DR. STIRLING MCDOWELL
Foundation
FOR
RESEARCH INTO TEACHING

TEACHING AND LEARNING
RESEARCH EXCHANGE

An Action Research Report:

Connecting Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan Schools

Doug Smith and Sam Robinson

Project #56
November 2000

This research was funded by the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

The purpose of the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching is to fund research, inquiry, and dissemination of information focusing on instruction (both teaching and learning) in the context of the public elementary and secondary education system. Specifically, it will:

1) contribute to knowledge about teaching and learning;
2) encourage educational inquiry through a wide range of methodologies;
3) support the involvement of practising teachers in active research projects;
4) encourage organizations as well as individuals to determine and act in areas of research and inquiry; and
5) encourage experimentation with innovative ideas and methodologies related to teaching and learning.

The Foundation is an independent charitable organization formed by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation in 1991. It is governed by a Board of Directors with the assistance of an advisory committee of representatives from the educational and business communities. The selection and evaluation of projects funded by the Foundation is carried out by a teacher-led Project Review Committee. Inquiries concerning research supported by the McDowell Foundation may be directed to the following address:

Research Coordinator
Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation
2317 Arlington Avenue
Saskatoon SK S7J 2H8
Telephone: 1-800-667-7762 or (306) 373-1660
E-mail: gallenv@stf.sk.ca. or mcdowell@stf.sk.ca

© 2000 by the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching Inc.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ii

Acknowledgements iv

Dedication v

Table of Contents vi

List of Figures vii

Action Research Report: Connecting Wanuskewin & Schools 1
- The Handbook 1
  - The Research Team 2
- Action Research 3
  - Meagan Lee 5
  - Colleen Kowaluk 6
  - Jan Sterling 7
- Selected Themes 8
  - Aboriginal Knowledge and Cross-cultural Relationships 8
    - Previous Experiences at Wanuskewin 12
  - Experiential Learning 13
  - Utility of the Wanuskewin Project 16
    - The Wanuskewin Staff 18
- The Experience of the First Nations Participants 20

Field Trials at Wanuskewin 25
- Data Collection 26
- Field Trial Highlights 27
  - Before the Visit 27
  - During the Visit 27
  - After the Visit 30
  - References 32

The Experience of an Intern Teacher: Derek Murdock 33

Executive Summary of

An Action Research Report: Connecting Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan Schools

by Doug Smith and Sam Robinson
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

This report is the story of an action research project. The project began when Doug Smith had an idea which he took to the Wanuskewin staff. From this conversation, Doug and the Wanuskewin personnel defined a research problem: how to make Wanuskewin more accessible to schools. How could Wanuskewin get more students to the site, to help fulfill their educational mandate? Doug then assembled a team of primary teachers and Wanuskewin personnel and said, "Here is our problem: how do we connect Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan schools?" In doing this, Doug was acting within the framework of action research – allowing the participants to state and own the research problem.

In keeping with the action research model, the participants defined the solution: a handbook for primary teachers. Acting as facilitator, Doug worked with the project team to produce the handbook. It was a collaborative work, which drew upon the teaching experience of four primary teachers and the Aboriginal knowledge of the Wanuskewin personnel. This handbook, *Connecting Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan Schools*, is now available for primary teachers to plan a field trip to Wanuskewin Heritage Site.[1]

As this story of our action research project points out, the project is representative of the nature of action research: personal, professional, and political. On the personal level, the project provided the primary teachers, Norine, Jan, Colleen, and Megan, with the opportunity to grow in their awareness of Aboriginal knowledge, and they valued the sharing of ideas; the Wanuskewin personnel, Darlene and Lionel, discovered the world of teachers and learned more clearly what a site visit means for teachers – how a field trip to Wanuskewin can help them achieve curriculum objectives. And the university personnel, Doug and Sam, grew in their awareness of Wanuskewin, Aboriginal culture, and the conduct of action research.

On the professional level, the project team has put together a handbook of value to teachers. Through this project, they extended their professional commitment which will, at once, help teachers with field trips to Wanuskewin and help the Wanuskewin staff to make these field trips more appropriate for teachers and their students.

The project indirectly dealt with the political nature of action research. It was a project in which three Aboriginal and five Non-aboriginal personnel worked together. Although each of the Non-aboriginal participants had had cross-cultural experience, they noted the value in having the Wanuskewin resource personnel as part of the team. All participants, it was interesting to note, were conscious of the long-range, long-term value of this project. They clearly saw their role as setting a foundation to improve and enhance relationships between First Nations and non-Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan. It was a project to help young children grow in their understanding and acceptance of differences among people.

[1] This handbook is available in hard copy from the Stewart Resources Centre, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan homepage: Federation and the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan homepage: <http://www.stf.ca/>

<http://www.usask.ca/education/wanuskewin/>

Acknowledgements

The project team acknowledges the assistance of the following institutions who provided help and permission to complete our handbook, and the opportunity for our action research project.

We are grateful for the major contribution of the McDowell Foundation for funding this research and to Wanuskewin Heritage Park for help with content for the handbook, and for providing such warm and spiritual hospitality for our meetings. And to the Wanuskewin Heritage Park Elders, thank you for receiving our report and giving us permission to share this nugget of Aboriginal heritage with Saskatchewan teachers and students.

Thanks also to:

British Columbia Ministry of Education

College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

Gabriel Dumont Institute

Indian Teacher Education Program, University of Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Education

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre

St. Paul's R.C.S.S. S.D. #20

Saskatoon Public S.D. #13

Saskatoon Tribal Council

SUNTEP Saskatoon & Prince Albert

Dedication

This report is dedicated…

To all who work with children and youth;
To all who strive for understanding across cultures;
To our children – the promise of a future;
To the elders who preserve and pass on
WANUSKEWIN,
a place, ambience, and opportunity
"to seek peace of mind."

Megwich (Saulteaux – thank you)

An Action Research Report: Connecting Wanuskewin & Saskatchewan Schools

This is the story of an action research project. It all began in 1998 when Doug Smith gave his secondary, preservice, teacher-education students an exam question: develop a plan for your subject area to show how you would conduct a field trip to Wanuskewin Heritage Park. He was so impressed with the answers that he took some of the suggestions to Jeremy Morgan, then director of Wanuskewin, where he received encouragement to carry on with his idea.

Jeremy told Doug that the Wanuskewin Board had placed relationships with schools, and attracting more school visits, as an important priority. So Doug got the idea: to connect Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan schools. His original thought was to develop a series of plans for kindergarten to grade twelve. But, his sense of reason prevailed, and he decided to work only at the primary level – for kindergarten and grade-one teachers.

Doug gathered an action research team of teachers, Wanuskewin personnel, and university researchers and applied for a McDowell Research grant. They submitted the application, were funded for $4,765.00, and the project is finished: a handbook for teachers of kindergarten and grade one, and this action research report.

The Handbook

Before moving to the action research report, we will provide you with an overview of the handbook. The handbook, *Connecting Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan Schools*, is available from several sources. You can access it through the College of Education: Links homepage or the STF homepage, and hard copies are available from the Stewart Resources Centre at the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

As stated in the handbook, the objectives of *Connecting Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan Schools* are:

- to increase awareness of Aboriginal students and teachers to their own cultural heritage,
- to increase sensitivity of non-aboriginal teachers and students to First Nations' people and their cultural heritage,
- to increase understanding of Saskatchewan teachers of Wanuskewin Heritage Site and Aboriginal heritage,
- to develop a teacher handbook that correlates with primary curricula,
- to study and evaluate the experiences of the co-researchers as they engage in an action research project, considering experiential learning and site visitation.

The handbook, then, is a guide for teachers to take their primary classes to the Wanuskewin Heritage site. It provides useful information on how to prepare for a site visit, conduct a site visit with students, and plan follow-up activities. This report responds to the last objective – a comment on this action research project.

