

THE DECOLONIZING JOURNEY OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALTH CENTRE
AND LIVING ROCK MINISTRIES

THE DECOLONIZING JOURNEY OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALTH CENTRE
AND LIVING ROCK MINISTRIES:
PARTNERING IN REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

By

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Abstract

This qualitative case study looks at a partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries. I explore what makes for a humanizing partnership between two communities when one has historically been oppressed, and the other has historically held positions of dominance within the same context. It is crucial to this study that we understand the colonial culture and the ongoing collective trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples. This will shape our understanding of the challenges faced in partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples today. Healing and resistance are vital to the decolonization process that Aboriginal communities are focused on. Paulo Freire (1970) describes a false consciousness which both the oppressed and the oppressors internalize. Here I identify this consciousness as the colonial reality. I argue that dominant institutions, specifically the Christian church, are in serious need of critical reflection upon their roles in reproducing the colonial culture. Critical reflection is required in order to take action and experience liberation from the unjust social order which is largely reproduced through white hegemony and Eurocentric dominance. Both the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries explain that they value and pursue individual and collective healing. Their partnership is characterized by equality, authentic dialogue, reciprocity, trust and love. Humanizing relationship can only be realized through an authentic collective commitment to critical reflection and action. This thesis explores how the partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries became what it is today, and suggests some principles which have the potential to foster humanizing relationships in other contexts.

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First Words

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) draws attention to the need for a renewed relationship between the First Peoples of Turtle Island and Canadian society. Healing and resistance are vital to the way of life for Aboriginal communities (Freeman & Lee 2007). Historically dominant Eurocentric systems, government, religious and economic, have imposed relationships that deny the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to be self-determining, and limit them in their healing journey. This study explores a local partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries of Hamilton that functions quite differently than historic relationships between Aboriginal and Christian groups. This unique partnership began organically, out of a shared vision to serve street-involved Aboriginal youth. It is characterized by honest dialogue, reciprocity, trust and love. This partnership is especially interesting because of the historic dynamics between Aboriginal communities and Christian churches. An understanding of this partnership has the potential to provide insight into renewing the broken relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. I ask: What makes for an authentic and mutually beneficial relationship between a historically oppressed group, and the group who has played a role in their oppression? How can a contradictory and dehumanizing relationship become authentic and humanizing?

The participants of this study suggest that this particular partnership is unlike others they have been involved in. Healing and resistance are not only critical to how Aboriginal communities heal, but also essential for renewing relations with non-Aboriginal Canada. Non-Aboriginal Society has an equally pressing need to embark on this healing journey; however the process will be quite different. In order for Canada to

enter into a renewed relationship with Aboriginal people, its dominant institutions and structures need to explore how they have failed Aboriginal people and how they continue to reproduce the colonial reality. The literature makes it clear that this journey toward decolonization is something that non-Aboriginal society cannot lead. This study investigates how non-Aboriginal society can become allies in this journey, and undergo a process of transformation from a colonial consciousness into a new humanizing reality.

This thesis has challenged and stretched my own understanding of what it is to be a white, Christian, settler descendent. I have been required to ask myself questions that challenge me not only academically, but spiritually and emotionally. As a white woman with no Aboriginal heritage I am very much aware that critical self-reflection and analysis are fundamental to the process and to the outcome of this research. The importance of developing this self awareness is heightened because of my identification with Christian spirituality. As this process has been highly introspective, for the participants and for me, I have written this thesis in a conversational and personal style which reflects the nature of the research. Through this process I have sought an understanding of how I as a non-Aboriginal person can participate in decolonization. I believe that my participation requires that I make space for the decolonization process in dominant Eurocentric institutions. Western academia has the tendency to push Aboriginal research epistemologies and perspectives to the margins. It is important to me that through this thesis I do not reproduce dominant and hegemonic assumptions. I have written this thesis with transparency and the hope that others can relate to, find encouragement in, and be challenged by the lessons that we (the participants and me) have learned along the way.

The openness of the participants and their involvement in shaping the research guide and the analysis is what gave this study its shape. My initial analysis focused on the history of this partnership, its successes and its challenges. The participants took my analysis far beyond where I thought it would go. The themes I discuss are direct outcomes of the interest and willingness of the participants to explore their journey in partnership. This exploration of partnership is significant because of its historic context; as such each theme is analyzed within the context of the colonial reality. I am particularly interested in how Aboriginal and Christian spirituality have shaped the development of this partnership. From the initial conversations I had with participants they explained that the success of this partnership is not about the organizations, but it has to do with the people involved. Although the participants did not speak directly to decolonization, what they did share fits into the decolonization literature. I will discuss how their relationship is humanizing, and taking them on a journey toward decolonization. In my discussion of the decolonizing journey I have developed a framework analysis that contrasts dehumanizing and humanizing relationships in the context of colonial culture. This framework incorporates the themes that emerged in the research.

Since contact, a variety of labels and definitions have been imposed on the first peoples. 'Indian' is a past and current legal term which reflects the ignorance those who assumed the right to name the people they came into contact with (Curley cited in Lee, Sammon and Dumbrill, 2005). I will only use this term when referring to legal documents or when citing other speakers who use it. While there are many ways to identify the first peoples of this country, I decided to use the word Aboriginal for a variety of reasons. First, this is the language the Aboriginal Health Centre has chosen to use in its self-

identification. Realizing that multiple words are accepted, I do not assume that all of the staff or clients of the centre identify with the word Aboriginal. I originally began my writing using the term First Nations, because of its political orientation. It has come to be a current legal term, used by the federal government and by First Nations people themselves. However, First Nations only refers to status-Indians who are members of Band Councils which are constructions of the Indian Act. I did not feel that it is representative of the all of the participants or those whose work I have been influenced by. “Aboriginal” refers to any person who can trace their origin to the first peoples of what is now Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005). This includes Metis, Inuit, status and non-status Indians (Statistics Canada, 2005). More importantly, the concept of aboriginality “relates to the first quadrant of the eastern teaching Medicine Wheel; that is the physical reality of the individual” (Curley cited Lee, Sammon and Dumbrill, 2005). Believing that language is powerful and that it has the potential to both reproduce and deconstruct myths and dominant constructions of reality, I want to carefully choose my words. My intention is to research and write anti-oppressively, and with that I have chosen to use the word Aboriginal.

The work of Paulo Freire has given me a great deal of guidance in my analysis. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) puts to words what I have observed and heard in my exploration of the partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries. This partnership functions and has progressed because of a commitment to dialogue and action. “To speak a true word is to change the world” (Freire, 1970, p.87). A true word requires action. The interaction of reflection and action is called praxis. When people talk but do not act, their words are useless. When people act without

collectively reflecting upon their reality, their actions are ineffective, or mere activism (Freire, 1970). My intention is that this thesis reflects an important collective dialogue which expands beyond the participants and me to include the perspectives of others who speak to the issues of decolonization and transformation. I believe that these words have the potential to transcend the written form and inspire action, starting with me.

Literature Review

Partnerships

Partnership between organizations in the Canadian context is never neutral. Partnerships are not formed in isolation from the broader determinants of social trends. This discussion requires an understanding of the social, political and economic realities which shape the experiences of partnership. The Canadian Council on Social Development commissioned a report called *Funding Matters* (Scott 2003) which explores the challenges experienced by the non-profit and voluntary sector in regards to funding as the government and other funders scale back their commitments to the sectors. Competition for funding between organizations is becoming fierce, as are the politics involved in community partnerships (Scott 2003). This funding dilemma is not limited to the Canadian context, nor can the root cause of the problem be found in analysis of the Canadian welfare state. Globalization theorists explore the pressures that neo-liberal social policies place on the welfare state. Pressures from global market forces are diminishing the states power to respond to social problems (Cox & Pawar 2006; Prince & Rice 2000). With the rise of neo-liberalism the social and economic rights and protections once guaranteed by the welfare state are being cut back. The welfare state is viewed by neo-liberalists as unproductive, uneconomic, inefficient and constricting (Cox & Pawar 2006). According to this perspective, as the state invests in social spending it will be less competitive and attractive to the corporations it needs to fuel the economy. As a result of this neoliberal trend toward the devolution of welfare rights, communities, families, and charities are forced to respond to social contingencies by stepping in where the state once provided support. Less government money is distributed to help deal with weakening

social structures and more money is focused on protecting the corporations which already have a hold on social, economic and political power. While globalization may be the root cause of restructuring, the immediate concern is the primacy of the neo-liberal agenda.

Scott asked non-profit and voluntary organizations how they are faring with all the changes in funding patterns. According to the report organizations have responded to neo-liberal restructuring by diversifying their own funding sources, and going through organizational restructuring. Organizations are seeking out partnerships, largely as a requirement of funders but also as a survival strategy. Increasingly funders require that organizations have partnerships which will provide partial funding before they consider a financial contribution. In the past five years over 93% of organizations surveyed have had to diversify their funding sources (Scott, 2003). Non-profit and voluntary organizations have to rely more on partnerships within the community just to remain above water and to be considered for project funding.

While partnerships are becoming strategic to survival in an era of welfare retrenchment and funding cuts, successful partnership may be enhanced and challenged by increasing societal plurality. Rice and Prince (2000) discuss the tensions and controversies which emerge as people and communities with different orientations, world views, values, and ways of operating come into each other's realms. Not only will pluralization challenge partnership, but it also has the potential to enhance social inclusion by recognizing and empowering difference perspectives (Rice & Prince, 2000). Pluralization will also create a need for dialogue to navigate some of the challenges as partnerships develop across culture and social location. Because of this, there is a growing body of literature which explores the dynamics of intercultural partnership at all

levels, ranging from small community partnerships to the relationship between the federal government and Aboriginal nations (Berry & Ward, 2006; Gurthrie, et al., 2006; Ladner, 2001; Dumbrill, 2006; Parker, 2003; RCAP, 1996; Green & Sonn, 2006; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006; Waterfall, 2002; Weber, Loverich & Gaffney, 2007). The literature that looks at partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations is mainly from Canada and Australia. In most partnerships the non-Aboriginal organization initiated or was commissioned to develop a partnership with the Aboriginal community in order to provide support and guidance or to help deal with a perceived deficit or gap.

The *North-South Partnership for Children* is an excellent representation of the kind of vertically imposed relationships that have historically been formed between marginalized and dominant groups. This partnership is made up of individuals and organizations in Southern Ontario and members of 30 remote Aboriginal communities in Northwestern Ontario. The vision of this partnership is that it would support the goals of each Northern community and address some of the challenges facing children, youth and families. The partnership is designed to help the communities in meeting short and long term goals, through the development of caring networks, shared learning and by following the lead of the communities themselves. This partnership is for the benefit of the Northern community, rather than for the mutual benefit of both. The South is involved in the partnership because of identified needs of the North. The partnership is not characterized by reciprocity, as the action is for the benefit of the Northern community. This kind of relationship may have the tendency to swing toward a paternalistic vertical relationship, where the South acts as expert and decision maker, and the North as a client receiving services. The *North-South Partnership for Children* must

struggle against power imbalances that are maintained through paternalism. Its commitment to shared learning between the North and the South is one way that this partnership may challenge the reproduction of colonial mindsets.

The *North-South Partnership for Children* is characteristic of partnerships which are often developed between marginal and dominant groups in this ‘post-colonial’ era. Relevant to this kind of vertically imposed relationship, by one community for the benefit of the other, is Lee’s exploration of the dynamics in community based research. Lee looks at relationships between researchers and participant communities. He identifies three different approaches to community research—research on communities, research for communities and research with communities. The informing elements which are characteristic of research for communities are similar to the relationship dynamics of the *North-South Partnership for Children*. Lee describes the relationship as collaborative “yet mostly in the hands of the researcher” (p.9). The relationship and the action taken by the partners are for the benefit of one community. This dynamic is often typical of partnerships where one has historically assumed a position of dominance over the other, who is perceived to be less autonomous or capable.

Partnerships cannot be detached from their context, socially, politically, culturally, environmentally, etc. Unless the relationship is committed to authentic reciprocity it may unequally benefit the more powerful or dominant partner (Lee 2007:9). Partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities cannot ignore the ongoing effects of colonization. Lee emphasizes the benefit of negotiating goals and navigating a balance of power from the beginning. According to Lee (2007) “the ideal relationship is one based on collaboration although we need to be mindful that issues of

power affect the negotiation of goals from the onset” (p.9). When one partner has historically been subjugated and marginalized, there is a potential for the partnership to reproduce and more deeply entrench the sense that that group is dependent on the more privileged partner to affect change for them. Within this dynamic there is a risk that one partner will speak for the other, potentially disempowering and misrepresenting an already marginalized voice (Lee 2007).

While this kind of relationship, which lacks reciprocity, is not ideal, it is sometimes an unavoidable option. Even Harold Cardinal who urged non-Native ‘helpers’ to back down, recognizes that some Aboriginal communities lack the social and economic resources needed to independently deal with certain issues.

The solutions to the social and economic difficulties of the Indians depend on our own ability to forge the type of resource teams we need and upon the extent to which we can build a genuine partnership with helpful resource people in the white community” (Cardinal 1969, p.79).

Cardinal (1969) continues to explain that while the effectiveness of white people in Aboriginal communities is highly questionable, there is a need for partnership with the non-Aboriginal community. There is also a need for dialogue and mutual understanding within white society, which is something that could be achieved through a genuine partnership. Cardinal is asking non-Aboriginal people who want to help through partnership to enter in as learners, rather than teachers or experts. It is widely accepted among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics, advocates, community organizers and social workers that authentic community healing must be conceived, birthed and nurtured by the community itself. This is a holistic process that considers individual health, families, community wellbeing and the environment. According to Warry (1998), community health is intimately connected to citizenship participation, self-determination,

shared decision making and new forms of government that reflect the community, rather than the state. This perspective affirms what Aboriginal scholars (Alfred (1999), Cardinal (1969), Monture Angus (1995), Battiste (2000) express regarding the interconnectedness of decolonization, self-determination and community healing.

Historically relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups have been imposed by the state, promoting Euro-Canadian values and methods. While partnerships today are less likely to be developed for the purpose of cultural assimilation, Aboriginal communities express a legitimate fear and mistrust when developing a relationship with non-Aboriginal organizations. Robertson (as cited in Lee, 1992) defines colonization as the “subjugation of one people by another through destruction and/or weakening of basic institutions of the subjugated culture and replacing them with those of the dominant culture” (Lee 1992, p. 212). The dominant culture or the settler group has violently and manipulatively pushed Aboriginal peoples out of power and into marginal positions, strategically fragmenting cultural traditions, knowledge, political systems, rights, family and other fundamental resources. Canada’s assimilation agenda was focused on removing children from their families and culture. This form of cultural genocide is rooted in a colonial mentality which fears difference and imposes paternalistic control over those who are ‘other’ in order to protect its own interests. Historic injustices such as residential schools and the sixties scoop were most often justified under the pretenses of providing help. During the period in which the first Indian Act was imposed, a principle government negotiator Alexander Morris prayed this prayer which is not far removed from the paternalistic attitudes which characterize mainstream services today.

Let us have Christianity and civilization among the Indian tribes...let us have a wise and paternal government...doing its utmost to help and elevate the Indian population, who have been cast upon our care...and Canada will be enabled to feel, that in a truly patriotic spirit, our country has done its duty to the red men” (RCAP 1996: vol 1, ch 6).

