

Nigawchiisuun: Participatory evaluation as indigenous methodology

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I. INTRODUCTION

Despite a recent apology for the trauma caused by the imposition of residential schools (Minister, 2008), the legacy of colonisation for First Nations and Inuit people by the Canadian state continues to be felt in their communities. As research produced by government commissions, scholars and activists has shown, this legacy has amounted to genocide, racism, expropriation of their traditional lands, and forced migration, as well as the kidnapping of native children and their placement in residential schools until the last quarter of the 20th century. The effects of these events on aboriginal people, whether urban or on designated reserves, has had profoundly negative implications for their lived experience of Canadian society. The legacies of colonialism are particularly visible in several areas: in education where their children still struggle to meet levels of attainment achieved by their southern peers (Battiste, 2005) in health where many communities are confronted by an emerging epidemic of diabetes (Boston et al., 1997); and in socio-economic status, with growing poverty and its attendant social problems (Schissel and Wotherspoon, 2003).

In countering these legacies of colonisation, aboriginal communities across Canada are beginning to mount their own locally inspired and developed initiatives in business, health, welfare and education to address needs that they have identified and that are organised and delivered from their own particular cultural standpoint and experience. This paper reports on one such initiative created and launched by the Cree Nation of Wemindji (in Quebec, Canada), called COOL (Challenging Our Own Limits) or Nigawchiisuun.¹

The paper will briefly outline the creation, development and implementation of COOL over the past five years and will discuss the theoretical and methodological framework that supports the project. COOL, in this respect we will argue that the participatory evaluation we conducted of COOL represents a potentially fertile approach to research in indigenous contexts. We have organised the paper into three sections. First, we present a brief background and discussion of the origins, impetus and eventual launch of COOL as a pilot project in 2004-5. Second, we provide a general theoretical framework situating participatory evaluation (PE) in relation to the broader field of participatory action research (PAR). Third, and perhaps most importantly, we consider the implications and potential of this methodology for indigenous research. Last, we will provide concluding remarks on participatory evaluation as an indigenous alternative to mainstream program evaluation and related managerial technologies.

II. COOL (NIGAWCHISUUN)

COOL, or Nigawchiisuun in Cree, first began operating in the Cree Nation of Wemindji in January 2005. Wemindji is a small community of approximately 1300 on the eastern coast of the James Bay. It is one of nine such communities with a total population of just over 10,000 Cree (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

From its inception, it has been a locally funded and administered after-school care program that provides places for children from kindergarten age up to grade four (future plans include expanding the program to include older children). The program evolved in response to growing concerns in Wemindji that Cree children and youth were not being served well by existing social and educational programs. Indeed, as the Mianscum report (Mianscum, 1999) made clear, these were concerns that were also shared by other Cree communities in the James Bay. Within Wemindji, however, it was at the 17th Annual General Assembly held in 2000 that issues around children and youth came into sharp focus. In particular, workshops that addressed issues concerning youth and children highlighted a number of pressing concerns including: the need for more community activities; the lack of parenting skills; vandalism; low retention rates; poor student achievement at the elementary level; negative attitude towards self; others and school; poor study habits and substance abuse. Discussion of these issues at the Assembly led to the passing of a motion that mandated the creation and expansion of social programs and services for children and youth within Wemindji. The recommendations of a report issued by the Principal of the Maquatua School, on alcohol and drug abuse, gave further impetus to a collective recognition that something had to be done within the community.

Despite regional initiatives (such as Mianscum) and the reports that flowed from them, there was no clear evidence of any concrete action plan emerging to tackle the problems that had been identified within the nine Cree communities of the James Bay. Consequently, Band Council leaders in Wemindji decided to take the initiative and develop their own locally conceived response to the concerns and problems

identified in the 17th General Assembly workshops, the Mianscum report and other consultations. Led by Chief Rodney Mark and members of the Band Council a decision was made to generate a vision statement that would both guide and provide a framework for the development of future policy making that expressed Cree culture, traditions, customs and knowledge. The project that emerged from this initiative became known as, “Revitalizing and Strengthening Our Traditional Philosophies and Principles Towards Building Strong Governance, Administration and Accountability Systems.” This project, from which COOL was to emerge, aimed to develop a transparent process for local governance that was anchored in Cree language, culture and customs. A key indicator of success for the project was to involve as many of the community’s approximately 1300 members as possible, particularly in the various rounds of consultations that were envisaged as a key element in generating the particularly Cree orientation of the initiative.

