

Supporting Native American Students with Traditional Spirituality

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Exploring spaces for learning

HETL Conference
Orlando, Florida
January 14, 2013

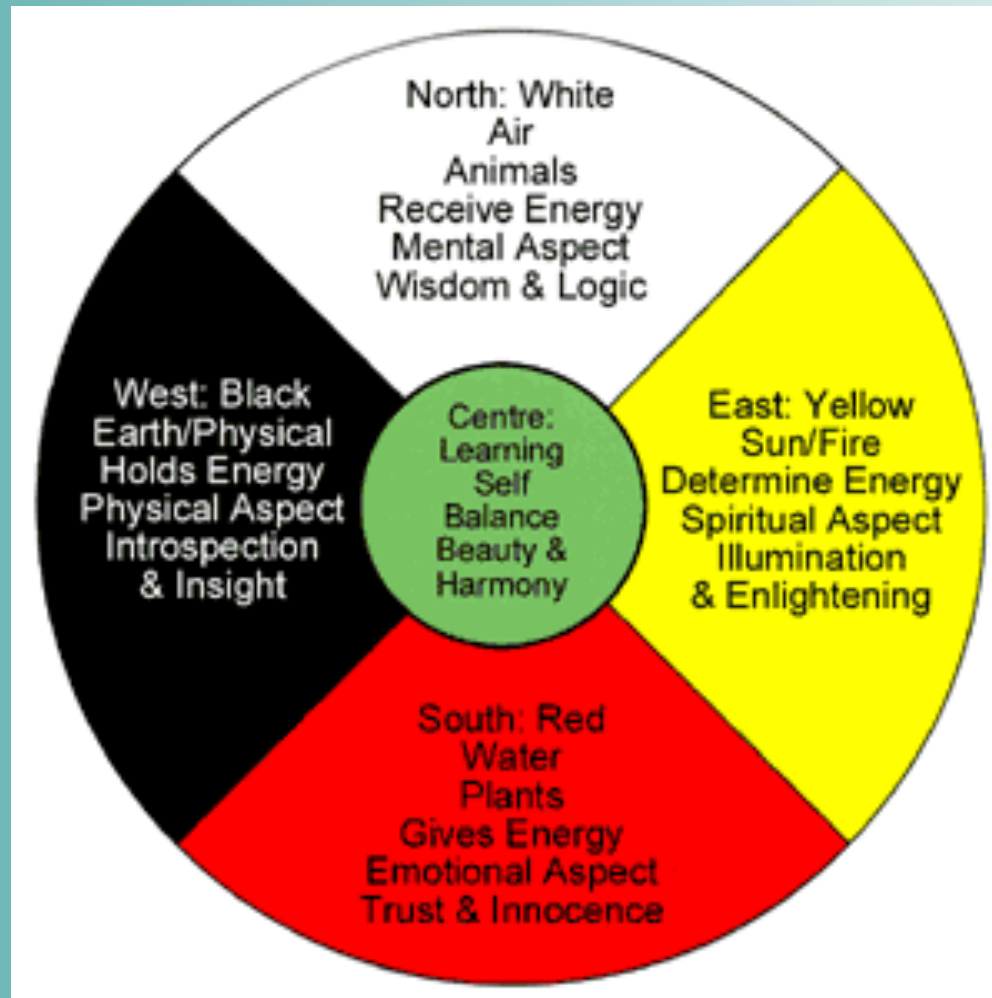
Overview

- This study examined barriers and supports to Aboriginal students within an Anishinaabe methodological framework (Restoule & Chacaby, 2008).
- We integrated institutional ethnography, looking at the everyday experiences of Aboriginal people interfacing with university organizational practices (Smith, 1987, 2006; Wilson & Pence, 2006).

Aboriginal people and PSIs

- Rae report (2005) found Aboriginal people (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) were among several underrepresented groups in post-secondary education institutions.
- Our study looked at the barriers that Aboriginal people face in accessing PSE & how PSIs can better support Aboriginal students once they enrol.

An Anishinaabe Research Framework



Source: <http://www.ammsa.com/buffalospirit/June-2000/medicinewheel>.