According to Albert Memmi (1965), the most devastating impact of colonization experienced by the colonized is their removal and exclusion from history and their isolation from the global community. Colonization appropriates any self-determined role in war and peace, and controls every decision made toward the future of the colonized people. Exercising control over the process of history making allows the colonizer to construct a mythical portrait of both the colonizer and the colonized. This myth perpetuates a belief that colonized need the cultural, economic, political and religious knowledge and expertise that the colonizer inherently possesses. The colonized are viewed as less human than the colonizer. These myths are used to justify the ongoing oppression of the colonized. The historic relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the settler society includes genocide, relocation, abusive residential schools, and the imposition of European religious and political systems as well as other oppressive assimilation policies (Freeman & Lee, 2007). Aboriginal communities are concerned with the process of healing and resistance at multiple levels; individual, family and community. While Aboriginal communities have proved their resilience and will to survive in the face of brutal assimilation tactics, the past few decades have shown a need to recover what was lost and to heal what was wounded (Freeman & Lee, 2007). The process of healing and resistance is broad, ranging from land reclamation to residential school settlements to resolving intergeneration family wounds through traditional healing (Lee, 1992; Warry, 1998). The intergenerational collective trauma experienced by

Aboriginal communities will undoubtedly complicate and set back relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations today. It may be more difficult for an Aboriginal community to enter into partnership because of this historic trauma.

Alfred (1999), Waterfall (2002) and Dumbrill (2006) show how the colonial mindset of the settler group operates today in child welfare under the guise of a new relationship. Alfred (1999) argues that this new neo-Colonial relationship is forged as another control mechanism, under the rhetoric of self-determination. He explains that in this so called 'post-colonial' world of reserves run by Aboriginal people, the new relationship continues to oppress Aboriginal people (Alfred, 1999). This oppression becomes more deeply embedded through its subtleties and Aboriginal nations are still bound to a colonial order. Waterfall (2002) and Dumbrill (2006) contend that child welfare under Aboriginal administration continues to operate out of paternalistic Eurocentric mind sets, assumptions and values while obscuring and de-legitimizing Aboriginal forms of knowledge and the expertise of the communities themselves. Both Waterfall (2002) and Dumbrill (2006) experienced a pressure to impose government standards and regulations, for the purpose of reproducing Eurocentric values and beliefs around child rearing and family structure within Aboriginal communities. The goal of introducing *Aboriginal Child Welfare* is that child protection would be administered by Aboriginal workers in their own communities. Waterfall (2002) rejects this policy initiative, asserting that it will only serve to further entrench the colonial mindset in Aboriginal communities as Eurocentric values and practices are enforced by Aboriginal people. Dumbrill (2006) suggests that Aboriginal child welfare trainers develop their own, culturally appropriate and relevant child protection measures. Even with this

suggestion, Aboriginal families and *Child Welfare* would still be controlled and monitored by the provincial government.

Similarly, out of frustration with the hegemony of Eurocentric thought within Aboriginal Child Welfare partnerships, Waterfall (2002) worked with an Elder to create a new method of assessment based on the Medicine Wheel. While this model furthered the service providers and service users right to a self-determined agency, it still existed within the paternal government imposed and regulated system of Child Welfare (Waterfall 2002). The *Aboriginal Child Welfare* systems Waterfall (2002) and Dumbrill (2006) describe are manifestations of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is a system which was designed to pacify resistance to the direct control of the government over Aboriginal peoples (Waterfall 2002). Within this system Aboriginal people are hired to do certain levels of work that non-Aboriginal people had previously done. The workers that Dumbrill (2006) trained are an example of this. Authentic control, funding, and decision making powers remain within government hands, making it near impossible to affect meaningful and sustainable change.

Neo-colonial systems create an appearance of authentic collaboration and self-determination but in actuality replicate colonial values and the bureaucratic culture of Euro-Canadian systems. It is doubtful whether colonization can be dismantled apart from the struggle for self-government as determined by Aboriginal peoples (Alfred, 1999). Well intentioned partnerships which are vertically imposed such an *Aboriginal Child Welfare* system may serve to obscure the need for self-government. Partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities runs the risk of becoming co-optive and reproducing colonial dynamics (Alfred, 1999; Lee, 1992). Lee (1999) defines power as

the “degree to which we are able to act to influence our environment—to get things done, or makes things happen; or to keep things from getting done, or happening” (p. 23). He identifies five elements that are central to power; money, information, numbers, status, and belief or conviction. The Canadian government and its various institutions such as *Child Welfare* now try to control Aboriginal moneys, status, knowledge, resources and values indirectly though the co-optation of Aboriginal leaders. Alfred (1999) observes that some will take action to contend this unjust power, while others will allow it to co-opt them. This appropriation operates through the distortion of traditional values, political aims, and cultural knowledge and through the control of legal Aboriginal status. For example, policy makers have jumped on the rhetoric of self-government, but have distorted its true meaning replacing it with neo-colonial forms of Aboriginal administration and limited control. This is the ‘new relationship’ that the government claims will bring about reconciliation and healing.

Moana Jackson of the Iwi nation of Ngati Kahungunu and Ngati Porou in Aotearoa studies the politics and processes of colonial myth-making, in which the colonizer masks the extent of oppression and dispossession which has shaped the present. This legitimizes the ongoing denial of the rights of those who have been colonized. This myth not only serves to justify oppression in the eyes of the colonizers, but also in the eyes of the colonized. Jackson describes a good faith partnership between present day Aotearoa and Maori people. They report that within this partnership any challenge made by the Maori is perceived by the dominant society as a threat to racial harmony. The Maori have to live within parameters of self-determination as defined by the state, which limits them in their cultural expressions of sovereignty: language, music, art and custom

(Jackson, 2004). It is through the dominant culture that the State defines and facilitates Maori expressions of sovereignty, and the dominant construction does not recognize political self-determination. Jackson's (2004) case study in Aotearoa demonstrates the necessity of deconstructing the colonial myth. The present-day partnership between Maori and Aotearoa is a replication of the old colonial relationship these myths that maintain colonization require identification and deconstruction.

The RCAP envisions a renewed relationship between Aboriginal people and Canadian society. It begins its discussion about restructuring the relationship by acknowledging Aboriginal peoples as self-determined nations. While the right to self-governance is not dependent on the legitimization of the Canadian government, it is recognized in both domestic and international law (Ladner, 2001). This inherent right to self-determined nationhood is a gift of the creator, and not something bestowed by the Canadian or British governments. The Commission agrees that,

Aboriginal people trace their existence and their systems of government back as far as memory and oral history extend. They say that the ultimate source of their right to be self-governing is the Creator. The Creator placed each nation on its own land and gave the people the responsibility of caring for the land - and one another - until the end of time" (RCAP, 1996: chapter 1, p. 676).

With this in mind the partnership to be negotiated is one between nations. While the commission expresses that this new relationship has to be understood as one composed of equal partners, nation to nation, it also has to deal with a legacy of colonial oppression and subjugation.

The Commissioners express that,

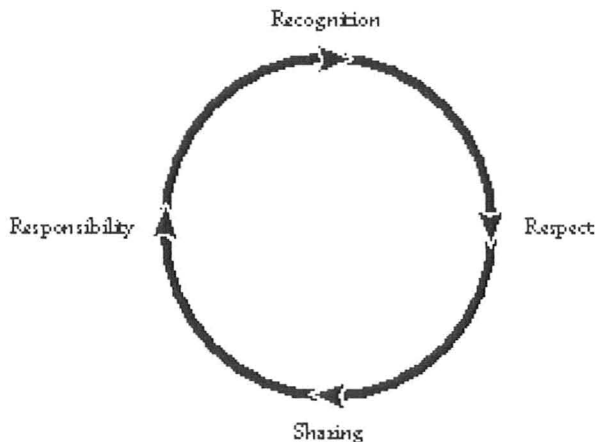
"a vision of balanced relationship has been a constant theme in our work as a Commission...we reject the idea that the past can simply be put aside and

forgotten as we seek to build a new relationship. The concept of renewal expresses better the blend of historical sensitivity and creative initiative that should characterize future relations among Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in this country. It would be false and unjust to suggest that we start entirely anew, false and unjust to attempt to wipe the slate clean, ignoring both the wrongs of the past and the rights flowing from our previous relationships and interactions” (RCAP,1996 chapter 1, p.677).

This renewed partnership is based on a vision of vision of four fundamental elements: mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility (RCAP 1996). These principles will be realized through healing, reconciliation and cooperation. It is believed that these principles will lead to the decolonization and renewing of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, which will pave the way toward a more equitable future. Partnership is the word that RCAP uses to describe this renewed relationship. The principles are depicted as equal parts of an ongoing circle. Each aspect is fundamental to the complete whole, and must be actively committed to by both groups in order to live out an authentic partnership (see Figure 2).

Figure 2:1

The Principles of a Renewed Relationship



(RCAP, 1996, chapter 2, p.16)

Ladner (2001) argues that while the RCAP vision for a renewed partnership appears to be a positive mechanism for decolonizing the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canada, this vision for renewal is actually a continuation of colonial means and ends. Ladner (2001) suggests that for most Aboriginal peoples, RCAP is an unacceptable response to the past and it does not uphold the vision which Aboriginal peoples have for their future as self-governing nations. The options for self-government that RCAP gives Aboriginal peoples, and the notion of nationhood that is constructed by the commissioners further disempowers Aboriginal nations under a still colonial regime. This is not authentic partnership, nor is it equal, it is what Ladner calls “negotiated inferiority” (2001, p.259).

The Six Nations Confederacy describes their relationships with other nations as a silver covenant chain.

“Silver is sturdy and does not break easily,” they say. “It does not rust or deteriorate with time. However, it does become tarnished. So when we come together, we must polish the chain, time and again, to restore our friendship to its original brightness.” In other words, a relationship among peoples is not a static thing. It changes and develops over time, in response to new conditions. If constant efforts are not made to maintain and update it, it can easily deteriorate or fall apart (RCAP, 1996 chapter 16 section 1.4).

Another illustration of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal society is the Haudenosaunee *Two Row Wampum Belt*. This belt symbolizes a treaty between the Haudenosaunee people and the European settlers. The oral history that accompanies the belt dates back to the early 1600’s. This treaty speaks of co-existence and non-interference. Here are two different English translations of the treaty;

“This symbolizes the agreement under which the Haudenosaunee welcomed the white peoples to their lands.

We will NOT be like father and son, but like brothers.
These TWO ROWS will symbolize vessels,
traveling down the same river together.
One will be for the Original People, their laws, their customs,
and the other for the European people and their laws and customs.
We will each travel the river together,
but each in our own boat.
And neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel” (Miller, 1980).

“In our canoe we have all our laws, culture, and beliefs and in your vessel you shall have all your laws, culture, and beliefs, traveling side by side through life as equals never enforcing or interfering in each others affairs as long as the sun shall shine the grass shall grow and the rivers shall flow this will be everlasting” (Mohawk Nation Press, 1996).

This treaty provides a picture of an ideal relationship between nations, as separate peoples coexisting together as equals in a shared land, a kind of partnership. Alfred (1999) says that the main obstacle to decolonization and the restoration of peaceful coexistence is the hegemony of Eurocentric values, ideas and ways of being. Eurocentrism is a force which prevents the creation of a just relationship between Aboriginal nations and non-Aboriginal society. Alfred (1999) provides four ideals from Indigenous political thought which he believes are fundamental to ending the colonial relationship, and developing a just relationship. These principles are: respect, harmony, autonomy and peaceful coexistence.

Cultural Dynamics: Dealing with Difference

Understanding differences between cultures is important to intercultural partnership. Speaking about difference and how it shapes relationships is part of a commitment to antiracism. Exposing and understanding hidden differences between cultures will help to bridge gaps in communication and to resolve misperceptions (Gudykunst, 1991; Hall, 1976; Hall & Hall, 1987). Hall (1976) looks at the predominant

ways in which a culture communicates, and differentiates cultures as high-context or low-context communication. Low-context communication is attributed to individualistic societies, where high-context communication is found in collectivist societies. Context is the information and meaning which surrounds an event. Cultures vary in how much attention is paid to context in communication. High context (HC) is a message that relies mostly on non-coded or explicit information. Low context (LC) communication is at the other end of the spectrum, as it relies mainly on explicitly coded information (Hall & Hall, 1987). These concepts helped Hall and Hall understand the Japanese culture and how American's can develop better business relationships across hidden differences. While this case is specific to Japanese culture, it shows the importance of breaking down spoken words, material things and behaviour when communicating across culture. This orientation may be relevant to a partnership between other collectivist and individualist cultures, specifically Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian communities.

Welcoming difference is critical to experiencing and attaining new ways of being. Critical ontology helps individuals and groups recognize how their political orientations, world views, religion, race, sexual orientation, gender and class experiences are shaped by the dominant culture (Kincheloe, 2006). An ontological vision helps us move beyond our present self as we discern what forces have molded us. Bateson (Kincheloe, 2006) explores the power of difference as central to critical ontology through the example of binoculars. The image seen through binoculars is singular and undivided, yet it is formed through the synthesis of images from the left and right side of the brain. "A synergy is created where the sum of the images is greater than the separate parts. As a result of bringing the two different views together, resolution and contrast are enhanced"

(Kincheloe, 2006, p. 183). The most important part of this synergy is that new depth and insight is gained, and new dimensions are seen. So too when multiple perspectives come together from a variety of contexts, histories and worldviews, there is a strong potential for new vision and understanding.

With increasing diversity in most facets of society, social work practice, research, policy and education is participating in a dialogue around cultural competency. The notion of cultural competency is not synonymous with anti-racism, nor does it ensure equality or justice. Models and guidelines for culturally sensitive or competent practice usually rely on beliefs and understandings of cultural practices or ethnic norms that are static, misrepresentative or essentialized (Sonn & Green, 2006). The tools developed to help deal with the tensions and challenges of intercultural relations are often constructed from with a Western view of the world and understanding of culture. In social work education and practice, cross cultural or cultural competency discourse has the tendency to obscure or misrepresent Aboriginal knowledge, culture and the history of colonization. Sinclair problematizes current cross cultural approaches to social work with Aboriginal people, asserting that they are often ineffective in addressing the ongoing nature of colonial oppression. Sinclair (2004) provides an example where the history of colonization is called ‘cultural disruption,’ and where Aboriginal methodology and epistemology is reduced to ‘mysticism.’ The way that Aboriginal culture and history is inaccurately represented or omitted, lends to a culture of silence (Sinclair 2004). Freire (1970) uses the term ‘culture of silence’ to describe situations where the oppressed are silenced and mainstream ignorance/apathy concerning their experiences serves to intensify oppression by blaming the oppressed for the circumstances.

Yee and Dumbrill (2003) identify whiteness as “a form of hegemony that allows one group to use power to dominate a group in a position of less power” (p. 102). Whiteness constructs a hidden and silenced discourse in which white, Western, Eurocentric culture is understood to be the norm. This structurally violent world view is what justified and fueled the establishment of what is now Canada, through the subjugation, assimilation and genocide of the peoples of Turtle Island. It is largely out of the same privilege and power that whiteness reifies and constructs non-white cultural and ethnic groups as deviating from the norm. Sonn and Green (2006) point out that the notions of culture and ethnicity that are developed to guide intercultural relations often dismiss historic political, social and structural realities that disadvantage and privilege certain groups. White service providers and researchers attempt to understand and describe issues concerning Aboriginal peoples for the purpose of improving intercultural relations; however this often reproduces an ‘us versus them’ dichotomy. “To know an Indigenous social world is to have experienced it from within, while to know about an Indigenous social world is to impose a conceptual framework” (Sonn & Green, 2006, p. 342). Yee and Dumbrill (2003) discuss the repercussions of placing people within ethno-racial categories. While this attempt to be culturally competent may provide one with a broad and generalized understanding of a community’s needs, it does nothing to address issues of racism and ethnocentrism that reproduce inequalities in cross cultural partnerships. Sonn and Green (2006) and Yee and Dumbrill (2003), problematize ethno-racial classification systems which are used to foster cultural competency. Yee and Dumbrill (2003) raise issues about the construction of knowledge. Whose knowledge is recognized as legitimate? Who benefits from the knowledge? Addressing these questions

may be more helpful in a cross cultural partnership than a system of cultural categorization.

