

CULTURE BRINGS MEANING TO ADULT LEARNING; A MEDICINE WHEEL APPROACH TO PROGRAM PLANNING

Joan Sanderson

ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine program planning by integrating teachings from traditional First Nations Elders about the Medicine Wheel, narrative inquiry with adult educators, and other knowledge accumulated over thirty years of working with and for First Nations communities and organizations. The Medicine Wheel symbol is used to emphasize the cyclical nature of program planning and the relevance of meaningful cultural knowledge to the program planning process. The importance of community identity, relationships, visioning, creation, and celebration emerge from the research and the traditional teachings as important elements in a First Nations program planning process.

Key words: First Nations, program planning, Medicine Wheel Model

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS: ADULT EDUCATION

This article shares important teachings of the Medicine Wheel originally researched for a previously unpublished masters project. It then moves on to examine a cultural approach to program planning for First Nations adult learning by using the Medicine Wheel symbol and teachings. The focus is on the developmental process of planning programs and not on the particular educational topic. The author's and the research participants' experience is primarily with programs that support personal growth and healing. The model developed here, however, can be used no matter what particular

information is included in the program, since it relates to the planning process and implementation of program development. Some historical information regarding First Nations adult education will put this research endeavour in context.

Prior to contact and the invasive educational policies of the Canadian government, traditional education of the adult community members involved ongoing development of their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects (Hart, 2002). Adult learning developed parenting and teaching responsibilities; honed specific individual gifts such as medicine women and men; developed the hunting, fishing, and gathering occupations; continued the political process which involved the entire community and resulted in ever-growing abilities at negotiations, oration, mediation, and cooperation; and last (but perhaps most important) deepened continuous spiritual learning through personal and communal ceremonies. Lifelong learning was part of the way of life (Knight, 2008).

However, for the past 150 years, since contact with European immigrants became entrenched, First Nations peoples have had a minimal role in determining their education agenda (Adam, 1995). The first in a series of residential “schools” that forced attendance on the first peoples were the Industrial Schools (Milloy, 1999). Assimilation was the underlying agenda, and, from the earliest years of contact, government policies determined the occupations that the first people would assume — primarily farming for the men and homemaking for the women. Occasionally young men were chosen to enter the ministry as part of a government and church agenda to Christianize the “natives.” Adult training revolved around these activities. The Indian Act affected all of the activities that had supported the First Nations’ traditional educational system (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 1980). It eliminated free movement from community to community; infringed on survival occupations such as hunting and gathering; made spiritual and political gatherings illegal; and assigned sole responsibility for education to the churches, forcing parents to give up their children for most of the year.

The movement toward self-determination and self-government on the part of First Nations has challenged that oppressive reality (Trocme et al., 2004). The last several decades have seen the development of First Nation adult education organizations across Canada on reserves and in urban centres. Many programs reflect the mainstream adult education agenda, i.e., adult basic education upgrading programs. More and more, however, First

Nation politicians, educators, learners, and communities are unwilling to use only a “cultural borrowing” approach to program development by mirroring Euro-Canadian philosophies, theories, and processes. If these approaches had successfully provided the positive development that leaders and elders want for their people and communities perhaps the resurgence of traditional First Nation ways of knowing and doing would not have become such a powerful movement. In fact, however, the “ways” of dominant society have neither provided First Nations with the means to empower their communities and nations, nor created the opportunity to participate in Canadian life fully and equally (Adams, 1995). It is in this context that this article offers one small contribution to support the agenda of First Nations’ control of First Nations’ education.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND GOOD HEALTH: THE INTERSECT

Good health is truly a holistic endeavour; it includes our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects (Knight, 2008). It is in everyone’s best interest — health administrators, practitioners, educators, and community members — to have appropriate health programming available so that individuals can truly begin to take an active role in their own wellness. This is not a new idea, but it is also not a simple idea. When the health community decides that particular information should be part of each individual’s life choices, it is essential to make those individuals want that information and then truly integrate it. Very little changes, in terms of people’s personal health choices, if they just carry information around in their brain. Until that information becomes knowledge that is known and understood by their body and their spirit as well as their brain, it is little more than unused ideas (Knight, 2008). How do we engage people so that the ideas presented in health programming can be transformed to usable life choices? One important way is to make all phases of the program culturally relevant, and this article focuses on that approach.

TWO RESEARCH PROCESSES INTERCONNECT

I have combined two research projects to develop this model of program planning from a First Nations’ perspective. The first research project is reflected in the section “Teachings from Elders,” which includes the Medicine Wheel and the six directions. It is based on teachings from traditional Cree

Elders, with some supporting literature. The research method will be described below. For this master's project I was neither guided nor directed by my supervisor or committee members to submit an ethics review, nor was I aware of this concern. On a positive note — times have improved.

The second research project, "Program Planning in a First Nations Context" (Sanderson, 1995), was developed from information shared by eight education experts who had been in the program planning "business" for approximately ten years each at the time of the project. It was a PhD assignment and, again, the research method will be described below.

