool,<sup>17</sup> Feedback and Feed-forward, Co-Construction meetings, and Shadow Coaching (explained in more detail below). The *hui* "metaphorically ... describes the interactions between the participants ... and the process of arriving at an agreed collaborative story" (Bishop, 1996, p. 33). In Te Kotahitanga, the hui is conceptualized as a three-day workshop held for both new facilitators and new teachers into the project. The hui is usually held at a Marae,<sup>18</sup> a traditional Maori meeting house. At the hui everyone is housed together, sharing mealtimes, and interacting with one another in the Marae for three full days. Facilitators are the key in-school support for the teachers.





*Figure 2. Te Kotahitanga self-learning model. My own conceptualization of the process.*

The facilitators' role is one of mentoring the teachers into the Te Kotahitanga processes. They provide safe opportunities for observation for formative purposes, feedback, feed-forward, and shadow coaching. Shadow coaching provides the teacher with a supportive environment to plan, try, trial, collaboratively process, and reflect. Peered shadow coaching is framed in the mutuality component of the relationship circle. Sincere and honest mutuality in any type of relationship is not possible without the elements of trust and intimacy. Co-construction meetings are held where all teachers meet to focus on the learning needs of their respective classes and reflect on student participation and achievement for formative purposes.

As stated above, relationships are key elements in Te Kotahitanga and are stressed throughout the three-day hui in the facilitator-teacher mentorship as well as between teachers and their respective students. The relationships between the teachers and students are said to be the key to Maori student achievement. Furthermore, these relationships are about positioning, that is, the individual whether a teacher, mentor, or mentoree. Teachers both at the initial hui and with the ongoing relationships with in-school facilitators are challenged to work at solutions and strategies for overcoming deficit thinking<sup>19</sup> and pathologizing pedagogy<sup>20</sup> (see Figure 3). In deficit thinking an individual would say something like: "I cannot make changes because ... In rejecting deficit thinking and pathologizing pedagogy an individual would say with some confidence: I am able to make changes and I know how to do it."

Bishop (personal communication, March 15, 2007) stated that the professional development process moves mature teachers in the project from reliance on the observation tool, which is used by the facilitators to observe teacher-student interactions to provide feedback to the teachers on how they are interacting with Maori students in their classrooms, to the

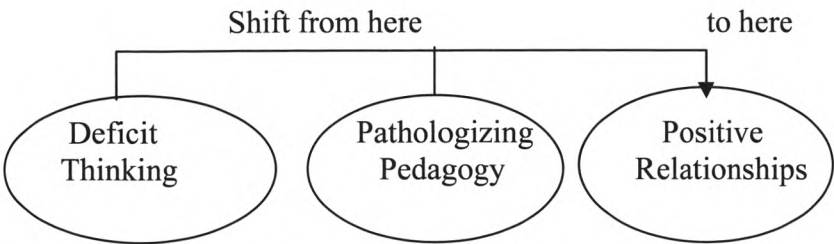


Figure 3. Repositioning deficit thinking and pathologizing pedagogy.

consistent use of peer shadow coaching. Te Kotahitanga processes model the mentoring relationship as discussed above. The developing Te Kotahitanga teacher moves through the intensive mentoring process based on a need and a request to fill that need, namely, to assist teachers through the professional development process as set out in the Te Kotahitanga program to raise the achievement levels of Maori students. The relationship begins with intense mentoring where the teacher depends on the facilitator; this state of dependence is the beginning of the process of transformation. The teachers (mentorees), by placing themselves in a state of dependence on the facilitators (mentors), acknowledge their willingness and responsiveness to transform current deficit thinking and pathologizing praxis. As a teacher matures in the mentoring relationship, he or she moves from a state of dependence to one of independence; empowerment has occurred (see Figure 4).

