

Living Warriorship: Learning Warriorship within the Context of Indigenous Community

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Despite efforts to improve the schooling experience of American Indian children in the United States, academic achievement, by dominant cultural standards, remains elusive. This critical ethnographic study presents ways that the social practice of education in a public urban school produced warriorship, situated in scholarship, among American Indian adolescents and adults at the school. Ogichidaawin, warriorship, is a practice offering a design for living, according to community cultural values of respect, harmony, balance, and cohesion, that includes intense and purposeful learning.

Introduction

Reform of American Indian education has typically resembled general educational reform, as favoured by dominant culture school systems. I argue that intensification of academic standards (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 214), increased testing, and an increased kind of accountability that Deloria argues “is actually the problem” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 9), are ineffective reform strategies for Native education. Such reform has led to a situation whereby students and their teachers are drowning in facts, bereft of meaning or wisdom (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, pp. 29-30). Efforts to reform middle schools, in particular, are influenced by the myth that “young adolescents are so distracted by their social, emotional, physical, and psychological development that they have no interest in learning” (Mizell, 2002, p. 65). Further, when the myth of adolescent resistance to learning is layered upon a more global belief system regarding limitations of students based on “race, language, culture, or family income or background” (Mizell, 2002, p. 65), the learning environment for American Indian youth, particularly those in middle school, can become stultified.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) have critiqued the prevailing models of school reform with origins in conservative political movements and, in particular, the designation of some students as “at-risk” (p. 139). With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), critics of public education in the United States have situated the underachievement of some students based on race and class, social conditions, and cultural influences. Lipman (1998) and her colleagues studied how remedies to underachievement were situated in schools with differential demographics based on race and class. Teachers in schools with a high percentage of non-White students from low-income families tended

to assign responsibility for low achievement to deficits within social patterns of parents, families, and communities. According to Lipman (1998), "teachers contended that parents were apathetic and students' social problems undermined whatever efforts teachers might make, and there was really very little they could do" (p. 81). Remedies to the problem of non-achievement within schools emerge as attempts are made to compensate for perceived deficits existing outside of school and within the community.

An alternative perspective positions the Indigenous community as a resource with the capacity to strengthen classroom-based instruction. Certainly, we find abundant theoretical and empirical support for this approach when we examine significant policy documents in Canada. A clear, unequivocal call for local control of education by First Nations communities and parents, particularly in the area of Native history, language, and culture within classroom instruction, was first articulated by the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations (1972). That mandate was reiterated in *Gathering Strength*, a report issued by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), emphasizing a belief that education for Aboriginal children must reflect the values and vision of Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal communities. Subsequent calls for the implementation of these policy recommendations also support community involvement in Aboriginal education (Battiste, 2000; Cherubini & Hodson, 2011; Kirkness, 1990). Recently, a comprehensive study was released outlining the ways that Indigenous knowledge, particularly within the spiritual realm of human being, have highlighted the continued role of Aboriginal communities in creating successful learning environments and supporting resilience among children and other community members (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008).

Policy supporting the inclusion of American Indian parents and communities in the United States was first formalized in the 1978 passage of PL 95-561, the Indian School Equalization Program legislation and regulations that mandate school boards for federally-operated schools and provide funds for the administration of those school boards. As in Canada, repeated calls for implementation of policies that are inclusive of families and communities have been voiced (Cummins, 1989; Reyhner, 1992; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; St. Germaine, 1995; Tippeconnic, 2000).

With policy in place and repeated calls for implementation of that policy, it becomes all the more important that dynamic, creative, and effective middle school teaching practices be examined for the potential to influence broader reform of middle school education for American Indian students. The purpose of my research at Medicine Wheel School, an Indigenous perspective K-8 school located in the city centre of a large US metropolitan area on the edge of the Great Plains, was to explore and document learning practices that occur when the design of instructional practices is not encumbered by biased preconceptions; instead, the design of instructional

practices is powered by a belief that learning is a means by which Native youth may serve the Indigenous community. I sought to answer a number of questions on potential links between American identity and scholarship. What emerged as the most focused link, however, was that between warriorship and scholarship situated in community-based learning of history.

In 2000, during my preparation for the study at Medicine Wheel School, a number of decisions affecting both the study organization and my position as a researcher needed to be made. As an emerging critical scholar, I chose to apply practice theory to the study, focusing primarily on cultural productions. Cultural productions are adaptations (represented in activities and meaning) that groups produce in response to oppressive conditions in everyday activities (Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998, p. 40; Willis, 1977) and patterns "of social assertion that significant others recognize and come to expect" (Davidson, 1996, p. 2). I was interested in learning whether those cultural productions would either support or divert attention from learning. Learning is not a neutral cognitive process. Beyond issues of curriculum and pedagogy, the contexts in which learning is constructed and situated are highly charged with ideological overtones and are influenced by the presence of historical/political artifacts. Moreover, influence is not a totally passive process. We choose to respond to some aspects of our environment and to overlook others; we choose our influences. As I planned the study at Medicine Wheel School, I was interested in seeing what influences the students at the school would choose to accept. During my observations and interviews with both students and adults at the school, I sought to locate and document evidence regarding accommodation strategies, including displays of participatory identities and membership in communities of practice. I also examined practice at the school for the construction of historical/political identities. I anticipated that I would find displays of identity, including, for example, Leader and Elder.