The Research Team

In keeping with action research technique, Doug gathered a research and development team who entered the project with varying responsibilities:

- The first group in the project were the kindergarten and grade-one teachers from Saskatoon: Colleen Kowaluk (St. Mark), Megan Lee (Hugh Cairns), Jan Stirling (Hugh Cairns), and Norine Tourangeau (King George). Their contribution was to bring the reality of the primary classroom to the project. Derrek Murdoch, a College of Education intern who was placed in Colleen's classroom, also participated in planning and development of the handbook.

- The team also included two Wanuskewin staff members, Darlene Brander and Lionel Tootoosis, who brought to the project their knowledge of Wanuskewin. Darlene and Lionel, with Norine Tourangeau, also served as consultants on First Nations culture and protocol.

- The project included two College of Education professors: Doug Smith and Sam Robinson. Doug assumed the role of over-all director of the project; Sam served as research consultant and writer.

- Rodger Graham, Instructional Support Services, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, was responsible for the layout and graphic design of the handbook as well as the design and layout of the website.

Jan, Megan, Norine, and Colleen assess the site

Action Research

The origins of action research lie in social activism, brought into focus by the social conscience of the 1960s and 70s. This thinking linked a desire for social change and social justice with research. Action and research were seen very much as a political process, not as a process for finding answers or truth.

Educators have tended to take a less political view of action research. For them, action research represents a means to bridge the theory practice gap. It represents an approach to research that values the knowledge of the participants, and provides a means for them to become centrally involved in a research project, all the way from defining the question to working toward a resolution or solution. This involves a change in role for the traditional researcher, from working *on* subjects to working *with* participants.

There is an additional perspective on action research: the personal. The result of action research, in addition to political action or knowledge generation, lies in its value to the individuals in the project. For them, action research provides an opportunity to gain greater self-knowledge, an expanded understanding of professional practice, and the benefits of personal relationships that come from working with a team.

The reader may find these references to action research useful:

Bill Atweh, Stephen Kemmis, & Patricia Weeks. (1998). *Action Research in Practice: Partnerships in Social Justice in Education.* Routledge.

Wilfred Carr & Stephen Kemmis. (1986). *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research.* Deakin University Press.

Peter Reason. (1994). *Participation in Human Inquiry.* Sage

Ernest T. Stringer. (1999). *Action Research*, second edition. Sage

Our project, then, has its root in the action research tradition, combining elements of all three traditions: the political, the professional, and the personal. On the personal level, the participants have noted the benefit from their work with the project, as part of their growth in understanding their own professional expertise, but also that of the other participants. In particular, the Wanuskewin staff gained a greater appreciation for the needs of teachers from a site visit; the teachers came to understand the purpose and problems of those working at the Wanuskewin site. At the professional level, the Wanuskewin project has fulfilled its main purpose: to connect Wanuskewin and Saskatchewan schools. We now have a handbook which will introduce teachers to Wanuskewin and to help them plan a site visit more efficiently and effectively. Finally, on the political level, this project can be see as a component of the anti-racism endeavours that are part of our society. It helps teachers start children at a young age to understand and value the heritage of the First Nations members of our society. For the non-Aboriginal children, the Wanuskewin visit introduced them to the spirit and sacredness of the Wanuskewin site; for the Aboriginal children, the Wanuskewin visit provided the opportunity to see and value their own heritage.

None of the participants in our project had previously engaged in action research. In fact, the idea of research was not something close to them. Theirs is the world of practice – of making things work for young children in their classrooms. Yet these teachers willingly accepted Doug's invitation to join this project, an invitation which they came to value. The following section presents the experiences of these teachers with action research – giving their understanding of their involvement, and their assessment of their achievements.

Each participant was interviewed at the completion of the project by Sam and Doug. They used conversational interviewing, an approach to interviewing which suggests that both interviewee and interviewer are responsible for building or co-constructing the content of the interview. It is interesting to note that the teachers' responses closely align with the perspective presented in the research literature. That is, they intuitively experienced the personal, professional, and political aspects of action research.

Megan Lee

For Megan Lee, this action research project was very much an opportunity to gain personal knowledge and to develop professional expertise. When asked why she joined the project, she said:

> *It was to learn more about Aboriginal culture…. I started my career in inner-city. Really as a beginning teacher, I didn't know a lot about Aboriginal culture. But I encountered many Aboriginal children in the classroom, so over the years I tried to learn a little bit, but I just scratched the surface…. So it [joining the project] is to enhance my personal knowledge.*

Megan's involvement included not only gaining knowledge, but also experiencing collaborative work. She says, "I think I learned how to put things together, the process of group work, how a person, then a group, come to a consensus, decision-making, that kind of thing." Megan listed her knowledge achievements from this action research project: "[I learned about] elements of the culture I didn't understand, met some people of Aboriginal ancestry, spent more time at Wanuskewin, learning more about the culture in general." Interestingly, for Megan, her personal involvement in action research reached out to include a political component. Her work in the project connected her with the Wanuskewin staff, and she saw how our action research project was in effect a microcosm of how people learn to accept each other in the wider world. Megan explains,

> *When we come to understand how other people do things, then you can come together to a certain extent. One group gives a little, another does as well. So you can't collaborate unless you do that, unless you have mutual understanding. It is really difficult to come to that point where you get somewhere. So the process evolved from several people's distinct ways of doing things to, eventually, a group way.*

Colleen Kowaluk

Colleen entered the project for much the same reason that Megan did: her school had decided to focus on Aboriginal knowledge. Colleen tended to stress the professional aspect of action research – a concern for classroom practice. When asked about her reaction to joining an action research project, Colleen confessed that research for her was dry, distant, and not particularly practical. She understood research as experimentation, as a search for truth or conclusions. It was something done on teachers; teachers became the "other" in the research equation. She didn't find that kind of research of real help for her work in the classroom. About McDowell research, and research in general, she says:

> *A lot of things…with the McDowell Foundation have been very dry, from other people you know…and very technical, and not necessarily things that I have found that were extremely useful in the classroom.*

The action research model fed into her strong desire for application. In commenting on her involvement in the project, she says,

> *I feel that this [the action research project], of us getting together and sharing ideas and learning out there, we've really been able to find something that's going to be very functional for people in the classroom.*

Her focus, very much on the professional and personal aspect of action research, took a decidedly qualitative perspective. She goes on:

Well, you're researching but you're doing it as you're going along, you're working through, taking everybody's ideas and you're not just taking stats and trying to make things work. I feel with action research it's people getting together, brainstorming, sharing ideas, and coming up with something that's workable.

Colleen intuitively bought into the model of research as people coming up with their own solutions: "it's people getting together." Stressing the collaborative nature of this model, Colleen developed this metaphor: "We each took a little part and the parts came together to make a wonderful recipe." She concluded her description of action research with a reminder that this research is important for professional development, for support to teachers. Colleen says, "Research is fine but I like, research to me, the best part of it is coming up with something that's workable for other people and I think that's what we did here. And I like that."

Jan Stirling

Jan entered the project because of Megan. Teaching in the same school, Megan asked Jan to join the action research project which she had just committed to. And so Jan entered for personal reasons and for her own professional development: Doug was very enthusiastic about the project. But I have not been involved in a project like this before so it was a learning experience for me from that point of view, too.

She entered the project, then, because of its practical nature, a chance to deal directly with classroom activity. In defining action research, Jan noted its functional nature and its utility for professional development for teachers:

I think of a practical kind of research that could be used at a later date. That can be user-friendly for teachers. I'm happy to see, in this case, something already established in the city [Wanuskewin Heritage Site] and that we need to use more.

For Jan, the collaborative nature of action research was important. She saw, too, the utility of the handbook as something developed from within the teachers' circle, and not imposed from outside. She had this to say:

I have manufactured much of my own materials, and I haven't collaborated with other people over it. To have the collaboration with other people was wonderful. To have the input from Wanuskewin people was great, too.

The whole process wasn't too difficult for Jan, for she saw collaboration as a natural act for teachers: "teachers are natural for collaborating."