Dei (1999) writes that “the dominance of Eurocentric values ensures that cross-cultural exchanges are mediated through centers of power outside the domain of the marginalized” (p. 398). Dei provides an anti-colonial discursive framework which addresses the impact of knowledge produced through dominant thinking, which reflects cultural history and interacts with daily social interactions and experiences. Dei’s framework is directed toward education and acknowledges the role of the system in reproducing and maintaining social and economic inequalities based on race, class, gender, sexuality and other social locations. The anti-colonial discursive framework stresses the importance of confronting the barriers and challenges that arise out of difference and diversity. Dei (1999) and Lawrence and Dua (2005) argue that even anti-racism perspectives and practice have the potential to subordinate individuals and groups which lie outside of the realm of power and dominance. Whiteness, including gender, class, age, religion, language and ability is placed in the centre of power, as if it is the beginning and end of all things. Antiracism affirms this social reality, but risks affirming it as a static, unchanging or historic vocation. Critical reflection and analysis about social identities and the systemic inequalities that follow is necessary for social change. Dei (1999) warns that social critique through a focus on difference has the potential to reproduce dominant forms of knowledge and practice. The anti-colonial discourse not only analyzes difference, but explores issues around colonial relationships, structures of power and dominant ideas which are entrenched in culture and knowledge construction.

The experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal people in their struggle for

decolonization are largely excluded from anti-racism (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

Aboriginal activists and theorists do not see themselves in antiracism frameworks, nor do they feel the support of allies.

Critical race and postcolonial scholars have systematically excluded ongoing colonization from the ways in which racism is articulated. This has erased the presence of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing struggles for decolonization, precluding a more sophisticated analysis of migration, diasporic identities, and diasporic countercultures. Equally disturbing, when we look at the few scholars who include Aboriginal peoples and decolonization in their theoretical frameworks, decolonization politics are equated with antiracist politics. Such an ontological approach places decolonization and antiracism within a liberal-pluralist framework, which decenters decolonization (Lawrence & Dua 2005, p.1).

Disrupting Dominance: A Decolonizing Process

Within a still colonial mindset many partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities allow only outward expressions of indigeneity. There is an internalized belief that that only the preconditions and structures which are rooted in Euro-Western practices and ideals are viable options for success (Battiste, 2000). This thinking reflects hundreds of years of colonial control, manipulation, deceit and subjugation. Freire (1970) uses the descriptors ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressors’ to discuss situations of oppression in a way that includes all life throughout history. This language is powerful as it includes everyone in the dialogue, from the most powerful and privileged to the most vulnerable and marginalized. Being aware of the power of language to silence, stereotype and disempower people, I need to unpack the language Freire uses in his Pedagogy.

Applying Freire’s praxis to the Canadian experience of colonial domination, the settler group or Euro-Canadian society will be viewed as the *oppressor* and Aboriginal

communities as the *oppressed*. While this language can be useful to our discussion of colonial oppression, in using it we risk negating 500 years of Aboriginal peoples struggle against colonization. This language has the potential to essentialize the experiences of Aboriginal nations, obscuring their resiliency, resistance and strength. This terminology may also suggest that non-Aboriginal Canadians are without exception privileged and in positions of power and dominance. This language will only be used for application of Freire's theory to this discussion. Alfred (1999), Monture-Angus (1995), and Battiste (2000) speak about oppression using the same language, in which Aboriginal communities are 'the oppressed' and Euro-Canadian settler communities and institutions are 'the oppressors'.

Much of the literature around dismantling dominance and challenging oppression questions who can and cannot assume such a role. Monture Angus (1995) believes that it is necessary that we all, regardless of our social location, collectively reflect on and evaluate the assumptions, dominance discourses and values within our institutions. This is not just for the benefit of those who are perceived to be disadvantaged or minorities, but it is for the benefit of all people, just as it is the responsibility of all people. Freire (1970) stresses that dialogical reflection and action is necessary for any revolutionary liberation from oppression. According to Freire this process must be initiated and carried out by the oppressed in order for liberation to be authentic. Within this thinking a revolution cannot be carried out by the leaders for the people, but rather transformative power is born out of solidarity and communion with the people, those who are oppressed. In the Canadian context, Aboriginal nations will never become liberated from colonial oppression by will or through the mechanisms of the same forces that oppress them.

Alfred (2004) suggests that through failed attempts to recognize Aboriginal nationhood in Canada, and through the frailty of tribal governing powers in the United States, the governments of Canada and America have demonstrated their inability to liberalize their relationships with the Aboriginal nations. Freire (1970) and Alfred (2004) insist that liberation can only be realized through an authentic praxis of reflection and action by the people who are oppressed. This is not to say there is no role for non-Aboriginal allies in the process of decolonization. Freire (1970) explores the dynamics of struggle and liberation as they relate to the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy. Central to Freire's position is the concept of duality and the critical discovery of the oppressed that they have internalized the oppressor. True humanization and liberation or decolonization requires rejecting the role of hosting the oppressor and realizing oppression as a limit situation that can be transformed into a new reality. As converts to the cause of the oppressed, oppressors, must enter into trusting communion *with* the people, rather than imposing in a fight *for* the people. The reality is that transitioning into the oppressed group to engage *with* them as an equal partner, requires the convert to give up having power over. While Freire acknowledges the important historic role of converts in revolution, he warns that the potential duality and inability to enter into trusting communion with the people will compromise the struggle for liberation. As converts, this struggle for liberation with the oppressed must be characterized by constant self examination. What are my motivations for entering into this struggle or partnership with the oppressed? Do I have genuine trust in the community? Am I holding onto the status and power associated with my origins or my status? Freire captures the struggle that many people have when joining the oppressed as allies or partners. The next discussion

will capture some of the recent dialogue around the participation of oppressors in the processes of liberation or decolonization.

In his discussion of community development with First Nations, Lee (1992) echoes the writings of bell hooks. hooks (1986) says “we do not need to share oppression to fight equally to end oppression” (p.9.) Battiste (2000) warns non-Aboriginal researchers, service providers and allies not to appropriate the pain and experiences of the oppressed. The tension around non-Aboriginal participants in the decolonization process is due to a well-founded fear that Aboriginal processes, knowledge, and struggles for self-determination will be co-opted into mainstream institutions and systems of power. There is reason for suspicion and distrust when the struggle for healing and decolonization is played out in the dominance and priorities of Eurocentric knowledge. In *The Unjust Society*, Harold Cardinal makes it clear that in his view the best way non-Aboriginal people can help First Nations communities is by leaving them.

The big problem for the non-Indian is simply that he doesn't know what he is doing. He lacks any clear understanding of the Indian and because of this he can't develop any clear perspective of the issues facing our people. His efforts confuse the issues rather than contribute to happy resolutions (Cardinal, 1969, p.76).

The message is clear that non-Aboriginal people need to step back and make space for Aboriginal approaches, yet Cardinal goes beyond simply saying ‘get out’. In reference to what had been publicly labeled the Indian problem, to which an assimilation agenda was proposed, Cardinal offers a counterproposal, “get brown or get lost” (Cardinal, 1969, p. 76). Essentially, the imposition of white values and solutions are not welcome. The options are to get on board with what Aboriginal peoples are doing, as a learner, or to back off. He is intuitively critiquing the power of whiteness in its self-proclaimed liberty

to make decisions for Aboriginal peoples and to paternalistically inhibit their voices and self-determination. He is calling for a new movement in which Aboriginal nations take control of their affairs and share dominant spaces in Canadian society. He is asking non-Aboriginal Eurocentric thinkers to recognize the legitimacy of Aboriginal world views, political systems and rights to self-determination.

Kovach (2005) explains that Aboriginal control of research is pivotal to decolonization. The notion of “researching back,” is about Aboriginal people taking back research as a mechanism of resistance and healing (Kovach, 2005, p.33). Research is identified by Kovach (2005), Battiste (2000) and Absolon and Willit (2005) as a needed and practical tool for taking ownership and control of issues concerning Aboriginal peoples and their struggle toward self-determination. As Kovach (2005) and others point out, Aboriginal communities have been researched to death, and have seen little benefit in return.

Angela Cavender Wilson (2004) explains that decolonization is about Indigenous people developing a critical consciousness about the causes of oppression and a shared commitment to transformation. Wilson (2004) writes about carving out a place in academia for Indigenous traditions to be legitimized on their own terms. The solution to colonization cannot emerge out of a Eurocentric perspective. In *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, Irene-Daes (as cited in Battiste, 2000) expresses that any solution born out of dominance or the Eurocentric hegemony will only reproduce paternal subordination, serving the interests of the status quo. For decolonization to be authentic and transformative, the process must be initiated and led by those who have been subjected to colonial forces, rather than the settle groups who are submerged in the

colonial mentality. Daes explains that because Indigenous people are closest to an understanding of the realities of colonial oppression, they are also closest to their own sources of healing and restoration, essentially decolonization (as cited in Battiste, 2000).

Inasmuch as the literature constructs decolonization as a process that must be carried out by those who have been colonized, there is a body of literature that suggests an appropriate area of participation for those who are part of the colonizing group. Essentially, this is a call to all of us Eurocentric thinkers who have been positioned in dominant spaces. Placing bandages over the wounds caused by oppression, injustice and poverty is big business. Eurocentric discourse and constructions of knowledge have a monopoly on such business. We, the privileged, the academics, the social workers who make a life off of studying and responding to the oppression of others, need to ask ourselves how we are reaping the benefits of various forms of injustice. Paul Farmer (2005) said that “the world that is satisfying to us is the same world that is utterly devastating to them” (p.41). We need to do away with the forces that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’.

Yee and Dumbrill (2003) stress that in order to understand how discriminatory realities are produced and perpetuated, one must identify how and why mechanisms such as colonization operate. Colonial forces are often obscured and its perpetrators are not easily singled out. It is easy to blame and demonize historic agents, the church or the government, while overlooking how each of us supports colonization when we buy into Eurocentric dominance. Yee and Dumbrill (2003) examine whiteness explaining that its power is created and maintained through a silent discourse which sets whiteness up as the norm, going unchallenged and un-noticed. Whiteness must be challenged as it is a dominant mechanism by which colonialism ‘others’ people, excluding, de-legitimizing, and marginalizing

Indigenous sources of knowledge. I believe that challenging whiteness or Eurocentric dominance is a way that non-Indigenous advocates can participate in decolonization without taking control of or co-opting the process. This is a way I can create space, rather than take space. Challenging whiteness and colonization can be done through exposing, examining and dismantling subordination, domination and privilege (Yee and Dumbrill, 2003). It could be argued that not only is this role acceptable for non-Aboriginal social workers or academics, but that challenging colonization and Eurocentric dominance is crucial to upholding the value of social justice. Morley (2004) challenges social workers to recognize and expose dominant discourses, especially if we find ourselves participating in them, or extracting privilege because of them.

Recognizing the mechanisms of the operations of dominant discourses and changing our inadvertent participation in them is the first step towards challenging and changing inequitable and unjust power relations. Challenge might also involve identifying discourses, naming how they create their dominance, and actively attempting not to participate in the ones that devalue or disempower us. Further resistance may take the form of posing new or alternative discourses, or uncovering ones that have been hidden or silenced (Morely, 2004, p.299).

Impressions

The seminal and emerging literature which poses mechanisms to dismantle unjust power relations and to establish equal and liberated relationships between marginal colonized and dominant settler groups is highly theoretical. There are many examples of cross cultural partnership, but fewer examples of partnership which contribute to the process of decolonization. Many of these partnerships are vertically imposed or developed for purposes which resemble charity for the Aboriginal community. The principles and ideals for just relations that emerge from RCAP and from the Wampum belt have yet to be upheld by both communities. Self-determination,

mutual respect, recognition and sharing are important to equal partnerships.

Coexistence, reciprocity and non-inference are ideals which can be authentically lived out when both communities are willing to engage critically in reflection and action for the purpose of decolonization. Partnerships between historically oppressed and dominant communities have the potential to reproduce those learned power inequalities. This dynamic positions the marginal community in a client role, and the dominant community assumes the role of expert. This is not true partnership. True partnership between an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organization must be decolonizing. While the language of decolonization may never be explicitly used, the values and beliefs that characterize the relationship must challenge the colonial agenda. Despite all of the attention paid to decolonization within Aboriginal epistemology and methodology there is a disconnect when it comes to bridging these notions with mainstream institutions where many Aboriginal service users are positioned.

The partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and The Rock is unique because it was not formed out of political correctness, a funding mandate or charity model. This partnership was not vertically imposed. It was birthed from a shared vision to reciprocally meet the needs of both communities. These decolonized future organizations have needed to wrestle through the hurts, the fears, and the inequalities of past and present negotiations and relations. The relevant literature lacks lived examples of partnerships that reciprocally function and challenge the structural inequalities and oppressions that characterize their historic relations. The relationship between the Aboriginal Health Centre and The Rock is one that upholds the values and meets the mandates of both. It has the potential to contribute an understanding of how

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society can co-exist in a renewed relationship that works to meet a shared vision for a decolonized future.

Situating Myself

I cannot speak for or represent something that is not mine. How I am situated within the intersections of social meaning, effects how I interpret data and construct meaning. Dei (1999) explains that it is crucial to the struggle for social change and anti-racism that one acknowledges their subject position and various identities. “Every writer is a positioned subject actively engaged in constructing meaning and interpretations. All personal and educational journeys, like human experiences, have material consequences” (Dei, 1999, p. 396). The way I situate myself has the power to influence how this discussion is received and understood by the reader. Working from an anti-oppressive perspective and valuing Indigenous research methods, I cannot jump into a discussion of methodology without first situating myself within the research. Anti-oppressive methodology brings the researchers location to the forefront so that the reader can critically analyze how the researcher’s values and beliefs shape the processes and outcomes of the study. I will begin with the most defining element of my identity, because it is also what makes this research most challenging. My faith as a follower of Jesus Christ is central to who I am and shapes my analysis within this research. I view my faith as different but not separate from my religious background within Christianity. This dynamic is what complicates my position within the research. My faith shapes my longing for reconciliation and transformation through social justice and liberation from oppression. As part of the Christian faith I share a destructive heritage through a collective historic role of oppressor and colonizer. While this clash of identities may not be a concern to those participating in the research, it is something that I must wrestle through. If I ignore this part of my social location there is a good chance that my research

will be motivated by white-Christian guilt, which may narrow my analysis such that I misrepresent the relationship between the organizations. I am conscious of my tendency to both defend Christianity and implicate it in my own analysis. Both guilt and judgment when left alone have the potential to paralyze my analysis and action. While this research will never be neutral or purely objective, a commitment to self-reflection and critical awareness will help me to accurately share the stories and experiences, allowing me to engage in a critical analysis of this case study.