I observed and participated in the social practice of learning at Medicine Wheel School primarily in a seventh-grade history class. I applied standard anthropological methods to produce an ethnographic text, by observing, taking fieldnotes, reflecting in a journal, and conducting individual and focused group interviews. I used Spradley's (1980) methods of analysis to organize the data once collected. Spradley's systematic methods allowed for deep analysis of units of meaning, identifying domains, and comparison of meanings across units of text to identify dimensions of difference and themes (Spradley, 1980). I consistently returned interview transcripts to participants and welcomed comments, reflections, and clarifications to those texts. Draft chapters and a copy of the final dissertation were placed in the library of Medicine Wheel School, with Neegon at the Peace Center, and with the school district in which Medicine Wheel School was located.

My work with the seventh graders allowed me to study the ways that students worked together in small groups, to organize and develop National History Day projects requiring them to engage in both historical and ethnographic research. Researching and developing a History Day project required three seventh graders and their classmates to read extensively, use digital technology, and interview Elders and other community members to gather primary source data in support of their central and secondary theses about a topic in history. Sophie, the middle school history teacher at Medicine Wheel School, asked me to work with Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk in the early spring of 2001 as they struggled to form a team and select a topic for their history work. Ultimately, the three young men chose to study the series of events leading up to, during, and after the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, by members of the American Indian Movement, Oglala supporters, and many others.

All proper names used in this discussion, including Medicine Wheel School, are pseudonyms or “research names.” During my early work at the school, Sophie, the middle school social studies teacher, organized a “naming” ceremony during her morning Circle Time with the seventh graders. Each student was given a research name by classmates. Buffalo, a tall Lakota youth with wide shoulders, was named first. Buffalo was a good name, he agreed, and he would accept that name. Hawk was then given his name because he was always able to notice things that others were not able to see. His skills as a keen observer would prove useful during the research process; he and his team members served as junior ethnographers in search of the meaning of Wounded Knee in 1973. Hawk accepted the name, but asked for permission to use his uncle’s name as well, and the class agreed. Hawk became Alex Hawk. Skip was absent on the day of the naming ceremony. His classmates in the seventh grade gave him a name that represented the most significant feature of his day, which was his absence from the Circle. Thus, Skip was named.

All persons whose social and cultural practices are described in this discussion are Native. Alex Hawk and Skip are Anishinabe, and Buffalo, as I indicated, is Lakota. Tribal affiliations of Native adults in the school reflected those of the Native children and youth in the school: Anishinabe, Lakota, and Dakota. Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, Eagle Charge, Oniijaani, Sophie, Nagweyaab, and I are Anishinabe from bands whose homelands and historical territories are located across the northern woodlands and Great Plains of the United States and Canada. Eagle Horse and Moto Bloke are Lakota from Grand River, where Buffalo now resides.

Ways of Being a Researcher

I have been a teacher for most of my adult life. I was a classroom teacher and program administrator at Medicine Wheel for a period of five years before I began the study of social practice at the school. I had left the school

several years earlier to pursue doctoral study in Colorado and returned to the school to conduct research for my PhD dissertation.

I received enthusiastic support from my University advisor, and from faculty and administrators at Medicine Wheel School, to complete the study of social practice at the school. This surprised me, given the levels of subjectivity that such a study would involve. Medicine Wheel School had served as the centre of my social, cultural, and spiritual life while I worked there. I was a member of the Native community in the city and frequently was called upon to speak and contribute to the community in other ways. Thus, when I returned to the school to conduct the study, the context of the study was familiar to me and I was familiar to, and trusted by, the faculty, administration, and many of the students at the school. I did not take for granted the immense blessing engendered in my role as an "insider" at the school. I was reminded daily of that blessing as I observed, participated, collected fieldnotes and artifacts, and reflected on what I was experiencing at the school from 2000 to 2002.

I had worked with Sophie in the past, and had noted the high quality of research that her students conducted for their History Day projects. I observed and videotaped instruction in Sophie's classroom for two hours each day until I began the more intense process of mentoring Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk. After that point, I collected audiotape, augmented with fieldnotes, of conversations while working with the *Wounded Knee in 1973* History Day team, and videotaped the ethnographic interviews that the team conducted with community Leaders, Elders, and others who shared insights about events at Wounded Knee in 1973. Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk typically met with me in the middle school computer lab, where we searched for digitized primary sources and read secondary sources that we found in the school's library. During most of April and May of 2001, we worked together five days a week for approximately five hours a day. We occasionally worked after school, reading to one another or working on a computer. We worked together as a team whose members had different roles, but we were a team, nonetheless. Sophie and the middle school language arts teacher contributed substantially to the work of the History Day team.

I collected data during a period from 2000 to 2002. I transcribed and analyzed data from 2002 to 2003 and began the process of drafting the dissertation in 2003. In drafting the dissertation, with far too much data to create a cohesive document, I made the decision to concentrate on the work of Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk as they gathered and interpreted historical and ethnographic data about events at Wounded Knee in 1973. The evidence that I had gathered with the seventh graders had naturally taken a narrative form, and would allow me to tell a cohesive and manageable story. Thus, I was able to complete the dissertation and graduate from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2004.

I had initially planned to collect evidence about high-achieving American Indian students who identified themselves as scholars or who articulated characteristics of their own scholarship. However, the concept of scholarship was an abstraction that none of the students, and only a few of the adults, could articulate.

The work of Mehl-Madrono (2005, 2007) and others (Archibald, 2008; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Battiste 2000; Cajete, 1994; Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Haven, 2007; Iseke, 2009; Stanley, 2006) centres on stories and the power of stories to heal, energize, and restore. Stories do not have expiry dates. It has been nine years since the last interviews for the study were conducted. However, there is a timeless quality to the responses of the seventh graders to American Indian history that allows me to believe that the stories about warriorship at Medicine Wheel School, Wounded Knee, and other places where American Indian people have gathered for purposes of social justice, still have relevance. I wish to honour the sacred gifts of time, energy, and trust that were given to me at Medicine Wheel School. I am deeply grateful to those Indigenous scholars who did the work and contributed to the research and writing while I was engaged in scholarly activities that did not result in publication. Migwech. I symbolically give you tobacco.

