DESIGNING ETHICAL SPACE: A STORY OF SUCCESS

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The conceptualization of the ethical space as an abstract location that lends itself to the negotiation of ethics in any research that cross cultural borders. The construction of this ethical space, in theory, leads to the creation of new knowledge based on respectful relations and realigning knowledge through the new frontier of emancipated thought. (p. 140)

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<td>35% of school population - 122</td>
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<td>84% increase on Honour Roll</td>
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<td>Graduation went up 82% from 4 to 9 students</td>
<td>In 2006 there are 9 First Nations Graduates In 2007 there are 12 First Nations Graduates</td>
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<td>Suspensions dropped by 78%</td>
<td>Suspensions decreased by 67%</td>
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This data represents one First Nation success. Due to the lack of a Voluntary Self-Identification Policy, the school was not able to tabulate data for all Aboriginal students.

Note: In 2007, 36% of the school’s students self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit.
Presentation Outline

Personal Background: My Approach
Two Row Wampum Belt and Ethical Space
Building Ethical Space: A Risk Taking Strategy
The Voices
Conclusions and Choices
Recommended Reading
Comments, Questions and Answers
Stories serve as a way to orient oneself and others toward the world and life (Brayboy, 2005, p. 439).
Background

Personal Qualifications
2003 – 2005

Aboriginal Mother, Grandmother
• Life Skills Coach
• Addiction Studies, McMaster University
• Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
• Bachelor of Education in Adult Education (B.Ed. - ADED) completed June 2005
• Not a band member of the area’s First Nations
• Not a provincially certified teacher

Traditional Mentor Worker Job Description

The purpose of the Traditional Mentor Program is to provide secondary students with an improved quality of life and a vision, to improve their communication skills, the ability to express themselves, learn cultural relevant activities, and team building skills. The program will introduce and promote cultural identity and traditional teachings while promoting healthy life styles and choices. (Job Posting September, 2003)

This position was federally funded through New Paths under INAC (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada). I left in June 2005 to participate in higher education. This program was visioned by a First Nation Education program staff member.
1. Determine the *vision* of education from all parties: the District School Board, school, the First Nation, and Aboriginal students

2. Recognize the *relationships* within the community and school

3. Analyze the history, demographics, geography, economics, and educational outcomes of the community and determine the extent of traditional *knowledge* and practice

4. Design a program for *action* in the school to address Aboriginal student internal motivations.

I designed and distributed questionnaires and surveys that would help myself and the students clarify what they were requesting and to give me some feedback on the progress we were making.
Process: Beginning Steps

- Introductions, Roles and Responsibilities – gain and demonstrate respect
- Listen – the school is a community
- Observe – Interactions, relationships
- Understand the policies of the school
- Establish a relationship with a leader (leading decision-maker with ability to influence and respected by the students)
- Problem Solve
- Eliminate the ‘elite’ group First Nations status and approach the problems as an Aboriginal group with common concerns for academic success within a school community
- Establish guidelines, methods – protocols and processes to instil purpose for academic success
- Seek Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community involvement i.e. donations, keep them informed
- Keep an open door
Two Row Wampum Belt

Ethical Space

Symbol Of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal boats

Two Vehicles: Two Worldviews

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“There are two sorts of space because there are two sorts of intentions. The intentions structure the space in two different ways. When the two sets of intentions…confront each other…then ethical space is set up instantaneously.” (Roger Poole (1972) cited in Ermine, 2000, p. 5)

Process to follow:
1. Creation of new knowledge,
2. Alignment of this new knowledge, and
Leads to the creation of new knowledge based on respectful relations
Examines the process of how to realign knowledge through new frontiers (the unknown)
Development of concrete arguments and concepts that articulate the need for Western society and institutions to commit to forms of healing from the ills of colonial thought

Ethical Space suggests...

- Models of *healing*...that emancipate the human spirit from the confines of caged existence
- Freedom requires the guidance of alternate models of knowledge and emancipation
- (Ermine, 2005, p. 140-141).
Belief in Minority Student Success (Black, 2006)

70 percent of minority students have high hopes for their future, but only 40 percent of their teachers believe these students will succeed.

56 percent of high school principals believe the teachers in their schools have high expectations for students, but only 25 percent of students agree.

The gap is greater in high-minority schools. 66 percent of high school principals say their schools have high academic standards, but only 38 percent of their students agree.

46 percent of elementary teachers say instructors in their schools “believe that all students can learn.” However, only 28 percent of high school teachers make the same statement.
Questions that Guided My Intent to Understand ‘Ethical Space’ in Education

- In what ways can all parties connect when there are two cultural ways of seeing education?
- In what ways can two standards for education determine a process for an agreeable transformation of curriculum?
- In what ways must the context be designed to encourage an exchange of information?
Educators and Aboriginal peoples express culturally different perspectives at the cultural divide and this affects Aboriginal student academic success.