COOL was, therefore, generated from within a much broader governance project based on locally defined Cree values, customs, traditions and forms of knowledge (Stocek and Mark, 2009). In particular, a series of band initiatives, flowing from the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values Project*, were conducted that eventually led to the establishment of a COOL committee composed of band and community members responsible for overseeing its design, development, implementation and evaluation. Led by Chief Mark, the COOL committee initiated a consultation process with parents, Elders and community members to determine how the principles and values identified in *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values* could be best integrated and made effective within the after school program that was to become COOL (Figure 2).

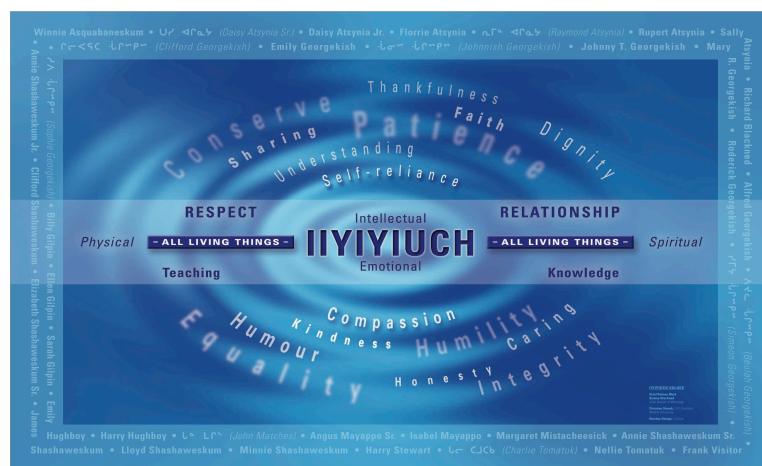


Figure 2.

One of the key questions confronting the participatory evaluation we conducted was how to determine whether or not these principles and values were being realised within COOL through, for example, its organisation, teaching and learning, animation, children’s play, or relationship to the local school and wider community. It was within this broader context that COOL was launched in January 2005.

The aims and objectives of COOL were outlined by Chief Mark in 2004. In particular, he noted that, “[COOL was] to further enhance the development of our children in their intellectual, emotional & physical well-being. Spiritual well being is an outcome of achieving an interconnected, interdependent balance of intellectual, emotional and physical well being” (Mark, 2004). Translating this vision into practice, the COOL committee (established to oversee the program) identified a set of program objectives to guide the future orientation and growth of COOL. These program objectives were as follows:

- it should be fun and entertaining;
- it should be developed through community and parental consultation;
- COOL would serve as a bridge between the school, parents, and the community;

- It should foster creativity and encourage imagination;
- provide a nurturing, healthy, and positive environment;
- foster respect and relationship as well as the *Wemindji Iiyiyiuch Core Values*;
- strengthen an understanding of self, family and community;
- develop proactive personal skills;
- build a foundation for successful experiences outside of the community;
- be student centered;
- build a positive relationship with the local school;
- develop community awareness and leadership;
- involve parents and children in activities together;
- foster the confidence to communicate thoughts and ideas in diverse ways;
- and foster both traditional and contemporary activities based on Iiyiyiuch values.

All these objectives are intended to draw on forms of knowledge, understanding and experience that have traditionally constituted Cree cultural customs, traditions and practices.

As noted above, the program has been overseen by a COOL committee, chaired by Chief Mark, members of the band council, parents and community members. They are a dynamic group of young people in their thirties who are drawn from a range of professional occupations (e.g. the project coordinator of local health services; the project manager of Twaich Development Corporation; a secondary school teacher; an employment officer; and the Chief and his Deputy). While they are primarily concerned with overseeing the implementation and development of COOL, they are also responsible for closely monitoring and acting on findings emerging from the participatory evaluation which they commissioned Dr Steve Jordan and Christine Stoczek (a graduate student), to design organise and implement.ⁱⁱ

While COOL initially began operating in the local school, it was eventually moved to the community's newly constructed sports centre where it still is based. As an after school program, COOL has the following characteristics:

- It runs every day throughout the school year for three hours in the afternoon (3-6pm), including half and full pedagogical days
- COOL offers approximately 30 places to children, kindergarten to grade four (it is intended that the program will eventually expand to offer places to children and youth ages 5-17)
- The day-to-day organisation and administration of COOL is the responsibility of a project manager who reports directly to the COOL committee, and up to six facilitators and animators who direct children's play and other activities.
- The core of the program's staff are the facilitators, most of whom are young women in their early twenties (some of them are parents) drawn from the community. Facilitators work closely with the children and do the day-to-day planning of the program, as well as collaborating with and supervising teenage animators from the school who support their work.
- The project manager and facilitators have all received training in qualitative research so that they can become an integral part of the participatory evaluation. In this respect they have dual roles as educators and researchers/evaluators (their role in the evaluation will be outlined in more detail later)

III. PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

The proliferation of forms of program evaluation during the latter half of the 20th century continues unabated into the 21st. Indeed, program evaluation has not only spawned a massive literature in north America consisting of how-to manuals, technical publications, and academic journals, it is now a multi-billion dollar industry which has paralleled the spread of neo-liberal globalisation. Within this context, in an era of accountability, performativity, and value-added, program evaluation has increasingly become a technology of surveillance, social regulation and extra-local ruling (Smith, 1994) centred on sustaining the social relations of neo-liberal accumulation. As a technology of power, program evaluation has achieved this through legions of consultants, researchers and professional program evaluators who have utilised an equally vast array of methodologies and practices shared by multi-national corporations, national governments, international agencies (such as the World Bank), Universities, and NGOs. While we will make some more observations on these developments later in the paper, for now we draw attention to this genealogy (in the Foucauldian sense) to indicate our critical stance towards, and departure from, a traditional program evaluation approach in evaluating COOL as an after-school program. In adopting a participatory evaluation (an oxymoron for those engaged in the conventional program variant), we wanted to signal an explicit commitment to research that was both participatory and inclusive, as well as sensitive to the particular indigenous context in which it was to be conducted. We also wanted to indicate that what was to be evaluated would not be done using conventionally accepted practices in program evaluation, but would be both experimental and exploratory in mapping out principles and practices that derived from a very different onto-epistemic conceptual terrain. As we show below, this approach was grounded in participatory action research (PAR).

Over its relatively short history the development of PAR has been marked by an ongoing debate among its practitioners over what aims, principles, and practices should be used to conduct social research. This debate has not only turned on substantial theoretical and political differences between practitioners, but on questions of methodology and the social organisation of the research process itself. In this respect it is important to remember that PAR consists of an amalgam of methodological approaches that, together or in different combinations, have produced an orientation to social research rather than a distinct methodology per se (Jordan, 2003). PAR has drawn on a wide array of theoretical paradigms within the social sciences that encompass both mainstream positivist approaches (drawn from social psychology or sociology), as well as critical traditions such as Marxism and critical theory. While these theoretical traditions have been important, the emergence and development of PAR has also continued to be informed and shaped by practice in the field. Such practice has been generated by anti-colonial movements, popular and community struggles, transformative adult education initiatives, and more recently feminism and the new social movements (e.g. environmentalism, gay and lesbian groups, anti-globalisation protesters). One of the defining characteristics of PAR from its beginnings, therefore, is the centrality of this dialogical relationship between theory and practice. Indeed, unlike grounded theory (Glaser, 1968) which aspires to be a quasi-scientific methodology (Burawoy, 1991), PAR is an organic, praxis-based methodology that has deep roots in the actuality of peoples' everyday struggles. From this praxis-based methodology have emerged a number of principles that have come to define PAR (Hagey, 1997, Hall, 1992). We outline what three of these key principles below.