Selected Themes

During the interviews, we (Doug and Sam) asked the teachers about specific experiences in planning the handbook for the Wanuskewin project. We wanted their opinions on a number of issues: cross-cultural relationships, the utility or value of the project, experiential learning. In the following discussion, we report the teachers' thoughts on these issues.

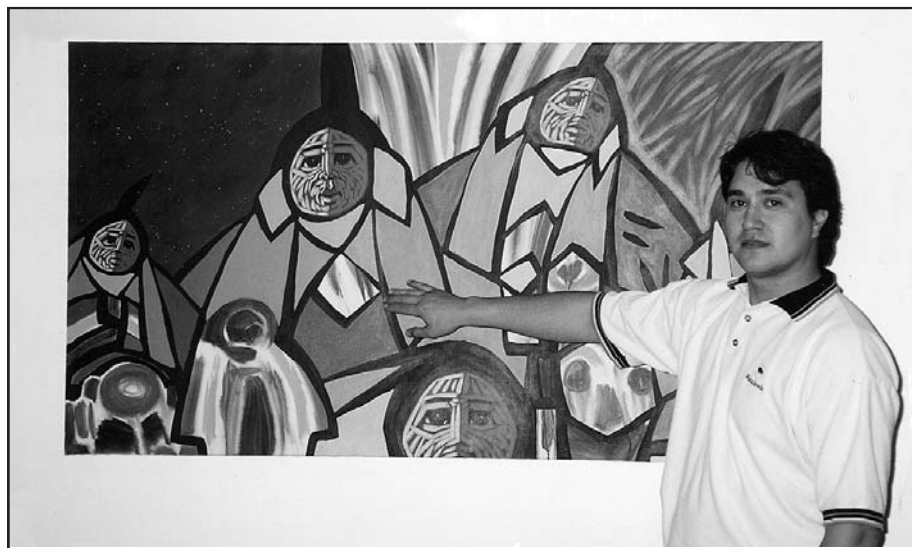
Aboriginal Knowledge and Cross-cultural Relationships

One strength of Wanuskewin is that it presents first hand the history of the Aboriginal peoples of the prairie region. Lionel pointed out that the curators at Wanuskewin are concerned with translations into Aboriginal languages. So much of the region is Cree-speaking; yet there are other language groups in the area as well, such as the Dene, the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota peoples, and the Sioux and Saulteau. By default, then, many displays are presented in English. Lionel explains:

> *They tended to shy away from stuff like that [touch screens] because there is all the different languages, and it is obviously easiest to get Cree things, and you want them to have equal representation.*

At the time that the planning process was happening, Wanuskewin had a display of the Treaties that were signed on the prairies. Lionel pointed out how this display helped viewers understand the treaties, and indeed, that some treaties had been signed recently. Lionel says,

> *Like I was looking at a grade ten curriculum – social studies and native studies – and one of the things that people don't realize, that there was a treaty signed right up until the 1970s. I mean these things aren't things that happened a hundred years ago, they are really current.*



Lionel highlights tribal differences

The experience with the Wanuskewin Project helped even the experienced teachers in the project increase their cultural sensitivity. Megan says,

> *There are things I learned, not earth shaking or shattering, that have nuances of meaning that I had no idea before. For example, the drums and the implications for women. And re-creating certain parts of the culture are more sensitive issues than others. [I thought about] what you can do with kids in the classroom, what you can re-create [and what is inappropriate].*

With her increased cultural sensitivity, Megan has learned not to take for granted things that she gave little thought to previously.

Yes, my sensitivity is heightened. With increased sensitivity, you are always double checking, always thinking, "Am I saying something that might offend someone? Is there something here that I don't know?" I had to ask that question a couple of times because I wasn't sure of the implications. With your heightened sensitivity, you don't want to make a mistake.

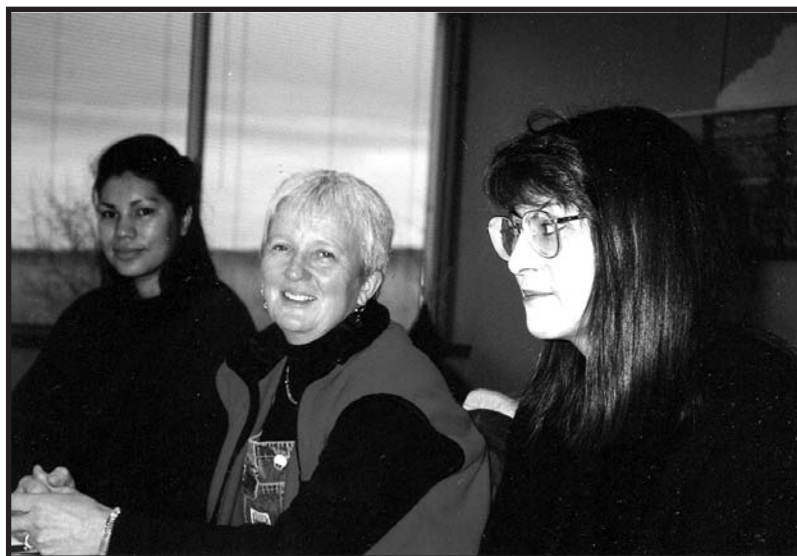
Jan noted the value of introducing kindergarten children to a cross-cultural experience. She explains, "I really think that this is the best age to give a cross-cultural experience to children because they are so open." In fact, she shared a field-trial experience with a group of children from White Cap First Nation, and noted how naturally the children accepted each other: "I don't think that my children realized that they were White Cap First Nations, First Nations people. They just saw them as eight kids on the trip as well." Jan describes the situation:

They came along on the trip, ate our bannock, sat with us. I think that a wonderful cross-cultural thing happened right there. I think that I might hesitate to say that [to the children]. Then we might look at them in a different light. Five year olds are so wonderful at being all-encompassing, saying we're all kids, we all play together.

Jan, however, does point out a difficulty in introducing young children to Wanuskewin: the problem of bridging past and present. The children become so fascinated with seeing the historical Aboriginal people that they can't bridge to the present. She was supportive that the Wanuskewin guides did not appear in traditional dress, an approach that would have continued the stereotyping of Aboriginal people caught in a time trap. Jan explains,

My one concern is, how we can relate current-day native lifestyle to what the children are seeing [at Wanuskewin]. That's a big concern for me. Every now and then I'll say to the children, "Do the First Nations people live in tipis right now? Well, no, of course they don't. What happens right now?" They happily reply to me "No they don't." But I'm still not sure if [my children really get it].

Jan goes deeper into the issues and raised the question of dealing with differences among cultures with young children. Should she, she queries, have raised the fact that her children were sitting with First Nations children? It becomes, then, an issue of pointing out similarities, rather than differences. And, thinks Jan, you don't have to point out similarities: "The similarities were there…. They were unspoken similarities that just existed." The moment for these five year olds was experiencing and appreciating, not understanding.



Darlene, Jan, and Norine – the "oreo Cookie" trio.