GATHERING THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge shared in the section "Teachings from Elders" is a small part of a Masters of Adult Education project, *A Cree Way of Life* (Sanderson, 1992), that began in 1989. It was such an important time of personal awakening for me, and a quote from my introduction in *A Cree Way of Life* (1992), underscores the impact that research can have:

I ventured into a research project that focused on the sacred circle, traditional spirituality and philosophy of Plains and Parkland Cree people for several reasons. Initially, my own particular thirst for a comforting spiritual resting place was a conscious part of my needs.... As well, I entered into the research because I had heard many Elders say that their traditional way of life would be the path that would guide ... people out of oppression and back into productive and balanced lives. My dream was to connect with some of these Elders about the old ways so they would have another forum to share wisdom, and as an educator, I could take their stories of the sacred circle to the people....

It was from this basis that the research project with a number of Elders began.... Off and on for two years we have engaged in dialogue, teachings, ceremonies, prayer, interviews, writing, thinking, mulling and on and on. Now I find myself close to the end of the process, pulling aspects of it together in this project. Just writing that this process is coming to closure grips my chest and throat. I cannot speak or write for anyone else who has been involved. For myself, I have 'connected' — to new people who have taught me things of such depth that this project will never be able to reflect their importance; to old friends and acquaintances in new ways that have thrilled me; to ideas and concepts that give breadth and depth to that which I am conscious of knowing; to the sacred circle of life giving me feelings of joy, belonging, wholeness, balance and ultimately peace. And so I grieve that it ends, and I celebrate that it happened. I take it with me within me. I am changed. (1992, pp. 7-8)

The research process of this life-changing experience, along with ethical considerations, is described here. I began to gather audio- and videotaped

conversations with Elders in 1989 out of personal interest and as a preliminary step in deciding the specific focus of my Masters project. Then, in early 1990, a day-long meeting with eight traditional people and Elders was arranged to ask for their guidance and knowledge in research about traditional teachings of Plains and Parkland first peoples, specifically about the sacred circle also referred to as the medicine wheel. The meeting began with offerings of cloth and tobacco, and a request for the guidance and support we needed from them. This was followed by a pipe ceremony. The project was officially underway. My colleague guided this early process as he is a traditional man and I was not yet aware of the cultural ethical protocols that should be followed. It was such an honour to learn in this way, and in reflection it was a rare learning opportunity considering this took place over two decades ago, prior to more developed guidelines and ethics for research involving First Nations people.

The morning progressed with each Elder taking a turn to speak to the two relatively young researchers. They gave their blessings to proceed with our interests, but also gave us guidance regarding how to determine what could be written as the research progressed. They began to share sacred circle teachings on a beginner's level that afternoon, and suggested that our learning would deepen if we were doing this work for the right reasons. In that meeting I was the scribe. Our time ended that day with prayer. Information shared in the meeting is referenced as Elders' Meeting (1990). Over the next two years a few of these folks remained connected and became guides, editors, liaisons, a personal ethics committee, and so much more. They also shared the names of other Elders and traditional people to connect with, and over time they were approached with tobacco, cloth, or gifts, depending on local protocol and whether they were ceremony keepers. In all, twenty Elders shared stories, memories, and/or teachings that fleshed out the research. In some cases, with the participants' permission, audio recordings captured the information, and in most cases, again with permission, notes were taken. I would not describe these "get-togethers" as qualitative interviews; rather, they were quality visits with tea and humour and sacred moments with the Elders, who guided us regarding what could and should be shared.

I was clear that the information shared by these Elders was more important to my work than other sources, and so two things were decided. First, permission was requested to use each contributor's name. To be honest, they were surprised by the request, as they assumed that would be the

case. Traditionally, when stories and teachings are shared the “teller” is always acknowledged, as in “I am going to tell you a story that was given to me by ...” or “The teaching that I am giving you today was given to me by...” The contributors were expert sources, rather than subjects of the research, so the second decision was to find a way to reference them in the same way that books and journal articles are acknowledged. There may be other ways to deal with this concern now, but in the early nineties the only way seemed to gather the data and to keep it in raw form. In this way each Elder, ceremony keeper, and traditionalist could be cited under an APA referencing rule. The rule, listed under the heading “Unpublished raw data from study, untitled work” (*Publication Manual*, 2003, p. 264) meant that each contribution could be cited in the form that the following example indicates, “Felix, J.M. (1990). [The Plains and Parkland Cree way of life]. Unpublished raw data. Sturgeon Lake Reserve, SK.

Raw data is in the form collected from each participant or about each element, compiled with data from all participants into a data set. This meant that the analysis stage of the research was nonexistent, other than in my head, as decisions were made while integrating the words of the expert contributors. It made the writing process tedious as knowledge was drawn from this raw data source to prepare the original masters work, but it was well worth it to acknowledge each contributor in the reference pages.

