

Just Do It: Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education

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In an attempt to meet the educational needs of Anishinaabe children and youth, innovative education must be created to specifically reflect Anishinaabe culture and Anishinaabe community realities. The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program was one of the very few off-reserve, culture-based educational spaces created for Anishinaabe children and youth in Canada.

This paper presents the project of visioning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program, located in Burleigh Falls, Ontario. An Anishinaabe medicine wheel construct is used throughout the study. A medicine wheel framework is employed in the design and implementation of the program. Additionally, the medicine wheel is used as a theoretical framework and methodology in the evaluation of the program. Methods used in the program evaluation consisted of sharing circles with students, parents, and Elders, followed by review circles to review the summaries and findings of the sharing circle discussions. Additionally, Elder observations and discussions occurred, along with individual interviews with parents, students, and teachers. The analysis of the data was organized around themes of programming; leadership and resources; school climate; healing and identity; and parents and community.

The creation of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program represents a transformational educational site built for the self-determination of Anishinaabe people, in alignment with the Indian Control of Indian Education policy document of 1972. The program exists as a model for other off-reserve Anishinaabe communities to create culturally-based educational spaces for their children by “just doing it”.

Introduction

Boozhoo. Zongdekwe n’dizhinikaas. Makwa n’doodem. Kitigan Zibi n’doonjibaa. Anishinaabe-kwe n’deow. Greetings. My English name is Nicole Bell and I am Anishinaabe of the Bear Clan from Kitigan Zibi First Nation. I am dedicated to the healing that needs to be done in Anishinaabe communities and I have dedicated my life to that task, through protecting and raising up our children to be strong Anishinaabeg in spirit, mind, body, and heart, through the process of culture-based education.

The key to the future of any society lies in the transmission of its culture and worldview to succeeding generations. The socialization of children, through education, shapes all aspects of identity, instilling knowledge of the group’s language, history, traditions, behavior, and spiritual beliefs. It is for this reason that Aboriginal people have placed such a high priority on ... the education of their children. (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986, p. 1)

While Anishinaabe people may know that public schooling does not meet the cultural needs of their children, it is quite another thing to actually do something about it. It is so easy to get “stuck” in complaining, fear, feelings

of inadequacies, and justifications, to the point that one feels it is someone else's responsibility to act. As a result, nothing gets done. I have been in this place. When I shared with Elder Vera Martin my dilemma as a parent with a child that no longer wanted to attend public school and was faced with the challenge of educating him at home while working and being a full-time student, Vera replied, "Nicole, you have been thinking and dreaming about creating a school long enough; it is time to 'just do it'". This paper addresses my attempts at "just doing it."

I created an Anishinaabe culture-based educational and healing space for Indigenous children and youth from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The goal of the program was for students to achieve an education academically comparable to the public education system, while learning about Anishinaabe culture and, therefore, developing a strong sense of identity and pride in self. The program is addressed in the past tense as it is no longer operational due to funding.

The Research Quest

While it can be argued that great strides have been made in the field of Indigenous education, one can clearly see the inadequacies in education for off-reserve Indigenous children (Battiste, 2013; Graveline, 1998; Kanu, 2011; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). A great injustice continues to be perpetuated against Indigenous children who attend public schools, preventing them from establishing and fostering an Anishinaabe identity. The space still has not been provided within these schools for the Anishinaabe student to fit, to establish and foster an Anishinaabe identity. The goals of public schooling do not address the need for Anishinaabe children to see their cultures and identities reflected in public schools (Battiste, 2013; Graveline, 1998; Kanu, 2011; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).

More Indigenous people live off a First Nation community than those that live in a First Nation community and most of these off-reserve children and youth are educated in public schools (Statistics Canada, 2006). While many First Nations provide on-reserve schooling, many do not address all grade levels and some First Nations communities have not yet established their own schools. Indigenous students living in First Nations communities, including many non-status and Métis students who live off-reserve, find themselves attending public schools after the last grade offered in their home community or for their entire school career. From an educational perspective, the cultural needs of these students become the responsibility of the home and the school. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) (1996) contained the views of Indigenous parents. Elders, youth, and leaders gathered at public hearings, addressing the vital importance of education in achieving their vision of a prosperous future:

They want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only part of their vision. Presenters told us that

education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. Current education policies fail to realize these goals. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 404)

The study discussed in this article is based on the assumption that culturally-appropriate education is needed for all Indigenous students, while focusing on the educational needs of off-reserve Anishinaabe children and youth. Extensive research supports this assumption. The National Indian Brotherhood (the forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations or AFN) created the policy document *Indian Control of Indian Education* in 1972 in response to the Canadian government's White Paper of 1969. This was the first time that culturally appropriate education for Indigenous children was identified as a need in a formal way to the government. The ICIE position paper stated:

Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 4)

In 1988, the Assembly of First Nations issued a further document, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future: A Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education*, which stated that only 20 per cent of Indigenous children complete the secondary level of education compared to the national average of 75 per cent. This begged the question: "Why are Indigenous students not succeeding in public schools?" The Assembly of First Nations (1988) believed that part of the answer concerned the quality of education Indigenous students received. The Assembly noted that:

First Nations students have a right to develop or obtain education programs and services of the highest quality which incorporate culturally relevant content and academic skills. First Nations [children] require curricula to teach cultural heritage and traditional First Nations skills with the same emphasis as academic learning. (Assembly of First Nations, 1988, p. 15)

The AFN (1988) believed that this could be accomplished by developing more holistic, culturally-appropriate, and value-based approaches to education wherein culture becomes pervasive throughout the curricula.