Colleen notes that how this action research project was a personal, professional development experience. She explains,

> *What I found really, really good for me was finding all the different authors and storybooks that would work with kids and things that would fit into the things I have already been trying to teach the kids. And I think I got a lot wider range of ideas and a better understanding.*

And she goes on,

> *And I think I've got a much better understanding of the people at Wanuskewin, what they're trying to accomplish out there, and what I can take from that and give to these little five and six year olds to help them with their [understanding], we're on this, anti-racist [theme].*

Colleen explains in some depth her widening knowledge which resulted from her work with the project. In response to the question, what was the most brilliant experience for you in your cross-cultural relationship among the project team, Colleen commented on her increased awareness of Aboriginal dancing:

> *I think that the one experience that was biggest for me was the dancing and how it's grown, and talking about the different meanings of the costumes [regalia]…. I didn't know anything about the dancing, you know, understand what the jingles meant and the different types of dances and the things like that…. And their dancing and their drumming and all of that is encompassed with the spirituality of what they believed back then, and it's a higher being, Mother Nature, you know, the mother sun guiding and the whole bit. And the relationship of what I believe and practice today [as a Roman Catholic] was a real sort of Eureka moment.*

In the interview, Doug asked Norine whether our Wanuskewin project would do anything to combat racism. Norine provided this thoughtful response:

> *Anything that can bridge, and make connections, is a big step. As an Aboriginal person, what has been going on [in Saskatoon concerning allegations of police racism] is very disturbing. We need to address a lot of issues still. A lot of racism does exist and it exists in institutions. Education is a way to do that…. As educators, we don't need to carry the world on our shoulders. But we have a role to play and a responsibility for battling racism. This is a big step in that direction. Our Wanuskewin project has the chance to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.*

Previous Experiences at Wanuskewin

The experiences that some teachers already had at Wanuskewin directed their thinking about how to set up the site visit. In preparation, Colleen said that she had visited the site to get ready for a visit. She noted just how important such preparation is for making good use of time while at Wanuskewin:

> *I went through the display, right from the very beginning all the way through, and wrote down the specific things, so that when teachers go, they have an idea of what is in the display. When you come, to begin with, it is so overwhelming, like it was for us, making sure that you see everything that is there, so I went through and wrote it all out – in point form.*

Colleen had taken her class out the previous year where she had an interesting experience with one of her students, an immigrant child from Bosnia. This child was terrified at the thunder sounds that are part of the indoor display. Colleen tells this story:

My little boy from Bosnia, that I had a couple of years ago, freaked out on me. He thought he was being bombed. He dropped to the ground and started to scream.

And, as Colleen notes, few teachers would think of such a reaction to the Wanuskewin display.

Experiential Learning

The site visit to Wanuskewin can be explained as experiential learning, and the teachers saw the value of the hands-on nature of this project. Jan stresses the importance of hands-on experiences for young children:

I think that the teachers need to be made aware of [the need for students to use their senses] before they come into the display. That the kids have to really look, as well as the things that they can touch, because I had parents that were with me that said "don't touch those, just look." and I would say, "no, they're there, put them on, try them out, this is hands-on in here for you to work with."

For Jan, Wanuskewin is a good way to get students to understand the concept of history. She says,

Like yesterday, when we went there, I stood there and looked at this hill and I thought, how would they know this is a buffalo jump, and I guess that is where we are coming from with the children, because there is so much for them to learn there.

Ready to add tipi poles.

Megan notes that experiential learning is not laissez-faire teaching. Rather the experiential component of Wanuskewin should be supported by classroom activity. Becoming a full-time graduate student, Megan had the opportunity to observe Jan's follow-up activities. She points out that what Jan did before and after the site visit supported the students' experiential learning:

> *What Jan chose to select from the information [about Wanuskewin] and what she chose to focus on after. That might have helped form their minds. But she did ask them to bring things from home. In that way, each child could focus on what was important to him or her.*

In fact, these artifacts from home could become valuable in assessing students' learning:

> *If they brought it [their article from home] in before, they would have a before perception – before knowing about it. I think maybe afterwards, when they took these items home, then they might have more or different knowledge or viewpoint of how that impacted on the lives of Aboriginal people.*

Colleen provides an anecdote of one of her student's learning about wind and the placement of the camps:

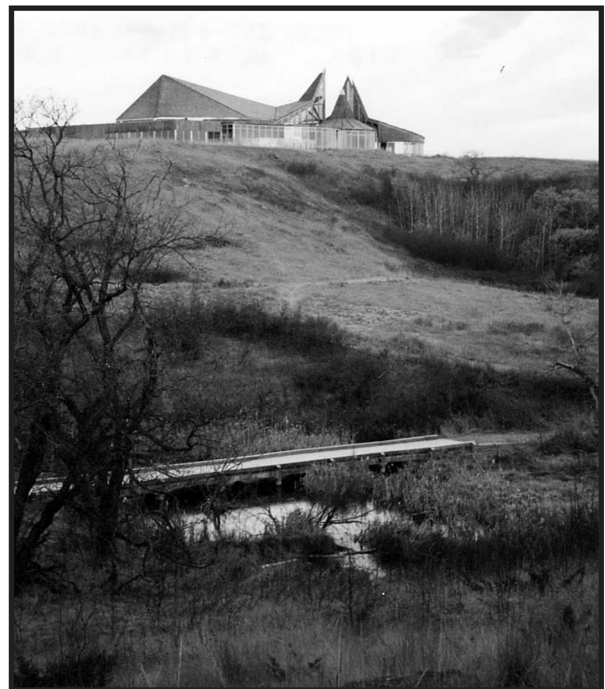
> *You had the wind. They understood why the camps were down [the cliff]. They did the tipis [back in the classroom as an after-visit activity]. They were setting them up [in our model camp], and I laughed at one of the little guys as he put it in [the model camp] and he wanted to put it on the floor. And I said, "Well, why would you want to put the tipi on the floor?" "Well, it needs to be down in the valley, so the wind doesn't get it." They did learn, they really grasped the concept of what it was back then.*

Norine noted that the idea of experiential learning was upper-most in the minds of the teachers in the project. She describes how these teachers had the concept of "hands on" central in their mind:

> *I think "hands on" came out the most. Experiential learning. In order for them to experience what goes on at Wanuskewin, they have to touch, listen.... That's the way students learn. It has to be visually there. They have to hear it. It has to make sense for them. I believe "hands on" does that.*

Jan reminded us that we need to consider experiential learning for teachers, too. Her vision for teacher inservice is to hold sessions at Wanuskewin, in effect take teachers through the same process that the action researcher project team used.

> *I think, though, that we have to inservice teachers as well. For many reasons it [a site visit] is overwhelming. We know it [the handbook] back to front, but for those not involved in the project.... Megan and I were talking, the best place would be Wanuskewin. Actually go out there with a group of people [teachers], go round the whole site. Hands on!*



Campsite sheltered from the wind.

Utility of the Wanuskewin Project

The project team spent nearly two years on the Wanuskewin Project; hence we were interested to know what value the participants saw in the project. The project, we discovered, was of value both to the teachers and the Wanuskewin staff.

Colleen described the handbook this way: "I've been out there a lot of times with kids and have done a lot of things but it's nice to have that handbook to give me a really good focus on exactly what I want to do out there." She shared a draft of the handbook with the other teachers in her school:

> *I gave it to a couple staff members to look at, the grade-one teachers and the grade-four teachers and they thought it was really good. The grade-four teachers thought they should be using it for their field trips. They have a grade-four program [at Wanuskewin] and they walk the trails and do the buffalo hunt, but they really liked the before activities and the after activities and they felt that those were really beneficial, even for older kids.*

Her final assessment gave a strong passing grade to the handbook:

> *I think what we developed here is something that can be used across grades, not just necessarily in kindergarten and grade one, but any kind of primary, lower-elementary grade would be able to find it very useful.... I think we have a very good working model. Give ourselves a pat on the back.*

Megan echoed Colleen's conclusion. She saw the handbook as a solid aid for teachers. She says about the handbook,

> *I hope that it gives teachers a place to start.... And that is all we can expect. If teachers take us at our invitation and come to Wanuskewin with their classes, they will be introduced to information that they didn't know before. Like anything that you provide to teachers, some will run with it, others will do the trip, then put the handbook on the shelf.*

Jan answered our question pragmatically. She used it in her own planning. She noted that she was having trouble coming to a starting point for her theme on Wanuskewin. She mentioned, "Usually I have resources all round me and go from there," but for this Wanuskewin project, she couldn't find the centre of her theme. Because the unit was new for her, she struggled where to go with it. She used a draft of the handbook to get her direction:

> *The cultural notes are very good. They focussed me back again on what I was saying. For example, the related curriculum tells you what things to key in on – the importance of family, look at the teepee, show how needs are met.*

Norine also noted that she found the handbook of value in her own unit planning. In comparing her field trip last year to this year's experience, she attributed her success to the work on the action research project – and the handbook. She notes just how practical the guide is:

> *When a primary teacher decides to go to Wanuskewin, our teachers' guide has it all there. The teacher won't have to go digging around. It's all there from when you first have the idea to go. It's clearly laid out in the book – things to do before you go and things to do when you get back. Definitely useful.... I took my class last year. We went, it went fast, but we didn't really zero in on important things. If I had our handbook then, it would have shown me what Wanuskewin has, what we can do, and even what we can do back in the classroom.*

And Norine believes that the handbook is a good start to help teachers keep Aboriginal culture in mind throughout the year. As she says, "The curricula are ongoing all year. The experience will help with National Aboriginal Day in June."