Methods

- Combine Anishinaabe methodology with Institutional Ethnography
- Phase One: Literature review and online survey
- Phase Two: Follow-up interviews
- Phase Three: Interviews and textual analysis with university admin staff

Who are Aboriginal Students?

Our survey backs up the literature:

- Majority are mature female
 - All interviewees were mature students
 - Interviewees reported their mature status as a strength
- Many have family and community responsibilities
 - Child care affects participation and attendance
 - Many interviewees reported working while studying

Barriers to Success at PSIs

- inadequate financial resources
- poor academic preparation
- lack of self-confidence and motivation
- absence of role models who have PSE
- lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture on campus
- racism on campus
- legacy of mistrust re: residential schools

Family and Community Supports

- Mentors and role models
 - Family members who complete
 - Aboriginal teachers in high school and PSE
- Feeling of belonging on campus crucial
- Community ties strengthened by PSE
- Strong traditional spirituality linked to retention and completion

Spirituality & Student Retention

- Survey found spirituality linked to PSE retention and completion
- Participants highlighted the need to balance their education with spiritual supports:
 - Elders
 - traditional teachings
 - ceremonies

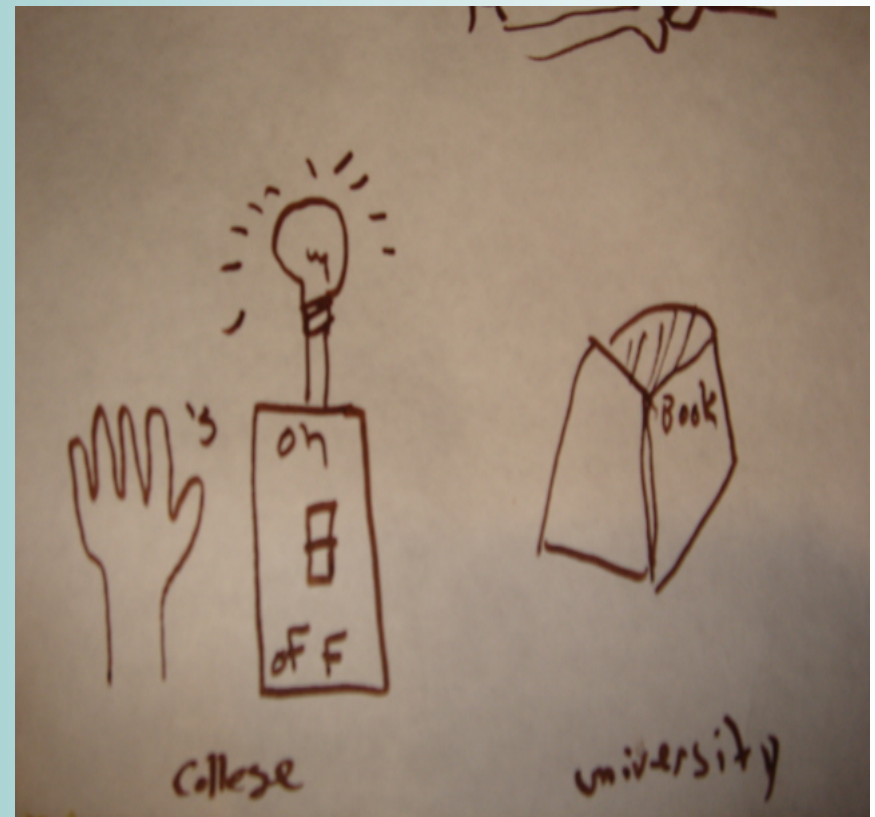
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Learning in Balance

Most participants interviewed emphasized the value of the interconnected and holistic nature of Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Aboriginal students tended not to separate their learning into compartmentalized areas like mind, emotion and spirit



"I didn't get what I needed spiritually from the academic system – I had to seek that out in other places."



Aboriginal students in Eurocentric academic settings tended to embrace Aboriginal spirituality

Aboriginal spirituality provides:

- cultural pride
- strength in affirming one's identity, and
- a solid base from which to express worldview, knowledge and conduct research in a bicultural world.