GATHERING THE PROGRAM PLANNING KNOWLEDGE

The data on program planning comes from eight conversational interviews conducted with adult educators who worked with First Nations adult learning programs as planners and sometimes also as teachers. The project was undertaken as an assignment in a PhD course on Adult Education Program Planning, and I was told it was considered an evaluation of programs from professionals’ perspectives, and so exempted from the ethics process. Participants were aware of this and agreed to participate, but were also informed they could choose not to respond to any of the questions and they could withdraw at any time. Although the participants were experts they were also considered subjects in this project, and anonymity was guaranteed. All participants who contributed agreed that not every process of program planning with First Nation communities would reflect what they shared for this paper. However, the focus of the research was to share those experiences which, in their opinion, seemed the most positive and useful, and which gave them a deeper understanding of First Nations’ worldview

and ways of knowing. The data analysis led to the original paper, “Program Planning in a First Nations Context” (Sanderson, 1995).

TEACHINGS FROM ELDERS

THE SACRED CIRCLE

In a meeting with invited Elders that initiated my research project, they explained that many First Nations express their spirituality and philosophy through the Sacred Circle (Elders’ Meeting, 1990). They also explained that the Sacred Circle and the Medicine Wheel are interchangeable concepts — different terminology, but both are the sacred containers for the ancient (and current) belief system of their ancestors and themselves. The Elders stated that many First Nations have attached particular sacred colours and teachings to aspects (directions) of their Medicine Wheel, and that these will differ from nation to nation and even sometimes from family to family. We are to understand, however, that all these interpretations are to be respected and honoured. When we have an opportunity to learn about the Medicine Wheel from an Elder then we must acknowledge that teacher whenever we share those teachings with others.

The totality of the universe and all its intersecting cycles is macrocosmically represented in the circle (Ameta, 1987). In the Indian way the circle is danced, drawn, smoked, sat, prayed, and spoken with great wisdom and perception. These reenactments of the symbol (and others) invoke the power of the circle, and the possibility of “tapping into” its sacred significance (Ameta, 1987). The circle symbolizes oneness — the unity and wholeness of all things (Felix, 1990; Turner, 1990). Things may be separate and individual and complete, while being an integral part of the whole. In the Plains Cree culture, the circle symbolizes the Creator, the Great Mystery, the Great Spirit that is above and within all the natural forms and forces of the universe (Fiddler and Sanderson, 1990).

This powerful circle represents the never-ending cycles of Mother Earth (Tobacco, 1989). Cycles are part of the power of the circle. Seasons move cyclically around and around — spring to summer, summer to fall, fall to winter, winter to spring. Each season has lessons to share with those who observe and listen to the sounds of nature. It recognizes that people, like seasons, pass through many cycles as the circle of life moves around them. Each phase of human life from the child, to youth, to the adult, to the Elder has responsibilities that are learned through traditions that in turn

are framed in the spiritual circle. These cycles may relate to natural aging cycles, cycles of relationship roles, or cycles of deeper awareness and learning leading to wisdom. So it is for humans moving through their cycles — life is a circle from birth to death to rebirth. The Elders encouraged a respect of these cycles so that we, in turn, recognize our connection to them and to the cyclical nature of relationships, learning, and human development (Fiddler, 1990).

Smith Atimoyoo (1991) noted that within the Plains and Parkland Cree culture the theme of “fours” is repeated in many ways. The Medicine Wheel exemplifies this. The four cardinal directions are symbolically representative of the four races of the earth. There are also the four aspects of humanness — emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual (Fiddler, 1990). Humans have four cycles of life from childhood to youth to adult to old age (McLeod, 1990). Four important roles evolve over time; being a child, being a mate, being a parent, and being a grandparent. Time patterns are counted in fours — day, night, moon (month), year — as well as the four seasons marking the passage of each year. These natural patterns of fours are repeated in many spiritual activities of the Plains and Parkland Cree, reinforcing the connection to nature (Fiddler, 1990). The pipe stem is circled in the four directions before being passed around the circle. The sweatlodge ceremony has four rounds. Songs often have four repetitions or rounds.

After explaining the symbolic importance of the circle and its cycles the Elders focused specifically on the Plains and Parkland Cree Medicine Wheel. The cross within the circle, when precisely plotted, creates a central axis and the six cardinal directions. These are the Creator above; Mother Earth below; and the Spirit world of the four cardinal directions, East, South, West, and North. When ritually symbolized “a three-dimensional sphere is created which mysteriously contains, reflects, and possesses within itself the perimeters and powers of the entire universe, indeed, of reality itself” (Ameta, 1987, p. 48). Each of the six powers of the universe has symbolic, life giving colours (Felix, 1990). Likewise, each of the four cardinal directions has Great Grand Spirits, with qualities, values, and teachings which the individual can choose to seek (Fiddler, 1990).

One of the great lessons of the Sacred Circle is that all human beings can acquire gifts in all of the symbolic directions (Tobacco, 1989). These gifts are not just for the person who receives them, but for all those whose lives they touch. The lessons of the Plains and Parkland Cree Medicine Wheel symbols are many. Although there are common and mutually accepted ideas of what

the symbols represent, there is also an emphasis on each individual finding their own deep meaning and interpretation in the symbols of the six powers of the universe (Fiddler, 1990). Many of the gifts do not come automatically or even easily. Each individual can make a commitment to internalize and practice the teachings of the Sacred Circle, but will find that this process takes tremendous effort on a regular, consistent basis (Felix, 1989). When applying the teachings of the Sacred Circle Medicine Wheel to their lives “many of the Indian Elders consider themselves as children of the journey in the path of ‘Nihyaw Pimatisowin’ or Indian way of life” (Fiddler, 1990).