The Wanuskewin Staff:

For the Wanuskewin staff, they saw value in learning the teacher perspective on a site visit. They came to see that a visit is not just an experience, an exciting trip if you will. It is, rather, an experience which is connected to the Saskatchewan curriculum, and which teachers use to further the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of their students, achieving the objectives of the curriculum.

Darlene commented on the different styles of working. The kindergarten teachers, who are used to working with each other, informally talk and explore, and in an indirect way come to closure on a thought or problem. Darlene found this way of working at odds with her more direct approach, perhaps an approach honed by working in the business world at Wanuskewin. Darlene says,

> *I like to go straight to the point and there's other learning styles [the teachers] that would like to explore every single option…and to web it. You can imagine a web, and exploring every point on the web and doing that. Whereas I like to try to go straight to the point…and discuss the one straight topic instead of veering off to this side and then veering off to that side.*

Darlene didn't see these differences as cultural, but as more people specific. She mentioned, "I think it's people differences [in learning style]. I think it's just personal, just my way of learning versus another person's way of learning."

Lionel tended to agree with Darlene, that differences in approaching group work were personal rather than cultural. He saw the group work that the action research project team was involved in differently from Darlene. Like the primary teachers, he saw value in talk and group exploration:

> *I think when you're working with different groups like we were, that there are a lot of things that need to be clarified so you did veer off the topic a little. You had to start talking about different things and people started talking about their experiences so it was interesting in that sense. You learn more about the people in the group and you get a little more idea of where people are coming from and I think you need those excursions to carry on.*

Like the primary teachers, Lionel and Darlene thought that the project achieved its objective. The action research project did produce a teacher-friendly document. Darlene noted that the handbook was the result of solid collaboration of people from several perspectives, and that the success of the handbook could be attributed, in part, to the variety of opinions and experiences that the team members brought to the project. She says,

> *It was accomplished because there were representatives from Wanuskewin here, and there were teacher reps here too that could input information and could confine it so that the handbook is extremely teacher-friendly, and so that it can be used by a wide number of teachers, from rural to city.*

The Wanuskewin staff members, moreover, saw the project working both ways. The project was equally helpful to Wanuskewin, for Wanuskewin's mandate is not only tourism, but education. Darlene describes this benefit:

> *Wanuskewin sees itself as an educational institute, not only a tourist attraction. So the process of doing this project, developing the handbook, and being able to distribute it to the education system may verify ourselves in Wanuskewin's offering to schools. It works both ways.*

Both Lionel and Darlene felt their responsibility to Wanuskewin to make certain that anything included in the handbook would be acceptable to the First Nations' community. Lionel felt that the contribution from the Wanuskewin staff was crucial in developing the handbook. He says,

> *I think when I agreed to do it [join the project], I wanted to make sure that what was in the handbook was culturally appropriate. We're not going to put together some document that somebody is going to tell us what to put in it. No, I'm going to make my points and make sure that what I think is right and what was originally – like Wanuskewin was originally set up by the elders. They approved everything and basically we're not putting in anything new. We're just putting a different slant on it for younger kids – so in that sense it was okay. But I think we…our input was very necessary as to what they should be learning and the way it should be presented.*

And Lionel did reserve the right to review the references that the teachers had collected for a bibliography in the handbook. He did reject one book which did not represent First Nations culture appropriately. He was not familiar with many of the titles that the primary teachers included, but, taking his responsibility to make certain that the handbook represented the First Nations culture appropriately, he did review all books on the list and rejected those that were not appropriate.

One interesting fact to emerge from this interview was the variety in First Nations cultures. Indeed, Darlene, Norine, and Lionel represented differences among even the Cree culture. Darlene explains:

> *Because Lionel and Norine come from the Northwest Saskatchewan and they have different takes on Aboriginal culture and traditions, and I'm from the Northeast and I'm of a different perspective.*

In the interview, Doug Smith asked about the issue of gender role difference within the First Nations community. He had noted that for some questions, Darlene wouldn't respond, but deferred to Lionel, to get him to answer. This issue wasn't of real concern for either Darlene or Lionel, but it did lead to a discussion of spirituality. Darlene explained that there were spiritual issues that she was not free to talk about, and that gender differences in roles played were of a spiritual nature. Darlene says, "There were certain things around the spiritual area that I might have known but I don't have the right or the wish to talk about. I want to make that clear." She went on to explain that she had written a protocol for Wanuskewin which they could give to teachers who would like to have an elder visit their classroom. There is a definite protocol to follow in making such a request.

The Experience of the First Nations Participants

Three members of the project team were First Nations personnel – Lionel Tootoosis and Darlene Brander from the Wanuskewin site, and Norine Tourangeau, a grade-one teacher from King George School in Saskatoon. This section provides an account of their experiences as project team members.

Norine appreciated the value in having more than one Aboriginal person on the project team. She noted that often Aboriginal teachers are asked to represent the whole of First Nations culture and experience, something that is impossible to do. There was support in numbers.

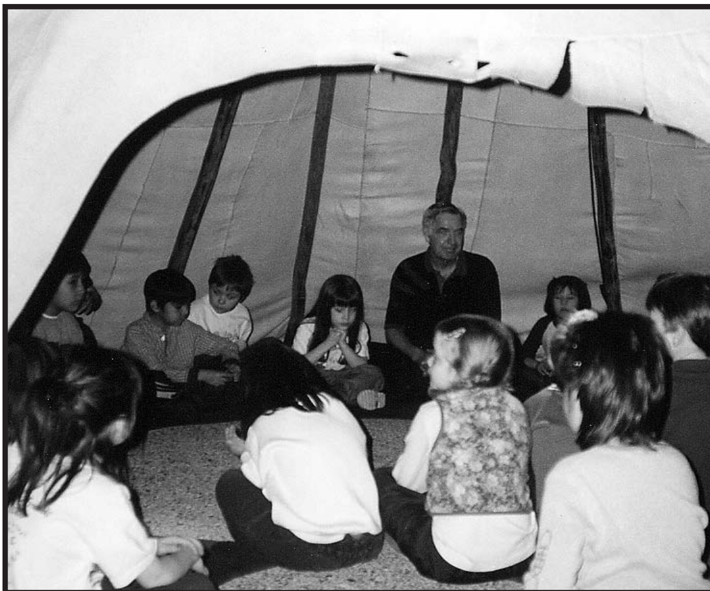
> *Darlene and Lionel have as their jobs the answers to questions about Aboriginal culture. They present Aboriginal culture to the public. Having them there was a big asset. If I was the only one there…. I don't have all the answers and don't claim to know all about Aboriginal culture. They added to it.*

Norine saw the value of the project as an experience for school children. In her interview, we noted that a significant objective for the Wanuskewin site was to bring the First Nations heritage to the First Nations peoples. Norine felt that our Wanuskewin project did this. At the same time, she was aware of the need to present the First Nations heritage to others. Indeed it was important for her that children of all cultures learn the values and heritage of Wanuskewin, and to make these values relevant to them. She describes her feelings,

> *I have about one third Aboriginal students [in my classroom]…. It's not only Aboriginal, but all cultures. Like I have Chinese students in my room. I think that anything that Wanuskewin has to offer is relevant to all people, all students. I think all can learn from the Aboriginal values that are presented to students at Wanuskewin.*

Norine noted that one feature of Wanuskewin was to present First Nations people of Saskatchewan as unique groups. She believes, like so many First Nations people, that it is necessary to recognize the differences among Aboriginal peoples. So she says,

> *It helps to show that Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan are not one and alike. That even if I know that as an Aboriginal person, my students, for example, probably don't have a very clear view on that yet. No one has really addressed that yet. They don't know if they are Cree or Saulteau. So I think that is important for them to know who they are and what First Nation they come from.*



Learning "how the bee got its stinger".