As the teacher moves through the process, tensions arise just as in the mentoring relationship. These are about having to create and establish solid, trusting relationships in a stressful, accelerated, and constrained time frame through the professional development model: Is the observation tool going to be used for surveillance purposes? Will the facilitator or other teachers think less of me if I get a less-than-perfect evaluation or feedback? However, it has been noted by Bishop, the project team, the project teachers, and facilitators throughout various hui (personal com-

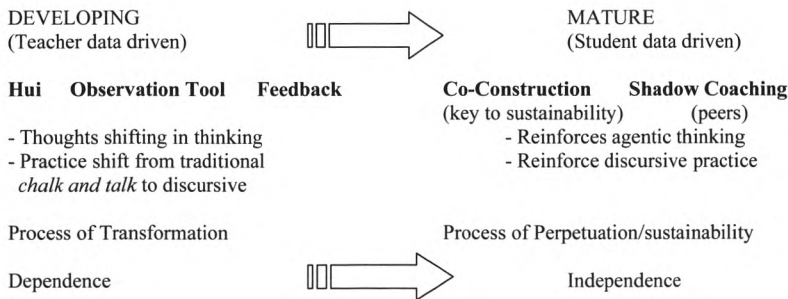


Figure 4. Professional development process.

munication, February-March 2007) that the teachers develop trusting and intimate relationships with the facilitators and other Te Kotahitanga teachers based on elements of mutuality and responsibility. Once the teachers are confident that the evaluations are for formative and not summative purposes and are used for their own professional development, not for surveillance, they begin to share their respective observation evaluations willingly with one another and look to the co-construction meetings for feedback and feed-forward in order to focus on the learning needs of their respective students. The dynamics of the interconnected relationships—teacher-student, teacher-facilitator, teacher-teacher—lead us back to increased positive interactions between teacher and student. This circle of relationships promotes the achievement of the outcomes of Te Kotahitanga, which is to increase the achievement levels of Maori students. Such relationships are not confined to one-on-one relationships such as between mentor and mentoree, student and teacher, teacher and facilitator, or teacher and teacher.

A larger mentoring relationship exists between a researcher and the community or culture-sharing group being researched as the representatives of a community (in this case the Kaumatua/Maori Elders) can decide to take a researcher under their wing and protect, shelter, and take the time to impart their knowledge to the researcher/mentoree. Celia Haig-Brown, knowing the work that I was doing for my thesis about language-shifting, arranged a meeting with the manager of Poutama Pounamu in Tauranga, who told me that the Kaumatua had heard about my arrival and work in the area of language-shifting. The Kaumatua had extended an invitation for me to talk with them about their initial struggles and how they have successfully revitalized *te reo* in their community. It was thought that I could develop questions and to interview the Kaumatua in their group of three, the transcription of which would be archived at Poutama Pounamu for their own future use. After the interview, the Kaumatua had organized visits to some of the Maraes, the language nest programs, Maori language schools, and immersion programs located in mainstream school settings. They arranged meetings with some of the educators and students in these school systems, and I acquired a deeper knowledge of Maori culture and hence the importance of language in that culture-sharing group. During this time, one of the Kaumatua was always with me, talking with me; sharing their stories, explaining various elements of culture, history, and language; translating the language for me, and observing my interactions. Although this may seem like an intense mentoring relationship, it was occasional as I was only with this particular community for compressed periods during my stay in Aotearoa.

My meaning in the above statement “you are the researched” is reflected in Smith (1999), a Maori researcher who recounts her own early

community research experience as “learning more about research and being a researcher” (p. 139) than could ever have been experienced in any esoteric lecture or course material. Immersing herself in the research experience added complexity to the experience, and she became an integral component of the totality of the experience and not simply a detached observer/interviewer. Smith asserts that Indigenous research is also about the researcher himself or herself being observed and having to build credibility in a particular community or culture-sharing group. Furthermore, it is about “negotiating entry to a community or a home” (p. 136) through a complex process of observing “protocols of respect and practices of reciprocity” (p. 136), and hence the researcher becomes the researched; the observer becomes the observed.

In the formative stage of this particular mentoring relationship, the manager of Poutama Pounamu on behalf of her community was initializing contact to assess the chemistry/attraction, my responsiveness, and sense of accountability as a mentoree/researcher with the Kaumatua as mentors. If I was found to be suitable, the meeting was to determine how the mentoring/research relationship would proceed. When I initially met with the manager to discuss my working with Poutama Poutamu, she asked me to articulate my research intentions using Russell Bishop’s (1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999) power-sharing model, which tests research and the researcher on five points of interest: initiation, benefits, representation, legitimization, and accountability. According to Bishop and Glynn, the power-sharing model evaluates and monitors the progress of the power relationships in the education system. It was also used by the manager to evaluate my responsiveness to entering into a mentoring/research relationship with the Kaumatua and thereby the community. The power-sharing model, although designed for use in education, can be adapted for use in the context of the mentoring/research relationship noted here as follows.