Ways of Being a Warrior

Edmunds (2001) asserts that maintaining ties to tribal communities is one characteristic of twentieth (and twenty-first) century Warriors as they conduct their work in education, law, politics, or the arts. "Like tribal leaders in the past, many of these twentieth-century warriors developed and employed a series of strategies to strengthen and defend tribal sovereignty, Native American identity, and protect Native American rights" (Edmunds, 2001, p. 15). The discourse presented below constitutes a substantial body of evidence that warriorship was an identification of significance at Medicine Wheel School, accessible to students and supported by the surrounding community.

A Warrior Stands for the People:

During the first History Day interviews conducted by Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk, Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, director of the Peace Center located near the school, and Eagle Charge, principal of Medicine Wheel School, both used the Ojibwe term that is often translated as "Warrior" but has a more comprehensive meaning: Ogichidaa (male) and Ogichidaakwe (female). Ogichidaawin or "warriorship" is a collection of ways of being a Warrior. Literally translated, Ogichidaa means "stands big" or "stands tall." The contextual understanding of that term might be represented as someone who articulates and enacts big ideas—ideas important to the collective welfare of the people. Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung expanded that

meaning in a concrete sense to describe for the three seventh graders that a Warrior may need to stand, in a literal sense, in order to see to the needs of others, especially Elders:

A Warrior is someone who stands up for the women and children. A Warrior is someone who will go and assist an Elder at their home. Maybe the Elder might need a ride to the store or somebody to go to the store and bring back some groceries. Help them get into and out of the car. Make sure that they have a plate of food in front of them at Medicine Wheel School, and a place to sit at a table. Make sure that you serve them before you serve yourselves. You serve your people a long time before you think of yourself. You think of yourself after that. The Creator will take care of you if there is no food left. (Video file, March 28, 2001)

Oniijaani, a counsellor at Medicine Wheel School, affirmed that a Warrior is someone who is willing to help others: "A Warrior wants to protect the community. A Warrior wants to do good things." (Audio file, June 11, 2001). A Warrior may be a teacher standing up for her students or students standing up for one another. Oniijaani reflected on her own role as a Warrior for her University-bound students: "I will do whatever I can to help them. That's what the kids do, as well, for one another" (Audio file, June 11, 2001).

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung pointed out to the History Day team that Warriors may work not only within their own organization, but with other organizations, as well. He told the young men that Warriors may not always be prominent and visible as help is provided to others, but that the presence of a Warrior under those circumstances will always be felt: "A Warrior is someone who is called upon to go and support another organization and to protect our community, and do all you should. You may not stand out, but you are always there, you always show up" (Video file, March 28, 2001).

Eagle Charge, the principal of Medicine Wheel School, was a nineteen-year-old university student in 1973 when he left the city to participate in events at Wounded Knee. During their first History Day interview, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk learned from Eagle Charge that a Warrior is a person who stays strong in a variety of ways. First, *it is important for a Warrior to stay strong physically*. Eagle Charge shared with the seventh graders that a Warrior must be in good health and practice a healthy lifestyle by exercising and working out in the best way possible. Playing hockey, baseball, softball, or basketball are ways to stay physically healthy. These guidelines for living a healthy physical life do not apply only to men; they apply to women as well. Women can play sports, work out, and stay healthy as well as men. In order to be physically healthy, we need to feed our body what it needs. Eagle Charge emphasized the need to avoid abusing our body with tobacco and other drugs (Video file, March 21, 2001). In a later interview with Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, the young men were further cautioned that a Warrior "is a person who is free of alcohol, free of drugs" (Video file, March 28, 2001).

Warriors may experience physical hardship as they inhabit the reality of others' suffering. During their interview with Eagle Horse, an administrative intern at the school, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk began to learn about events that have taken place at Wounded Knee since 1973. For example, Big Foot Rides were organized annually for a period of four years, in preparation for a final ride in 1990 to commemorate the path taken by Sitting Bull's people, with Big Foot and his people, to Wounded Knee to seek safety on the Pine Ridge reservation after Sitting Bull's death. Eagle Horse rode as a Big Foot Rider in 1990:

It was bitterly cold that Friday, the 29th of December in 1990. That weather was very similar to the weather 100 years ago when the people fled from Grand River...The day of the Wounded Knee massacre, there was a major blizzard. A lot of the bodies were left lying where they fell until the weather cleared up and the soldiers came back to gather up the bodies. The bodies were buried in a mass grave. (Video file, May 2, 2001)

Big Foot Riders, including Eagle Horse, suffered the cold of a Great Plains winter just as their ancestors had 100 years earlier. As he rode, Eagle Horse reflected on the lives of his ancestors and their struggle to preserve life for future generations. He shared with the seventh graders that he had spent a lot of time in prayer as he rode (Video file, May 2, 2001).

A Warrior is Also Strong Intellectually:

Eagle Charge told Buffalo and Skip that a person who is a Warrior has a mind that is intelligent and stays on top of current issues: "That can be done by keeping in touch with other people through socializing or by reading" (Video file, March 21, 2001). A Warrior is able to respond to confrontation with reasoned answers based on knowledge. "If anyone confronts you and asks you a question about the American Indian Movement tomorrow, you'll be able to answer that question," Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung assured the seventh graders (Video file, March 28, 2001).