Still, in 1996, the need for culturally-appropriate education of Indigenous students remained. The RCAP report (1996) presented a framework to address lifelong, holistic education from an Indigenous perspective. The report stated:

In Aboriginal educational tradition, the individual is viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. Each of these aspects must be addressed in the learning process The circularity of the medicine wheel urges us to keep the whole picture in mind. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 415)

Based on this framework, the Commission recommended that “Federal, provincial and territorial governments collaborate with Aboriginal governments, organizations and educators to develop or continue developing innovative curricula that reflect Aboriginal cultures and community realities for delivery” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 431).

This paper focuses upon innovative education that specifically reflects Anishinaabe culture and Anishinaabe community realities. While this study is located within an Anishinaabe context, the issues and realities of other Indigenous nations and their communities may also be similar. The central research question was: “How can Anishinaabe worldview and values inform education in the contemporary context of Anishinaabe life?”

The methodology for exploring this question involved the design, implementation, and evaluation of a school program. In January 2002, I created a space for off-reserve Anishinaabe children who had no cultural alternative for schooling within the Peterborough (Ontario, Canada) area through the establishment of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program, in Burleigh Falls, Ontario. A medicine wheel educational model that is culturally relevant to Anishinaabe children was created and implemented. While this model was specifically designed to meet the needs of off-reserve Anishinaabe children, since the host is not a First Nations community, it could be applied to First Nations communities as well. The Anishinaabe Bimaadizwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program sought a balance between providing Indigenous students with a cultural setting that provided Anishinaabe cultural knowledge and values while also providing the mainstream academic subjects of math; language arts; social studies; science and technology; health and physical education; and the arts. The goal was for the integration or webbing of traditional and contemporary knowledges so that Anishinaabe children and youth could walk in two worlds: the Anishinaabe cultural world and the mainstream Euro-Canadian world. Contained within this study is the vision which led to the design of the program, the tasks involved in the implementation of the program, and a reflection of the entire project through an evaluation process.

Forever present in my mind throughout this journey were the words of Elder Edna Manitowabi:

We, as educators, must realize that Anishinaabe children don't fit into the molds that are made for non-Aboriginal children. We are spiritually-based, natural people of the earth, and in order for our children to know where they are going, they must know who they are as Aboriginal people. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975, p. 74)

I firmly believe that as Anishinaabe teachers and parents, we can teach Anishinaabe children how to live in two cultures successfully and still retain Anishinaabe culture in a contemporary society. Anishinaabe children must become solidly grounded in a belief system which enables them to

claim and validate their own lives. Interweaving the content of the Anishinaabe culture with Euro-Canadian academic concepts creates a blended model, set within a contemporary arena (English, 1996). Further, like English (1996), I believe that:

... webbing educational information—both traditional and western—can create a paradigm of schooling in Native education among Native peoples. Therefore, children may experience an integration which should be beneficial for them, not only in the classroom but also in society, through becoming successful Canadian citizens who maintain an interwoven way of life with pride, dignity, and self-determination. This will help Native people to move in a parallel fashion with each other as Aboriginals and with the rest of mainstream, contemporary society. (English, 1996, pp. 24-25)

The Research Process and Methods

The research design, the process, and specific methods employed in this study were presented through the framework of a medicine wheel. In contemplating this research quest, I believed a medicine wheel could serve as a guiding framework. The medicine wheel is a circle divided equally into four quadrants, symbolically identifying the power/medicine of the four directions using four different colours. The final representation resembles a compass for human understanding. "Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g., behind us or around a corner), Medicine Wheels can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects" (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984, p. 9). Medicine wheels have been used by many Indigenous groups to address the complex issues they face, such as racism (Calliou, 1995), the impact of residential schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994), healing (Coggins, 1990; Regnier, 1994; Hart, 2002), sexual abuse (Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing, 1993), education (Odjig-White, 1996), and research (Young, 1999; Graveline, 1998). Within medicine wheels there are many, many "rings" of teachings that exist with significant meaning independently but are all the more powerful when understood as a collective of interdependent knowledge teachings and practices. Embodied within the medicine wheel are the core concepts of wholeness, balance, connection, and harmony (Hart, 2002).

The medicine wheel framework and its teachings were employed throughout the entire project. It was used in the visioning and therefore design of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program. It was used as a curriculum framework and teaching tool in the implementation of the program. And finally, it was used as a research framework in the evaluation of the program. The following figure (Figure 1) of a medicine wheel illustrates the research process. These teachings were utilized in the research process and therefore employed in the research methods and ethics of the study.

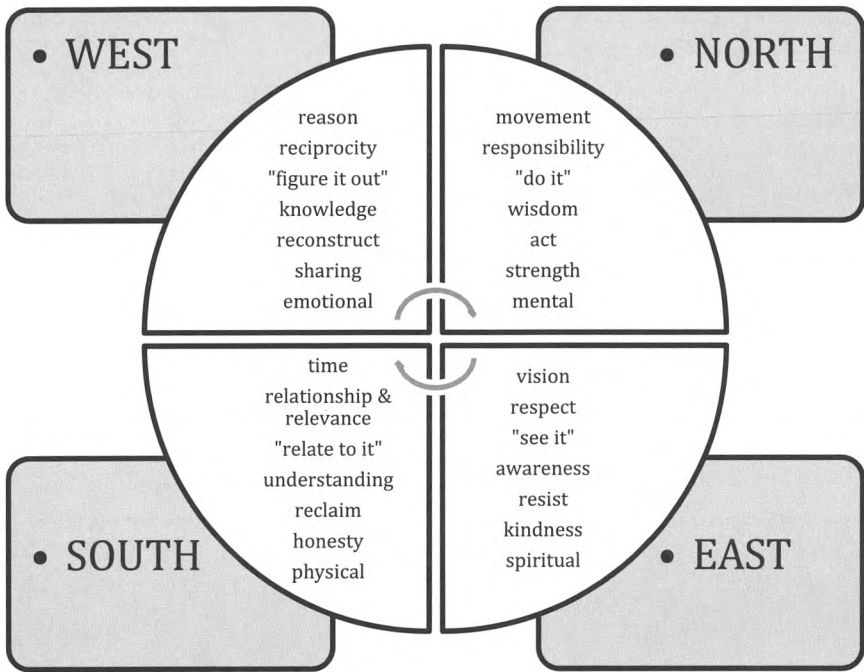


Figure 1. *The Medicine Wheel as a Research Framework*

The components of the research design were therefore framed around an examination of the past, present, and future through the following activities:

- the design of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program;
- the implementation of the program;
- the evaluation of the program.