- *Initiation.* Whose interests is the research promoting? Who establishes the goals and defines cultural appropriateness?
- *Benefits.* Who will gain directly from the research? How will this be determined and by whom?
- *Representation.* Whose reality and stories are privileged in the research? How will that reality and those stories be represented and by whom?
- *Legitimization.* Whose reality and experiences or stories are legitimized by the research? How will legitimization be achieved? Who determines legitimacy?
- *Accountability.* To whom is the researcher accountable? Who has control over the research, and how is this demonstrated?

These five points of interest can also be articulated through Smith’s (1999) critical questions: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose inter-

ests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated? These questions were asked in the complexity of the relationship circle model (trust, intimacy, mutuality, and responsibility). During the initial meeting and subsequent visits with the Kaumatua, having been invited to enter through the eastern direction of intimacy, connections were made and lasting relationships established; proceeding through to the southern direction of mutuality, relational power differentials are equalized, everyone benefits equally from the relationship, and reciprocity is normalized; as we proceed to the western direction, responsibility, mutual accountability, dependability, and commitments are shared elements; this then takes us to the northern direction where trust has been developed and contributes to an ongoing and long-lasting bond. As stated above, the iterative relationship circle leads back to the eastern direction of a renewed intimacy, which with each repetition of the circle adds depth and dimension to the relationship. It was imperative that I come into this formative mentoring/research relationship circle with the utmost dignity, respect, and gentleness in order to "develop membership, credibility, and reputation" (Smith, p. 15).

Jiménez Estrada (2005), describing the process of legitimizing Indigenous research, states, "honouring and privileging Indigenous knowledges require that the researcher states her/his own roots of motivation for entering into research [mentoring] relationships ... this means open and honest communication" (p. 48) that includes a dialogue on intention and motivation. Smith (1999) asserts that these cultural "protocols, values, and behaviors ... are factors to be built in to research explicitly [and I would also say the mentoring relationship], to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly ... to be discussed as part of the final results ... and to be disseminated back ... in culturally appropriate ways" (p. 15).

Bishop (1996) asserts that mutuality in shared meaning-making is developed through ongoing dialogue with the researcher, community, and research participants in order to "facilitate ongoing collaborative analysis and construction of meaning/explanations about the experiences of research participants" (p. 29). Although Bishop discusses the above in the context of a research relationship, I would suggest that this also indicates the mentoring relationship of a researcher with the community. At the end of my eight weeks in Aotearoa, on the final day I had lunch with the manager, researchers, and Kaumatua of Poutama Poutamu to discuss the work that I had been doing while with them, what my plans were for the completion of my own work, and how we might continue to collaborate and connect after I returned home.

Solid, ongoing, reciprocal relationships have been established with Poutama Poutamu and the community based on the relationship circle of



trust, intimacy, mutuality, and responsibility. So how have I made sense of my time in Aotearoa?

Throughout my time there, I honored my ancestors by laying down my tobacco,<sup>21</sup> and looking to the east in humility and prayer, seeking insight and guidance from the Creator.

A particularly defining moment occurred while I was out walking early one morning, and the thought exploded into my mind as I realized just how much we really do define and interpret normalcy by our own standards. We talk about it in classrooms and lecture theaters, we justify how we think and feel, and we convince others and by extension ourselves that we do no such thing. It is not even intentional, but it is how we view our world and the perspective from which we view others' reality. No experience, research, or relationship is objective. It is in every sense subject to our own sense of how to generate meaning from what we observe and experience.

So how do we trust our own interpretations of situations, events, word usage, and/or body language, just to name a few? The truth is that we do not, we cannot. We must engage ourselves in consistent reflexivity in the chaos of situating and immersing ourselves in another culture. This is an exhausting and messy endeavor; it is mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting. I was continually being stretched outside my comfort zone from many angles and sources, which also meant that I was vulnerable, sensitive, and emotional. It is not possible to be objective. Nor is it possible to experience this kind of intense fieldwork from a distance. I had to dig in and submerge myself in the experience, and hence I *was* the experience. Consequently, when I returned to my own life, I experienced a period of disorientation and general disquiet as I reacquainted myself with my family, friends, work, and ways of being and knowing in my own reality. My experiences had vastly affected me and changed me in ways that were difficult to discern immediately. There was an unsettling expectation that I would simply pick up where I had left off, and yet I was no longer the same person I had been when I left. I felt disconnected.