A Warrior may also use writing as a way of standing for the people. "And I will give you this other guide to help you with the writing for project," Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung shared with Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk. "It's a brief history of the American Indian Movement. We're making documentaries today. We're writing books. The story is going to be told" (Video file, March 28, 2001). Moreover, a Warrior may write books or screenplays that will become movies in which dialogue is spoken in Indigenous languages, Mato Bloka asserted: "I've often wondered why books about American Indian people aren't written by the Ojibwe and Dakota people, for example. It's about time for you students to start writing. You students should be writing about your own culture and history, and making the films, making the movies about American Indian people, speaking their own language, writing in your own language" (April 23, 2001). Mato Bloka was the Lakota/Dakota language instructor at Medicine Wheel School. He spoke to Skip and Alex Hawk about the oral traditions

of the Hunkpapa Lakota regarding events at Wounded Knee in 1890 when his ancestors survived attack.

Emotional Strength is Another Characteristic of a Warrior:

In addition to encouraging Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk to be Warriors in ways that involved outward behaviour toward other people, Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung encouraged the middle school students to attend to the condition of their emotional selves. He cautioned Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk that being emotionally strong involves being free of anger, hatred, and bad feelings toward another person. He explained to them the ways that he has been able to resolve feelings of anger:

You have to get rid of that anger. I get rid of it in many different ways. I go to sweat lodges. I go to ceremonies. People are surprised to see me cry sometimes...A lot of people say, "Oh, you're not a Warrior if you cry." There are a lot of reasons to cry today...Sometimes I have to go out to the lake and just let it go, and just cry. I go in the sun dance. I've been dancing for twenty-nine solid years. You can't be a Warrior if you have hatred, anger, or bad feelings within you. (Video file, March 28, 2001)

Shortly after the Regional History Day competition, Buffalo had moved with his family back to Grand River where his family was in mourning. I drove down to see him, bringing copies of transcripts, photos, food, and other gifts. As we spoke over lunch, Buffalo offered another dimension of emotional strength. He reminded me toward the end of our interview in July 2002 that a Warrior remains calm under any circumstance:

Buffalo: There's one question you didn't ask me.

Sandra: You tell me what question I didn't ask you.

Buffalo: How does a Warrior react?

Sandra: Okay, how does a Warrior react?

Buffalo: A Warrior reacts to things in a calm and pleasant tone.

Sandra is amazed.

Sandra: How did you learn about that?

Buffalo continues.

Buffalo: A Warrior needs to stay calm in different situations. (Audio file, July 19, 2002)

Buffalo had remained calm during the period between the local competition and the regional competition when the *Wounded Knee in 1973* History Day team was selected to advance to the state competition. His calmness and pleasant tone were an example to Skip and Alex Hawk, but were also a great source of comfort for me. I had acknowledged calmness in Buffalo's disposition. I had not realized, however, that Buffalo's calmness was a choice. Calmness was a self-discipline that Buffalo had chosen to display. The discourse of calmness had not emerged during the work of the History Day team until Buffalo articulated that concept after the project was completed.

However, the characteristic of a Warrior as one who is ready did emerge in an interview with Nagweyaab, the second grade teacher at Medicine Wheel School. Recognized as a scholar and athlete in her community,

Nagweyaab shared her insights about being a Warrior:

Being a Warrior means to be ready. Warriors do not have time to anticipate fear or death or danger. They just are ready. Not everybody can be the Warrior, but if you are, if it is in you to be a Warrior, it's about selflessness, to an extent. But you also have to look at the good of the community and be ready to shoulder criticism. (Audio file, June 12, 2002)

As they prepared for the forthcoming History Day competitions through extensive reading and interviewing Elders and other community members, Buffalo and the other team members also displayed greater ease in displaying the knowledge they had acquired about Wounded Knee in 1973. Practice and repeated rehearsal supported their efforts to stay calm and be prepared. Staying calm and being ready may have been Warrior characteristics that Skip and Alex Hawk had heard of in their homes, but that was certainly the case for Buffalo. The discourse of warriorship, which included hearing stories such as the events at Wounded Knee in 1890, was part of his experience growing up.

Spiritual Strength is Also a Characteristic of a Warrior:

Eagle Charge explained to the seventh graders that, "The person who is a Warrior is also a spiritual leader, someone who knows that there is a higher power" (Video file, March 21, 2001). Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung also instructed Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk about the necessity for a Warrior to be spiritually strong:

You have to be a spiritual person. You have to be a spiritual Warrior. Every morning when you get up, put your tobacco out. Ask the Creator for direction for that day. Ask nothing for yourselves, but only for those in need. When that day ends, you go out again and put your tobacco out and thank the Creator for that day that he has provided for us, for food and shelter, which many people don't have. That's what I do each day. (Video file, March 28, 2001)

Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk shared time, space, discourse, and meaning with adults who supported their work as they gathered evidence for their History Day project. Those adults described the characteristics of warriorship in many ways, as processes representing the activities, identity, and agency of being fully human. Physical, emotional, intellectual, and finally, spiritual strength are all required of a Warrior, the young men were told.

A Warrior is a Peacemaker:

Buffalo specifically asked Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung about the peacemaker aspect of warriorship:

Buffalo: Can a Warrior also be a Peacemaker?

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung: You have to be a Peacemaker. To be a Warrior, you have to be willing to sit down in peace. That's what a real Warrior is all about. That's what the Peace Center is all about. We are trying to make peace within the community. We're trying to keep our young men and our young women away from gangs and the escalation of violence that is taking place, not only here, but across America. The fastest growing movement in America today is Native youth gangs. (Video file, March 28, 2001)

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung insisted, as he spoke to Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk, that street gangs are not Warrior societies, and that Warriors do not belong to street gangs:

The Creator hasn't put anyone on earth to take another man's life, another woman's life. We are here to love; we are here to protect, and to take care of one another. Sometimes there is alcohol and drugs available to us and there is peer pressure. There are gangs and gang members to influence us, but who is hurt if we go that way? We end up hurting someone in our own community or hurting someone in our own family. (Video file, March 28, 2001)

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung argued that reliance on weaponry is not a way to be a Warrior. He assured Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk that he did not carry a weapon at Wounded Knee in 1973 and he has been widely recognized as an American Indian Movement leader who travelled around the United States unarmed (Video file, March 28, 2001).

However, Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung had supported the young Warriors, such as Eagle Charge, who carried and used weapons during Wounded Knee in 1973. At that time and place, in the face of overwhelming firepower in the hands of the US federal government, the use of firearms for protection was considered appropriate. He shared with the junior ethnographers that he did not approve of the use of weapons by American Indian Movement members and supporters until the Oglala traditional leaders, primarily Frank Fools Crow, concurred with the use of weapons (Video file, March 28, 2001).

A Warrior May Display a Passion for the Preservation of an Indigenous Language: Ajiijaak, the Ojibwe language instructor at Medicine Wheel School, spoke about the need for American Indian youth to engage themselves as "Language Warriors":

I'd like to create that passion in younger learners, a passion to protect and preserve the language...Whether they go to powwows or sweats, or in whatever way they learn about their "Indian-ness," knowing how to speak and understand Ojibwe will support that identity. It's something that I want to see them do. (Audio file, June 11, 2002)

Ajiijaak emphasized that his use of the term "Warrior" was deliberate. "I believe very strongly in the need for 'Language Warriors,'" he told me. In Ajiijaak's view, preserving and protecting a living language is as vital a role for a Warrior as the preservation of other forms of life (Audio file, June 11, 2002).

Studying Indigenous History is a Way to be a Warrior:

Buffalo made a commitment to me and to himself on the afternoon of Monday, March 19th, when he approached me in the Media Center of Medicine Wheel School to ask for help. Earlier, Buffalo and his team members had struggled, experiencing delays and false starts while Sophie was away from the school, and refusing help from me. The History Day team had missed an appointment to interview Eagle Charge:

Sandra: Why did you miss your appointment?

Buffalo: We weren't ready.

Sandra: Well, let's get ready then." (Fieldnotes, March 19, 2001)

Whether it was difficult for Buffalo to ask for help after initially refusing help was not discussed. Once a commitment to pursue the work was established, there was abundant effort ahead, but also a fairly clear path.

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung was impressed that the three young men had brought tobacco to offer him before the interview. He told them, "We always offer tobacco. So, I'm glad that you young Warriors knew to do that today. You knew how to conduct yourself. That's what's beautiful about the Indian way. All we need is tobacco" (Video file, March 28, 2001). The Elder also asked the three middle school students, "How many students in your school have decided to take on a project like this, to learn about your own history, to learn about the Movement?" (Video file, March 28, 2001). Taking on a project in which evidence and conclusions place the US federal government in an unfavourable light could well result in the diminished evaluation of such work by adults who fail to see those events in the same way. Living life as a Warrior is a difficult path, as Eagle Charge pointed out, but whatever we give, we always get back. It may be that what we get back has taken a different form, but there is always a return of good things when good things are given to the community (Video file, March 21, 2001).

The agenda for warriorship that was articulated by Eagle Charge, Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, and others for Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk consisted of a set of ethical principles grounded in the experience of those who had served their own communities as Warriors. Those Warriors were willing, in turn, to provide the History Day team with support and guidance in the development of their own warriorship. Expressions of Warrior practice included descriptions of the characteristics of a Warrior (definitions of warriorship) and ways to be a Warrior (examples of warriorship). The set of ethical principles articulated for the History Day team also included cautions regarding activities and practices that are not warriorship. It is important to acknowledge that in the absence of time-honoured warriorship practices in their lives, many youth will invent warriorship practices based on media representations of Warriors as militaristic and violent young males (Alfred, 1999, p. 131; Alfred, 2005, p. 44).

Warriorship practices articulated during interviews and conversations were neither gender-defined nor age-defined within the discourse and practice at Medicine Wheel School. During interviews, women were routinely acknowledged as Warriors. As he described for Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk how consensus was established regarding representation of the Oglala people among those entering Wounded Knee in February of 1973, Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung noted that the first to be acknowledged were the elderly chiefs and the women. "I wanted all the chiefs, and the women

who wanted to, to come along. The women are Warriors, too. In fact, they are our Warriors" (Video file, March 28, 2001). In addition, as we read accounts of events at Wounded Knee in 1973, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk pondered the kind of courage that it must have taken for Agnes Lamont to send her young granddaughters into Wounded Knee at night with backpacks full of food (Smith & Warrior, 1996, p. 252; Eagle Charge, Video file, March 21, 2001). The young men also admired the courage of Mrs. Lamont's granddaughters. Mrs. Lamont lost her son, Buddy Lamont, when he was shot by US federal forces on April 27, 1973.

The Meaning of History for Native Youth

Sophie designed her instructional practice to strengthen and defend the development of Native identity among her students through the teaching of American Indian history. Sophie's decision to offer students choices in their topics of study was a strategy of self-determination (Edmunds, 2001, p. 15) at a curricular level:

I emphasize American Indian history for many reasons, but primarily because I believe that if you don't know your history, you don't know yourself. With the History Day projects, the students choose what they want to study and they choose American Indian history projects. They really excel at that kind of learning because it represents a choice for them and they have a chance to study something that is interesting to them. So, I think that a choice type format for our kids is a good thing (Audio file, June 12, 2002).