The first is that PAR has tended to eschew conventional (i.e. positivist and structuralist) forms of social scientific research in favour of more critical or non-positivist approaches. As Smith (1990a) has noted, this has its origins in a critique and rejection of conventional social science research as a form of cultural imperialism that continues to be shared by a wide range of groups within both developed and less developed countries. The essence of this critique is that conventional forms of social science research - particularly those that employ quantitative methodologies - tend to generate knowledge making practices that legitimate class inequality under capitalism. In particular, the hierarchical organisation of the social sciences, their procedures for data collection and analysis, and rigid adherence to the separation of researcher and subjects in the pursuit of objectivity, are seen to produce forms of knowledge that express

the relations of ruling (Smith, 1994). Consequently, qualitative approaches are favoured on both technical and ideological grounds. As a collection of techniques or methods they resonate with indigenous epistemologies through their emphasis on holistic perspectives, but also through their openness to narrative or storied representation of the social (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Strong-Wilson, 2008). They are also better suited to small-scale local studies, which are accessible to participation by the communities in which they are conducted. In this respect they are less susceptible to colonisation by outside experts. Non-positivist forms of interpretive inquiry are also preferred because they hold the potential for marginalised groups to have greater access to - and thereby have a voice in - the research process than do quantitative methodologies. Used within a participatory process, qualitative methodologies also encourage engagement in nascent forms of reflexivity, as well as providing tools to stimulate local discursive practices and group activities that constitute PAR.

A second theme that characterises PAR is that it is openly political. Its politics is evident in several ways. It is political in the sense that its practices have emerged from a critique of western social science methodologies viewing these in many instances as cultural imperialism (Said, 1993, Smith, 1999). This theme is also expressed through its commitment to work *with* (as opposed to *on*) subordinate, marginalised, and oppressed groups to change their circumstances within society. This stems from the recognition that the social is constituted by asymmetrical power relations in the workplace, the family, education and, more broadly, within politics and civil society that systematically generate inequalities between individuals and groups. The recognition that these inequalities are endemic to capitalist societies, especially so in an era of neo-liberal globalisation, has produced a strong ethical stance that research should focus on issues of social justice. Arising from this stance, PAR has also been equally committed to democratic engagement/activism, transparency and openness, a strong co-operative and communitarian ethos, inclusion and a clear conviction to issues connected with sustainability. These core values have made PAR a particularly flexible methodology, adaptable across a broad range of issues and contexts.

However, what distinguishes PAR from other research methodologies that share a similar ethics is that:

... it has been demonstrated time and time again that the application of the researches of others (especially positivist research, which blithely claims or assumes universal applicability) in new social, cultural, and economic contexts is unlikely to work. *People must conduct substantive research themselves on the practices that affect their own lives.* (McTaggart, 1997/*italics added*)

Thus, unlike conventional forms of research methodology where authority is vested in the researcher-academic, PAR aims to shift responsibility for the research process on to individuals and groups who are directly affected by these inequalities. Kapoor (2009) for instance, argues that the only way to ensure that a PAR process is initiated and sustained is for academic researchers to continually work at embedding all aspects of participatory research in a living praxis, where participants learn to take control and academic researchers become 'willing hostages' to their concerns. Insofar as professional researchers have a role within PAR, therefore, it is to set their expertise alongside the lay knowledge, skills and experiences of people who are the focus of their investigations. In this way the research process is conceptualised as an encounter, where equal partners meet, enter into dialogue and share different kinds of knowledge and expertise on how to address issues of exploitation, oppression and justice. In this respect PAR is unashamedly committed to a politics of equity and social transformation that conventional social science research would dismiss as ideological.

Last, the politics of equity and social inclusion that PAR has engaged in has had direct implications for the kinds of theoretical traditions on which its knowledge making practices have historically been constituted. This orientation has led to the adoption of theoretical paradigms that have embraced some form of critical theory (e.g. critical ethnography (Jordan, 2002)) or Freirian critical pedagogy (Fals-Borda and Anisur Rahman, 1991). This has also included versions of Marxism and neo-Marxism, feminism, post-colonial critiques, postmodernism, cultural studies and indigenous methodology that have generated some

of its key conceptual practices. For example, Friere's (1972) concept of conscientisation, Gramsci's (1974) notion of hegemony, the feminist analysis of patriarchy (Smith, 1990b), or the indigenous idea of 'researching back' (Smith, 2005) have either influenced, or directly shaped, the forms of social organisation that practitioners have used to conduct PAR.