We have all become a part of each other's stories, and so this experience has created change in my personhood that has somehow elusively become a part of defining who I am now and how I will journey on from here. This is not to be construed as some vague classroom exercise, but is in essence a spiritual awakening, and there is no way to quantify or measure the effect of this experience. Not the least of this, transnational relationships have been created that will continue to form and inform future research projects and ways of considering the concept of Indigenous<sup>22</sup> from the perspective of all my relations.<sup>23</sup>

One year later, as I see and reflect on my mentoring/research experience, I can easily determine that it has affected my academic and professional life both directly and indirectly. Directly in that I returned from

Aotearoa with transcripts from three independent interviews for use in my own work; and also I have established transnational relationships with people whom I consider friends, colleagues, and my relations from across the great water. My field mentor, people from both Te Kotahitanga and Poutama Pounamu, and I reconnected at the 2008 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in New York. This was an exciting and heartfelt reunion, and I was able to make transnational connections for colleagues who attended the conference with me. Furthermore, I have collaborated with my relations from across the great water to submit a proposal for a joint presentation at the 2008 World Indigenous People Conference in Education (WIPCE) in Australia.

Indirectly, although intangible, it is clearly evident in the confidence with which I approach Indigenous research as a whole. This is not to say that I no longer have anything to learn or that I have no further need to contest my own constructs, as each new experience brings its own unique challenges, but rather this newfound confidence has grounded me and enabled me to find my voice and to stand up to the rigors of being challenged by others. Also, I trust the process of engaging in community-based Indigenous research in meaningful, relevant, and culturally appropriate ways. I consider research from a relational/mentoring perspective based on the relationship circle noted in Figure 1. This process occurs through establishing relationships through collaborative knowledge-building, mutually interpretative meaning-making, and reciprocal and responsible interactions. I have had opportunities to mentor non-Indigenous researchers in conducting research in an Indigenous community, as well as Indigenous community members who are inexperienced in the processes of academic research in how to navigate the systemic realities of academia. The effect of these mentoring relationships is reflected in a collaborative paper presented at the 2008 AERA conference entitled *Walking in Two Worlds: Engaging the Space Between Indigenous Community and Academia*. I have also been mentoring new students through the gamut of their own educational experiences.

To this end, I have had numerous discussions with graduate students who feel disconnected from academia, the faculty, and their own educational experience. They do not feel grounded and/or confident in their own sense of scholarship and lack opportunities to build capacity. Many of them express frustration, have a sense of being disoriented, and are barely hanging on as the process carries them along rather than their being able to take control of their own experience. For those who have managed to control their experience, this remains narrow and small and is locked in the boundaries and limitations of their ability to create their own sphere of influence. Mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students would serve to foster a sense of community in academia that would demystify the experience for students. Mutuality in these mentoring rela-

tionships would ensure that both mentor and mentoree benefit equally from the experience and build capacity for the graduate student/mentoree. Connecting students with international colleagues broadens their experience, which cannot be achieved by solely reading text. International research projects allow graduate student interns to observe directly and interact with the research experience in a safe and supported environment while being immersed in an intense cultural experience. One cannot assume that because a student took a research course, he or she knows the depth and breadth of research processes. Experiential learning through mentoring relationships would add a richer dimension to the learning experience for both the mentor/faculty member and the student/mentoree. All the above-mentioned dialogue happens in the assurance that all knowledge is thematically layered, interwoven, and is part of a collective story that does not belong to any individual alone as we are all a part of all that is beneath us (sense of place/earth), all that is above (spirituality), and all that is around us (the circle of relationships). The mentoring relationship is one tacit example of this interconnectedness.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Kotahitanga is a Maori word denoting unity, oneness, and interconnectedness.

<sup>2</sup>Te (the) Kotahitanga Project is a three-phase project designed to investigate years 9 and 10 Maori student achievement in mainstream school settings.

<sup>3</sup>The general meaning of Poutama is "steps to heaven." The literal contextual interpretation would be provided by the Kaumatua (Maori Elders) at the time of its use.

<sup>4</sup>Pounamu is New Zealand greenstone or jade, a highly valued element of Maori culture.

<sup>5</sup>The Poutama Pounamu Education Research and Development Centre was established in 1995. Its role is to develop, trial, and evaluate behavior and learning resources and assessment procedures for Maori students in both English and Maori settings in culturally appropriate ways.

<sup>6</sup>"Very familiar; known very well; resulting from close familiarity; personal, private—a close friend" (Avis, Drysdale, Gregg, Neufeldt, & Scargill, 1983, p. 611).