Sophie believed that the energy generated by adolescent growth and development can be used by her students to build emotional and spiritual strength. She aligned her practice with research that supported a belief in the potential for adolescents to engage in serious social justice work:

I don't have to instill a sense of social justice in the middle school students. That's just a natural part of being an adolescent. That's one of their psychological characteristics. It's a developmental thing. They need to see that something is contributing to social justice before they will engage in learning. (Audio file, June 12, 2002)

The History Day projects through which Sophie and her students recovered, constructed, and displayed Indigenous knowledge clearly offered benefits beyond engagement in academics. Sophie referred to the History Day work conducted in her classroom each spring as part of the middle school "ritual." "I started the middle school ritual of History Day projects in the fall of 1998. Now it's an annual event. Every year the kids just get into it because it gives them a choice based on their own interest and culture" (Audio file, June 12, 2002).

Alfred (1999) has argued that reinstatement of traditional initiation ceremonies is needed to address the increasing disaffection of Indigenous youth toward the concerns of their Elders in Canada and the United States:

Many traditional people believe that the problem [of disaffected Indigenous youth] can be traced to the abandonment of traditional initiation rituals. In the vacuum created by the loss of those rituals, alternatives emerge that are not rooted in Indigenous culture. (Alfred, 1999, p. 131)

Indigenous rites of passage for adolescents typically serve several purposes. Such rituals are intended to instill “standards of behaviour” expected of adolescents moving into adulthood (Beck et al., 1992, p. 196). During adolescence, young people will begin to consider their responsibility for the perpetuation of human life. Rites of passage “mark the significant changing points in the life of an individual....Rituals performed at these times help make that individual aware of his/her particular contribution to the life of *The People*, and of the ‘meaning’ of life in general” (Beck et al., 1992, p. 35).

In large measure, History Day project work served as a transition ritual for middle school students at Medicine Wheel School, as the young people made choices about the kinds of historical and cultural knowledge they would pursue. They also chose the methods they would employ in their pursuit of historical knowledge. They prepared not only for the public display, but also for the public defense of their work. The process of interviewing Elders and other community members, and of constructing arguments to support central and secondary theses, served effectively to allow the middle school students to internalize the content of their arguments and the meaning of what they had learned (Beck et al., 1992, p. 35). During a powwow held at the school in late May, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk were recognized as History Warriors. Students and other community members came forward to shake hands with Skip and Alex Hawk, give them gifts, and dance with them as the school’s drum group sang for them. Buffalo was not present, but was honoured, nevertheless. After the powwow, a reporter from a local newspaper spoke to Skip and Alex, as well as Neegon, about the importance of events at Wounded Knee in 1973. His article stated, in part:

Honor the Children Pow Wow at Medicine Wheel School—Youth Honored as History Warriors

During the May 17 Honor the Youth Pow Wow at Medicine Wheel, the school honored role models from within the school. Three Medicine Wheel youth were celebrated for their work in documenting and analyzing events at Wounded Knee, in South Dakota, when the town was seized by followers of the American Indian Movement (AIM) on February 27, 1973. The takeover was in support of the Oglala Lakota (Oglala Sioux) of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation who opposed Oglala tribal chairman Richard A. “Dick” Wilson. The U.S. military and government officers, including the FBI, surrounded Wounded Knee the same day.

The standoff lasted for a period of 71 days, after which AIM agreed to disband the armed resistance. Several arrests were made. Dennis Banks and Russell Means were tried, but a finding of prosecutorial misconduct ended the trial.

Since 1973, books, films and media attention to the event have brought to light a long list of legitimate grievances about the corrupt tribal government at Pine Ridge and the U.S. federal government complicity in supporting government. The takeover also marked one of the first times that American Indian people and their supporters presented a united front in the face of overwhelming force.

Buffalo, Skip and Alex Hawk, three seventh graders at Medicine Wheel School, used those books and other resources to build a history display. Their project was based on their belief that “Wounded Knee in 1973 drew attention to the demands of American Indian people to operate their own schools. After 1973, schools such as Medicine Wheel School were created

to give American Indian children a chance to learn their own history, language and culture.” The students each received gifts and several certificates of honor. One of those declared the youth to be History Warriors. (City Circle, May 17, 2001)

As apprentice Warriors, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk would be expected to grow into adulthood with requisite skills and a set of beliefs that would affirm community and cultural values of balance, harmony, and cohesion.

The Meaning of Warriorship for Classrooms and Communities

The implications of the experience of Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk suggest that the purpose of school, for American Indian middle school students, may need to be refocused from acquisition of decontextualized academic skills to construction of an identity that requires the use of skills as academic tools for the pursuit of social justice. In addition, this study suggests that isolating adolescents from community influences may limit their opportunities for learning. Educators must trust that Indigenous communities continue to engender ethical principles that bear the capacity to guide young people in socially appropriate and proactive ways of supporting their community, through acquisition of powerful knowledge.

I have not included all of the discourse produced and enacted about warriorship at Medicine Wheel School during my research experience there, but I have highlighted several elaborations of one central principle that situated warriorship within the school and community interaction. That overarching principle is *Warriors stand up for others*. I have also included four specific principles that may serve to guide the design of school- and community-based experiences that embed warriorship in learning for adolescents:

- Learning experiences that encourage adolescents to develop not only physical strength, but also the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strength to stand up for others
- Learning experiences that encourage adolescents to serve as peacemakers in their own community and the communities of others
- Opportunities to promote Indigenous rights and the rights of others
- Opportunities to learn about the multiple histories that affect relationships among individuals and groups not only in the United States and Canada, but globally.

I can envision enactment of these principles in a school-based or after-school program for Indigenous adolescents, organized as a service-learning project, an oral history project, or a program with a focus on social justice, including the learning of Indigenous languages.