IV. INDIGENOUS RESEARCH AND JAGGED WORLD VIEWS

Through its adoption of qualitative, non-positivist methodology; its political commitments; and its engagement with forms of critical social theory, scholars such as Sinclair (2003) have argued that:

Participatory research presents a non-directive, holistic approach to community research and action. For Indigenous communities, disempowered by western research hegemony, the crucial concepts of PAR include respect of indigenous knowledge and worldviews, indigenous epistemology, respect and inclusivity in the research agenda [...] PAR combats intellectual imperialism through its grassroots approach to supporting and nurturing the reconstruction of indigenous knowledge, and by operating on the assumption that knowledge and action that originates with the people, will be the most effective in addressing the problems of the people. These tenets are most closely aligned with indigenous science [...] PAR does not demand the separation of the mind, body, and spirit; rather these are viewed as legitimate ways of information gathering, and coming to knowledge. Problem solving is placed within the hands of those most affected [...] Participatory Action Research, with its emphasis on participation and hence, personal empowerment, can only invoke the life force. (p.5)

As will become evident in what follows, the PE we have constructed for COOL is indebted to these principles, as it is to the research of others in the field of participatory methodologies (Kapoor and Jordan, 2009, Patton, 2002), in an attempt to include indigenous research agendas. Consequently, in this section of the paper we are concerned with elaborating on how these principles can be used by indigenous communities to construct approaches to research that better reflect their needs and aspirations.

Participatory evaluation facilitates improvements and generates knowledge as it asks people to purposefully spend time thinking about what they are doing and why. PE is concerned with making research and its results meaningful and useful to the people involved, so that they will be better informed when making future decisions and taking action. PE often includes people directly in the process from beginning to end, whether in constructing research questions, or collecting and analysing data. Participation of this nature democratizes the research process as it is organized in an emerging and on-going manner in order to empower the voices of the people who will be most affected by the programs being evaluated. Thus, research agendas are not set by an outside evaluator but evolve through a collaborative process. PE responds to needs, interests and concerns as primary users identify and focus the process on outcomes which they think are important and that matter to the community. The evaluator does not assume the role of the expert but instead may be part teacher, facilitator, collaborator and participant in the process. When participants collaborate with the evaluator, establishing the questions to be asked, ways used to collect the information, how to understand what the information means, as well as analyzing and understanding the conclusions drawn, participants become empowered in an active sense and begin to take ownership of the PE process. Most crucially for indigenous peoples, self-determination and self-governing processes are engaged.

PE methods emphasize the importance of the design and planning process, viewing it as interconnected and educative within the evaluation process itself. This encourages participants to be responsible to themselves and their community first. As we illustrate with *word pictures* below, care is taken to generate and distribute results in ways that can be easily grasped and used to make decisions concerning issues or to improve the programs under evaluation. The goal is to provide knowledge that is based on issues and questions that grow from the groups concerned, focusing on program improvement, not judgment-making

that is often associated with conventional program evaluations. As the PE evolves, participants can assume more control, using the evaluator as a sounding board. However, for this to be effective, the evaluator must be immersed in the evaluation process. To meet these goals, evaluation has to be a continual, on-going process. As the evaluation progresses, changes happen as people reflect on customary or taken-for-granted practices than they might otherwise have done. Also, the evaluation process itself may evolve, changing with the participants.

From the very beginning, the COOL committee was concerned to ensure that a comprehensive PE process was built into the development of COOL that reflected local needs, aspirations and *Iiyiyiuch Core Values*. With these in mind, and in consultation with the two external evaluators from McGill University (Steven Jordan and Christine Stoczek), it established the following objectives for the evaluation:

- To implement a program evaluation of COOL that would engage local Cree facilitators/animators in training and research and thereby build capacity within the community for future programs
- To stimulate a sustained dialogue on community development and social programs
- To develop a collaborative approach to community development initiatives that would reflect the community's *Iiyiyiuch Core Values* by engaging local knowledge networks on social and educational issues
- To develop and adapt innovative research processes used in the PE of COOL for future social and educational programs in the community
- To foster approaches to lifelong learning by training community members involved with COOL in research practices that could be used in other learning contexts
- To provide research opportunities and intensive field experiences for a graduate student (Christine Stoczek) from McGill in aboriginal research issues, educational programming, and PE
- To enhance capacity for creating forms of Cree social capital that will contribute to the future development of the community