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program Design

Anishinaabe spirituality, worldview, and values informed the philosophical foundation of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program. The design of the program also incorporated specific Anishinaabe knowledge that I acquired through my cultural learning with Elders and traditional people from whom I have learned. The design of the program was also indebted to other Indigenous thinkers and educators who are also committed to the cultural survival of their people through the education of their children (Cajete, 1994, 1999; Graveline, 1998; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997; Hampton, 1995).

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program was a program that attempted to fulfill the cultural and academic

needs of Anishinaabe children in the Burleigh Falls area. The vision of the program was as follows:

Anishinaabe people of all ages will become solidly grounded in their culture which will enable them to claim and validate their own life. Through the webbing of educational information—both Anishinaabe and contemporary—children, youth, adults, and Elders may experience integration as community members who maintain an interwoven way of life with pride, dignity, and self-determination. This will help Anishinaabe people to move in a parallel fashion with each other as Anishinaabeg and with the rest of mainstream, contemporary society. Through the revitalization of our ancestral ways, we may use foundations of the past along with contemporary life to build our futures. (Bell, 2002, p. 1)

This vision was enacted through a schooling environment, registered as a private school with the Ontario Ministry of Education, for grades from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12. It was funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres Initiative of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. Private school

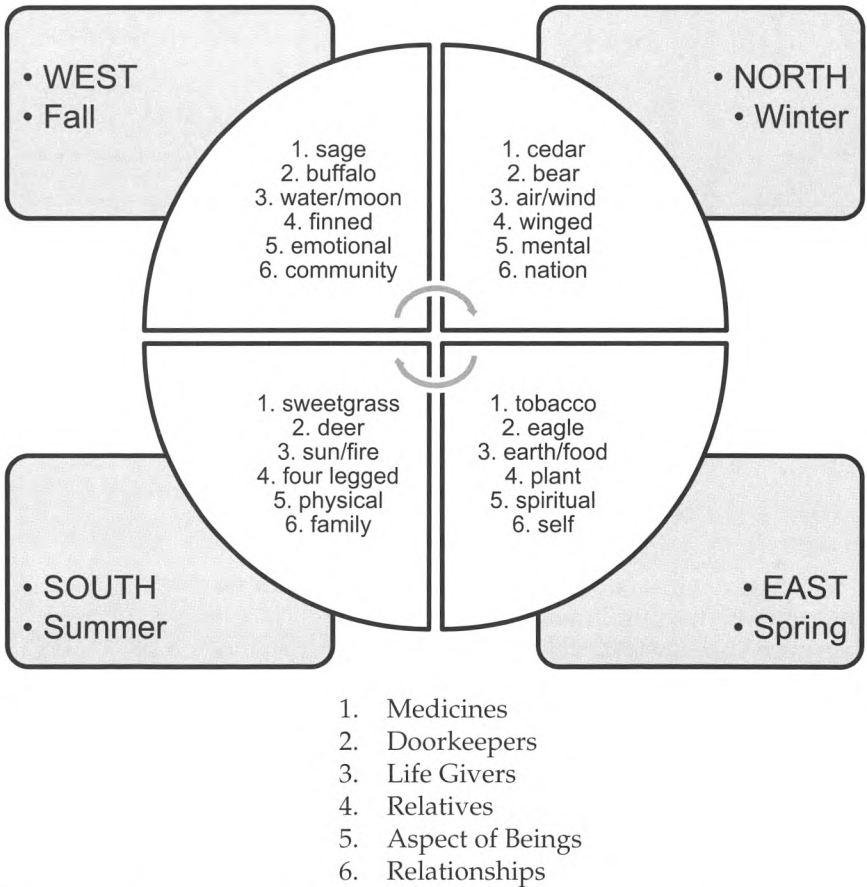
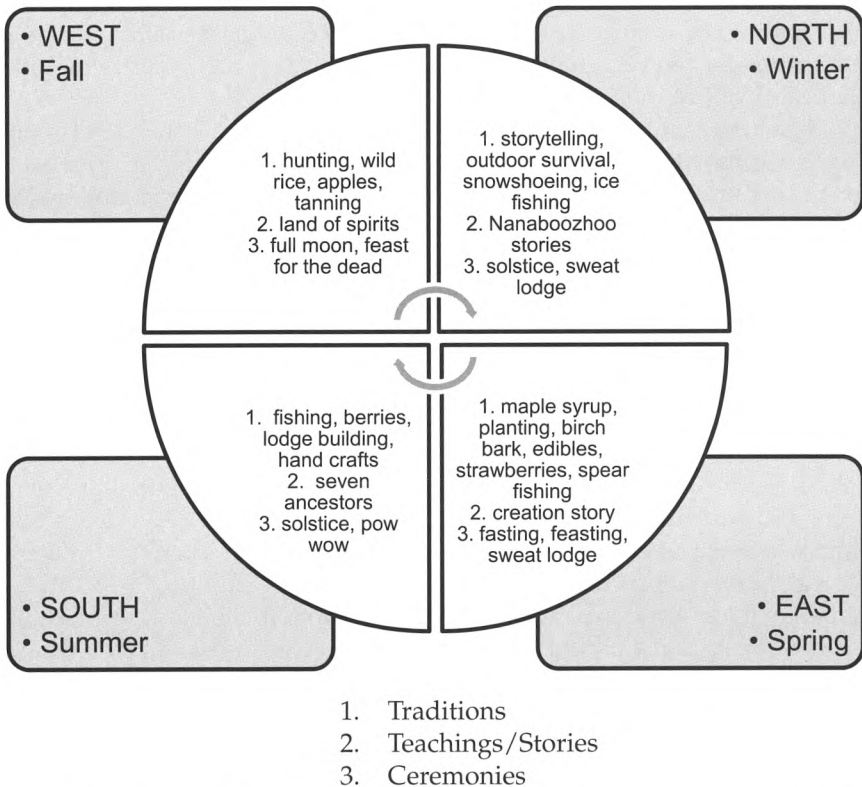