Norine also noted that the handbook provided a good introduction to Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing. She exclaims:

> *Oh, I really liked the four-part sheets. The students at this level will look and relate to the four parts. The four seasons and so on…. And just carrying on from there. Using the sheets can be an ongoing thing as well. The medicine wheel is taught this way. That's the essential thing.*

As part of the project, Jan invited Norine's class to Jan's school to dance for her kindergarten children – as a result of one of the suggestions in the handbook. Norine tells just what a positive experience this event was for her own students, how they came to value their Aboriginal heritage.

> *They liked it. They were really proud. In the first performance a couple of my girls were dancing with their heads down. I told them go in with your head up. Don't be looking at your feet. I talked about what they were able to show others. In the next dance they were very proud. They need more things like that to happen to them.*

Lionel found the exchange of ideas with teachers helpful. Although he had been working with school field trips at Wanuskewin, he didn't know the objectives of teachers for field trips. He talked about his learning this way:

> *For me…I don't come from an education background, so it was really interesting to see the way teachers think and how when you're developing [a curriculum], the steps you have to go through. It was a learning process for me.*
>
> *I think it's been helpful because, for me, I'm always presenting information. I'm always giving information, now I get to see what goes on behind. When a teacher comes, I didn't look at it [the site visit] from their perspective as much as I probably should have. Then you start to see what the teachers' expectations are, and what they wanted to get from what you're saying and what they think their kids should be learning…. It really helped; I didn't realize how much there was behind all the information that the students needed to get out of it.*

Lionel also discovered something about the awareness that others have about Aboriginal cultures. Even though he was working with teachers and professors who have had an interest in Aboriginal education, he found that what he thought was common knowledge wasn't always so. He says,

> *The other thing that I really noticed right away was how little people really know about Aboriginal culture. I think a lot of times I just assumed that people knew a lot of things, like certain easy things or just the basic things, and there is a lot of knowledge there, I guess. Teachers just don't really know.*

Darlene, too, found that there were things that she thought the teachers would know, but didn't. Yet, she saw the benefit of the action research project in getting the project team together. She says, "It was interesting to actually see [the gap in knowledge], but it was also good to have the opportunity to explain that."

Lionel provided an example of his surprise at knowledge awareness. He noted that the dancers were described as wearing costumes or outfits. He had to explain that what the dancers wore were not costumes, a word that tended to trivialize their dress. Rather, the more appropriate word would be regalia, a word which captures the significance and spirituality of the dancers and their dress. He pointed to another example: the importance of the eagle feather in Cree tradition. The eagle feather is an important symbol in Cree culture. If a dancer drops an eagle feather, only an elder must pick it up. The eagle feather remembers warriors who have died, and having an elder

pick up this representation of a fallen warrior honours his memory.

Lionel also provided his feeling of responsibility for his First Nations community, and the importance of his involvement in our action research project. He wanted to make certain that anything he signed would be in keeping with the intent of Wanuskewin and the elders who have directed Wanuskewin. He is aware of the long-term impact of anything put into writing:

> *I'm kind of wary of thinking somebody is going to come along and read what this guy Lionel said. I've always been taught that you have got to be very careful when you put things down on paper, that I can affect generations and generations to come.*

In fact, he provided an insider's perspective on Wanuskewin, and the fact that many elders were wary about Wanuskewin and especially concerned about the impact of anything they put into writing, and he outlines why the oral tradition is so important for First Nations people. He alludes to the fact that the oral tradition carries with it consensus, the holistic view of a group of people. In contrast, anything written reflects the views of only one person:

> *A lot of elders are really scared about putting a place like this up because you're going to affect people beyond your time…. A lot of First Nations people will not, they're leery about putting something onto paper…. They are wary of these things [like the handbook]. They might come back, or it'll come back to that person that put it down. You can't capture everybody's [ideas], and that's why the oral tradition is so important…. That you don't want to put things on paper.*

Both Darlene and Lionel felt that their involvement in the action research project was worthwhile. They noted too the difference between urban First Nations students and those students living on a reserve. And that the project was a beginning, with many directions to follow. Darlene sums it up:

> *There are a lot of different avenues this project could take, and probably should take – a perspective from the band school, urban Indians in the regular public school systems and separate school systems, and how to address all their needs and objectives as well. I know Wanuskewin would be very interested in pursuing more options like our [action research] project…. Sure, count us in.*

Field Trials at Wanuskewin

The February 29th, March 3rd and 8th field trials were opportunities to test our handbook plan with 108 students, 18 parents, 4 teachers and 6 other adults. Other adults comprised four teacher associates and two university graduate students who used their respective expertise in outdoor education and museum education to critique our handbook and trial. Adults and students from four schools participated. Classes included: combined morning and afternoon classes from two kindergartens, one grade one, and one K3 multigrade class. Their clientele ranged from: white middle class suburbs; multicultural school with a balance of mainstream, Aboriginal and immigrant children (10 ESL); an innercity school with one-third Aboriginal pupils; and an all Aboriginal band controlled school.

Because Megan moved from teaching to university study in January 2000, we had room to accommodate an additional class. A multigrade class from a band controlled school extended our range of students. Doug provided the Whitecap First Nations teacher with an invitation, explanations and the handbook. She agreed to join Jan's group on the March 3rd field trial.

During the three trial days at Wanuskewin each class participated in an introduction, archaeology/nature walk, exhibit tour, tipi raising and dance. Each class used whole group instruction for the introduction and dance portions and divided into three small groups for the walk, tour, and tipi raising. A teacher or two or more adults led each small group.

Booking dates were selected to meet research timelines, and to test winter visits feasibility. Teachers favoured late spring or early fall visits and avoided other seasons. Our winter visit would demonstrate that positive school visits were possible at any season. Doug acted as liaison, photographer, participant observer and program modifier in each of three site visits.

Data Collection

Previsit data was collected from teacher interviews, field notes collected during visits to the schools, and phone calls to the Band controlled school. During the visit data were collected from participant observation notes, teacher and parent responses, and after-visit interviews with the four teachers. Post-visit data were also collected from teacher interviews, examination of student products, and parents' survey responses. Interviews were conducted by Sam and Doug, Jan and Megan created and conducted a parent survey, and Doug examined student products in the schools.

Sam interviews Megan.

During analysis, Sam and Doug highlighted interview transcripts excerpts as they listened to the interview audio tapes. Then Doug collated data under the before, during, and after the visit themes. Below, Doug describes highlights from the "before", "during" and "after the visit" experiences for the four classes and himself. Co-researchers approved or edited the manuscript as needed.

Field Trial Highlights

Before the Visit

Each class found unique ways to prepare for the visit. Prior to the visit, Colleen explained her site day plan and shared the relevant handbook sections with her parent and teacher-associate, small-group leaders. Both she and her group leaders had previously visited the site. She followed the handbook suggestions, enacting the buffalo drive leading to the building entrance, explaining the introductory media presentation, and stating expectations for her two classes.

Jan's suburban kindergarten classes employed several methods. They discussed and displayed Aboriginal artifacts collected from home in a "Show and Tell" case because she wanted her students to connect home artifacts with the site activities and exhibits. As well, she prepared them for archaeology with "dishpan digs" where broken flower-pot parts were discovered in pans of sand. And when Norine's Aboriginal dance troupe performed, it sparked interest beyond her classroom:

> *We pushed all the tables back and both grade one classes attended as well. I could have invited the whole school. Other teachers were keen to be part of it. This cultural area where we live and teach doesn't have enough of that. This is obviously a need.*

Jan prepared her small group parent leaders on the bus ride to the site.