THE SYMBOL OF THE MEDICINE WHEEL

In this Cree Medicine Wheel symbol, there is an outer circle and an inner circle. The space within the larger circle is divided into four quadrants as in Figure 1. This figure is a dimensional and directional perspective of the six major powers of the universe. These are the Creator above; the Spirit world of the four directions, East, South, West, and North; and Mother Earth below. Each of these aspects of the Medicine Wheel symbol has colours and qualities that are essential expressions of its power.

Above: Creator

“The Creator is Great Mystery — the primal force from which originated all that exists” (Cuthand, 1990, p. 2). The symbolic colour of the Creator is white (Tobacco, 1990). The Creator is always prayed to first. In pipe ceremonies “the Creator is acknowledged first as the ultimate protector and ruler of the universe” (Felix, 1990). The pipe ceremony is traditionally held with the sunrise and as the beginning of many ceremonies or important meetings (Sand, 1989). The pipe stem is raised in the direction of the sky and the Creator reinforcing the interrelatedness and interdependence of all life to the Creator, and the sacredness of all relationships.

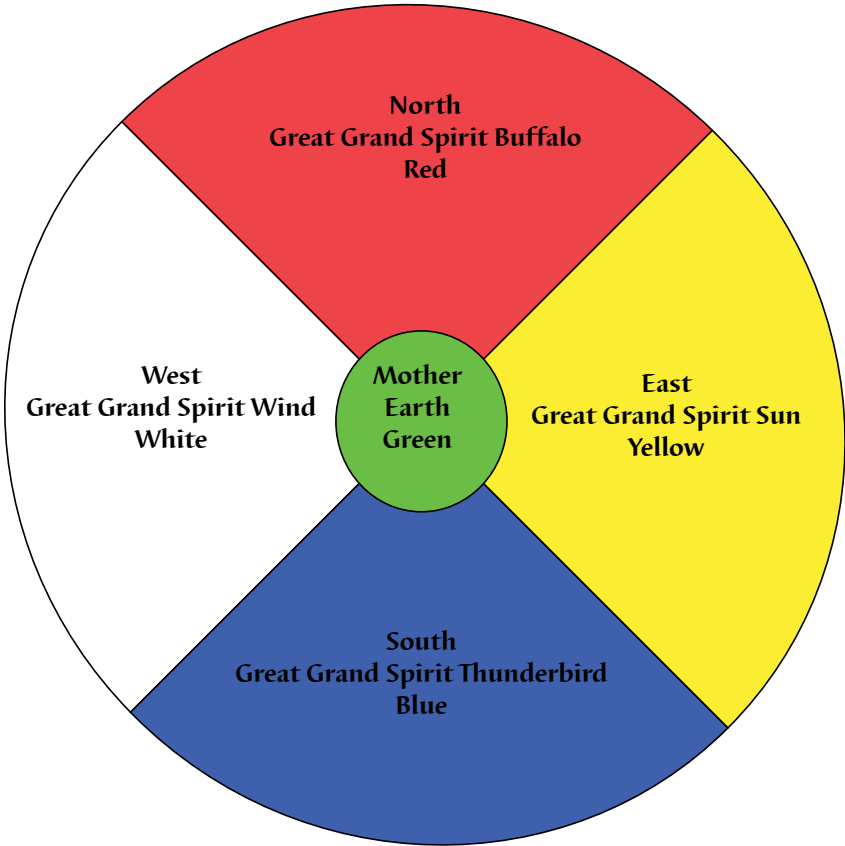
For the Cree of the Plains and Parkland region of Saskatchewan, spirituality is paramount (Sand, 1989). Their relationship with the Creator is essential for personal meaning. It is the foundation upon which fulfilling relationships are based, both with other people and with the nonhuman environment.

Below: Mother Earth

The importance of Mother Earth to the Plains and Parkland Cree Nations is symbolically represented in their Medicine Wheel (Cuthand, 1990). The outer circle, representing oneness with the Creator, surrounds an inner circle, which symbolizes Mother Earth, who is Mother to all that lives.

Figure 1. Plains and Parkland Cree Medicine Wheel

Creator Above



Her body is our home. Her children become our food, and we are relatives to them. Should Mother Earth become sick, we become sick: should she die, we die. She is very female, very much a mother. (Cuthand, 1990, p. 5)

She is represented by green, the color of the first spring grass; this life force which nurtures, feeds, and medicates all life forms (Tobacco, 1990). Sustenance of two-legged children, four-legged creatures, winged birds, the swimmers and all plants comes from the body of Mother Earth. We are relatives through our common Mother.

Mother Earth is sacred in her wholeness, and all her varied aspects are sacred as well. Her mountains, Her lakes, Her plains, Her trees, plants, grasses are all sacred, as the Creator is within all things.