Figure 2. Medicine Wheel Seasonal Curriculum Framework—Direction Teachings

status at the secondary school level allowed the program to issue credits towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The curriculum was designed based on an amalgamation of my cultural learning and teacher training. The curriculum was organized on a medicine wheel framework (see Figure 2 and Figure 3) where cultural teachings and activities were addressed in the corresponding season on the medicine wheel.

The philosophical foundation of the program was also grounded in Indigenous cultural teachings. The Anishinaabe seven Ancestral Teachings (respect, love, honesty, humility, bravery, truth, wisdom) were the guiding principles for the way in which individuals were to treat each other within the program and reflect the values the program intended to instill in the children. Eight principles of instruction were identified for



*While some of these traditions, teachings/stories, or ceremonies occur throughout the year (i.e., full moon ceremonies), they are listed in only one season to provide a balance of focus throughout the year.

Figure 3. Medicine Wheel Seasons Curriculum Framework—Seasonal Cultural Practices

the program, adopted from Cajete (1999). They were: (1) nurturing environment; (2) meaningful content; (3) choices; (4) adequate time; (5) collaboration; (6) immediate feedback; and (7) mastery. Also adopted from Cajete (1999) were the contexts and methods through which teaching and learning occurs: experiential learning, storytelling, ritual/ceremony, dreaming, tutoring, artistic creation, and wholistic learning. The program also followed the 12 cultural standards as outlined by Hampton (1995): (1) spirituality; (2) service; (3) diversity; (4) culture; (5) tradition; (6) respect; (7) history; (8) relentlessness; (9) vitality; (10) conflict; (11) place; and (12) transformation.

Program Implementation

The creation of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program involved taking the foundational philosophy of the design phase and implementing it into the practice of providing education and healing. In essence, it required that medicine wheel teachings along with Anishinaabe spirituality, worldview, and values be manifested into the reality of program delivery.

The program began in January of 2002, with a day-school program serving Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 Indigenous students. The program expanded to serve Indigenous students in secondary school, while also offering an after-school youth program which served students in the school and Indigenous students who attended school elsewhere. Initially, the school began with a September to June schedule, mirroring the public school year calendar. Since a medicine wheel framework was employed to organize the cultural and academic curriculum, it seemed necessary to have the school year begin in the spring season or the eastern direction of the medicine wheel. The eastern direction is the starting point on medicine wheels so the school year start date was changed to March. The school year was therefore divided into four parts reflecting the four seasons and the four directions of a medicine wheel. Two-week school breaks were taken between each season. The program therefore offered a year-round curriculum.

A total of 53 students were served by the program in its four and a half years of operation. Student needs and abilities were as varied as the personalities present in the student group. Many of the students verbalized that they wanted to come to the program because they were experiencing racism in public school and also they wanted to learn about their culture. Some of the students had experienced great difficulty learning in a public school setting, where they were expected to perform to a standard. Because of the oppression that Indigenous people have faced as a result of colonization, many of the students required special attention to their emotional needs. Some students had multiple emotional challenges that needed just as much attention as their academic learning.

Because the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program was a culturally and community-based program, it was essential that parents played a prominent role in the design and delivery of the program. Parents were therefore required to assist with the delivery of the program in a capacity that they were able to. Ongoing communication with parents was a priority and this occurred in multiple ways: monthly newsletters; weekly student progress reports; seasonal reporting and parent-teacher conferences; and telephone calls. Monthly parent meetings occurred to serve a number of purposes: to receive feedback from parents; to get parents to help with future planning; to involve parents in decisions that needed to be made; and to report to parents on administrative information. Parents were also asked for their feedback and insight into the operations of the school through regular evaluations, usually done twice a year.

The program used an individual learning process, whereby students learn at their own level and work at a pace that is comfortable for them. Individualized learning relieved the students of the stress and anxiety of having to keep up to a class, while allowing their self-esteem to remain intact, and students who needed more time were provided it. Students were able to achieve and experience success through the assignment of academic tasks that were challenging, and yet not so hard that they became frustrated. Faster learners were able to progress and develop their skills even further, without becoming bored by a lack of challenge.

A numerical or alphabetical grading system was not used in the program. A cooperative learning environment was promoted wherein one student is not compared to another. Additionally, students were not compared to a standard or a norm. The program was simply interested in recognizing the efforts of its students and ensuring that they were progressing in their skills, knowledge, and attitude. Students were expected to progress to their own potential, which cannot be compared to anyone else's.

Each day began with a morning circle. The students and staff gathered together to give thanks for the day through a tobacco offering and prayer. The girls took responsibility for bringing water to the circle and the boys lit the fire (candle) for the day. Traditional songs were sung with shakers and drums, followed by each person greeting everyone with a handshake or a hug and being greeted by everyone else.