Adults supporting the warriorship of Native adolescents must prepare the next generation to stand up and throw off “the weight of colonial oppression” and shoulder “the responsibilities of a dangerous freedom-

seeking struggle for dignity" (Alfred, 2005, p. 85). Alarmist concerns regarding academic achievement, school attendance, graduation rates, and other realities central to the schooling of Native young people, must be seen as merely surface reflections of deeper and more troubling aspects of contemporary life experienced by our youth. For far too many Native youth, those realities include time spent in classrooms that are emotional, spiritual, and psychological war zones (J. Hodson, personal communication, September 3, 2010).

Alfred (1999) asserts that whether or not warriorship is offered to youth within their learning experiences, Indigenous youth will find expression for the intense sense of responsibility that they must feel. The form their expressions of warriorship may take will depend on the purposes served and the influences applied:

Native youth are warriors in a very traditional sense; they are the ones who will be expected to carry out the community's decisions. If things are operating in a traditional mode, they would have had input into those decisions and participated freely in shaping their future. But in the colonial mode they remain doubly bound; to their situation, and to a future not of their own making. These warriors need purpose and guidance. They will find them. The question is where and from whom? (Alfred, 1999, p. 131)

Sophie's classroom at Medicine Wheel School was not a war zone. It was the site of warriorship practice situated in learning. The lived experience of adults within the community served as reference points as Native youth learned about and practiced *ogichidaawin* or warriorship.

The Meaning of Warriorship for Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk

The theme for History Day work for the school year 2000-2001 was "Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas." Over time, Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk developed a convincing argument regarding the role of events at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1873 as a *Frontier in History* because those events marked the beginning of the American Indian civil rights movement in the United States on a national scale. Prior to that time, they argued, local acts of resistance had occurred but received only local attention. It was only during the resistance displayed at Wounded Knee in 1873 that national attention was drawn to issues of social justice for American Indian people. National media attention, US federal police response to quell the occupation, and international efforts to support the occupation had all occurred in abundance during the 71-day period, from February 27, 1873, to May 5, 1873.

When Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk chose to study events at Wounded Knee in 1873 from an Indigenous perspective, they were choosing to study warriorship. They may or may not have realized this at the time they made the initial choice; inevitably, that was the result. Within the process of studying the warriorship of others, their own warriorship was incrementally being formed, strengthened, and affirmed. During the period of

intense study in preparation for Regional and State History Day competitions, there was little time for personal reflection by Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk. After the state meet, however, I turned my attention to the team members to enquire about their own sense of the warriorship trajectories they had followed, and how their sense of themselves might have changed. I interviewed Buffalo near his home on Grand River:

Sandra: What does that topic of Wounded Knee mean to you as a Lakota person? Does it have a special meaning to you?

Buffalo: Eya, studying Wounded Knee, I can go back for a time and get to know my culture and my ancestors. I can learn about my culture and how they did things a long time ago. You can get to know your ancestors from a long time ago, to know how the Indians grew up before us. You can get to know how it was in the time of our ancestors. (Audio file, July 19, 2002)

Buffalo's ancestors included those who resisted destruction during events at Wounded Knee when Hunkpapa and Miniconjou Lakota people were arrested, surrounded, and attacked by US military forces on December 29, 1890. Stories of those events have been told by Elders in Buffalo's family since that time to the present. Buffalo had experienced the process of learning about Wounded Knee from Elders before he began work on the History Day project. He would later hear affirmation of the value of that learning process during interviews with both Eagle Charge, the principal of Medicine Wheel School, and Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, the director of the Peace Center and a respected community Elder. Both men had participated in events at Wounded Knee in South Dakota, in 1973. In addition to sharing personal reflections and little-known details about their experiences, both men described their own passage into warriorship as they learned from Elders at Wounded Knee in 1973.

After his experience developing the *Wounded Knee in 1973* History Day project and with his emerging Warrior identity well in place, Buffalo was able to articulate both the characteristics of a Warrior and the meaning of warriorship. In Buffalo's view, a Warrior *must* fight for the people: "A Warrior is someone who fights because he cares about people and does not want them to be hurt...A Warrior cares about people" (Audio file, July 19, 2002). Protecting others from harm is a way of fighting for the people and of being a Warrior.

Skip and Alex Hawk also learned about their own warriorship during their study of the warriorship of others at Wounded Knee in 1973. Alex Hawk, for example, learned how a Warrior views the privilege of having food to eat. After the interview of Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung at the Peace Center down the street from the school, Alex Hawk replayed the videotape of the interview many times, until he could recite many of the Elder's words from memory. One day while we were studying, I told Alex Hawk how pleased I was that so many people had agreed to help him and the other members of the team with their project. Alex Hawk told me that he recognized how important the oral histories were to the team:

Yes, we learn a lot from their stories. That's how Elders teach you. When I have children, I'll teach them the same way. I'll tell them, "When I was your age, and you weren't even born yet, I worked on a history project with two other guys. We studied Wounded Knee in 1973. We interviewed Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung, and he told us, 'You have to be a spiritual Warrior. Every morning when you get up, put your tobacco out. Ask the Creator for direction for that day. Ask nothing for yourselves, but only for those in need. When that day ends, you go out again and put your tobacco out and thank the Creator for that day that he has provided for us, for food and shelter, which many people don't have.' He told us to do that each day. And that's the way I have lived since then." (Fieldnotes, May 3, 2001)

Alex Hawk had begun to make a practice of not accepting food until everyone else was served, even in the lunchroom of the school. When I offered him juice boxes and granola bars during study sessions, he would open his only after Skip and I had begun to eat. This was warriorship practice, as Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung described it: "Make sure that you serve others before you serve yourselves. You serve your people a long time before you think of yourself. The Creator will take care of you if there is no food left. That's what a Warrior does" (Video file, March 28, 2001).

Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk had a purpose (after Alfred, 1999, p. 131); they sought to understand events at Wounded Knee in 1973 and to comprehend the background and implications of those events. They further sought to explicate their new knowledge to others as they developed their History Day exhibit. Their new knowledge resulted from extensive research under the guidance of community academics, Elders, and other leaders who had experienced the historical events that the youth had chosen to study. Their practice as History Warriors was not influenced by media association with weaponry and combat, masculinity and mystique, but was instead shaped by the expectations of the Indigenous community.

The intense learning experienced by Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk might be identified simply as scholarship in another context. However, within the context of learning American Indian history in an American Indian school, the scholarship that enabled the seventh graders to display their work at the state History Day competition, and compete with high school seniors, was learning that must be situated along a trajectory aimed at service to the community. On the Monday after the state History Day meet, Skip and I drove to the local university where the event had been held, to pick up and transport the Wounded Knee in 1973 exhibit that Skip and Alex Hawk had defended. The exhibit boards were stacked against the wall in a storage closet and the union building was full of young people setting up exhibit boards about the big bang theory and challenges to the status of Pluto as a planet, for example. Skip and I stopped to chat with one student, who pointed to elements on his exhibit board and who explained his topic within the field of astrophysics to us. After we had located and loaded the tri-fold display board, made of wooden flooring called underlayment that Alex Hawk and I had painted, into my truck, we walked across the street to the ice cream shop on campus. Surrounded by univer-

sity students in the quiet and pleasant setting, Skip and I ordered lunch and had an ice cream treat. We visited as we ate our meal and listened to the music and conversations surrounding us. Skip asked me, "Can I ask you something?" I was hoping that what he had to ask was not about astrophysics. I was prepared to confess that I did not know much about that subject.

Skip: So, the students in the student union showing their exhibits, are they University students?

Sandra: Yes, they are students studying astronomy, which is about planets and stars, and probably more than that.

Skip: Where did they get the ideas that they posted on their exhibits?

Sandra: Well, I guess that they study and study and something catches their interest, so they dig into that subject. They do research and try to find new information, such as you did when you looked for primary sources.

Skip: Just like we dug into Wounded Knee?

Sandra: Yes, just like that.

Skip: If I go to college, can I study astronomy and make a display about that?

Sandra: Yes, you can study astronomy and many other subjects.

Skip: So, the way we worked on our history project, that's the same kind of work that University students do in other subjects like astronomy?

Sandra: Yes. What do you think about that? Do you want to go to the University? I think that you could.

Skip: Yes, if I can stay in school, I mean, if I don't...

(long pause)

Skip: I just dug into Wounded Knee because I wanted to help Buffalo, and he wanted to dig into Wounded Knee because his ancestors were there. I didn't know that we would end of up at the University talking to astronomy students.

Sandra: And eating ice cream. Well, that's the path you followed.

Skip: Yes. (Fieldnotes, May 7, 2001)

Skip and I finished our ice cream, and then drove back to Medicine Wheel School. We set up the *Wounded Knee in 1973* exhibit board in the Media Center, carefully taping at the board to secure the sticky backing of the display pieces. I shook Skip's hand and thanked him for his help, and then he left to walk home. I believe that Skip was beginning to see the connection between what he and the other team members had done as an academic task with broad implications. Prior to the visit to the University that day, the nature of the academic task was thoroughly embedded within the narrower context of the community relationships that had made the project possible.

In late May and early June of 2001, Skip and Alex Hawk were called upon to each come to the Media Center several times to interpret their History Day project for students in the elementary school. They continued to be acknowledged by adults, their peers, and younger children through the remainder of the school year. They met me in the Media Center several times to rehearse for those presentations, just as they had met to prepare for the History Day events in which they had participated. While the competitive phase of their history project had ended, and they had not taken their project to the national competition, they continued to read and learn

about events at Wounded Knee in 1973 so that they could speak to other students about those events. I continued to enjoy the privilege of being able to pull the two seventh graders out of class whenever I needed to do that, in preparation for their participation in interpreting the Wounded Knee in 1973 exhibit in the Media Center. I continued to see Skip and Alex Hawk almost every day. I continued to work with them and other seventh graders in the Middle School on timeline entries and dioramas about topics in American Indian history. Alex Hawk completed a diorama representing events at the Battle of the Little Big Horn that included the topography of the locale and depictions of cavalrymen, Lakota, and allies of the Lakota. He intended to use the diorama as part of his History Day display during the following school year.

The social practice of education in this public urban school produced warriorship, situated in scholarship, among American Indian adolescents and adults at the school. Warriorship practice offered a design for enacting community cultural values of respect, harmony, balance, and cohesion while engaging students in intense and purposeful learning. The process of learning American Indian history from an Indigenous perspective provided the context within which the Warrior identity was studied and reproduced. There is no reason to expect that learning within the intense environment of community perspectives could not be considered best practice in other communities in the United States and Canada. Ojibwe and Lakota/Dakota people lived for millennia undisturbed by the 49th parallel, an artificial division between two nations highly linked linguistically, historically, culturally, and politically. American Indian people across the Great Plains and to the Pacific coast speak affectionately about "Grandmother's Land," referring to Queen Victoria, and still believing, in many regards, that "Safety lies in the North" as we have all been told since childhood. I thank you for reading the words of Buffalo, Skip, and Alex Hawk and the words of those who nurtured their warriorship. *Gakina Indinawe-maaganag. Mitakuye Oyasin. All my relations.*

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