These objectives, therefore, have informed the development of PE used to evaluate COOL over the past five years. In line with the alternative and exploratory character of PE we have attempted to construct novel approaches in the conduct and practice of the research that would be flexible enough to accommodate the very different literacy levels and educational experiences of facilitators working on the program. With the exception of one young man, facilitators were invariably young women from the community, a number of whom had not completed high school or any form of post-16 training and education. Nevertheless, they have been crucial to the evaluation as they do not only run COOL on a day-to-day basis, but have been trained as participatory evaluators. Consequently, early on a decision was made to train the facilitators in PE methods that would have three objectives:

- allow Cree to be used as the dominant language of the research process
- to avoid reliance on methods of recording data as written texts e.g. entries to journals
- and create a strong sense of solidarity and team work

To realize these objectives we decided to adopt evaluative methods that primarily relied on visual, photographic, materials. While facilitators did keep field journals to record textual data, extensive use was made of digital *Fuji Finepix* cameras (provided to every facilitator) that allow photographs, with attached audio recordings, to be taken. Through a series of workshops, facilitators were encouraged to take photographs of everyday events, activities, objects and situations that they considered represented either a

COOL highlight or lowlight (Orlick et al., 2006). They were then asked to make short audio recordings for each photograph describing their own impressions and thoughts.

The purpose of this exercise was to encourage facilitators to attach their voice and words to the photograph as a way of contributing to and re-framing the actual picture they had taken beyond its purely visual components. Placing the photographer in the picture in this way we hoped to create a self-reflexive awareness of the broader social relations that constituted COOL within the community. These word pictures then became the primary source of data that we began to assemble as part of our evaluation. In many respects these photographs defined the PE process, as they have acted to focus and engage facilitators and external evaluators in a range of activities, from camera use workshops to data analysis seminars, dissolving social distinctions and creating a strong sense of collective identity. They have also formed the basis for a digital archive which we have used to systematically document the development of COOL over the past five years.

Thus, unlike traditional forms of program evaluation which impose change from above (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, Stronach and Morris, 1994) the participatory evaluation of COOL sought to effect change that arose out of consensus building processes from below. Conventional program evaluation also differs from PE in its essentially managerialist aims and objectives, typically expressed in the ubiquitous needs assessment analyses that it mandates, as well as promulgating a discourse that is anchored in southern concepts of individualism, private property rights, efficiency, performativity and productivity (i.e. capitalism). It reproduces what Leroy Little Bear has called 'jagged world views' within aboriginal communities (Battiste, 2000). In this respect conventional forms of program evaluation can be understood as powerful tools of neo-colonisation by exerting technologies of extra-local ruling that either limit or negate processes of decolonisation and self-determination (Cooke and Kothari, 2001b, Cooke and Kothari, 2001a). Drawing on the key principles of PAR outlined above, PE offers not only a profound critique of the powerful technologies associated with program evaluation, but also provides an alternative methodological paradigm within which to construct forms of social inquiry that are compatible with the parallel processes of decolonisation and self-determination i.e. indigenous methodology.

One question we are invariably asked after making conference presentations - usually by mainstream program evaluators - is 'How do you measure the success of COOL?', or more specifically, 'What are its success indicators?' In responding to these questions we have pointed to a number of key indicators, including:

- strong support for COOL from parents with children in the program
- the fact that teachers in the local school have noticed how children participating in COOL are calmer and better behaved
- or the promotion of healthier practices, such as the elimination of junk food from children's diets

However, such questions are typically generated from within a conventional program evaluation paradigm. Concepts such as 'measure,' 'success,' and 'value' are conceptual practices that are either fundamentally contradictory to the underlying philosophy and methodological orientation of PE as indigenous methodology. If these very comfortable concepts are not engaged critically, however, PE stands to be co-opted by forms of program evaluation that will subvert the dual processes of de-colonisation and self-determination (Jordan, 2003).

In addressing these questions, therefore, we have been disinclined to respond with a discourse that draws on managerialist notions of measurement, success, performance, productivity and so on. Rather, our argument is that as conventional forms of program evaluation serve only to reproduce the jagged world views of (neo)colonialism within aboriginal communities, indigenous peoples must - in collaboration with other researchers - attempt to generate alternative epistemological concepts and paradigms for research that

draws on indigenous knowledge, values, experience and understanding for their inspiration, as well as critically engaging dominant knowledge producing systems of the social sciences. This would mean, for example, a shift away from the positivist and quantitative concepts we described earlier, to historical and qualitative indicators that are able to capture the reality of aboriginal life in all its complexity.