An Elder-in-residence position was employed in the program. An Elder was hired part-time at the school to deliver teachings and ceremony with the students. Many other Elders were invited to the school to share their expertise and knowledge with the students.

Providing healing services to students was a priority in the program, to ensure healthier adults, families, and communities in the future. The program worked very hard at ensuring that problems were resolved. Unhealthy behaviours were addressed and rectified so that a healthy school environment existed. The process often involved the parents of the

students so that everyone was made aware and could support the creation of a healthier environment. One-on-one counselling and weekly boys' and girls' circles were also used.

A celebration of the arts occurred twice a year whereby the students prepared presentations for a live audience, open to the community, that focused on sharing their cultural knowledge. After each season, the program honoured the students for the work they had done. Families gathered, feasting was enjoyed, and all students were honoured for the growth and learning they experienced.

The program implemented a wide range of cultural learning activities and experiences. Daily Anishinaabe language instruction occurred with a first and fluent language speaker. The remaining staff was not fluent in the language but communicated in Anishinaabe with what they knew. Many field trips occurred to also enrich student learning and experience.

Program Evaluation

While the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program was evaluated on an ongoing basis, a formative evaluation was undertaken in its third year of operation. As used in the design and implementation of the program, a medicine wheel was used to guide the evaluation. In addition, the analysis was guided by a study by David Bell (2004), who examined 10 Indigenous schools to determine elements of their success.

To reach an awareness of Anishinaabe worldview and values, sharing circles were conducted with Elders, students, and parents to determine, from their perspective, how the program integrated the seven sacred teachings, or core values, into the program. Additionally, the Elders were asked to spend time at the school to observe and provide feedback regarding the implementation of Anishinaabe worldview and values, and to articulate what could be improved within the program.

In addition to sharing circles, individual interviews with parents, staff, and students were used as research methods in the evaluation component of the study. The learning process was experiential and modification was an ongoing activity; learning gained from one process (such as sharing circles) informed another process (such as the interview guide). As part of the methodology, circles occurred with three different types of groups:

1. Two circles with 11 parents performed an internal investigation that addressed the changes observed in the children/youth of the program.
2. Two circles with four Elders performed an external and cultural investigation.
3. Three circles with each student group provided a participant perspective. The students were divided into age-appropriate groups (Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, Grades 7-12) so that the sharing occurred at an appropriate development level.

Interviews were also used to gather more information about the program. Guides for the parent interview (13 participants), student interview (18 participants), and staff interview (4 participants) were designed after the circles took place, to ensure that important components or topics addressed in the circles were captured in the interviews. The questions used for the interviews were informed by the Bell (2004) study which determined factors of success in Indigenous schools. More knowledge about the program was gained by gathering “stories of change” (Mosse, 1998) from parents of the students, which was an opportunity for parents to share stories about the changes they had witnessed in their child(ren) and possibly in their family as a result of their child(ren) participating in the program. Stories of change were also gathered from the students through student circle sharing.

The data analysis was organized around themes of programming; leadership and resources; school climate; healing and identity; and parents and community. The successful elements, practices, and methods of Indigenous schools found in Bell’s 2004 study led to a list of recommendations for other Indigenous schools. This examination resulted in identifying the program’s strengths and limitations.

Programming

Differing opinions existed among the parents themselves, between teachers and parents, and between teachers and the province regarding what was considered “high expectations.” This made it difficult to determine the state of student achievement in the program. The program placed an emphasis on providing instruction at the students’ ability levels while also challenging them to ensure progress. This level may not have been in accordance with provincial expectations for that child’s age/grade and may not have been at the level parents wanted and expected their child to be performing. However, asking a child to perform at a level far above or below their ability is not fair to the child’s academic needs. Providing instruction at the child’s level of ability was therefore a strength of the program and promoted more efficient progress, despite the desires of parents and as compared to provincial standards. There was also a general feeling among the teachers that students were getting more education than the average student in a public school setting. As shared by these teachers:

It is giving them life skills which is way beyond academic skills (personal communication, 2004)

The school is looking at something else and measuring success from a different angle. Creating health and strength within will promote health and strength in our children (personal communication, 2004).

I believe the program that we’ve developed has much higher achievement levels than the regular school system, because we work with the mind, body, and spirit, and we work in a holistic way, so the education we are delivering is holistic and reaches all the areas of the individual—it’s a better system (personal communication, 2004).

Offering individualized instruction and small class sizes provided layers of support to the student. Small classes gave students the opportunity to engage in their learning at different levels, thus enabling the teacher to make individualized learning a reality. Students were able to get more teacher attention when needed, thus promoting more efficient progress. Students particularly enjoyed the cultural components of the program that included learning the Anishinaabe language, participating in morning circle and other ceremonies, and engaging in traditional activities such as harvesting. Students also identified that the school taught them Anishinaabe traditions, culture, and spiritual values through its cultural activities (language instruction; teachings and stories; drumming, dancing and singing; Elders; arts and crafts; circles and ceremonies; using the sacred medicines; grandfather/grandmother teachings; and Nana-boozhoo stories). One student expressed the effects of the cultural programming by stating, "I am a stronger Anishinaabe person" (student circle, 2004).

Parents and students also made reference to the Ogichidaa Youth Program as a unique component of the school. Its primary goal was to assist youth in developing healthy warrior qualities by creating strong individuals who can assist the Indigenous community. The Ogichidaa Youth Program placed particular emphasis on the concept of apprenticeship or becoming a good helper and role model.

Leadership and Resources

Teachers are the priority staff for an educational program. With limited funding, support staff, such as secretaries, counsellors, educational assistants, janitorial staff, and librarians, could not be hired. This resulted in a reliance on the teaching staff and parents of students to provide these services. Because there was limited, non-sustainable funding, job security was an issue. Staff accepted more secure positions elsewhere, as the program was only able to offer employment for the duration of the funding contracts. Also, there was no benefit or pension package to offer teachers, which often exist in other teaching environments. Staff retention was therefore a problem.