I do not speak for or claim to represent an Aboriginal perspective or a Christian perspective. History reminds me that attempting to speak on behalf of a community, whether I am part of it or not, has the potential to be more hurtful than helpful (Dumbrill 2006). While my interpretations and perspectives are shaped by my faith experiences, they are by no means representative of the Christian religion or any church denomination. My hope is that I am able to share the views and voices of the participants as they speak for themselves. My methodology section will explain how the perspectives of the participants involved in this case study unveil a clearer picture of decolonizing partnership.

Methodology

Foundations for Research

Before explaining the specific methods used for this study, I must speak to the theories, epistemologies and frameworks that provide a foundation to my research. Freire's theories of revolutionary action, Critical Social Science (CSS) and Anti-oppressive research perspectives provided me with the guidance and understanding of what makes for meaningful and ethical research. This background was fundamental to how I began asking questions and how I understood the participant's roles. While it was important for me to carefully determine which methods I would use and why, the process as a whole depended more on the contribution of these frameworks.

The purpose of CSS is to explain social phenomena in a way that leads to the transformation of injustices and contradictions within the social order (Neuman, 1997). Critical social science is meant to expose myths, hidden truths and challenge discourses so that people can change the world for themselves. While I want to develop a deeper understanding of what makes cross cultural partnership successful from the perspectives of the individuals involved, I am not content to stop at merely explaining how the participants understand and experience their social reality. It is important to draw the obscure out into plain view and uncover its meaning, but unless this meaning is placed in a macro-level historic context it may not go any further than the bookshelf. CSS aims to identify unrealized potential that is too often obscured by false consciousness.

Freire (1970) writes about an untested feasibility which lies beyond the limit-situations. Through a new consciousness or 'potential consciousness' the untested feasibility can be realized and achieved. The limit-situation could be any context of

contradiction, oppression, manipulation, or domination. For example, Eurocentric values and ways of knowing are given an uncontested position of dominance and authority in research and policy making. Out of the same power structure that elevates Eurocentric ways of knowing, Indigenous forms of knowledge and values are constructed as archaic, irrelevant to mainstream academia and unsophisticated in their approach to knowledge construction. Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) observe that “Eurocentric thinkers automatically assume the superiority of their worldview and attempt to impose it on others, extending their definitions to encompass the whole world” (p. 36). The exclusion and racism experienced by Indigenous people in the realms of research and policy making is a limit situation. This limit situation has been maintained through a false consciousness in which racism is obscured and internalized. CSS (Neuman, 1997 and Freire’s (1970) liberation theories are unique from other positivist and science based methods of inquiry because the ultimate purpose is transformation of the world through a critical consciousness and collective action. In *aboriginalizing methodology: considering the canoe* Peter Cole (2002) writes a poetic critique of the imposition of Western knowledge on Indigenous peoples. Cole’s analysis lends to a collective critical consciousness which rejects the structures that Eurocentrism constructs as a fact. His article ignores standard punctuation and grammar, making a statement of protest against how Eurocentric privilege and dominance assigns or withholds legitimacy.

in order to enter those realms of anointed power
those racially predestined orbs those p/reserved of academ(ent)ia
those places where I can be of immediate help for my nation
it is deemed I am to follow western epistemologies
cast like the commandments of moses (Cole, 2002, p.450).\

Progressive theorists and researchers who work from critical perspectives and social justice orientations recognize that as human beings we are caught in a dialectical relationship between the limits of our situations and the realization of our freedom (Freire 1970). Cole (2002) and other Aboriginal theorists actively resist and contest false consciousnesses that maintain limit situations. They do more than reject the false, through dialogue they come into new or potential consciousness which allows them to take action for change. Actions taken to challenge historic limit-situations are focused on overcoming and deconstructing, rather than passively surviving and tolerating oppression (Freire 1970).

The CSS approach uses the idea of praxis, reflection and action which is fundamental to the theory of revolutionary action (Neuman 1997). The theory of praxis is fundamental to my analysis. My alignment with CSS, revolutionary action theory and anti-oppressive perspectives means that any interpretation or meaning drawn from my research is only valuable when it is made available to people in a way that helps them understand their world with its contradictions, and take action to transform it (Neuman 1997). The CSS methodology stresses the need for the exploration of historic contexts as they construct and maintain objective and subjective realities as well as underlying power structures. Aboriginal theorists hold that it is important to view the present situation of Aboriginal people within the historic lens of colonization, imperialism and oppression (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Alfred, 1999; Waterfall, 2002). It could be seen as unethical to conduct Aboriginal research in isolation from an Aboriginal understanding of the colonial context and its present day implications. Similarly it would be unethical to engage in research with an Aboriginal community without identifying the subjective positioning of

the researcher (Absolon & Willett 2005). Yee and Dumbrill (2003) stress that in order to understand how discriminatory realities are produced and perpetuated, one must identify how and why mechanisms such as colonization operate. Colonial forces are often obscured and the way it continues to operate is not easily identifiable. It is easy to blame and demonize historic agents such as the church or the government, while overlooking how each of us supports colonization when we buy into Eurocentric dominance as oppressed and as oppressors. Colonization is not an abstract notion, but rather a real process which involves people, relationships, and structures (Waterfall, 2002). On the flip side, decolonization is not an abstract hope, but a potential reality which I am committed to in my research.

While the discourses around decolonization are not new to academics, the language of decolonization is not used within the organizational settings I investigated. The literature explores decolonization theoretically and applies it at macro levels, such as Aboriginal self-government and education. I explore the process of decolonization as it is realized at the community level, across culture and between organizations. A case-study approach is well suited to this exploration of a relatively new process that has incomplete theoretical understanding, and is even less understood when it comes to application. Meyer (2001) suggests that there are social conditions and events that cannot be processed and understood apart from qualitative approaches such as a case study. The detailed observations entailed in the case study method enable us to study many different aspects, examine them in relation to each other, view the process within its total environment and also use the researchers capacity for *verstehen*” (Meyer, 200, p. 2). *Verstehen*, a German word for an empathetic or participatory understanding and interpretation, is most often used

in reference to an outside observer of culture (Martin, 2000). Case studies are open to the use of conceptual frameworks and theories to guide the research process and analysis of the findings. Without a theoretical framework, there is a potential for meaningless description and lack of analysis. Hartley (as cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 3) welcomes a wide range of theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the need for some form of pre-understanding, including models, concepts or general and specific knowledge that emerges from social and organizational patterns. In a very limited sense, my research follows principles of grounded theory, in that I began with an area of study and waited for what was relevant to emerge. I then pursued a deeper understanding of the themes that were developed from the ground up. I went into the research with little expectation for what I would find, and then built the interview guide based on what participants expressed as important themes. In this sense critical analysis was ongoing from the beginning stages and the participants shaped the focus of the data collection.

Kovach (2005) identifies non-Indigenous methodologies from the margins such as feminist, participatory action research (PAR) and emancipatory research as potential allies to Indigenous research, because of their willingness to embrace the political and revolutionary potential of research. Like the methodologies that Kovach mentioned, anti-oppressive research engenders a commitment to the participants both personally and professionally as the power between the research and participants is broken down (Potts & Brown 2005). The anti-oppressive researcher sets out to establish equality with the participants and aims to develop just and empowering research methods. Potts and Brown suggest that there are three tenets of anti-oppressive research. First, the process and outcome of the research should be about social justice and resistance. Second, the

researcher believes that all knowledge is socially constructed and of a political nature. And third, power and relationships have everything to do with the research process and its capacity to be anti-oppressive. In doing this research I have to ask myself how I may impose a deeply entrenched Eurocentric worldview upon the participants and on the interpretation of my findings. In my desire to make this research meaningful I fear that I will speak over research participants, politicizing their experiences, and detracting from the progress Indigenous scholars have made in carving out space for Indigenous voices. I recognize my need to develop a very clear and honest understanding of how Eurocentric dominance operates, how I buy into it and how I can disrupt that through my own work. Kovach (2005) instructs non-Aboriginal researchers like myself to ask; “Am I creating space or taking space?” (p. 26). This question has been at the forefront of my Masters of Social Work experience and continues to impact how I view my role and my methods.

Like anti-oppressive research, the values of PAR will help to address and balance out the power dynamics within the research process. PAR is concerned with power in the research process, and aims to empower the participants through their ownership of the process. The goal is that research happens with the community, not for them or on them. While I did not think it's possible to fully engage in PAR because of the time constraints of my research, I made sure to welcome the involvement of the participants in designing the research question, the methods, the direction that the research took and also the ongoing analysis. Because the participants in this study are the experts it was natural for me to look to them to set the course of direction for inquiry. It was through many informal exchanges with the community that I was able to develop a research guide that would bring about the information needed to address the research question.

Research Purpose and Design

This case study began with a question. What makes for an effective cross-cultural partnership? Throughout the literature review it became clear that this partnership is not unique because of the cultural differences, but rather because of the colonial legacy and historic tension between the two partners represented. The purpose evolved into understanding what has allowed this partnership between a historically dominant and a historically marginal group to function for the benefit of both. An additional question which helped to guide the process is: How does the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries experience a decolonialized partnership? I was interested in the stories that participants would tell and perspectives they would share, particularly around the theme of spiritual values within the partnership. I began this case study in hopes that there would be transferable lessons or principles for other partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations. My analysis began in the preliminary stages of the study and continued throughout the process of data collection. In many senses the participants engaged in critical analysis with me. Ideas shared in the first interview were introduced in the next interviews, and participant helped me to work out an understanding of the findings as they emerged.

It is fair to say that my research process and outcomes were more dependent on the relationships I developed with the participants, than the specifics methods used to conduct the research. Because of a prolonged process of gaining permission from McMaster's Research Ethics Board, I had to hold off on my formal data collection and wait. This period of waiting between February and June allowed me to enter into many informal conversations with participants as I worked along side them and joined in on

their Steering Committee meetings. While I had developed a relationship with the Rock staff over years of volunteering and employment, I had no previous rapport with staff from Aboriginal Health Centre. Throughout the spring, Pepper Lazore who ended up being a key informant in this study first became a friend. Through Pepper I became connected with other important participants. The dynamic between participants and me became one of trust, respect and reciprocation. My employment at the Rock and particularly with the breakfast program which is funded by the Aboriginal Health Centre provided a natural channel for communication with the participants from both organizations. This informal exchange of information and process of relationship building was important to my personal understanding of the context in which the research was situated. I suggest that developing familiar grounds with the participants and having an understanding of their context is a process that enhances the research experience for the participants and the researcher. McMaster's Research Ethics Board was reluctant to approve my research methods because they did not conform to a traditional understanding of how research should be structured and carried out. Community based research is unique because the researcher is intentional about truly understanding the context, experiences and needs of the people involved. It took me months to reassure the Ethics Board that my research methodology, my ties to the community and my invitation for the participants to be involved in determining the process, was not harmful to them in any way.

While personal ties to the researched community may be problematized by research methodologies that emphasize scientific objectivity, they are fundamental to Indigenous research values and methodologies. In fact it may be considered unethical to

engage in research with an Aboriginal community apart from any other investment in that community. Aboriginal researchers Absolom and Willett (2005) discuss the importance of location within Aboriginal research. When reflecting on the role of a researcher or worker in an Aboriginal community, Willett wonders about that individual's interest and purpose in the community. Willett (2005) asks "What stake does this person have in this community?" (p. 102). They (2005) emphasize that in order to fairly represent the interests and experiences of a community the research must be positioned within the community and connected to the people. From an Aboriginal paradigm this is ethical research. The fear is that without personal investment or relationship with the community there is a greater possibility that the researcher will use the information for personal gain or in a way that exploits the people who are involved. A vested interest in the community has a humanizing purpose in that it will foster a mutual trust and commitment which enhances and equalizes the experience of participants and the researcher.

Gathering Information

I interviewed five participants and facilitated a focus group which was composed of four participants. The same open-ended research guide was used for the focus group and for the interviews. The interviews and focus group had very little structure to them. We explored three themes; power, culture and the Canadian historic context. The participants agreed that these themes were necessary to an understanding of the challenges and successes of the partnership. The themes were based on my review of the literature and on informal dialogue with participants. I used Lee's (1999) definition of power to ensure that all participants were on the same page when it came to this theme. Lee (1999) defines power as "the degree to which we are able to influence our own

environment, to get things done, make things happen, or not happen. It includes access to resources, free choice and opportunity” (p. 23). In the interviews and focus group I asked the participants to speak to four things; a) the history of this partnership, b) partnership challenges (what has made this partnership hard), c) partnership successes (what has been positive about the process of partnership), d) values (what does your organization bring to the partnership?) Under the three main themes I included questions that I thought may stimulate dialogue (see Appendix A).

Sampling

I chose to invite staff from both organizations who have been directly in the partnership. As directed by McMaster University Research Ethics Board I provided each participant with a letter of invitation and information, explaining the details of the study and their rights as participants. Pepper Lazore, my primary contact at the Aboriginal Health Centre connected me with two other participants, Walter Cooke and Faye Lee. The Rock participants I interviewed were Allan Craig the Director and Tim Laws the Breakfast Coordinator. I had a focus group with four others who are also on staff: Karen Craig, Kevin Charles, Jennifer DeVries and Julie Conway. I selected each participant because of their knowledge of the partnership through their involvement. In non-probability purposive sampling participants are selected for a predetermined quality or trait (Luborsky & Rubinstein 1995). The gender of the participants was split fairly evenly between women and men. Five of the participants are women and four are men. The gender of the participants did not seem to influence their involvement or level of openness. In qualitative research there is no rule or set standard for sample size, as each study will have different goals and constraints concerning its sample size (Luborsky &

Rubinstein 1995). My goal was to have as many different perspectives of the partnership as I could manage with the time and resources I had for the study.

Because this study is interested in matters concerning two relatively small organizations, it would be difficult to maintain confidentiality. The participants agreed that this study would not be a confidential situation, and as such they would not disclose things to me that they would not share publicly. I felt that since the participants stories, experiences and perspectives may identify them to their community, it would be most ethical to identify them by name so that there would be no confusion regarding accountability for their words. The letter of information explains the participant's right to not answer any question and to withdraw from the study. It also asks for their permission to record the dialogue and to quote them by name.

Because I am personally connected to the research at multiple levels I am able to honour the participants by giving back in various ways. As an employee of The Rock Ministries I am able to provide insights through my research that will help with future planning, partnerships, funding strategies and internal processes. Through my relationship with Pepper of the Aboriginal Health Centre I have been asked to participate in a couple different events as a volunteer. I feel that helping out in this way will allow me to give back to the organization in a way that is relevant to them. In order to show my gratitude to the participants of this study I am providing them with a summary of the study, and plan to present this summary to each of the organizations during a lunch which will celebrate their partnership.

Data Analysis

This research was exploratory, and the analysis was built upon what emerged through the expertise of the participants. Not only was the knowledge base grounded in the participants expertise, but so too were methods for analysis. Throughout my research Pepper taught me how to use root cause analysis. This form of analysis looks at a presenting problem, asking ‘why’ questions in order to get to the root of the problem. I used this framework to identify the source of an apparent strength. I used root cause analysis to organize the themes which emerged throughout the data. I transcribed the recorded interviews and took notes throughout the dialogues. I also took notes of my observations as I participated in work with both organizations. From the data I was able to draw key concepts and themes, which I then compared and contrasted to the literature. As I identified concepts and themes which did not reflect the literature I began to ask new questions, and seek an understanding of the findings through the root cause analysis conceptual framework.