Dominant discourses in public education can be disrupted in decolonization efforts through understanding ethical space. Through story we can describe our intents for an education.

Figure 2. Symbiotic application of the Two Row Wampum Belt (Longboat, 2008)
Aboriginal Intentions

Physical and Metaphysical Ethical Space in an Informal/Unformal School Classroom
Description – Four Round Tables to Encourage higher Order Thinking Through Vision, Relationships, Knowledge and Action

- A work table near the computers and printer where students could lay out their work projects and access materials if they needed such as scissors, glue, coloured paper, Bristol board, magazines, etc.

- Another table was designed for students to read current news items and perhaps discuss, and challenge while raising questions relevant to their studies or build creative strategy skills through a game of chess, checkers, scrabble, etc.

- The students gathered around another table to collaborate with one another in their studies and to set a challenging pace for completion of assignments.

- Another table was set with arts and crafts material, it was a place for problem solving conversation, story telling, discovering creative solutions, and creating gifts.
Physical Ethical Space

- Recognized and supported as a place for specific inter-cultural activity and demonstration of Aboriginal ways of being and learning

- A place for Aboriginal community members to learn about Self and others in a safe environment

- A place to examine inter-cultural epistemologies
An abstract place for interchange of knowledge and discussion

A place where words are examined as the means to bridge cultural language differences in the design of mutually satisfying agreements
Ethical Space Is

where voices are encouraged to speak with conviction in the belief that the results are empowering steps toward negotiations

a safe place to position and address contentious issues, and admit to the unknown. It is a safe environment in which cultural confrontation is encouraged and cultural divides are subsequently examined.
Aboriginal Academic Success

A place or a deeper level where epistemological exchanges of differing subjectivities are shared in negotiation processes (Ermine, 2000)

an improved quality of life and a vision, to improve their communication skills, the ability to express themselves, learn cultural relevant activities, and team building skills. The program will introduce and promote cultural identity and traditional teachings while promoting healthy life styles and choices

Taken from Traditional Mentor Worker Job Description
Focus Groups/Talking Circles

- 3 hours for each group
- 26 volunteer stakeholder participants
- 5 cultural sub-groups
  1. Aboriginal students - 6
  2. Aboriginal parents - 4
  3. Aboriginal leaders - 6
  4. Non-Aboriginal Teachers - 6
  5. Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Administration, Decision makers, Resource peoples (ADR) – 5

*Aboriginal elders and Elders voices were not included

Each Group received Invitation to participate in an Ojibwa Ceremony with explanations
- Smudge
- Prayer
- Gift Giving
- Meal
- Talking Circle

- Audio Recording
- Group Transcripts from recordings
- Member script approvals
- Analytical Tool: Medicine Wheel
- First Draft and Second Draft offered to all group members for approval
- Community Presentations

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‘Ethical space’ in Education – Addressing the Issues

Past Experiences:
“But I think that even if we had a more inclusive curriculum, that other, that other thing would still exist” (Teacher)

“Bisahnya!” That meant be quiet, ‘listen’. So time went on and when those older people seen that you were listening, then you were allowed to do things. You were given that instruction to start doing things, and given that responsibility to do things. So...that’s what we learned as Aboriginal people...we had teachers back then...parents...grandparents...aunties...we had Elders that taught us... How do we teach Bisahnya?...To listen? How do we teach our young people to listen and to be able to speak at the right time instead of all the time just blurt out things without thinking? (Aboriginal Leader)

Student: I don’t know. When I am with my Native friends we just like...talk about – I don’t know- anything. With my other friends, it’s just like weird. You can’t talk to them about stuff like that because it’s like you got “Oh my God! That is so brown!” I mean, sure. (T1, p. 28)

Vandek (Student): Like you’re kinda crazy or something.

Asking Questions Openly
Why do we have to adapt? Is it because we are in the minority? ( Aboriginal student)

And I think: Are they [Aboriginal students sic] getting the education they require to be a whole person – to be really, really, really, who they are with that component or are they kind of like this bag that Catherine gave us? They don’t have all the components. They just have what an old structure says is important. ( MétisParent/Leader)

White people have the power to erase any native or anyone else for that matter. Erase our history. So couldn’t they erase our future? Either we do it and have no future? ( Aboriginal student)

Realigning Knowledge
“The Native student will do this part but he’s not going to do this other part. Well, my back goes up right away with that. Yeah. Because if it’s a sense of defiance? That’s one thing. But if it’s not defiance, maybe it’s this culture. We don’t recognize the difference. (Teacher)

We have to guard against tokenism and the ‘Pan Indianism’ and all these superficial things that say “Okay, Good. Done.” We’ve covered that in 5 whole minutes. There has to be culture there...someone who is incredibly wise regarding culture and knowledgeable and not just anyone because they could do much more damage. You should just leave it alone if the right teacher is not available. (Teacher)

In applied classes, teachers often waste sacred class time dealing with behavioural issues...not expecting homework to be done, or accepting an artificially low-standard of work from these students. (Teacher)
Preparing to seek new knowledge
Here I sit, born and raised in the middle of Ojibwa country…never heard that expression before, never saw a smudge before let alone participated in one. And 2 or 3 years ago, the first time I even realized I was invited, I was allowed to go to a Pow Wow. So I don’t think I understand what the Aboriginal students needs might be because I don’t understand what the culture is.