A limitation of the program was the absence of specialized staff to accommodate students with high academic, behavioural, or physical needs. This resulted in these students not being admitted to the program. These children deserved a culturally-relevant education and spaces need to be created for them.

Because the school ensured a strong home-school connection around student progress, additional support was provided to students. Staff were comfortable phoning parents to discuss academic concerns and encouraging families to address these issues at home. These concerns were then followed up by the school, either individually with the student

or collectively with the parent(s), so the student understood that both home and school cared about their progress and were working together in their best interests.

Parents were given the opportunity to assist with decision making through monthly parent meetings. Students were given decision making power through the Ogichidaa Youth Circle, an advisory group structured according to the medicine wheel. Monthly meetings occurred that allowed students in the youth program to make decisions about youth programming. Students reported that they were empowered through their involvement in the youth program decision making process as they were given a degree of responsibility which made them accountable.

There was a communal feeling among the students and parents that the teachers at the school were effective. Teachers were described by parents and students as nice, helpful, smart, considerate, energetic, fun, approachable, committed, and compassionate. Students identified and parents confirmed that they loved their teachers, and this contributed largely to their desire to want to come to school.

School Climate

Teachers and administrative staff were received well by the parent and student groups, and were considered a strength of the program. Parents usually felt comfortable coming forward with any concerns and engaged as active participants in the problem-solving process. Parents and students alike responded that the small school setting required everyone to operate as a family, resulting in a strong sense of community when those not at the school on a daily basis visited, and this sense of "family" was often identified by visitors to the school. This school characteristic was so obvious that visitors would make reference to it after being there for only a short period of time. Visitors also made a point of sharing how happy the children seemed to be.

Students addressed the school climate with statements such as: "I like being around the kids—I love the energy they give you" (personal communication, 2004); and "I like the whole community setting. The people here encourage you. I like the hands-on learning and getting to know who you are" (personal communication, 2004). Students and parents identified a holistic and foundational implementation of the seven sacred teachings into all aspects of the program, which greatly affected the personal development of students and the creation of a healthy climate in the school.

As parents came to understand that the school staff had genuine regard for them and truly cared about their child(ren), a climate of relational trust grew, from which effective learning partnerships could develop. The foundation of relational trust resulted in the students wanting to attend school. This was expressed by the students and verified by the parent responses. Parents were particularly impressed with how much

their child(ren) wanted to come to school when previously their child(ren) would refuse to attend other schools. Parents shared these comments about their child's love for school:

In another school it was a battle constantly to get my child to go to school. Once they began this school it was a battle to keep them away from it. I believe it has changed their life. The changes have been profound in my child's life. (personal communication, 2004)

For my child to say 'I love my school, I love my teachers, I love my friends, I like what I am learning,' for me, that says it all. My child's reaction and their opinion of the school, that's what gives the honour and privilege of having a school like that. It makes the school more special when my child sees it in that way. (personal communication, 2004).

The physical location of the school also provided a positive climate. Being situated in a rural setting, with a bush around it and close access to the water, was valued by the students at the school. Many students responded similarly to this student: "I like that the school is not in the city and that there is a bush to play in" (personal communication, 2004). A natural setting allowed the students and teachers to engage in land-based activities and learning essential to Indigenous education. These activities allowed students to develop a sense of who they were in relation to creation and to develop a sense of respect.

Healing and Identity

Many of the parent respondents felt that the most important goal and priority of the school was for their children to learn respect so that "they will be good people" (personal communication, 2004). Parents and students consensually agreed that the school assisted students in developing respect for themselves and others. They identified this as occurring through the school's healing components, which consisted of weekly healing circles, daily morning circles, and teachings on the seven ancestral teachings. Additionally, they identified that the school enforced rules about respect and expected all stakeholders in the program (students, teachers, parents) to use respect at all times. Many parents felt that one of the most effective ways of teaching respect was by the problem-solving process used by the school.

Students identified that they had become more respectful of themselves and of others, to the point of also saying that they were more respectful at home and with their parents, and, in particular, with their mothers. The older students attributed this change to having responsibility at the school that they did not have before at any other school. Because there were in a school with children much younger than themselves, they felt a sense of responsibility "to act in a good way and be a good role model" (personal communication, 2004). This kind of responsibility is represented in a student's statement that "the school has balanced me out—culturally and personally. By being around little kids and having responsibility is what turned me down a better road" (personal communication, 2004). Parents echoed these student responses and identified that their children were exhibiting healthier behaviours in the

home. Most parents made reference to how their family life had changed positively. They stated that their families felt more connected and had developed healthier relationships. Parents noticed that their children managed their emotions better, using positive methods to deal with anger, peer pressure, and stress. Parents also noticed that their children were happier and had a calmer nature about them, with an increased sense of spiritual awareness. Additionally, children were noticed to have increased self-confidence, which resulted in them taking responsibility for their actions and being more aware of boundaries and consequences.

Many students shared the relief they felt coming to a school that was free of racism. Students expressed the extreme stress they encountered facing racism on a daily basis in their previous schools. This relief may have contributed to the “happiness” that students displayed and their overwhelming desire to want to come to school.