As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) impress, in coding and analyzing the data we are confronted with ourselves and the role we play in shaping the end result. I am quick to recognize my biases in this research, the perspectives I bring and my loyalty to the organizations and the people within. As I developed my analysis I shared it with the participants and with my supervisor, seeking out their feedback and critical analysis.

Strengths and Limitations

It was my hope and intention that the entire process of data collection be characterized by a reciprocal relationship based on principles for participatory research; solidarity, respect, knowledge and power sharing (Lee 2006). While this research cannot

be considered true participatory action research, I conducted research in a way that welcomed and facilitated participation, such that it was research *with* the community, rather than *about* or *for* them. Absolon and Willitt (2005) explain that the process of conducting research is just as important as the outcome. Throughout the entire process attention was paid to the potential for personal and organizational transformation and self-empowerment. Through active listening and careful reflection I attempted to enter with participants into different areas of inquiry, probe more when necessary, follow up on certain themes, exclude irrelevant questions and add new questions as I was surprised by new themes. Using member checks I went back to participants to seek clarity or more depth out of their responses. Including the participants in the process analysis helped me to ensure that I was accurately reflecting the partnership. The most significant strength of this study was certainly the participant's willingness and eagerness to participate. Because the participants valued the nature of this research and found the research question to be relevant to their organizations, they were quite involved not only in sharing information, but also in critical analysis.

This study would have been strengthened through the involvement of more participants from the Aboriginal Health Centre. Unfortunately, because the Aboriginal Health Centre was going through a period of restructuring during this study there were few people available who had knowledge of or experience with the partnership. The information and analysis provided by the three participants was invaluable. If it were in my control I would have invited an equal number of participants from both organizations. Another difficulty that arose while gathering information was that of coordinating a time in which the Rock staff could participate in a focus group. We were only able to meet

together for one hour, which meant that we covered a wide range of information but did not have the opportunity to go in-depth. The themes that emerged in this group however were followed up in an interview with another staff member. This research should be considered exploratory, rather than representative.

Findings and Discussion

The Story

Like other things in life that end up being written about, this partnership had rough beginnings with an uncertain future. In 1999 Living Rock Ministries and a new Aboriginal Health Centre connected around a shared interest and mandate to serve the needs of youth in Hamilton. Allan Craig the executive director of the Rock and Bruce Peterkin the former executive director of Aboriginal Health Centre met through a workshop discussion about the needs of street involved Aboriginal youth. Out of this dialogue Allan and Bruce began to brainstorm about how they could come along side each other to fill some of the identified gaps in services for street-involved youth. This dialogue opened up to include the staff and board members of each organization. The relationship began informally as both groups shared what their needs were and what each could bring to the table. The Aboriginal Health Centre had a mandate to serve Aboriginal Youth. The Rock was seeing an over-representation of Aboriginal youth using their services. The Aboriginal population in the city of Hamilton in 1996 was 1.0% and in 2001 was 1.3%. The Aboriginal population of Ontario in 2001 was 1.7% (Vengris, 2005). Aboriginal people who are homeless are disproportionately represented in Hamilton at 20% (Vengris, 2005). A 2001 study showed that 17% of Aboriginal youth experience absolute or relative homelessness (Vengris, 2005). When the Aboriginal Health Centre was given funding to serve Aboriginal youth, they first had to determine the needs of the youth and where they could be reached. At that time the Rock was already serving at least 14% Aboriginal youth. Today the Rock serves between 17 and 20% Aboriginal youth (Tim Laws). It was decided by the Aboriginal Health Centre instead of ‘reinventing

the wheel' it would be wise to partner with a service that is already effectively drawing in Aboriginal Youth. Rather than compete with another agency for Aboriginal youth, the organizations decided to serve the same youth together.

Aboriginal Homelessness

The Social Planning and Research Council report *Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved Youth in Hamilton* (Vengris, 2005) takes a careful look at who street-involved youth are. Each youth has his or her unique story about the breakdown of or exclusion from traditional support structures, leading to homelessness. The experiences of Aboriginal youth may appear similar to those of white youth. Many of the street-involved youth, regardless of ethnic background, identify forms of abuse, family breakdown, foster care, alienation, substance abuse and mental illness as factors which lead to homelessness. Family conflict is reported to be one of the main reasons that youth find themselves homeless and involved in street culture (Vengris, 2005). The over-representation of Aboriginal youth who are street involved cannot be understood apart from the colonial legacy of displacement and collective trauma experienced through residential schools, child welfare, the reserve system and other assimilation policies. The trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples is ongoing, collective and intergenerational. Both the Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre recognize the link between the colonial reality and homelessness amongst Aboriginal youth today. A question that the partners continue to ask themselves and each other is "what is best for the youth?" An Aboriginal presence in the Rock, be it art, a display or an actual person, has encouraged Aboriginal youth to self-identify as Aboriginal and receive culturally specific services. The

participants expressed that if the funding were to end, the partnership would continue as would the process of co-learning, for the benefit of the youth.

Reflecting and Taking Action Together

Looking back at eight years of partnership, not surprisingly those involved had difficulty remembering the exact process of how this relationship became what it is today. The participants remembered doing a lot of dialoguing, observing, evaluating, visioning and planning. Many of their memories are captured through pictures, some of which are used here to contribute to my description of their partnership. The pictures will not have titles, as the explanation is in the text.

Moving the relationship from an informal exchange of human resources to a formal partnership felt like a risk for both partners. There was reluctance and fear experienced on both sides. While those involved had developed good rapport, there remained a lot of unknowns and fears about what it could mean to go further. The partners were challenged from the beginning to deal with fears that are rooted in a historic context and also in misunderstandings about what it meant to be Christian or traditionally Aboriginal. For example, the staff from the Aboriginal Health Centre had to grapple the effects of collective trauma, mistrust and fear that developed throughout intergenerational abuse, oppression and manipulation through church run residential schools (Freeman & Lee, 2007). Processes of negotiation with government bodies and non-Aboriginal people in general have been exploitative and disruptive of the social, cultural and political structures of Aboriginal people. With this in mind, the board of directors became conflicted as the partnership began moving toward the sharing of resources and funding. There were many questions, contentions and suspicions about

funding going to a white Christian organization, rather than directly to Aboriginal people. Likewise, the Rock was afraid that by accepting funding through this partnership they would be pressured to compromise in ways that would shift the spiritual principles of their mandate. The Rock is committed to following Christ and walking with youth as they build a spiritual foundation. Both organizations believe that a person's spiritual wellbeing is fundamental to their physical, mental and emotional health. This shared belief provided common ground to establish a working relationship, and it also presented the potential for conflict around differences in beliefs and the application of spirituality in programming. The issue of spirituality is something that continues to both challenge this partnership and make it truly dynamic and unified. The role of spirituality in forming this partnership will be explored in depth later through the discussion.

The first action taken between partners was in response to a recognized need for youth specific primary health care. This action came after many reflective conversations. It became apparent that youth were not accessing community health care services and that the Rock was a place where youth would feel comfortable seeking help for health in a broad sense of the term. The partners developed a letter of understanding which lay out the expectations of their commitment to each other. In this it was agreed that a nurse from the Aboriginal Health Centre would be on site at The Rock twice a week to treat all youth, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It was thought that the Rock could be a point of connection for Aboriginal youth with the Aboriginal Health Centre. The partnership met the needs of all youth, it filled the mandate of the Aboriginal Health Centre to serve youth and it provided the Rock with a service that they unable to provide independently. Together the Aboriginal Health Centre and the Rock were able to provide a service that

neither of them could offer in isolation. The participants describe this relationship as one where everyone wins, both the partners and the youth who are served through the partnership. As the relationship strengthened, the investment and commitment made by both organizations increased. The Rock gained funding for diagnostic equipment and medications, which advanced the health promotion initiative and raised the stakes in the partnership. As time allowed trust to grow, the Aboriginal Health Centre took another



bold step and gave the Rock a large sum of money to provide the youth with a breakfast program. This funding was given to the Aboriginal Health Centre for health promotion regarding pregnant or parenting moms and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum

Disorder (FASD) awareness. Nutritious eating and FASD education fit under the mandates of both partners. Unlike many partnerships that are based on funding and characterized by accountability and control, this partnership was characterized by trust and respect, and as such this funding was given to the Rock with few strings attached. The Aboriginal Health Centre trusted that the Rock would provide a service with the money that would meet the needs of the youth.

While there was no question concerning the fit between the programs and the funding mandates, there were questions about how well the programs were serving Aboriginal youth. When the staff from the Aboriginal Health Centre were on site at the Rock they were unable to see the 14% of Aboriginal youth that were reported to be using

the services. Walter Cooke, an Ojibway-Cree elder from the Bear Clan who came on site to share teachings began asking, “Where are the Aboriginal youth?” There was concern

that the funding designated for Aboriginal youth was not actually reaching them. When

this concern was expressed the partners

came to the table to talk about how to

identify Aboriginal youth in a way that was

ethical and sensitive. Should they ask each

person who comes through the door if they

are Aboriginal? Thankfully, they decided against this. As the dialogue continued staff

from the Aboriginal Health Centre established a more visible presence on site. An

Aboriginal Health Centre sign was hung behind the counter where youth accessed meals

daily. As Walter Cooke and other Aboriginal workers spent time at the Rock, many youth

began to self-identify through conversations with them. They discovered that many of the

youth who identified as Aboriginal did not have physical traits that are typically

Aboriginal. Many youth who appeared white would share with the Aboriginal staff that

they have a parent who is Aboriginal. With an increased Aboriginal presence at the Rock,

there seemed to be greater sense of freedom for youth to disclose and explore their

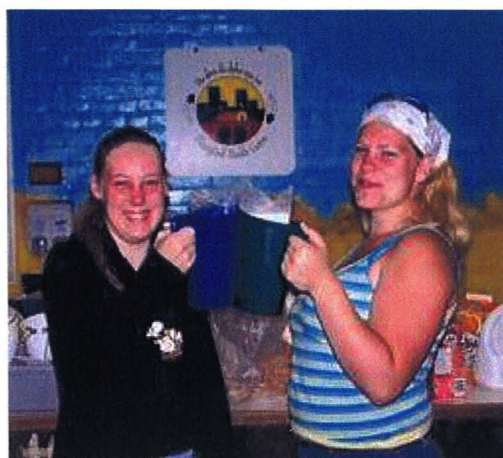
identity and heritage. This challenge had the potential to disrupt the flow of partnership

and question the allocation of funding to the breakfast program. Because of the

commitment of both partners, this concern was addressed with honesty and transparency.

Rather than back away from their investment at the Rock, the Aboriginal Health Centre

increased their involvement and their commitment to dialogue.



This partnership flourished because the people involved were not focused on self-protection or self-promotion; rather they were willing to take risks for the benefit of the other. Risk taking in this context meant stepping out in faith with a willingness to engage in something that wasn't yet ideal, with the commitment to moving forward even when things were uncomfortable and uncertain. This required trust. The board members and staff who were asked to participate in this partnership had to trust the judgment of their directors, without certainty of what the outcome would be. Over and over the participants told me that the success of this partnership had everything to do with the people involved in it. This is not merely a personality thing. With further analysis I understand that what participants meant by 'the people', is actually the principles and values by which 'the people' live their lives. The Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre share a belief that we as human beings are broken or wounded and in need of healing. As incomplete beings the people who make up these organizations engaged in a process of shared learning and journeying toward healing. The people involved have a unique "courage of conviction," which determines the choices made separately and together (Pepper Lazore). This partnership developed organically, as opposed to a mandated, funding based bureaucratic beginning that many partnerships have. Many relationships between Aboriginal and white communities are controlled and mediated through dominant white institutions, such as the church, legal system, education, and government bodies (Cuff, 1997). This particular partnership had the freedom to navigate through various challenges with the guidance of their spiritual belief systems and shared values. The success of this relationship experiences ebbs and flows, and the participants acknowledge that, as the organizations change internally, the partnership may also change. But, because this

partnership developed organically out of the will of the people involved, changes in funding will not end the partnership. The following discussion will focus some dominant themes which emerged throughout my dialogues with participants. This discussion will combine what I heard from the participants and what others have to say about these themes.

Fear

Through my conversations with participants I have come to understand fear as more than a natural protective response to unfamiliar, uncertain or surprising circumstances. I have observed that fear does not always mean actual risk, but it does indicate feelings of vulnerability or the threat of danger based on past experiences. The Aboriginal participants spoke of fear in their communities that is largely produced by inter-generational experiences of trauma and oppression. Ethnostress is a term used to describe the collective disruption or trauma of an ethnic community. Antone and Hill (1992) look at four conditions of ethnostress which disrupt and debilitate the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of many Aboriginal communities.

Ethnostress is;

- a) the disruption of the cultural beliefs or joyful identity of a people,
- b) the result of oppressive conditions forces upon a people in their environment,
- c) the negative experiences they feel when interacting with members of other cultural groups and,
- d) the feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness that disrupts [their] ability to achieve [their] basic needs (Antone & Hill, 1992, p. 3).

Fear is viewed as an experience that magnifies and sustains ethnostress within a community (Antone & Hill, 1992). Oppression operates by keeping a person or community in a state of fear. The fear of freedom or a fear of the unknown, keeps the oppressed from acting upon their reality and challenging the unjust order (Freire, 1970).

The effects of ethnostress can cause oppression to become deeply internalized within a community, such that the oppressed become oppressors of their own people (Antone & Hill, 1992; Freire, 1970; Worry, 2000). Pepper spoke of the impact of internalized oppression of her community as it disrupts the healing process and reproduces a paralyzing fear.

Aboriginal people are oppressed, but we are also oppressors and we need to become freed from our oppression, but we cannot be free when we refuse to talk about how we internalize oppression and how we oppress those in our own community (Pepper Lazore).

Fear was referred to by participants both in a historic sense and in reference to specific challenges which emerged in this partnership. For example, participants named fears directly derived from experiences in residential schools and in negotiations with white society. Pepper spoke specifically about the Caledonia land reclamation negotiations wherein both the provincial and federal governments are unwilling to take responsibility for the settlement process, and do not appear to be negotiating in good faith. She said that this situation reaffirms fears and mistrust that Aboriginal people have in negotiating with the government and other non-Aboriginal groups. Unresolved land claims and associated assimilation policies that are intended to negate any legal notion of status Indian and self-determination remind Aboriginal communities that the colonial nature of settler Canada is very much alive today. Historic experiences of deception and manipulation by the Canadian government denigrates the word of mainstream and government bodies today.

According to Pepper fear is an internal and a historic issue that immobilizes communities and acts as a barrier to forward movement. It is something that both Bruce and Allan had to deal with both personally and organizationally at the board level during the beginning stages of the partnership. Fear gripped the staff and board of the Aboriginal

Health Centre but went unidentified and unspoken. It manifested as reluctance, resistance and apathy. According to Faye and Walter it took much dialogue, courage and trust in order for the board members to give their support to Bruce in funding the breakfast program. It is not uncommon for community organizers to come up against fear within their community. The internal political dynamics of a community that is trying to organize can be the end of a project, and in this case the directors had to deal with what was happening inside first before addressing the external political situation. The external political situation involved the dynamics between partners and the larger Aboriginal community in Hamilton. The *Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition* (HEDAC) was aware of the evolving partnership and certain members had concern about monies going to a non-Aboriginal organization. Fear is a reality that can manifest in political disunity. Pepper explains that in the context where partnerships are more and more necessary, “fear is your detriment and your demise because it isolates you from the community.” In his discussion of external political situations that must be considered in the pre-entry stage of community development, Lee (1999) looks to the politics of collaboration between Aboriginal communities and organizations such as the church or the *Department of Indian and Northern Affairs*. In his experience many Aboriginal communities refuse to accept money or resources from mainstream institutions, because of the past experiences of people within the community. The fear of engaging in a relationship with mainstream organizations is understandably common among people who have experienced the residential school system personally, or through family members. Lee emphasizes how critical it is to understand the political context and feelings of the community members when entering into relationship. Both the Aboriginal

Health Centre and the Rock staff were aware of the potential fears and areas of mistrust that the other may be experiencing through the partnership. While the Rock participants agreed that they could not make assumptions about how colonialism and its destructive legacy may impact the staff from the Aboriginal Health Centre, they understood that it may very well be challenging for an Aboriginal organization to partner with a Christian organization. The Aboriginal Health Centre participants suggested that the Rock staff were afraid that partnership with a traditional Aboriginal organization may lead to the compromising of their Christian faith. Understanding who is on each other's boards and who makes decisions for the organization was important for developing trust. The initial fears and areas of mistrust were minimized as relationships developed and the true intentions and value sets of each organization became apparent.