<sup>7</sup>"Symbiosis with mutual advantage to both or all organisms involved; reciprocal (return in kind); having the same relationship toward each other or one another" (Guralnik, 1984). Mutuality in this context is also used in reference to relationships in regard to notions of positioning and power. If the relationship is mutual, the positioning and power of the people will be in balance.

<sup>8</sup>Obligation, accountability, dependability; to think and act rationally, and hence accountable for one's behavior; readily assuming obligations, duties, etc. (Guralnik, 1984).

<sup>9</sup>A firm belief in the honesty, truthfulness, justice, or power of a person or thing; faith; a confident expectation or hope (Avis et al., 1983).

<sup>10</sup>In the context of this article, organic is defined as something that contains a life force or energy that is interconnected with other life forces/energies to create mutual sustainability. It is dynamic, changing, evolving, and adapting contextually.

<sup>11</sup>The term *language-shifting* in the scope of my thesis refers to the examination of how language is currently being used in a specific community, as well as examining the need to shift social consciousness for the community to understand the urgency in privileging their first languages, which is not to suggest that English would no longer be used as a means of cross-cultural or business communication.

<sup>12</sup>*Hodensaunee* is a self-identifying term meaning "people of the long house" or "men who build long houses." They have also been known as the Iroquois, a name given to them by

other nations to the east and subsequently adopted by the early European explorers, colonists, and fur traders. The Hudenosaunee (Iroquoian) culture-sharing group located on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in southern Ontario originally comprised five distinct nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscarora nation faced harsh persecution by European settlers in their homeland located in what is now North Carolina in the US, migrated northward, and were the last to be accepted into the Iroquoian Confederacy some time in the early 1700s. Although there are some cultural commonalities between the six nations, each has its own language and particular cultural norms.

<sup>13</sup>Transnational (trans + national): Trans—prefix: across, over, beyond, on the other side of, into another place; National—affecting or belonging to a whole nation, extending throughout the nation, having members in every part of the nation, citizenship (Avis et al., 1983).

<sup>14</sup>The Peacemaker, we are told, was born among the Huron people and arrived first in the land of the Ganienkehaka, the People of the Flint, known in English as the Mohawks. Legend relates, "He crossed Lake Ontario in a stone Canoe" in order to establish "a union of peace under the principles the Haudenosaunee understand to be the natural laws of the universe" (Lyons, 1992, p. 34). I have been told that his name is considered so sacred that it is to be neither spoken nor written.

<sup>15</sup>A teachable moment is a learning opportunity. It is a specific moment when someone is open and responsive either to learn or to be made aware of something.

<sup>16</sup>According to Bishop (1999), a hui is literally a gathering. It includes "a formal welcome, a powhiri, a welcome rich in cultural meaning, imagery, and cultural practices ... The aim of a hui is to reach consensus, to arrive at a jointly constructed meaning. But the decision that this has or has not been achieved rests within the Maori culture, i.e. the Kaumatua [Elders]. This takes time, days if need be ... and is often a time when new agendas or directions are set or laid out" (pp. 122-123). Whakarera denotes the exposing of myths, lies, biases, assumptions, or fallacies; it also means to look at something or someone head on, directly, or in the face.

<sup>17</sup>The observation tool was developed as a professional development model (Bishop et al., 2003). Two in-class observers observe teacher-Maori student interaction in a classroom. The data collected "forms a picture of what was happening within the classroom and [provides] the basis for individual and group feedback and reflection sessions" (pp. 126-127).

<sup>18</sup>A Marae is a Wahi tapu or sacred place. Maraes are used for various religious and social purposes and have deep cultural significance for the Maori culture-sharing group.

<sup>19</sup>Deficient thinking focuses on gaps and weaknesses. In this context deficient thinking blames the student for his or her lack of success in the school system.

<sup>20</sup>Pathologizing pedagogy, which in general terms refers to harmful teaching practices, appears to be interconnected with deficient thinking in that each influences the other.

<sup>21</sup>Tobacco was the first of four sacred plants given to the Hudenosaunee people in order for them to be able to communicate with the spirit world, and so initiates interactions with all the other plant spirits. Tobacco is a strong and sacred medicine; it is always offered first.

<sup>22</sup>According to Smith (1999), the term *Indigenous peoples* "is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970's out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples" (p. 7).

<sup>23</sup>"The world's Indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples. They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives" (Smith, 1999, p. 7).

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