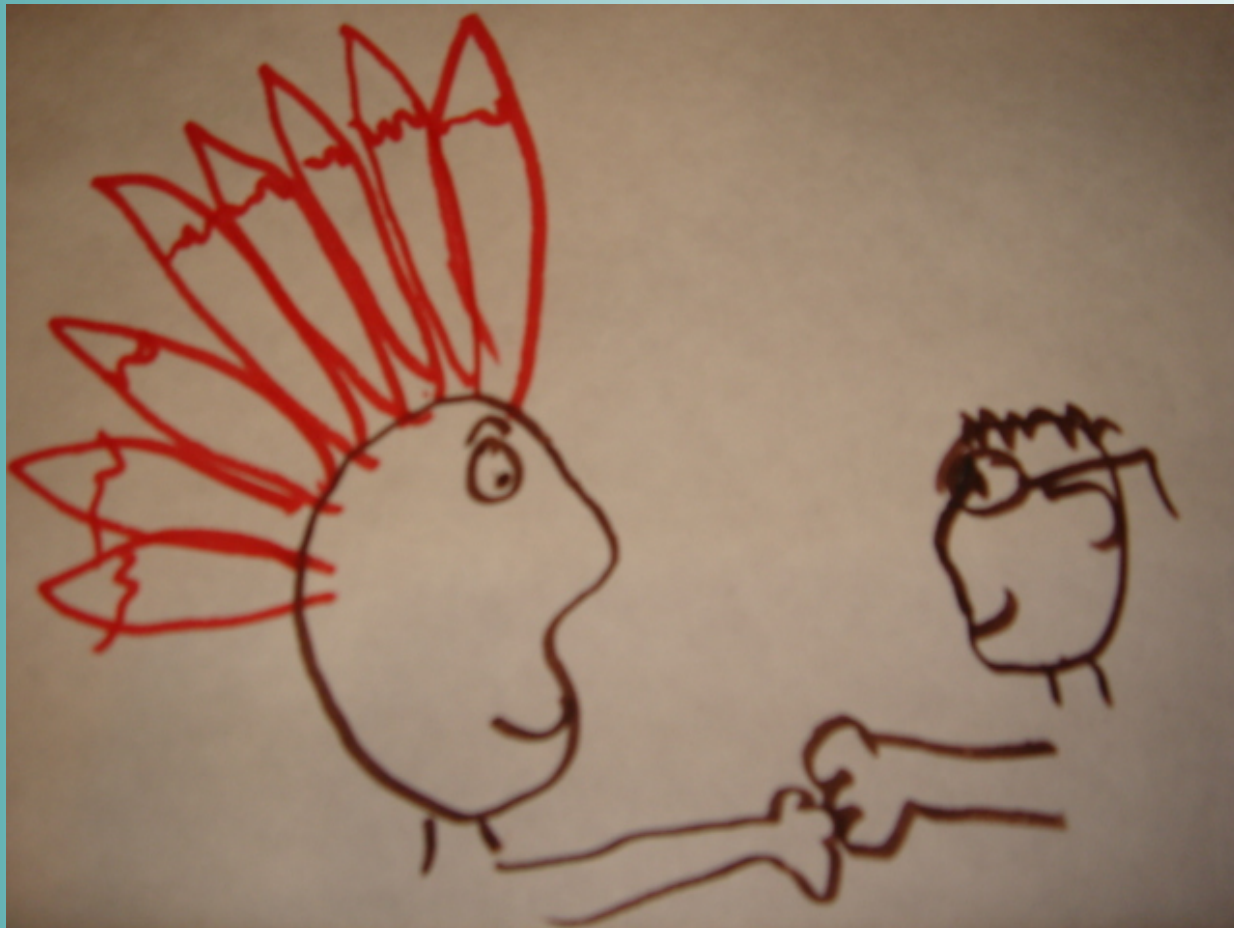
Making a place for Aboriginal students

- Students interviewed emphasized need to foster spirituality at all levels of institution:
 - Infuse Aboriginal perspectives: need for PSIs to hire more Aboriginal staff, faculty and Elders
 - Enhance Aboriginal student services: create a sense of place
 - Value traditional knowledge: acknowledgment and support
 - Build community: importance of community and events

References

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