Also of high priority to parents was that their children learn about their culture and who they were as an Indigenous person. Parents generally felt that this was of greater importance than pure academic learning. Parents and students felt collectively that the restoration of the students’ cultural identity was occurring at the school. Many parents reported that their child had integrated their cultural learning into all aspects of their life. Students had created “altars” in their home with Indigenous medicines and used them on a regular basis and in times of emotional need. As shared by this parent, “My child set up an altar in [his/her] room with the medicines and will smudge and pray. My child has brought home spirituality; [s/he] talks to the Creator, it helps him/her clear things up and be at peace when times are difficult for him/her” (personal communication, 2004). Other students integrated their learning into their play by pretending to have “circles” at home with their toys. Many parents reported that their children were teaching them cultural knowledge and encouraging the parent to follow through on teachings. As shared by this parent, “My child reminds us that when we take something to give tobacco, we are not allowed to take anything without offering tobacco. If we are taking something from the earth my child makes sure we make an offering and give thanks for the gift” (personal communication, 2004). Many parents also reported that students were bringing home the Anishinaabemowin language they had learned and were teaching it to the parents. Parents also noted a progression in their child’s language abilities: “My child used words for the first couple of years, now [s/he] is using sentences, phrases, expressions, prayers, and songs—a shift is happening. When my child is happy [s/he] sings in Ojibway” (personal communication, 2004).

The after-school youth program was well received by the youth and their families. It provided an opportunity for the youth in the program to further their social, cultural, and recreational relationships outside of the school day. It provided additional support to these youth at a challenging time in their lives.

Certainly, a strength of the program was its cultural curriculum, delivered in parallel with the seasons on a medicine wheel framework. Culture was incorporated into as many of the mainstream subjects and teaching activities as possible; however, this was often dependent on the ability of the teacher to do so. Improvements needed to be made in the program to further develop its mainstream curriculum, such as in language arts and math to incorporate more Anishinaabe culture.

The school provided an inherent aura of validations for the students, as shared by this parent: "They show up at school as Aboriginal children and they are told how incredibly beautiful that is. The school validates them, gives them strength, and shares knowledge with them about who they are. Their culture is validated and there is no racism" (personal communication, 2004).

Parents and Community

Parental involvement was an essential and necessary component of the program. Indigenous education is viewed as a community process that involves skilled community people, such as teachers, Elders, traditional people, and parents. While all parents signed a parental contribution agreement, not all parents committed to the agreement. This resulted in the active parents trying to fulfill all the parental responsibilities of the school.

Parental responses from the evaluation data indicated that relational trust existed between the parents and the school. Their responses also indicated that there was a shared vision of the school with slight variations. Parents felt there was a degree of ownership since they participated in decision making.

Parents responded that there was opportunity for them to engage with the school. These opportunities existed through such activities as fundraising, assisting in the classroom, assisting with administrative tasks, and attending parent meetings.

Excellent communication strategies were in place at the school. Many parents identified that they were well informed of school information and student progress. Parents noted that communication at the school took many forms: newsletters, report cards, teacher notes, phone calls, and parent meetings. Additionally, as one teacher shared, "We create opportunities for the natural interaction to happen between the parents and the teachers" (personal communication, 2004).

The sharing by program staff, students, and parents, combined with the research findings of other evaluation studies, resulted in a clear articulation of strengths and limitations of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program. The learning gleaned from the findings can also assist other communities in developing similar programs in their communities. Learning from other initiatives rather than "recreating the wheel" is a more efficient and effective way of serving our communities.

Culture-Based Education as Transformative Education

Indigenous nations around the world are engaging in a process of identity development, creating a collective voice and struggle to combat the colonization of all Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous nations use education as a vehicle to engage in this process, and many use a culture-based educational model. This is occurring in all regions of the world: New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii, the continental United States, Canada, and the Pacific Nations. Each Indigenous nation draws on its own culture to free themselves from the “cage” of oppression (Graveline, 1998).

The main goal of the Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program was to give back to Anishinaabe children and youth their culture, so that they may identify positively with themselves and imagine their own future free from the hegemony so prevalent in their nation. Indigenous children and youth of today have been denied their culture because of oppressive institutions established by colonization. As a result, many Indigenous parents do not necessarily have the teachings or the knowledge to ensure the cultural survival of their people because they were denied the culture themselves. This, in turn, creates the break in the chain for transference of cultural knowledge.

Culture-based education provides the opportunity to heal Anishinaabe children, their families, their communities, and, ultimately, their nations from colonization through conscientization. Kana’iaupini (2007) outlines culture-based education as consisting of the following five elements:

- Language: Recognizing and using native or heritage language.
- Family and community: Actively involving family and community in the development of curricula, everyday learning, and leadership.
- Context: Structuring the school and the classroom in culturally-appropriate ways.
- Content: Making learning meaningful and relevant through culturally grounded content and assessment.
- Data & Accountability: Gathering and maintaining data using various methods to insure student progress in culturally responsive ways. (Kana’iaupini, 2007, as cited in Singh, 2011, p. 14-15)

With some similarity and additional criteria, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network developed cultural standards in 1998, noting that culturally responsive education:

- fosters the on-going participation of Elders in all aspects of the schooling process;
- provides multiple avenues for students to access the learning that is offered, as well as multiple forms of assessment to demonstrate what they have learned;
- provides opportunities for students to learn in and/or about their heritage language;
- has a high level of involvement of professional staff who are of the same cultural background as the students with whom they are working;
- consists of facilities that are compatible with the community environment in which they are situated;
- fosters extensive on-going participation, communication, and interaction between the school and community personnel. (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998, as cited in Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 975)

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program, as a culture-specific school “designed to meet the needs of a specific cultural or ethnic group of students” (Demmert, 2011, p. 2), met the above-listed culture-based education elements and cultural standards, as described in the findings of the evaluation research.

Culture can be broadly defined as the values from which a people live their lives; the beliefs they carry (their worldview); and the teachings, stories, ceremonies, language, and the traditional skills and abilities of their people. All of this has an effect on people’s behaviours and how they choose to act. It was the belief of the program that children and youth, who learn about their culture in addition to being in an environment where it is a daily lived experience, provided through the traditional learning method of positive role modelling, will develop into strong and grounded Anishinaabeg, who know who they are and who can be proud. In the long term, it is hoped that these children will be less likely to continue the oppressive cycles of abuse that plague their communities.