Pupils from the remaining schools viewed the field trial as part of a continued focus on Aboriginal studies. For example, Norine's students, familiar with regalia used in Aboriginal dancing, extended their understanding during the site dance demonstrations. Similarly, the band controlled students, instructed in Dakota, displayed their understanding at Aboriginal languages listening stations. Teachers from both schools used handbook previsit suggestions before the visit.

During the Visit

The variable climatic conditions offered challenges and opportunities. Features of the handbook guided the activities but leaders adapted to weather. Despite Colleen's dread of cold, her students warmed on their walk to messages frozen in snow. Their evidence of animals, deer tracks later paired with coyote paw prints, exploded into a life sized actuality when white tail bounded over a hill. The walk was planned but the weather created an unexpected opportunity to study animals in their seasonal environment. Her urban pupils used to thinking of animals as cartoons, now asked: How did the Aboriginal people use the beaver?

Jan had different time of visit concerns. She questioned pupil readiness. Their site visit was also their first full day of instruction. She also regretted that cold prevented her children from seeing people digging at an archeological pit. She like others[1] learned that site visitor meanings may vary from those planned by educators. During their walk her students grew excited at every large rock. She was prepared to discuss glacial erratics; they, following images in the introductory movie, "expected a buffalo to pop out". She valued how the site offered "big picture things to see" and "tipis that grew before their eyes". Similarly, she appreciated how the exhibit hall set the scene:

> *Everything where it should be*
> *sights, sounds, fur to feel, tipis*
> *The buffalo jump above.*

[1] Macdonald (1999) discovered that visitors' meanings did not always conform to those planned by exhibit developers.

But, some of her parents, found the addition of the interactive computer touch screens in the same area "anachronisms better served in a different spot". Others saw "kids at computers" as students out of control.

In contrast, the intern, Colleen, and Norine accepted mediated multitask opportunities. Norine clarified: "Kids have to touch, listen, and see to make sense."[2] Megan noted that the children were "involved, and engaged" and spelled out why the passage of time in archaeology was a bit foreign to young children: "When they don't know when recess is, or if they have had lunch or not, going back in time is a very difficult concept."

The three separate site visits gave us the chance to discover flaws, modify and improve the handbook. For example, uneven small group timing during the first visit caused us to shorten the walking time and distance. Following adjustment, the three, small-group activities ran simultaneously. To compensate for not walking to the foot of an actual jump, we highlighted the interior buffalo jump exhibit. The children sat beneath the interior cliff face with closed eyes, drummed their hands on the floor in the rising crescendo of a bison stampede, then they opened their eyes upwards to see buffalo poised to plummet. Fingering buffalo jaw bones located on a nearby wall and their own mandibles helped children connect the jump to archaeological remains. We also fine-tuned the buffalo-drive role play with each field trial. On the third visit, we quickly cast the students as wolves, buffalo calf runner, and bison as they stepped down from the bus. Then all became part of the buffalo drive.

The arrival of Jan's student who is visually impaired and has cerebral palsy challenged access issues in our handbook. The icy trail walk was impassible for her wheelchair, but with help from her aide, we instantly improvised a touchsound tour for her. Tactile experiences included feeling stuffed animals, trying on furs, stroking rough buffalo pound logs, and sensing the temperature, sound, and texture differences of bronze and stone sculpture. Questioning the child through her aide, we discovered that she enjoyed placing her pole in the tipi raising, hearing drum dancing, exhibit hall thunderstorm sounds, and smelling fresh picked sage.[3]

Beneath the buffalo jump.

[2] Futurist Rushknoff (1996) explains that some adults have difficulty accepting change in a world mediated by television and computers but the "screen-age" child is valued for the ability to do many things at once (p. 50).

[3] McGinnis (1999) notes, learning how to communicate, behave and assist disabled persons on field trips are needed first steps in providing for exceptional children.

After the Visit

Interest generated in the field trial continued after the experience. Most frequently children recalled interactive experiential learnings such as role playing buffalo and placing their poles during the tipi raising. Bulletin board buffalo jumps, tipi floorplans, models, and dioramas illustrate this. Megan observed that children also learned what teachers chose to focus on. For example, Norine emphasized writing by having her grade-one students write sentences about tipis on a tipi shaped template.

Call to dance.

As well as creating four part visit memory drawings and model tipis, Colleen's children signed out all animal track and library resources written or illustrated by Aboriginal creators. The impact of weather during their field trial continued to direct their interest. Student fascination for the field trial was illustrated by one of Colleen's mothers who asked:

> *What did you say about Wanuskewin? My daughter's determined to go there in the spring, when things start to grow, in the fall when colors change and leaves fall off, and when they have dancers.*

The field trial affected the ESL (English as a second language) students. Colleen's request for a "B" word prompted an Iranian girl with little English to call out "buffalo" and placing her hands on her head, recreated the horns used in the buffalo drive role play. As mentioned before, the terrified Kosovo child linking falling buffalo to bombing had to be comforted while near the jump.[4]

Jan's suburban children portrayed strong visit memories and understanding in a bulletin board buffalo jump, decorated tipis, and a Wanuskewin booklet. The process and effects of the jump were shown with forty-eight original buffalo depicted in upright, splay-legged, and feet-up positions. These children also used prewriting skills, connecting symbols to objects during their selection of tipi decorations, and their booklet demonstrated sentence completion skills as seen in the chart below:

I HEARD	I SAW	I FELT
Talk about tipi	movie	fur
Thunder	tipi	scared (from thunder sound)
Drums	birds' nests	sad (missed his mother)

[4] Macdonald (1999) suggests that ESL student responses may be examples of unexpected visitor imagining or language competence problems.

Parent surveys highlighted the need to attract and educate parents for field trips. Parents, recruits, and volunteers helped two schools. The other schools with no option but to use teacher associates demonstrate the difficulties in obtaining parent helpers. Using the Wanuskewin volunteer seniors is an option that could be explored. These teachers were also concerned with how to help parents help them. Because parents in the project acted as small group leaders, parent performance expectations were high. Survey data revealed that some needed to know exactly what they should do and say. They needed pre-trip instruction and materials presented in a 15 minute after-school training session. Other more flexible parents adapted to need. But both groups needed focus cards for use during the visit. Teachers suggested that these cards should state: Look for…, see this…, and talk about….

The purpose of action research is to allow teachers to name, frame and solve their own problems. This team of co-researchers accepted the challenge of making the historic site more accessible to teachers and agreed that their handbook would be practical and useful. To accomplish their purposes they needed to conduct field trials with a range of teachers and students to test the handbook ideas. The handbook improved following testing with actual classes representing a diverse group of students. These experiences show that field trials are a needed component in action research.

References

Macdonald, Sharon (1999). Cultural imagining among museum visitors. In E.Hooper-Greenhill (Ed.) *The educational role of the museum* (2nd ed.) (pp. 269277).London: Routledge.

McGinnis, R. (1999). The disabling society. In E. Hooper-Greenhill (Ed.) *The educational role of the museum* (2nd ed.) (pp. 278287). London: Routledge.

Rushkoff, D. (1996). *Playing the Future: How kids culture can teach us to thrive in an age of chaos.* New York: Harper Collins.

The Experience of an Intern Teacher: Derek Murdock

When the project team began its work in the fall of 1999, we were joined by Derek Murdock who was completing his internship in Colleen Kowaluk's kindergarten classroom at St. Mark School, in Saskatoon. This is an account of the experience from an intern's perspective.