New language
I mean it’s about language you know. It’s about this school, you know. I mean language even…I just noticed today, too. The word OUR, I find is so colonial speaking about OUR Native students. OUR Aboriginal…. I hate that term. It’s very colonial as opposed to THE Aboriginal students of our – of this school-you know. Just small little thing (School staff member)

Describing Physical Spaces
Just because you move off the reserve doesn’t mean you will lose your teaching or practice all your traditions. But if it is going to be discouraged in the place where you live most of your day! I think we have a problem. (School staff member)

Miss, the one thing feels like it’s yours. Like when you come in here. You feel like you’re, like not in your classes. Like it’s awful sometimes, like it just gets on your nerves. It’s [pause] you don’t feel the same. Like you come to one of your other classes. Like in here it’s just quiet. (Aboriginal Student)

Accepting and including cultural divides:
“Aboriginal students have issues where they do not require typical, mainstream, formal solutions, but require a place to drop in and work at solutions in a different way and in relation to their culture. It might be by burning sage, sitting quietly, or observing other activities. The student feels support and decides: “Okay. I’m going to stay in school. I’m going to do all right”. (Aboriginal parent)

The fact that one half of our population needs to feel as successful as the other two thirds, and I’m recognizing that they don’t feel that they have that equity? And space? Then, they need to design things – redesign things so that everyone feels that this is a space for them. (Non-Aboriginal leader),

There is more understanding of us throughout the school (student)

So, this room … is not to be just for Aboriginals but for all students to come to feel secure if they need a place to talk, and whatever, and other programs could – this could be used as another program for, any one, to be able to come and just feel comfortable.
Concepts of Ethical Space Must Have Support From the Leadership

[The secondary school] should definitely be complimented on it – the staff and the Principal for sure be commended on where they’ve gone. And I think it is a big step forward –in combining the Aboriginal people whether they, be, Métis or whether they be First Nation, or Inuit. I think that the changes they’ve made are just fantastic…But you know, [the Principal] can honestly say, “We’ve been kinda dumb about this and we didn’t involve, you know, the Aboriginal people” Like, he can honestly say that. (Aboriginal leader)

We have a very strong role model in [the Principal]. We know that if we wanted to get on board with this, that he would be a great supporter of it. And it’s not something that we would like to be starting one month and then have the rug pulled out from under our feet the next. There would be some follow through. That would encourage me to be a part of it and that is already in place. (Non-Aboriginal Leader)

Signs of Reluctance to Press Curriculum Change

The fact remains that curriculum design is still a provincial matter and we have to know that it’s being supported elsewhere in the province too, so that our efforts are not made in vain when all is said and done (non-Aboriginal leader)

If they were to invite us to sit at a table and come up with a really great curriculum, I would have to say they have opened a door for us but would they meet us with an open mind? Because it’s really hard to go through an open door and meet with closed minds. So they might invite you in there but they have already decided before you even came through that open door that this is what they’re going to do and they’re not going to change it, no matter what our suggestions are. (Aboriginal leader)
When ‘language of possibility’ in ethical space is encouraged, participants are given the opportunity to be involved in verbal freedom to share thoughts and words; voices are afforded with the conditions that accept confrontational worldviews; voices are encouraged to speak with conviction in the belief that the results are empowering steps toward negotiations; cultural points of view require stringent interpretations and translations to maintain intentions.
Aboriginal peoples do not need another study about cultural differences but rather a study to explore what is in the distance at the cultural divide.
Aboriginal peoples need to begin to protect what we have left of our desires and our intents for an education that meets the needs of their communities.
Aboriginal peoples need to articulate, define, move from the abstract to the concrete so they can attract the attention of the school leadership and assist them to review policies.
Aboriginal peoples must express understanding of themselves at the cultural divide and understanding of how to use ‘language’ to address their intents across the cultural divide.
At the local level, Aboriginal peoples need to invite discussions and negotiate their intents with knowledge of the mainstream institution as one step towards designing ethical space at the local level – in the local school board and local schools towards Aboriginal student success.
CHOICES in the CLASSROOM

Impact on the Student
- Assimilate
- Accommodate
- Segregate
- Integrate

Pedagogy
- Transmission
- Transformation
- Transcendental

Concerning Epistemology
(the study or theory of the origin, nature, methods and limits of knowledge)
- Cultural
- Bi-Cultural

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References


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