Tuhiwai Smith (Smith, 1999) has argued for this kind of approach, with the potential benefits of ‘researching back,’ in the same tradition as ‘writing back’ or ‘talking back’, that have served post-colonial or anti-colonial discourses. These processes have involved a ‘knowingness of the colonizer’ and a ‘recovery’ of indigenous people’s knowledge, an analysis of colonialism and a struggle for self-determination. Thus, “Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized” (p. 7). As we have argued in this paper, PE as a research process can be understood as a counter-hegemonic research methodology, where dominant forms of research, such as program evaluation, can be opened up to provide new spaces for aboriginal peoples to *research back*. In doing so, they can re-negotiate and re-organize the nature of their collaborative relationships with external researchers, and also begin to assert the primacy of their own epistemological paradigms in the respective context(s) of decolonisation and self-determination that they may confront in Canada. In this respect, we agree with (Absolon and Willet, 2004) that:

Aboriginal research must have contexts that acknowledge both our cultural and colonial history. Such variables as knowledge of history, culture and contemporary contexts affect process and research outcomes, in turn, affect policy, programming, practice and societal perception. Renewal in Aboriginal research processes and methodology requires strength and pride in self, family, community, culture, nation, identity, economy, and governance. (p.12)

We would argue that, handled correctly, PE constitutes a powerful and alternative research methodology that can – and, we believe, must - be adapted to meet the special needs of aboriginal communities in dealing with the dual historical processes of decolonisation and self-determination in the contemporary period. The PE we have conducted of COOL over the past five years is, in our opinion, but one example of how this challenge might be engaged.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of our key arguments throughout this paper, therefore, has been that conventional forms of program evaluation should not be used in Aboriginal communities. In particular, we have noted that:

1. Its key conceptual practices are derived from an onto-epistemic imperative derived from conventional social sciences. As we have shown above, this translates into a concern with measurement and evaluation (i.e. “valuing”) that is primarily positivist and quantitative
2. In an era of neo-globalisation, it perpetuates and reproduces technologies of power that are fundamentally concerned with management, control, efficiency, performance, productivity and value-added (i.e. profit maximization)
3. In an era of neo-liberal globalisation, program evaluation reproduces social relations and practices that perpetuate neo-colonial patterns of extra-local ruling, whilst also undermining projects aimed at self-determination

We have also argued that that participatory evaluation (PE) can be seen as a powerful, alternative, approach to conventional program evaluation, particularly when working within Aboriginal contexts and communities. In drawing explicitly on key principles and practices that have defined PAR over the past half century - in particular a non-positivist qualitative methodology; an engagement with critical theory; and a commitment to social justice – we have attempted to show how participatory evaluation provides a methodology that simultaneously offers a critique and an alternative to managerialist forms of program

evaluation that are typically deployed by external consultants in evaluating social programs. These principles and practices were consistently used in constructing our PE of COOL (Nigawchisiisun) over the past five years. As we have shown, the PE of COOL that we have been developing has had several key characteristics. First, the training in PE that Cree facilitators had to undergo aimed at building research skills, competencies and knowledge in conducting social research from a standpoint that is respectful of the local community (i.e. that was Cree). Second, COOL engaged in a Friirian process of conscientisation, which aimed to build awareness among facilitators, parents and the wider community of the benefits of developing an autonomous social program that was inspired by Cree traditions, forms of knowledge, customs, and values. Third, PE deliberately eschews the top-down, managerialist methodologies of conventional program evaluation and the “jagged world views” that it reproduces as a technology of social regulation. Fourth, PE is a methodology that has the potential to subvert the (neo)colonialist agenda of mainstream program evaluation, while also articulating with broader processes of self-determination and decolonisation. Last, it is for these reasons that we argue that PE can be considered a promising, green field site, which has the potential to mark out new pathways for exploring indigenous methodologies.

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ENDNOTES

i <http://cool-wemindji.ca/vision/index.html>

ii This study was made possible by a grant from the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC grant # 856-2005-0027). We would like to express our gratitude to SSHRC for their generous support.