We saw the Great Spirit's work in almost everything: sun, moon, trees, wind, mountains. Sometimes we approach Him through these things... Indians living close to nature and nature's rulers are not living in darkness. (Neihardt, 1972, p. 16)

Individual expression of traditional spirituality is a daily devotion occurring in varied ways (Atimoyoo, 1977). Some practices are ceremonial and ritual, but others are spontaneous and ongoing. Mother Earth is often the precipitator of highly spiritual moments that permeate an individual's being, reinforcing and strengthening the beliefs and values that are lived by:

... in the course of the daily hunt [if] the red hunter comes upon a scene that is strikingly beautiful or sublime — a black thundercloud with the rainbow's glowing arch above the mountain, a white waterfall in the heart of a green gorge, a vast prairie tinged with the blood-red of sunset — he pauses for an instant in the attitude of worship. (Eastman, 1911, p. 111)

The great love and respect that traditional Indian people feel for Mother Earth is beyond the comprehension of many people outside those Aboriginal cultures (Ameta, 1987). Their identity is intrinsically bound up with earth: earth is a reflection of their earthly self and their spiritual self. They are not separate from Mother Earth, but are of Mother Earth. The Sioux warrior, Tatanka Yotanka (Sitting Bull), used to say that healthy feet can hear the very heart of Holy Earth (McLuhan, 1988).

Prayers for qualities such as the ability to be kind, to be supportive and loving, to be warm and nurturing, to encourage growth, and to enhance worth will be advocated on our behalf by Mother Earth. She is our mirror for these qualities, and will help us to acquire them if we seek Her support. Mother Earth shares many lessons with those who observe and listen closely (Atimoyoo, 1977). Each member of Mother Earth's family can tell its stories and lessons if one is spiritually attuned to "the voices of nature." It is the voice of the Creator speaking through his creations, and providing another way in which humans can access the wisdom of the spirit world.

Smith Atimoyoo (1977) tells how his kokum would rise with the sun and go out doors to greet the sacred moments of sunrise. After her private prayer ritual she would walk away from the house observing the natural setting around her watching carefully for her messages from the Creator through nature. Her eye might be drawn to a flower or a stone, or her ear might guide her to a bird or the wind. She would focus on the sight or sound that captured her attention, and would attend to it with all parts of her being. She would learn a new lesson or reinforce an old one. A flower

might tell her to look for the beauty in all those around her; a stone might help her to be grounded in reality; an eagle might remind her to see things from “a distance” to have a clearer picture.

Natural law dictates that it is the responsibility of Mother Earth’s inhabitants to live in harmony and ecological balance (Felix, 1989; Tobacco, 1989). Humans are not caretakers of this process, but a part of it. The well being of Indian people is dependent on the balancing of this sacred relationship between humanity and all other children of Mother Earth.

East: The Sun

The East is the place of the rising sun. This is the home of the Great Grand Spirit Sun and the sacred colour is yellow (Fiddler and Sanderson, 1990). It is the place of rebirth. “The sun rises in the East and represents the first light shining through perpetual night in the sacred moment of the Creator’s emergence” (Cutland, 1990, p. 2). The sacredness of the sunrise is so powerful it is said that living things go still, and quietness falls over the Earth at the moment of the first light of the sun. Even the wind is said to pause during the sacred moment.

The Grand Spirit Sun emanates life, embracing Mother Earth in warmth and light enabling growth of all living things (Fiddler, 1990). Prayer is said so that the Grandfather Sun will pity humankind and will ask the Creator to help in the development of such personal values as “warmth, generosity, thankfulness, and aid to those who are suffering, confused and metaphorically ‘lost in the dark’” (Felix, 1990). Offerings and prayers made to the East and to the Sun are often for someone who is sick or to help someone begin a new life.

If the Sun ceases to shine all living things on Earth will perish of the cold, and conversely if the sun burns too hot all life will die. The balance of the Sun’s power is what makes life possible, and reinforces the need for balance in other aspects of our life. “The early dawn of each day represents one of the sacred moments of transition, the rebirth of a new day to illuminate and remind people of the proper and sacred road of the Indians ways of life” (Tobacco, 1990).

South: The Thunderbird

The Great Grand Spirit Thunderbird resides in the South; is symbolized by the colour blue; and is associated with water, rain, thunder, and lightning (Fiddler and Sanderson, 1990). The Plains and Parkland Cree believe there

is one Great Grand Chief Thunderbird and many other lesser thunderbirds. Thunderbirds' voices are the thunder. Their piercing look is the lightning flashing from their eyes. The flashing lightning and low and rolling thunder is from the thunderbird of the old kind who sends his thunder sound rolling from cloud to cloud across the sky (Cuthand, 1990). The young thunderbirds flash lightning from their eyes, too, but their thunder is loud and crashing. Sometimes havoc and disaster are wrought by the younger, less mature Thunderbirds as they play. Early in creation lightning came from the Thunderbirds striking Mother Earth, impregnating her, and so lightning striking the Earth is sacred.

The clear blue colour of the sky on a sunny day is the symbolic colour of the Great Grand Chief Thunderbird. It symbolizes all water upon the Earth, the life-giving element necessary for survival. Thunderbirds, beings synonymous with water, represent a life giving force of great power. Rain falling on Mother Earth cleanses her body, and provides that life-giving force from which all life thrives, grows, and replenishes. Without water, all that lives upon the Mother Earth would die. Conversely, the Creation myths speak of a time when the Earth was destroyed by flood waters and reborn. The dual nature of positive and negative power is also within water. The food offering to the South is the Saskatoon berry. The opening of the lodges face South toward the Thunder Chief. "They open to truth. Thunder is the truth bringer" (Cuthand, 1990, p. 4). Thunder is the keeper of sacred pipes and sweat lodges.