Trust building is an essential process for any group or partnership (Hope & Timmel, 1984). Hope and Timmel suggest that there are four needs that a group should meet in order to build trust.

1. Establishing a climate of acceptance
2. Sharing information
 - i. about the people present and their experience
 - ii. about the issues they want to deal with
3. Setting goals
4. Organizing for action

(Hope & Timmel, 1984, p.19)

In a study looking at practice in diverse and marginal communities, participants spoke of a need for safe space where they can feel at home (George, Lee, McGrath & Moffatt, 2003). This space is a place where service users do not have to constantly negotiate their identities, where their experiences of discrimination are understood and taken seriously, and where they can trust the service providers. Safe space such as this

can provide a climate of acceptance for co-learning, healing and action. When the Aboriginal Health Centre and the Rock organized a monthly steering committee, they were able to collectively assess the outcome of partnership and dream about its future. Tim described the steering committee as something that allowed him to really get to know the partners and trust that they wanted the best for the Rock. The steering committee was a safe space in which the partners facilitated each of the four elements that Hope and Timmel (1984) say are vital for developing trust. The steering committee is what kept the momentum of the partnership going and pushed relational boundaries such that the individuals involved came to care for one another. Another outcome of trust building according to Faye is that the partners became transparent about the resources they had and honest about what they were willing and able to contribute to meet their goals.

By setting a regular cycle of reflection and action in which a group is constantly celebrating their successes and analyzing critically the causes of their mistakes and failures, they can become more and more capable of effectively transforming their daily life (Hope & Timmel, 1984, p.11).

As trust developed, fear diminished and this partnership became distinct. Karen pointed out that both Christian and Aboriginal people love to celebrate around food. Celebration



is a good sign that people feel comfortable, accepted and genuinely enjoy one another.

In 2003 the Rock hosted a breakfast feast to celebrate not only the success of the

breakfast program that came of the partnered visioning, but also to celebrate the partnership itself. Together both communities celebrated through singing, drumming and dancing. This celebration is something that the participants remember as a highlight because it was clear that at this point the partnership was a win-win situation. As such, many fears were relieved.

What Love's Got To Do With It

I was surprised to find that love emerged as a theme. While fear was identified as a barrier underlying the problems experienced in relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, love was identified as a way to actively overcome fear. Pepper first introduced the idea of love.

In an age where the word love is applied to a favorite food in the same breath as it is used to describe the ups and downs of human relationships, I get the feeling that in the context of this discussion the word could use some definition. Christian teacher and author Bruxy Cavey (2007) defines love as “the will to work for someone’s good. This choice will always lead to the increased well-being of both the one who is loved and the one who loves; no exceptions.” In conversation with the participants I defined love as other-centeredness, or the commitment to do what is in the best interest of the people you choose to love. The participants agreed with this definition of love and expanded on the role that love plays in partnership. Love can be felt on and off, but for it to bring an end to fear, hurt and injustice it must be a choice. The interviews and focus group shared an understanding of love as something that has the power to disarm fear, suspicion and competition. Here are some of the highlights from our conversations;

“Sharing vision and a common goal through partnership can break the historic chain of fear, bringing love into community. Love is needed to overcome fear”
(Pepper Lazore)

“There was no love in the beginning, because of mistrust, but then love crept in”
(Walter Cooke)

“When you say you are a Christian, people want you to act like Christ, which is love. When I say I’m an Indian, people want me to act traditional, which is like Christ. Traditional Indian is love, unconditional love for everyone and for the earth”
(Walter Cooke)

“Love is a direct outcome of my relationship with Christ. It is a spiritual value. Spiritual health is fundamental to overall health and healing”
(Faye Lee)

“Love transforms “I” statements into “we” statements. There was no competition between us”
(Faye Lee)

“Through a focus on community, value for life, respect for nature and love for all people, Aboriginal culture lives out our Christian ideal better than we do, we can learn a lot from them as we share in their teaching”
(Tim Laws).

“This partnership didn’t come out of political correctness, but out of genuine love and interest in each other and the youth, and out of a mutual desire to work together for what will benefit the youth”
(Focus Group).

“Love is a value we bring to partnership. How can we talk about Jesus’ love given the history of the church and residential schools? Love and reconciliation can be experienced and lived out through partnership.”
(Tim Laws)

I wanted to share all of these quotes because they demonstrate how important love is from the perspective of the participants. I also think it is beneficial for the participants, who will be reading this, to hear what each other had to say on the topic. Love is something that the participants identified as essential to a healthy, mutually beneficial and forward moving relationship. The more people chose to love, the less power fear had.

Fear has the power to destroy the very things that make this partnership work:

communication, honesty, reciprocity, courage to risk, and commitment. These things are possible because of the base ethic: love.

Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible...if I do not love the people—I cannot enter into dialogue (Freire, 1970, p. 89).

Love is not an act of emotion, a mere feeling. Love is a decision of individual and collective will. Love is a determined act of personal agency. According to Freire (1970) love must generate other actions of freedom, which is true of this partnership. Inequality, racism, manipulation, deceit, colonial myths and greed are anti-love. These objects of oppression must be acknowledged and extinguished to make room for acts of love. This talk of love is not merely a romanticized or idealized social work fairy tale. It demonstrates that when people choose to love one another authentically, there is a difference in the way they understand their reality and deal with the constraints of a limit situation.

When I asked about power both Walter and Allen said they did “not think that’s what they would call it.” They did not identify power as an issue they had to deal with. Walter described how in Aboriginal circles there should be no hierarchy and status differences. An elder like himself should be able to eat lunch and talk with a person who is homeless as easily as he could with the mayor. According to Walter when you have real love for all people, you do not use power over them. Walter did not deny that some

people have more power than others. He said that power is “the way of life.” Aboriginal teaching distributes power by viewing people equally, working together as one team in a circle. Walter brought this understanding of the way of life into the partnership. This is not to say there was no risk in this relationship for power imbalances. The steering committee was designed for open dialogue, in recognition that people need a forum to address concerns. Allan said that negotiating and defining the expectations for an equal partnership in the beginning helped the partners to keep a balance throughout it. When one staff member began to over step her position in the partnership, making decisions that were not hers to make, the steering committee talked about her inappropriate use of power. They were able to reflect back on their shared understanding of power, which they agreed upon in the beginning stages of partnership. According to Allan “power is what it is” and you negotiate it from the beginning. I wonder if the participants understood power as being a negative force only, and as a result tried to downplay that power dynamics that naturally existed. Lee (1999) says that power is needed to bring about positive change. In my experience people are often hesitant and closed when it comes to talking about power. Power has the tendency to be understood as a ‘dirty word’. Perhaps power becomes a ‘dirty word’ when people are unsure of how to talk about power without implicating themselves or someone else who is part of their team. I wonder if we are more reluctant to enter into dialogue about power, when it is perceived that a partnership is functioning effectively. It seems that both Walter and Allen understand that power dynamics will always exist, but because they do not believe they misuse power, they consider it to be a non-issue. They have not considered how they do use their position of power for the benefit of this partnership.

Non-interference: a word about coexistence

The ethic of non-interference means that “an Indian will never interfere in any way with the rights, privileges and activities of another person” (Ross, 1992, p. 12). This ethic extends from the individual to the context of nation to nation relations. Ross describes non-interference as the oldest and most fundamental ethic to shape the lives of Aboriginal people. The settling European communities had (and still do have) a very different modus operandi for inter-group relations. While intrusion and interference is considered rude and unethical among Aboriginal nations, white settlers operate as their “brother’s keepers” (Ross, 1992, p.12). Eurocentric norms accept advice giving or intervening in another person’s affairs as a way of helping that person or community. Ross provides the example of a gathering of white people. When someone announces that they want to buy a pear tree, he can expect another person to advise him to buy a peach tree instead. Someone else may tell him what he should know, who he should buy from and how he should go about buying his tree. The intrusive and encroaching nature of European settlers is something that the first peoples resisted at contact and continue to resist today.

The Longhouse teachings of Handsome Lake warn the Haudenosaunee people about the troubles they will have among themselves if they are to accept the religion of the missionaries and the Christian church (Thomas, 1994). It is worth mentioning that many of the Aboriginal people in Hamilton and from Six Nations and have an understanding of the Longhouse teachings. Handsome Lake, a Seneca visionary and teacher prophesied in the mid 1700’s that the missionaries would cause division among the people of the Longhouse, and rather than accept the teaching of the missionaries they

should be cautious and remain distinct. The prophecy also warns that people who accept the ways of the white race will suffer and that Christianity should not be embraced. According to oral tradition Handsome Lake taught that “this kind of belief does not belong to the Native people, it was only meant for the white race” (Thomas, 1994, p. 98). The Haudenosaunee people understood the importance of coexisting and in response to the encroaching presence of settler communities created the Two Row Wampum Belt. The principle of non-interference symbolized by the Wampum Belt was intended to protect both the first peoples and the new comers. Non-interference could mean that the two communities avoid each other like the plague, resulting in isolation and apathy. The ethic of non-interference is protective, but when both parties are committed to coexistence, this ethic can be mutually beneficial. Both the Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre were initially worried about how involved the other would become in their internal affairs. This partnership is reliant on a commitment to non-interference and coexistence. There is much that they share and do together, but from the beginning boundaries were set to ensure non-interference. This ethic is especially important as it relates to issues of spirituality.

Decolonizing the “white man’s god”

Aboriginal author Craig Smith (1998) describes how Jesus was introduced to him as a white man and Christianity as the Whitemans Gospel. Walter Cooke said that “Christianity and Indianity don’t mix.” “Indianity” is the word Walter used to describe the values and ethics of traditional Aboriginal spirituality. Indianity has been constructed by Christianity as pagan and uncivilized (Smith, 1998). Where the Christian God is viewed as the ‘whiteman’s god’ it is most likely because this ‘god’ is an invention of

white men. So often throughout history, Christians have imposed a view of God upon other people that reflects their human, egocentric, exploitative, and greedy nature, more than anything divine. It's no wonder that Aboriginal people have been unable to relate to Christianity when it reflects the white colonial consciousness. Walter explained that the tension and hostility between the church and Aboriginal people today has a lot to do with misunderstandings and assumptions that produce fear. This belief that Christianity and Indianity cannot coexist is prevalent in both Aboriginal and Christian circles (Walter Cooke). This notion is rooted in a multitude of failed attempts to coexist, and in a history of spiritual and cultural coercion; all this in the name of Christianity. The participants believe that often when Aboriginal people hear the words 'Christian' or 'church' they first think of the Anglican, Catholic and United church bodies that were responsible for residential schools (Walter Cooke, Pepper Lazore, Allan Craig, Tim Laws). Churches and missionaries have historically taught that in order for Aboriginal people to be civilized they must accept Christian teaching and they were required to forsake their culture (Smith, 1998). This distorted view of God needs to be examined and scrutinized as it excludes many people not only from a belief system, but more importantly from a dominant value system. This is not to say that Aboriginal people want to or should partake in Eurocentric value systems, but rather that their exclusion transcends religion and marginalizes them from their rights and entitlements. Being 'other' to this dominant system requires Aboriginal people to constantly defend, explain or resist (Monture Angus, 1995, p.32).

Missionization was a colonial tool used to dismantle the languages, socio-economic and political systems, and family structures of Aboriginal people and to disrupt

their relationship with the land. The process of unpacking the historic relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal communities has been important to the relationship between the Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre. Walter explains that one of his roles is helping his own people to deconstruct the distortions and myths of church teaching, to help them understand the potential for a new relationship with Christian communities. The racism of Christian institutions is something that the church has a responsibility and moral obligation to address. This may involve talking about what whiteness is and how it operates in the church. While the Christian church is ethnically diverse, I am referring to the settler church, which was predominantly white European. Racism can be defined as “white skin privilege plus power” (Monture Angus, 1995, p.36). In the context of spiritual oppression, racism can be more specifically defined as white privilege plus religious power. Religious power can be especially coercive and dehumanizing as those with privilege claim to be acting out of the will of God, and explain the hardship and suffering of the oppressed as part of a divine order (Freire 1970).

Writer Shane Claiborne (2006) is part of an emerging movement that challenges the Western church to critically analyze its place in the world. Claiborne emphasizes the need for the church to live in communion as family with those who are poor and oppressed, as this is how the oppressed and the oppressors can be liberated. This is kindred to Freire’s theories of liberation. According to Claiborne, the church must first come into a consciousness where it can see its own brokenness, fault and role in maintaining oppression. Only then can the church experience the kind of reconciliation and freedom that is needed in order to be in true communion with the oppressed. The

emphasis is on authentic relationship. Every action taken must be initiated together, the oppressor and the oppressed in partnership.

If it is not born of relationships, if it is not liberating for the oppressed and the oppressors, if it is not marked by raw, passionate love, then it is the same old self-righteousness that does little more than flaunt our own purity by making the rest of the world see how dirty they are....When we are first aware of our own brokenness, our eyes are opened to see our faces in the faces of the oppressed and to see our hands in the hands of the oppressors. Then we shall all be truly free (Claiborne, 2006, p.253).

Claiborne talks about the brokenness of the church and need for liberation in the same way that Freire (2006) describes the profound rebirth of the oppressor. The oppressor has a distorted view of God, and imposes that construction of God on the oppressed. In order for the church to become free from its role of oppressor it needs to undergo a profound rebirth. According to Freire it is only through a trusting and equal relationship with the oppressed that the oppressor can experience true conversion and participate in revolutionary action. The spiritual abuse that Aboriginal communities experienced through the imposition of Christianity has profoundly impacted both the Christian and Aboriginal community. With any relationship that the two communities pursue there will be a need to confront the tensions and wounds that remain even today (Allan Craig). The process of healing and reconciliation is both individual and collective. In order for reconciliation to be transformative it must be undertaken by both the church and by the Aboriginal community, and viewed from both sides (Smith, 1998, p.57). Often reconciliation has been called for by dominant societies, as an attempted quick fix to hundreds of years of colonial oppression. The process of so-called reconciliation can be imposed by dominant power structures in the same way that Christianity and Eurocentric values were vertically imposed. Any relationship imposed from a top down approach will

struggle to balance and manage power, and the historically dominant partner risks returning to the use of power over the historically oppressed partner.

The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived. The convert who approaches the people but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express, and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his 'status' remains nostalgic toward his origins (Freire, 1970, p. 61).