Derek saw the experience as valued added to his undergraduate teacher education. He had the opportunity to work with a project team, to find out about the McDowell Foundation, and to take part in a curriculum development project. At first, of course, Derek felt insecure about his involvement. He says, "I sat there and I was in awe at the situation. It really was an intimidating thing to sit there in the company of university professors and a bunch of teachers that have lots of experience and people that have a lot of knowledge about the subject matter – and I didn't have much." Derek sat through his first meeting wondering about his role, and wanting to say something: "well should I pipe up?" But Doug Smith solved that problem for him. Derek comments on how he didn't have time to think about his response: "I was a little thrown off right at the end when Doug asked me, what would I want. And then I came up with my famous line, 'You know, keep it simple.'" Derek describes his involvement this way, explaining how the experience has extended his university work. "It was the first time that I'd ever been anywhere near anything like this." In response to the question whether he found the experience intimidating, Derek says:

> *Intimidating isn't a good word for my experience. I guess it was just something very, very new. You know my research is in my papers and that's it, and that's not really too deep a thing. But it was just the situation, not knowing what was going on and just being happy to be there. And thinking this could be a really great opportunity for me.*

But Derek's hesitancy didn't last long. He soon realized that he had a role to play in the curriculum development project. Growing in comfort with the group, he describes the situation in the following comment where he makes reference to an event that happened during the final planning meeting. Derek voiced his opposition to the elaborate matrix which most of the group seemed to value. Encouraged by one of the project team, Derek put forth the argument that this matrix to cross reference curriculum content and Wanuskewin displays was too complex, not helpful for classroom teachers, and really it was a superfluous idea. Derek remembers:

> *At first I just sat back and listened to what they were doing. And as I got more comfortable – my nature is to voice my opinion quite freely, so I guess that [his opposition to the matrix] just kind of came out. I was kind of worried about that after that last meeting. I didn't want to come across too negative. I wasn't sure that I was a jerk, but that's just the way I am. If I see something or if I feel like I have an opinion on something, then I'm going to contribute. It' not really so much, I don't think that I learned to interact with them. It's just the point where I got comfortable enough to say, okay these people are going to listen to what I say, so I'm going to say it and you know if they accept it, if it works, then fine. If not, well that's okay.*

Incidentally, the matrix does appear in the final handbook, but in a much modified form, thanks to Derek's direction: keep it simple.

One valuable contribution that Derek made was to remind the planning group, who were all based in Saskatoon, of the needs of rural Saskatchewan. He was a student himself in Rosetown, and he was mindful that teachers in rural areas do not have the same opportunity or support available to teachers in Saskatoon. Here is Derek's description how minor changes to the handbook would make it more friendly for rural teachers:

Like the last meeting: seeing the Saskatoon Zoo. You don't have to say that. You can say "some animal farm or park," like those people who have bison farms, go visit that. I guess I kind of got pegged with that one too, but it's something rural. It just struck me right away. The first time I heard that, it's like ok, well that's great – if you were in Saskatoon. But if you're not in Saskatoon it's going to be bit more of a challenge to do that kind of thing. You're going to have to do some more work. So, it's just my background.

One of the goals of the Wanuskewin Project was to consider the nature of experiential learning. Derek described not only how he learned about experiential learning, but how he had experienced experiential learning. Derek had never been to Wanuskewin, and his introduction to the site had a major impact on him. He says,

A huge part [of my learning] for me [was] not being there before. I was lucky, maybe, to not have ever been to Wanuskewin before. So the first time that I went there, even sitting in for the slide presentation, it's kind of awe inspiring. You're sitting there and on the screen you've got the landscape and everything else and you turn around and you look out the window and it's right there. I guess going through the exhibits and playing with the computers and stuff…I'm probably more of a kid than a lot of kids that I'll ever teach. I love that stuff, and I hope the kids do too.

Derek goes more intensely into the value of experiential learning. He notes the value of experience over TV and video, connecting to the reality of the lives of many children. He comes up with the phrase "genuine meaning" to value experiential learning:

And I think being able to push the buttons, and make your choices for what kind of rock is going to make the best arrow head, for example, I think the kids will really get into that. As far as the dance, being able to participate in a round dance…what better way is there to learn about a part of culture. You can watch videos all day long, you know kids watch videos all the time. I think that experience loses its "genuine meaning." To be able to actually participate in a round dance with somebody that knows what they are doing, that is leading you through it, I think that's really important.

Doug and Derrick gain "hands-on" experience.

Derek goes on to note how people integrate experiences. He describes how children remember what they learn, what leaves impressions in their minds, or to put this into learning theory, how children form schema or constructs:

> *As far as a nature walk,… it's one thing to talk about archeology but to walk by and look at the remains of an archeology dig, I mean it's pretty impressive. And I think that's the kind of thing that leaves impressions in the kid's mind and, you know, we are dealing with grades K to 1 children, but that's the kind of thing they re going to remember. You know they are not going to remember little [things], but if they walk down and they see this big old hole where people actually dig and pull things out of that, I think they might remember that.*

For Derek, this project was a new venture into research. Derek valued the experience of moving from university papers, which he thought of as surface-level activity, to real, action research. For him the practicalities of the research process were fascinating – research protocols and ethics approval. He says,

> *It was just, well, to learn the process of how research was gong to [be done]. [Doug] outlined how everybody was going to sign a form, and then the waiver…, and then just the interview process and everything else…. It was the first time that I'd ever been anywhere near anything like this.*

The experience of this action research project provided Derek with the opportunity to work in a cross-cultural context. The reality of Aboriginal knowledge and the Aboriginal point of view was always front and centre, and Derek had the opportunity to interact with the First Nations people on the research project who represented Wanuskewin. Derek talks about his encounter with Aboriginal knowledge, describing the wonder he experienced as he acquired new knowledge:

> *Like with the dance, not picking up an eagle feather if it falls, stuff like that was... just kind of blew me away, because I didn't know about it. And I think there is so much stuff, so much information that we don't know…. I expanded my horizons a little bit better just being there…. The tipi thing, I didn't know there was always the same number of poles, and that each pole really had a sacred significance.*

He goes on to say, "I had always assumed that I was a fairly sensitive person and aware of things but there is lots of little things that I didn't really know about." Visiting Wanuskewin, Derek came to appreciate the value of visiting the heritage park, and the benefit of learning about Aboriginal culture on an equal playing field: the Wanuskewin site.

This action research project provided Derek with a first-hand experience with curriculum. In his comments, Derek outlines how he moved from a belief that curriculum is a listing of content, of material to be covered, to a more complex awareness of curriculum. He describes his understanding of the kindergarten curriculum this way:

> *In kindergarten there essentially is no curriculum. So the stuff that I did wasn't really based on a curriculum, whereas if I'd been interning in grade one or grade four or something like that, the stuff that I did, I would have to have been more structured.*

The experience with the Wanuskewin project propelled Derek to consider the concept of curriculum and to understand it as something more than "stuff that I did." He describes his growing awareness this way:

> *I guess the other thing I learnt about curriculum is that it's just so huge…. For me I think about it and I look at a curriculum and I say, holy smokes, like this seems just so massive….*

He goes on to describe a new view of curriculum which includes not only content but also children, and the importance of the interaction:

> *I understand there is a fine line to balance between curriculum and what the kids are actually going to do because really to the kids what they are going to do is more important than where it is coming from…. Looking at [our handbook], it tells me what is happening in Wanuskewin which is great; it tells me why it's in here, how it connects the curriculum, and I think that's [connection] the goal.*

Working with this project, Derek came to understand research, action research, and professional growth. He says, in response to a question about his involvement in the project, "Research is learning…. I think we all learned something." And he learned first hand about action research. "I think action research is something where you set out to do something, like with us we set out to make the teacher handbook." But Derek realizes his involvement was so much more than participation in research: "For me I have learned so much more than just making a handbook…. And I would assume that everybody else found something, whether it's about themselves, or about culture, or it's just learning how to [develop a handbook]."

Derek left the project with an enhanced understanding of curriculum, and a greater fund of knowledge about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal knowledge. He gained a more comprehensive awareness of curriculum and curriculum development, an initial understanding of the role of research and action research in education, and an appreciation of the McDowell Research Foundation.

2317 Arlington Avenue
Saskatoon SK Canada S7J 2H8
Phone: 306-373-1660
Toll Free: 1-800-667-7762
Fax: 306-374-1122
E-mail: mcdowell@stf.sk.ca

www.stf.sk.ca/mcdowell