In Indian dances, the drumbeat and the sound of the feet of the dancers hitting the ground are associated with the thunder and lightning, which hits Mother Earth and the heartbeat of the Indian Nation. The dancers periodically raise their arms when dancing, greeting, and giving thanks to the Creator through the drum.

In the physical plane the eagle is the symbolic representative of the Thunderbirds (Tobacco, 1990). Here on Earth the eagle is a sacred bird, and is chief of the winged ones. The eagle is inundated with qualities of great importance. It has foresightedness and can see the wide scope due to clarity of vision. It is equated with great courage and bravery, and in this vein is the guardian of hunters (Dusenbary, 1962). It symbolizes freedom, truth, pride, and wisdom. These qualities are sought through offerings and prayers to Grandfather Thunderbird to ask the Creator to assist Indian people in their survival and development.

West: The Wind

“When we are born we draw our first breath and when we die we release our last breath. Breath is wind” (Cuthand, 1990, p. 4). All that lives needs air moving, even fish who draw air through their gills from water. Every living thing needs air moving in and out of them. Wind is movement, energy, and thought. Wind takes things from place to place as the catalyst of change. A spiritual, life-enhancing wind is “white, warm, moist, and turning in a circle clockwise in a sacred manner” (Cuthand, 1990, p. 4).

Great Grand Spirit Wind has awesome power and can have devastating effects on living things and on Mother Earth (Fiddler, 1990). Conversely air is one of the essential necessities of continued life, and can be soothing and embracing in its touch. This duality repeats itself time and again in nature. The blowing Winds from the four directions result in the changing seasons. Symbolically the changing “seasons” of humans are represented by the Wind.

The ever-flowing, ever-changing aspects of life’s cycles and experiences can be understood more clearly through a deeper understanding of the Wind which abides in the West. Wind brings transformation and change. After the change there is a transition to either placid calmness or potent stormy energy. These are natural cycles of life, and change is seen as the truly constant gift of Grand Spirit Wind (Cuthand, 1990).

West is the “looks within” place. It is the sacred place of transition and periods of change, which require human introspection, reflection, resolution, and commitment.

The process of human growth and development, like the wind is neither predictive nor complete. At best it is self-corrective — a decision is made and lived through, lessons are learned, and a small cache of experience and wisdom is stored for the future. (Fiddler, 1990)

Personal growth also includes exploring and examining one’s spirituality and the deeper meaning of life. As an example, suffering is an indicator of the need for introspection, and is a signpost of the need for change based on that self-awareness. The periods of important life transitions and crisis resolution may utilize rituals and prayers to Grandfather Wind. Personal changes and transitions are varied and are ongoing through one’s cycle from birth, adolescence, adulthood, to old age (Tobacco, 1990). Offerings and prayers are sent to Grandfather Wind on humans’ behalf to the Creator for qualities such as courage, wisdom, determination, strength, and endurance to enhance the positive human development being sought.

North: The Buffalo

Great Grand Spirit Buffalo resides in the north direction (Fiddler, 1990). This Spirit Chief is a white buffalo who is considered the chief animal spirit of the four-legged ones. The North is the place of wisdom. The color red is associated with the North and with the life-giving element of blood. It represents the blood of the animal that gives its life for the survival of the two-legged creatures, and the life-blood flowing through the veins of all living animals.

Every great nation has contributing factors to its greatness. For the Plains and Parkland Cree Nations the buffalo were the cornerstone of their greatness. Many of the essentials for survival came from the buffalo. Cree people were humbly grateful for its sacrifice to them. Historically, the people hunted buffalo for their food, used their hides for blankets, tipis, robes, and clothing, and made utilities from many parts of the animal. Through legends and stories the buffalo also assume an important and sacred position in the mind, heart, body, and spirit of Cree Indian people (Fiddler, 1990).

Buffalo are attributed with many positive characteristics. They are respected for their strength and their protective nature. The Great Grand Spirit Buffalo is invoked to ask the Creator to assist people in attaining these qualities, as well as kindness, vitality, and in particular sharing, as they gave their lives as gifts so the people could survive.

PROGRAM PLANNING IN A FIRST NATIONS CONTEXT

We now look at the second project, which reflects the information gathered from the eight people who had program planning experience in First Nations communities. As the data was analyzed, essential aspects of positive programs in a First Nations context and the planning that went into their creation were identified. The most common and permeating theme was the focus on *spirit*. Some aspect of spirit connection permeated all of the following five themes that surfaced in the analysis: *community involvement, relationships, vision, creation and celebration*.

Fast-forward more than a decade. I was reviewing some of the research spanning a twenty-year academic career that was winding down. What should be shared? It felt essential that aspects of the master's research be shared. The old people had been so generous in their support and sharing. As well, the program planning piece seemed truly useful for community development at many levels. The stories of the six themes called out to be told from the image of the medicine wheel, as described by the Elders above.