The early church taught that true Christianity is about returning what they had stolen, whether that be an excess of resources, wealth, power or status. All these things had to come at the expense of someone else (Claiborne, 2006). Commitment to the transformation of an unjust order is at the very heart of reconciliation and liberation. The church today and all colonial structures for that matter need to talk less about charity which only reproduces an unjust order, and rather listen with ears that truly hear what Aboriginal peoples are saying.

In all of the interviews and in the focus group it became clear that the participants were surprised throughout the process by how much they found that Christianity and traditional Aboriginal spirituality have in common. This was a significant learning experience for the Rock staff. The Creator God, the illustration of spiritual rebirth, the focus on holistic health, the value for life, a desire to love people unconditionally just because they are human, and an enjoyment of community and celebration are shared values and beliefs between the Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre. The spiritual emphasis is something that could have prevented the organizations from even attempting partnership, for fear of all that is different. In this partnership however, spirituality became the common bond through which the organizations have been able relate to one

another and provide care for youth. The reason this partnership did work was because of “courage of conviction” (Pepper Lazore), a determination to love the youth and to care for them in a holistic way; meeting the needs of youth physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Walter observes that “many Christians and Indians only live out their teachings 9-5” and that “true Christians and traditional Indians can be recognized by their love for all people.” It is this love that inspires the transformation from a dehumanizing legacy into a humanizing reality.

My purpose today is to suggest to you that the church should accept that the development of people means rebellion. At a given and decisive point in history, people decide to act against these conditions which restrict their freedom as people. I am suggesting that unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the church will become irrelevant to people, and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the church, its members and its organizations, express God’s love for human beings by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present human conditions, then it will become identified with injustice and persecution. If this happens it will die, and humanly speaking will deserve to die—because it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to the human world...For if the church acquiesces in established evils, it is identifying itself and the Christian religion with injustice by its continuing presence (Nyerere, as cited in Hope & Timmel, 1984, p. 29).

Julius Nyerere spoke these words in 1968 (Hope & Timmel, 1984). Today we might wonder if it would not be a bad thing for the church in its distortion to experience a kind of death. Freire (1970) talks about the need for elites who want to participate in revolutionary action to ‘die’ to themselves and to the false consciousness, in order to be reborn and really live in a true reality.

Decolonization: the journey continues

Alfred (2005) writes of “rough pathways to freedom” (p. 40). There is no one formula or model for recovering what colonization has distorted and denied through domination, subordination and preservation of white privilege. Moreover there is no one theory of internal/internalized colonialism that all writers agree on (Cuff 1997). However, according to Alfred (2005) there is a rough trail being carved out which leads to individual and collective liberation. In reality there may be many paths to freedom from colonial oppression, each person Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal has a unique journey and a different starting point. “Colonized peoples have the right to decolonize themselves” (Jackson, 2004, p.129). Colonizing peoples have the responsibility and moral obligation to decolonize themselves. The colonizer cannot do this is isolation from the colonized. The decolonizing process for the colonizer and the colonized will be different but cannot be separate. I found that the participants from both the Rock and the Aboriginal Health Centre understand themselves to be on healing journeys, coming to terms with their social location and how their spiritual values call them to be at peace with everyone.

A person’s social location, collective history and ability to engage in reflective action will determine the scenery and detours in their journey. Freire (1970) says that those who commit themselves to the cause of liberation with the oppressed must re-examine themselves constantly. Rather than focusing on how others are damaged and in need of healing we need to explore our own areas of brokenness. While this journey is personal, it is also collective, and has more power to effect change this way. Personal transformation is less powerful in isolation. The sum of a community is greater than its individual parts (Freeman & Lee, 2007). Alfred states:

We who seek to bring about change in others and in society can only offer guidance out of shared concern and reflection based on our own experience, so that others anxious for the journey can listen and then embark on the challenge for themselves (Alfred, 2005, p. 39).

The Aboriginal Health Centre, through its commitment to all youth and to the Rock has essentially encouraged non-Aboriginal people to embark on a healing journey.

Non-Aboriginal Canadian society is deeply in need of healing and liberation from the oppressive colonial consciousness. The healing journey of non-Aboriginal society will look different from the decolonization of Aboriginal communities. It is said “You cannot be the doctor if you are the disease” (Battiste, 2000, p. 4). Eurocentric Canada has had the disease of an oppressed consciousness since before contact with the first peoples. As originating from the oppressor group, we (speaking from my own social location) are just as bonded and in need of liberation as the oppressed. We are socialized and educated within the colonial culture. Our submersion within the colonial culture, a false consciousness, makes us sick and incomplete. Because we are so used to this false consciousness, we cannot understand that it weakens us and constrains our freedom. Moreover, we are at a loss when it comes to our own healing. Mainstream, white Canada, cannot attempt to be the liberators of Aboriginal peoples from the oppressive colonial reality. As Daes (as cited in Battiste, 2004) points out, we are the disease.

Decolonizing theory and practice is highly political, involving resistance of Euro-Canadian structures, values and colonial control. According to Alfred (1999) rejecting colonization or participating in decolonization involves the “struggle to gain recognition and respect for their right to exist as peoples, unencumbered by demands, controls, and false identities imposed on them by others” (p. 1). The fight for self-determination and self-government is something that many non-Aboriginal people feel threatened by, and in

response refuse to move over for this political realignment of power. For example, when Aboriginal nations move to reclaim their traditional treaty lands, non-Aboriginal Canada reacts in fear of a loss of privilege and power. This racism has been experienced by the people of Six Nations who are in the midst of land settlement negotiations. When the media began covering the Aboriginal occupation of a land reclamation site in present day Caledonia, it became apparent that in general, white society is quite unwilling to discuss the redistribution of power, privilege and the notion of special entitlement. Listening to various news and radio programs I was surprised at the overtly racist perspectives shared by non-Aboriginal citizens, likening the Aboriginal protestors to terrorists. These perspectives, upsetting as they are, should not surprise me, as they reflect the more subtle racist undertones present in dominant institutions such as the media, education, religion, the justice system and government. Organized movements such as the Freedom Marchers, led by Gary McHale, focused on creating fear about the loss of white power within Canadian institutions. While the response of non-Aboriginal Canadians will not deter Aboriginal nations from claiming their inherent right of self-determination, the journey toward self-determination could use and has the right to expect the support of Canadian allies. Those interested allies may do well to pay attention to the notion of creating or enabling the development of safe space. Creating space has the potential to be more than creating a safe environment for dialogue and co-learning, as discussed earlier. Allies can participate in the process of decolonization by helping carving out space in mainstream institutions that are fearful or hostile toward notions of Aboriginal self-determination. Carving out space for transformative revolution involves deconstructing Eurocentric hegemony and exposing how white power and privilege continue to reap

benefits from of the oppression of the first peoples. The risk in using ‘safe space’ terminology is that allies may aim to integrate Aboriginal peoples into oppressive structures, rather than challenging and transforming those structures. To make space in dominant Eurocentric systems for the oppressed will only sink the oppressed consciousness further into obscurity and silence. Within Freire’s (1970) approach, transforming unjust structures creates space for the oppressed to become beings for themselves, rather than ‘objects’ or beings for another.

It is questionable whether non-Aboriginal allies should assume any other role in the decolonization process apart from deconstructing whiteness and warming a climate for authentic and transformative change in dominant systems. According to Freire (1970) the dominant class has historically played an important role with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. The dominant class will always carry elements of their privilege. This manifests in a lack of trust for the community, and underlying that mistrust is a belief that the community does not have what it takes to effect change apart from the knowledge imparted by the dominant class. According to Freire, when people from the dominant class join the oppressed they risk taking over the process, fighting oppression for the oppressed. While their intentions are good, they desire to be the executors of transformation, and this actually reproduces the unjust social order. Freire puts it this way:

They talk about the people but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust (Freire, 1970, p. 60).

Faye spoke of a shift in the language used in the partnership, from an “us and them” dynamic and a focus on “I and me” to “us and we” language. Decolonization in the context of this partnership has much to do with the humanization of a relationship that has historically been characterized by fear and mistrust. Deconstructing the ‘mythical Indian’, and understanding how people who follow Christ can be different from people who follow religion, allowed the partners to coexist in trusting relationship. Cuff (1997), in her understanding of the culture of colonialism, explores a critical path toward the humanization of the contradictory relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society. The consciousness of the oppressor is contradictory, because the oppressor believes he or she is free, yet acts of oppression create and maintain an unjust, dehumanizing and false reality.

While both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity (Freire, 1970, p. 44).

An essential role that non-Aboriginal allies can play in humanizing this relationship is identifying, deconstructing and challenging the contradictory relationship (Cuff, 1997). Cuff’s framework for humanizing relationships relies on Freire’s liberation theory of praxis; dialogical action and reflection. Authentic praxis requires Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to come into dialogue as subjects, with the belief that the limit situation is penetrable.

My research suggests that pursuing authentic humanizing relationships can challenge the colonial reality and transform the false consciousness that perpetuates

colonial oppression. The information and analysis I explored with the participants has helped me to create a framework for understanding the root causes of contradictory partnership and the root causes of authentic/humanizing partnership in the context of the colonial culture. Dialogical action and reflection are needed to transform the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The purpose of this framework is to look at the presenting issues illustrated by the flower (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2), and then critically analyze the causes of the issues, right down to the root of them. This requires asking explorative questions such. What do you see happening? What is good? What is bad? These questions are meant to get at surface level and presenting issues. After establishing these surface level indicators, we ask the ‘why’ questions. Why are you hesitant to enter into partnership? Why don’t you trust them? Why is conflict and fear present? The progression of this analysis helps us to understand the root cause of both contradictory and humanizing realities. Contrasting the flower illustrations can help us to envision the potential for change in the limit situations that characterize the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.

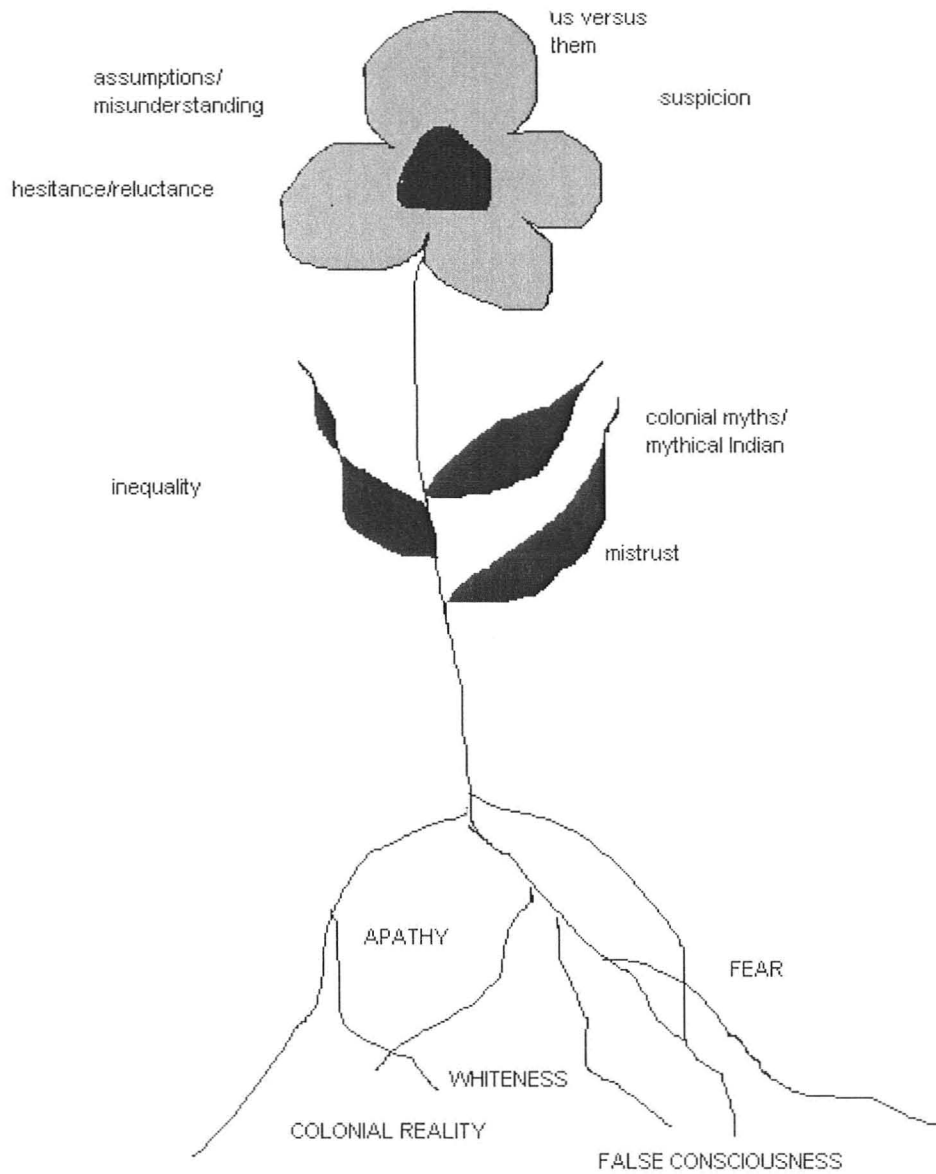


Figure 5.1: Contradictory/Dehumanizing Relationship: A Colonial Reality

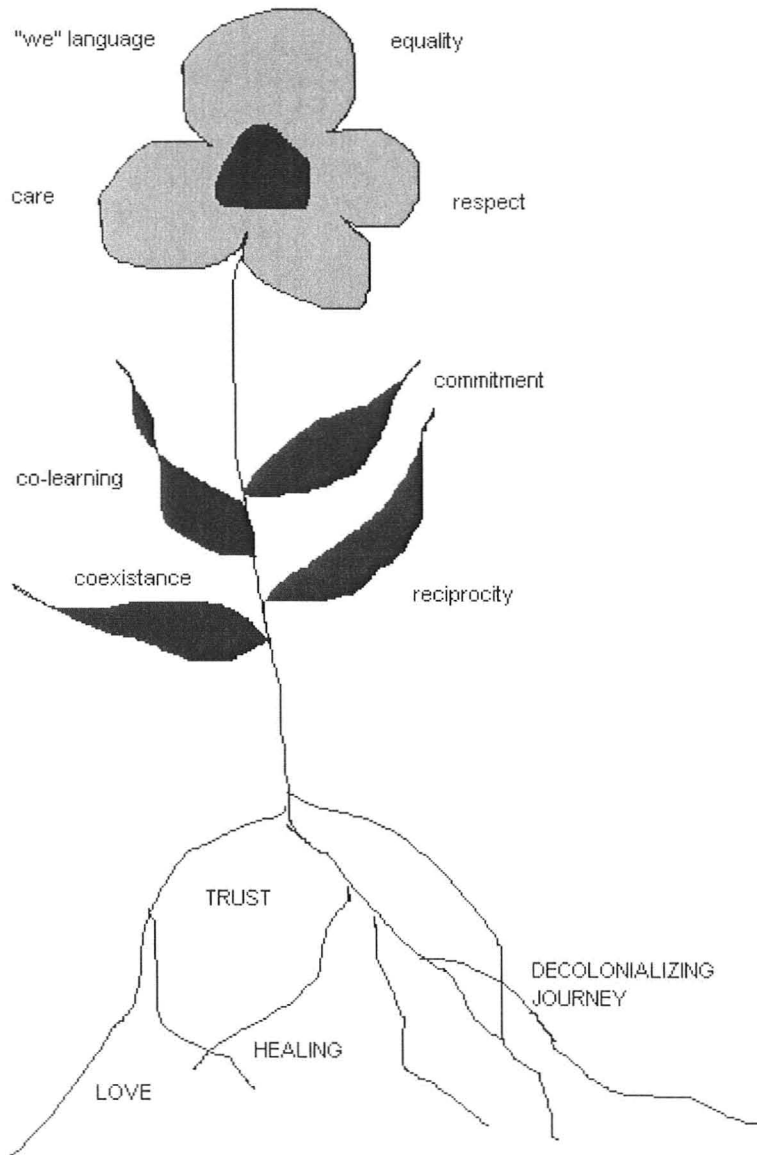


Figure 5.2: Authentic/Humanizing Relationship: Possible through Dialogical Action and Reflection Involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples

Conscientization through Root Cause Analysis

Each of the words in the above *humanizing relationship framework* came from the participants of this study. Of course these words did not always characterize the partnership, nor are they fixed experiences. Relationships are dynamic and fluid. The partnership became what it is today because the people involved were focused on personal and collective transformation and healing. The principles which the individuals live their lives according to gave the relationship humanizing qualities. This was not an accidental occurrence, but an intentional process, enabled by a commitment to dialogue, reflection and action and to love. Through this praxis, a relationship that is historically contradictory is now humanizing. Fear can be replaced with trust and myths undone by truth. Coming to a place where love and truth are realities requires a commitment to authentic relationship.