Many Canadian Indigenous children and youth find themselves in a school where they are not respected for who they are, where they cannot see themselves in the curriculum, where they are taught according to a conflicting and unhealthy value system, and where they are not provided the opportunity to come to understand their history at a nation level or at a family/personal level. The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program focused on providing a daily opportunity for Anishinaabe children and youth to develop into healthy and grounded Indigenous people, a task that cannot occur simply through after-school programs or added-on cultural curriculum. Addressing colonial oppression and its effects is a process, not an event. The program witnessed the unique benefits of engaging young people in a healing process that allowed them the opportunity to move their learning/healing to a place of “being” or to “live it”.

When many families engage in a healing process, a healthier nation results. Conversely, if an Indigenous nation chooses to improve its health and relationship abilities, it may institute nationwide programs and practices to develop its nation. With respect to education, each Indigenous nation may choose to use culture-based education as a way of acquiring a positive Indigenous identity and thus reconnect themselves for the purpose of decolonizing their nation. Anderson (2002) offers a framework in which to do this, through the process of resisting, reclaiming, reconstructing, and acting. A culture-based educational framework resists negative definitions of being in an attempt to dismantle the oppression and cognitive imperialism that the members of its nation carries (Battiste, 2000). Many Indigenous groups have joined the resistance movement by implementing a culture-based education system that provides the powerful opportunity of “reclaiming” Indigenous traditions. These traditions are not

just the tangible cultural components, such as hunting, ceremonies, and speaking the language, but also include ways of thinking and being, framed in an Indigenous worldview. A culture-based education system allows the construction of a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context. Members of the nation are provided with the skills to walk and be in the larger global world by developing a value system based on respect and by acquiring the skills to be resilient in the global world. A culture-based education system provides the opportunity for a nation to act on its identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of the communities and nation. Members of the nation become capable of putting their knowledge, identity, and skills into action, resulting in social change for their nations. “The validation, information, and pride” (Gay, 2010, in Singh, 2011, pp. 17-18) that cultural-based education “generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating” (Gay, 2010, in Singh, 2011, pp. 17-18).

Indian Control of Indian Education

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program existed as an education site in congruence with the Indian Control of Indian Education policy of 1972. The philosophy of the policy stated that, “In Indian tradition each adult is personally responsible for each child, to see that he learns all he needs to know in order to live a good life” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1) and that “we modern Indians, want our children to learn that happiness and satisfaction come from:

- pride in one’s self,
- understanding one’s fellowmen, and,
- living in harmony with nature. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1)

This philosophy statement was then articulated through the following statement of values:

We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honored place in Indian tradition and culture. The values which we want to pass on to our children, values which make our people a great race, are not written in any book. They are found in our history, in our legends and in the culture. We believe that if an Indian child is fully aware of the important Indian values he will have reason to be proud of our race and of himself as an Indian. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 2)

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program realized the Indian Control of Indian Education’s statement of philosophy and values through its vision, mission, administration, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Parental and local control are two major foundations of the Indian Control of Indian Education policy, whereby parents are given the responsibility of setting goals to ensure their children have their identity as an Indigenous person reinforced (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) and to ensure that they are provided “the training necessary for making a good

living in modern society” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 3). Regarding local control, the policy advocates for local authority over all components of delivering education. The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program involved parents at all levels of its operations while existing as a stand-alone school within the community of Burleigh Falls, serving the Peterborough area under the umbrella of the Kawartha Métis and Non-Status Indian Association, an independent not-for-profit organization of the Kawartha Nishnawbe Band.

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program existed as a case study of Indian Control of Indian Education in praxis. It addressed the policy in the areas of curriculum, language, and teachers. The curriculum was delivered with “balance and relevancy between academic/skill subjects and Indian cultural subjects” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 9). While the Anishinaabe language was not used as the language of instruction, the program embedded language learning as much as was possible to fulfill the language goal of the policy: “Knowing his maternal language helps a man to know himself; being proud of his language helps a man to be proud of himself” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 15). First Nations teachers were hired who had “an intimate understanding of Indian traditions, psychology, way of life and language” and who were “best able to create the learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Indian child” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 18).

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program no longer exists due to lack of funding. Its major funder was the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, whose funding ended for the program in 2006 and no other funder could be secured. A major claim of the Indian Control of Indian Education policy has still not been achieved; it called for the “financial responsibility of the Federal Government to provide education of all types and all levels to all status Indian people, whether living on or off reserves” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 3). None of the program’s students were able to find an educational setting comparable to the culture-based education provided by the program, which supports Castagno and Brayboy’s (2008) claim: “The fact that in 2008 we are still making this same argument and trying to convince educators of the need to provide a more culturally responsive pedagogy for Indigenous students indicates the pervasiveness and persistence of the problem” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 981).

The Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program existed as a site of transformational Indigenous education. The program was an act of self-determination; however, it existed as a unique site of resistance in Canada. Multiple sites across the country are required to ensure true transformation for Anishinaabe people in Canada. To other Anishinaabe communities and other Indigenous communities in general,

I share this thought from Graham Smith (2005), a Maori person who birthed the educational revolution in New Zealand. We need to move beyond our fears, beyond the overwhelmingness of the task, and beyond our own oppression to do what our people need. We need to just get started doing it. To get started, Graham (2005) suggests that we get a board, some paint, a hammer, and some nails. You put the name of your “education” on the board with the paint and nail it up and you have started—it’s as simple as that. Essentially, we need to “just do it.”

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