The cyclical and interconnected nature of these themes just popped off the page. This approach reflects aspects of Graveline's (1998) Aboriginal teaching model in *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. And so the idea of this current paper was conceived. A process of comparing and integrating the information from both projects unfolded to create a wholistic program planning model (Figure 2) that will support the people's cultural identity and well-being.

A NEW MODEL: A MEDICINE WHEEL APPROACH TO PROGRAM PLANNING

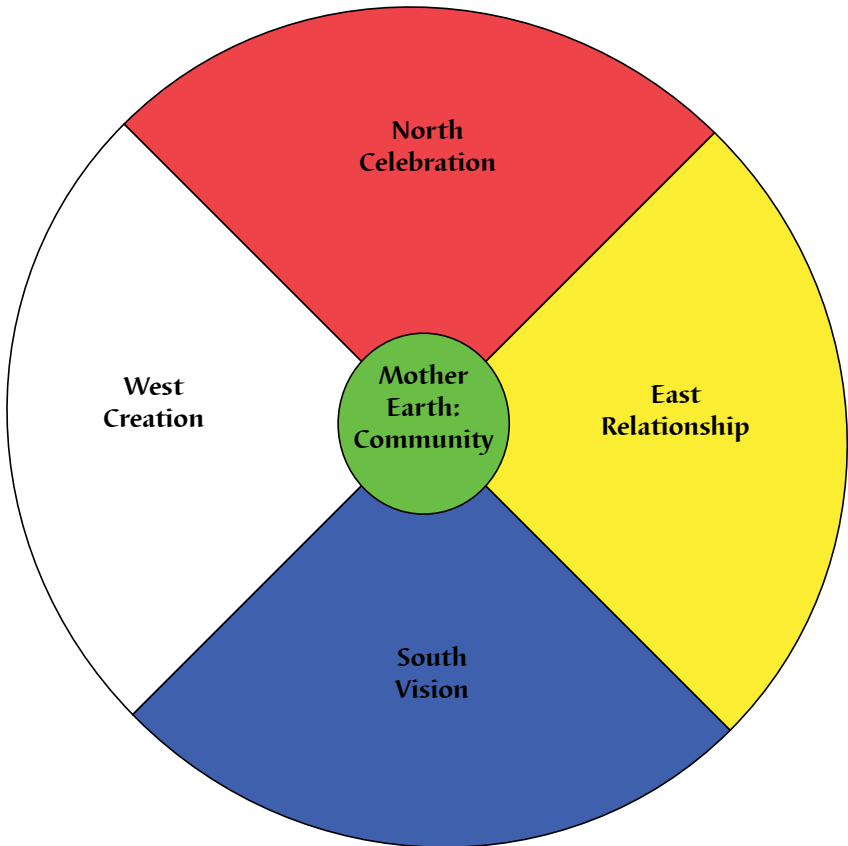
THE DIRECTION "ABOVE" — CREATOR: SPIRITUALITY

The stories shared by the research participants had a common theme that ran through the information no matter what aspect of the program planning process was being discussed. The common theme was spirituality; some expression of spirit occurred here and there in the process, sometimes formally planned and other times spontaneously simple as the following examples from Sanderson's (1995) research show:

- When the idea of creating a program for family violence offenders became a serious consideration in one First Nations community, cloth and tobacco were taken to a community Elder to pray for the project. A pipe ceremony and feast followed under the old one's guidance.
- When a rejection letter for funding a conference was received by a Native Women's organization the committee was called together to consider other options, and a smudge ceremony was the first action taken at the meeting. The women prayed for optimism and creativity. They were ultimately successful, and spirit is considered a part of keeping a positive outlook and having a positive outcome.

THE DIRECTION "BELOW" — MOTHER EARTH: COMMUNITY

As the data revealed its larger story, the central focus of any program planning process was *the community* that the program was intended for, not merely the particular people who would participate directly, but all those who had a vested interest and/or would be affected. The community is the people, and beyond that it is the land and the belief system of the generations. As Cajete (1994) states, the purpose of education from a First Nations approach is to connect people to their culture and to their distinct place on the land. In the program planning model presented here community

Figure 2. Medicine Wheel Model of Program Planning*Creator: Spirit*

holds the symbolic direction 'Below,' because it grounds the entire process as Mother Earth grounds humans' physical reality. One symbolic meaning of the circle is oneness and the importance placed on participation of the entire community is a traditional principle that the research bore out. All participants' stories reflected the importance of community involvement. As one individual stated, "... community grounds the [First Nations] individual historically and psychologically. It is an essential aspect of identity formation and an essential source of support." Communal commitment was an essential ingredient in program success, and several respondents placed an emphasis on ensuring that the old ones in the community had opportunities to contribute. It was also shared that the most positive pro-

gram planning had contributions from varied age groups and both females and males. Another explanation of the importance of participation in program development came to a respondent via an Elder's comments, "To develop as the Creator intends we must all be around the same campfire."

THE DIRECTION EAST: RELATIONSHIP

Relationships, found in the East in this program planning model, were a repeated focus. The nourishing and fostering of the connections between people, nature, and the Creator was one of the most important issues raised as part of the program development process. The relationships between the circle of people working to develop new programs or renew old ones was seen as vital to the success of specific programs. Relationships between this group and the community at large were vitally important, as well, for it was here that all the voices could be heard. The concepts of visiting and gatherings with an informal, social flavour were considered the most appropriate form of relating. Anyone who wanted to move from these larger circles (community members providing input) to the smaller circle of program planners was welcome to do so. The links between the program developers and other agencies in the community with a vested interest were also prioritized. The political relationships, which were most often the source of funding, were perceived as the most challenging, but reinforced the commitment the planners had to the spiritual relationships and the importance of community relationships. The common ingredient in relationship development was dialogue; a process of "going out and talking, and coming back and integrating" was the ongoing ebb and flow of the planners' process. Needs were addressed in this manner, but so was input into the program vision, content, and process. Evaluation was ongoing and participative throughout this "to and froing" of relationships.

THE DIRECTION SOUTH: VISION

In the South, growing out of relationship building and spirit nurturing, a vision of what the people saw in the future evolved. Whether it was a vision of a community day care with all its splendid community involvement or a carpenters' course teaching how to build circular buildings, the vision became the guiding light. Respondents expressed the powerful creativity they repeatedly observed when a community could "see" what they needed, and worked toward that prophesy. As more and more people participated in the process, the vision would expand in breadth and depth like a snowball being given "mitt fulls" of fresh flakes.

THE DIRECTION WEST: CREATION

The creation of the program stayed connected to the relationships and vision, deepening and clarifying both. Once the specifics began to be outlined many traditional teachings were integrated into programs. Some respondents mentioned only two or three of these teachings from the medicine wheel while others shared ten or more that they had seen woven into the development of various courses. The most commonly mentioned were the following:

- Humans have multiple aspects that all need fostering in their learning — these are emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual.
- Humans are always in relationships in the physical world and each of these needs recognition in their learning — self, family, community, nation.
- Humans go through cycles in their lives and each can be honoured in their learning — child, youth, adult, Elder — remember that we are all of these at any given time.
- Humans are both physical beings and spiritual beings; balance between the seen and the unseen needs attention in their learning.
- Human communities have varied functions, social, economic, political and spiritual, and each area should be appropriately integrated into the program to deepen understanding.

What is being emphasized here is that no matter what the content of a program may be there are certain principles that, if attended to within the content and process, will enhance learning, reinforce relationships, create positive change and development, enhance the balance and well-being of community members, and create true community over and over.

THE DIRECTION NORTH: CELEBRATION

The respondents saw celebration as part of the program planning process. It was not necessarily at the end point (although for sure there would be a gathering then). It was ongoing throughout the process of planning; moments/hours/days were set aside for the expression of thankfulness, gratitude, and honouring. There is truly a sense that “the honour of one is the honour of all.” Always the spiritual relationships were part of celebration, but solemnity was balanced with exuberance and fun. For those of us who have been part of developing programs in First Nation communities the empowerment through ceremony and socializing is as real and as palpable as

the dollars that are needed to support program development. Community, relationship, vision, creation are multiplied through celebration.

FULL CIRCLE

Even when a cyclical symbol is used, the Euro-Canadian mindset may translate it as linear — first you do this, then this, etc. What is intended is an understanding that the separate sections are not separate at all, but have been honoured as important and essential aspects of the whole experience. While in many situations program planners might start with a spiritual ceremony, connect to the community, and then move to the cardinal directions this is not absolute. Elders have said, “You can enter the circle anywhere.” Important, as well, is the recognition that when you are engaged in one aspect of program planning from this cyclical and holistic perspective, you are engaged in all the others, in some way, at the same time.

This glimpse at program planning experiences is not intended to provide a map of the specifics of program planning in First Nations; rather, it reflects that First Nations program planning directs us upward to the Creator, below to the people, and inward to the heart. The circle, the Medicine Wheel, takes us deeper into people’s hopes, possibilities, visions, and spirit, and reminds us of the importance of interconnectedness to fulfill the visions of our communities.

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I am an Associate Professor in the School of Indian Social Work, and I have worked at First Nations University of Canada since 1990. Prior to that, I was a counsellor and/or teacher in a variety of First Nations adult education settings. Program planning has been part of my professional work, particularly around mental health and personal development. My postgraduate degrees have been in adult education, which has a strong focus on program planning. Over the years my research has primarily focussed on group and community approaches that support personal healing.

I am connected to First Nations communities through my work, but also through my personal life. I married a Cree man in 1975, and we have two grown children and a growing number of grandchildren. Traditional spirituality is important to my own journey. Elder Danny Musqua traditionally adopted me in the early nineties, and he has been one of my primary teachers for traditional learning and development. I also want to acknowledge my friend and emerging Elder Sid Fiddler for the many teachings he shared that have helped me, some in this paper and many more in my heart.

Associate Professor Joan Sanderson

First Nations University of Canada

710 Duke Street

Saskatoon, SK. S7K 0P8

Phone: 306 931 1800 ex 5483

Fax: 306 931 1849

jsanderson@firstnationsuniversity.ca