Along the same lines of transformation theory, Monture Angus (1995) believes that before equality is understood or achieved, we must be able to understand caring. Caring happens when people choose to care; it's not a natural event for people with competing interests to genuinely care for one another. The colonial consciousness defines Aboriginal people as 'other', and 'less human'. As long as those in power, who have the privilege of defining 'normal' see a group of people as less human, inequality and its injustices will persist.

Without understanding caring we cannot understand 'peoplehood,' be it in a community as small as a gathering of a few people or something as large as the global community. Each person must be respected for who and what they are. Only when we all understand caring will we have reached equality (Monture Angus, 1995, p.11).

Aboriginal communities have made it clear that non-Aboriginal people could help in the decolonizing journey by giving them space to determine for themselves what it means to decolonialize. This means not speaking on their behalf (Battiste, 2000). It means not interfering with their processes (Waterfall, 2002). This does not mean that non-Aboriginal people are excused from dialogical action and reflection. Nor does it mean that we are excused from the hard work of exploring our involvement in the colonial reality, and what it will take to break down discriminative and oppressive structures. Canadian leaders and average citizens speak proudly of our democratic roots, yet we have negated the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples from day one. The humanizing nature of this partnership depends on the commitment of those involved to dialogical reflection and action.

Final Words

What I have gathered from this research is quite simple, but I wonder if it does not have the potential to contribute to significant change, both individually and collectively. The findings of the research suggest that developing humanizing partnership can be reduced to three things:

1. authentically reflect on our present reality, this analysis includes; thematic investigation, myth busting, co-learning and analyzing root causes;
2. do this in community and act together on what we come to understand, and;
3. choose to love (ourselves included) and value life (humanity and nature)

The combination of ‘getting real and loving’ may sound like a naïve approach to partnership in the colonial context, or in any other context. Yet this approach is one that both Freire and Guevara affirm through their experiences of revolutionary action.

Guevara said:

Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love (as cited in Freire, 1970).

I am going to go even farther however and suggest that breaking out of the limit-situation into an authentic reality and choosing to love has the potential to introduce healing to the mess that has been made through colonial arrogance and greed. While it seems simplistic, it may also be one of the most difficult things we could ask of a person, let alone entire communities. It would be easier and more comfortable if this research suggested that mutually beneficial relationships are established through instrumental mechanisms such as the regular meetings of a committed steering committee, shared mandates and openness about resources, etc. All of these things are useful, if the partners are self-serving and more interested in their own gain, the growth and reciprocity of the

partnership will be constricted. I view the relationship between the Aboriginal Health Centre and the Rock as a micro example of what could happen on a larger scale for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Authentic and humanizing relationship requires courage to dialogue, willingness to risk in acts of love and a commitment to do what is best for the other person/community.

Getting Real

According to Freire (1970) we can take hope in our incompleteness, because recognizing that we are incomplete compels us to journey out in search of becoming more fully human. This search must be carried out in community. Freire encourages communities of people who seek liberation and justice to become partners in naming the world, in creating a new reality. Such naming of a new reality requires us to critically analyze the contradictions of our current false consciousness. The oppression of Aboriginal peoples is fueled by a disregard for their humanity, for their dignity and worth. This is the opposite of love. The culture of silence and denial permeates Canadian institutions. Racism, for example, is so deeply embedded in dominant institutions that it requires overtly racist acts in order for it to be named. Even then it is usually only one individual who becomes the scapegoat, with structural racism remains hidden. Transformation requires that we collectively enter into a process by which we unveil our contradictory nature, our colonial sickness. In this I am speaking to the dominant structures that I participate in; implicating the whiteness of the church, mainstream education and media.

The ongoing oppression of Aboriginal peoples is often justified as a result of the construction of a mythicized world, which becomes internalized in the consciousness of

the oppressed as well as the oppressors. Those of us who wish to act as liberators, must first reject this false consciousness. Unless we identify and deconstruct colonial myths we remain incomplete, and risk falling back on the power of our privileged origins, and reproducing the false consciousness. We will see ourselves as rescuers, experts or kinds of saviors. The staff team at the Rock has done a lot of learning with the Aboriginal Health Centre and reflecting on the role of Christianity in colonial oppression. Sometimes outside perspectives shed new light on our own reality. This process is not easy, which is probably why it usually takes an outside perspective to shine a novel light on what is normal to us, yet highly dysfunctional. While making humanitarian claims, Canada continues to deny the rights of Aboriginal peoples, treating them as second-class citizens. It was embarrassing for Canada and shocking to some Canadians when the treatment of Aboriginal people was likened to the conditions of Apartheid South Africa. When Canada announced sanctions against South Africa because of its human rights abuses, South African foreign minister Pik Botha pointed out the dehumanization of Aboriginal peoples and the horrible conditions of the reserve system (CBC, 1977). It took international criticism pointing out Canada's hypocrisy in order for the governing bodies to own up to their brutal treatment of Aboriginal peoples. Similarly, after a period of silence and denial the Anglican Church was forced to acknowledge and deal with its role in abusive residential schools. It is always easy to point out the faults of another person, or group. The challenge is getting real and honest about our own brokenness.

Breaking out of the false, mythicized consciousness happens through what Freire (1970) calls *conscientization*. As our true reality is unveiled, theme by theme we can collectively intervene and respond to it. Thematic investigation requires a critical

historical awareness. For example, as Christian churches understand their roles in reproducing inequality and poverty through false charity, an important element of critical analysis is historic analysis. Why is it that Christian churches in the West are predominantly privileged and wealthy? At whose expense has the church become rich and powerful? The relationships had between Christian churches and the oppressed communities they aspire to support are false, placing the 'needy' community in a position of inferiority and dependence upon the 'compassionate' church. In contrary and vertical relationships such as this there is no room for dialogue. It is only when the church itself is liberated from internalized oppression that it will be able to enter into true relationship with, rather than for the oppressed.

Suggestions for Continued Work

There is a need for further research to explore the impact the humanizing, and perhaps also dehumanizing partnerships have on the larger community. It would be interesting to explore how the larger Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in Hamilton, including the youth at the Rock, are impacted by the humanizing nature of this partnership. Do the principles that shape this partnership transcend the reality of those directly involved, and impact the larger community context. In this case the partners live with and work from very similar values and principles. I wonder how this partnership would have transpired had the commitment to love and holistic healing not been reciprocal. There remains the ever-present issue of power. The participants were reluctant to name power, and resisted talking about how it is managed between the organizations. When partnership is functioning to the benefit of both organizations, does power become a taboo subject? I doubt such reluctance is unique to these organizations. I wonder what

more social work education and policy can be doing to open up conversations about power within community and practice settings. As long as power is perceived to be a dirty word or taboo subject, complete conscientization will be constrained. This reluctance to talk about power is probably quite typical of partnerships between organizations, both organic and enforced partnerships. Organic partnerships such as this may provide important policy insights for the development of mandated organizational partnerships. Those who are in policy development should examine how organic partnerships develop, function and maintain reciprocity, when determining how to construct other mandated partnerships.

In this research I suggest that Freire's (1970) revolutionary action theories of praxis, conscientization, co-learning and thematic investigation can offer a basis for authentic partnership to develop. I have not been able to go further in my research to suggest how the humanizing elements of this partnership can transcend the context of these two organizations, for the benefit of the larger community. I hope that we can learn from the experiences of this partnership. I am especially interested in the potential that the processes of conscientization and transformation has to liberate Christian churches and mainstream education institutions. Hope and Timmel's (1984) *Training for Transformation* series offers community workers some tools to engage communities in problem posing dialogue about the contradictions of their realities. These tools are drawn from Freire's (1970) theories on developing critical self-awareness and cultural/historic analysis. Similar tools, theories and exercises that Hope and Timmel (1984) use in their community work could help introduce a process of transformation for Christian communities and mainstream educators.

Love can be a very abstract word with multiple understandings. I have no doubt that other-centered love profoundly impacts the development of relationships. It makes sense that each individual and community come to their own understanding of love, before they are able to demonstrate it through action. An understanding of, or desire to love is not something that can be orchestrated or forced upon a person by a community organizer. I do however envision a community of people journeying together in critical self-awareness for the creation of a more just world, a more authentic and humanizing reality. I wonder if a re-contextualized version of Hope and Timmel's (1984) *Training for Transformation* handbooks would have the potential to help Church leaders and mainstream educators to humanize their doctrines and policies, for decolonializing purposes.

Conclusion

The literature review suggests that vertically imposed relationships are the outcome of an untested feasibility, in which Aboriginal communities are perceived to be incapable of taking control of their realities. The partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and the Rock suggests that horizontal and authentic partnership can challenge a limit situation. Without knowing this is what they were doing, the partners tested an untested feasibility. Through dialogical reflection and action, they entered into a new reality in which two historically opposed groups were able to relate to one another in a horizontal relationship as equals. The just response to the colonial conquest of Aboriginal peoples would be to give back the physical, historic, spiritual and cultural spaces that have been stolen, and which the dominant society continues to exploit. This requires a renewed commitment to coexistence and co-learning. This action can not only recompense

Aboriginal peoples, but it has the potential to address many of the social, economic and environmental problems that are rooted in colonialism and imperialism. Eurocentric dominance takes up incredible amounts of space to satisfy capitalist, nationalist and consumer driven egos and material lives. Few see how quickly we are damaging ourselves, and the generations ahead of us. When I asked Walter what how the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples could be improved he spoke about a change in mindset. “Euro-Christian settlers have always tried to change Aboriginal peoples from their ways because they believe they know what is right and best, but the ‘right’ and ‘best’ things often destroy the earth and its life” (Walter Cooke). According to Walter, a change in mindset involves a new respect and value for human life and for the earth. Pepper taught me to think in terms of the root cause, as well as future impact. “Each individual should leave something behind that carries on for the benefit of seven generations ahead” (Pepper Lazore). Again this is a love which requires us to get real, and get free from an unjust social order.

Jean Vanier (1971) said it well: “the gravity of the situation demands a revolution of love” (p. 79). While love may be revolutionary, it is also very common. Love is something that all human beings, young, old, female, male, religious, and irreligious can choose to act upon. The participants not only speak of love, but they seek to make this love a reality in their lives. The principles which guide their lives as individuals provide a foundation for praxis in their relationships. Authentic and humanizing partnership depends on dialogical reflection and action, and among other things praxis depends on love.

Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is

the logical consequence. It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue-loving, humble, and full of faith-did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever close partnership in the naming of the world (Freire, 1970, p. 91).

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Appendix A:

Focus Group and Interview Guide

We will begin by opening up in a discussion that will explore;

- a) the history of this partnership,
- b) partnership challenges (what has made this partnership hard)
- c) partnership successes (what has been positive about the process of partnership)
- d) values (what values does your organization bring to the partnership?)

I will then explore these 3 themes,

Power

The degree to which we are able to influence our own environment, to get things done, make things happen, or not happen. It includes access to resources, free choice and opportunity (Lee 1999).

1. How is power distributed in this partnership?
2. What power related challenges have emerged in the process?
3. How have you dealt with these challenges?

Culture

1. What role has culture or cultural difference played in making this partnership what it is today?
2. What challenges have emerged because of cultural difference?
3. How have you dealt with these challenges?

Canadian Historic Context

1. How have present and historic colonial forces influenced this partnership?
2. Have there been challenges related to spiritual orientations of the Rock and Aboriginal Health Centre?
3. How have you dealt with these challenges?

Appendix B:

Letter of Invitation and Consent for an Interview

Study of Cross Cultural Organizational Partnership

April 25/2007

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Why am I doing this study?

I am a Masters of Social Work Student. I am doing this study as part of the requirements for my degree. I am interested in learning what makes for an effective partnership between organizations. This study is unique because of the different cultural contexts, spiritual beliefs and historic backgrounds that frame the organizations. The partnership between the Aboriginal Health Centre and Living Rock Ministries has the potential to help other organizations to identify and navigate through the challenges and barriers that can arise in cross-cultural collaboration.

What will happen during this study?

You are invited to participate in an interview. This will take the shape of a dialogue which I will facilitate. The purpose of this interview will be to discuss the history of the partnership, its challenges and successes within the context of 3 main themes; power, culture and the Canadian historic context regarding the relationship between Aboriginal and settler communities. In order to give you a better understanding of what the interview will involve I have attached an interview guide that outlines these themes in more detail.

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. It will take place on a date that we agree upon and at a location that is most convenient. With your permission, I would like to audio-tape the discussion.

Potential Risks: Will anything harmful happen during the study?

There is no risk of physical risks involved in this study. The discussion may address issues that you feel strongly about and cause you some discomfort. While I will not be asking personal questions, the topics address a collective history that may feel highly personal. Only share what you are comfortable sharing publicly.

Potential Benefits: What good may come from my participation in this study?

This study will contribute towards a better understanding of how cross cultural partnerships work and may help to guide other organizations working towards this goal.

I hope that this study will also benefit your organization and your continued involvement such partnerships. Participating in this study will give you an opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges that have been experienced throughout the partnership. This may highlight areas that need rethinking or re-evaluation, and practices which have been beneficial to the partnership. This research will help honour the hard work which has been invested in developing this partnership.

Confidentiality:

Concerning my written report, with your permission I would like to acknowledge you by name. In order to maintain openness and transparency in the research process if I am quoting you directly I will be asking for permission to identify you by name. Please consider this when deciding on your participation and when choosing what to share in the interview. Of course at any time you may withdraw any statement or ask for anonymity in the final report.

The written and recorded information gathered in the focus group will be kept in a locked cabinet which only myself and Bill Lee will have access to. The information will be destroyed when the study is finished in September 2007.

Please be aware that I am legally required to disclose any information concerning harm to you, to the public, or the abuse of a child (under 16).

Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you do not have to answer any question you would prefer not to address, and still continue as a participant of the discussion. At any point during, or even after, the focus group discussion you have the right to withdraw from the study without consequence. If you choose to withdraw any information that you have provided will be automatically destroyed, unless you let me know otherwise.

Information about study results

The findings of the study will be made available to your organization through a final report. This will be a condensed version of my thesis. If you are interested in reading the full version you may contact me after September 2007 to access it.

Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your participation or the study itself, please contact me or Bill Lee.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Gillian Matheson of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant