

# Implementing Capacity-Building, Respect, Equity, and Empowerment (CREE) in the Social Sciences

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## Abstract

*The goals of 'naturalized knowledge systems' (NKS) and 'empowering partnerships' are to improve information networks, expand and refine local knowledge systems, and provide a healthy environment for future generations. With equity as its foundation, empowering partnerships seek to incorporate the concepts of capacity-building, respect, equity, and empowerment (CREE) in research. However, before empowering partnerships can be initiated, the process of 'healing the hurt' must be addressed. Healing the hurt acknowledges the socio-historical context of First Nations, rural communities, and academic researchers. The following article discusses how naturalized knowledge systems, healing the hurt, and the concepts of CREE were successfully applied into two research projects. The conclusions examine how this process can be implemented in protected area management.*

## Introduction

The involvement of local people in research initiatives has become a major feature of community-based research and participatory action research. However, while these principles have received widespread support (Lickers, 1994; Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks, 2000; Adams and Hulme, 2001; Mowforth and Munt, 2003), there has been little research on the concepts and ideas upon which it draws. In this paper we discuss these roots and their application in two graduate studies, and examine how this process can be implemented in protected area management.

According to Henry Lickers, the Director of Akwesasne's Environmental Division, partnerships in sustainable development projects can succeed within the parameters of '*naturalized knowledge systems*' (NKS) and the methodological approaches of '*healing the hurt*' and the '*zeal to deal*' (also referred to as '*empowering partnerships*') (Lickers, pers. com., 1996). Extending beyond the traditional realms of '*traditional ecological knowledge*' (TEK) – the basic understanding of the flora and fauna – NKS illustrates a mutual relationship between human societies and their environments. NKS can be best summarised as the sum total of grass-root experiences, technical expertise, ecological proficiency, socio-political competence, spiritual and ecological attunement, and inter-generational knowledge transfer (Lickers, 1994). NKS can be found in most communities that have a historical link or 'bond to the land'. In addition, NKS communities can be distinguished by the following six foundations:

- 1) the Earth is our mother;
- 2) the emotional and spiritual spheres are intertwined within our daily reality;
- 3) consensus, cooperation and mediation are the proper ways to solve challenges;
- 4) responsibility is the cornerstone of a mutualistic society – each individual must acknowledge his/her responsibilities and learn from them without fear of failure;
- 5) knowledge must be linked with responsibility and wisdom; and,
- 6) the process of cause and effect is seen as a web, spiralling back and forth from the physical, social, economical, and spiritual spheres – science and technology are components of this complex equation (Lickers, 1994).

Representing decentralisation, participation, respect, equity generation, and empowerment, NKS is a natural link to community based research or community conservation initiatives (Lickers, pers. com., 1995).

## Applying the Concepts of CREE in the Social Sciences

In the following sections we will examine how the processes of *healing the hurt* and *empowering partnerships* were incorporated into two academic graduate studies, the first being an MA thesis entitled *The Great Law of Peace and Social Movements in Akwesasne* (Lemelin, 1997) and the second being a doctoral study examining the human dimensions of Churchill's polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) viewing industry (Lemelin, 2004).

Lasting three years (1993-1996) and conducted in Akwesasne, the objectives of the master's research were to:

- identify Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Mohawk socio-political knowledge;
- highlight environmental transformations, conflicts, and socio-cultural adaptation; and,
- illustrate the role of the 'Great Law of Peace' in past and in contemporary Mohawk politics.

Findings from this study revealed that the *Kaianerenkowa* (the Great Law of Peace) has been transformed from a system of lore expounding communal participatory democracy into a socio-political construction servicing the needs of various (and sometimes opposing) Mohawk political groups in Akwesasne. Further, the emergence of the Great Law of Peace in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was seen by some as a sign of the revitalization, and perhaps, return to, traditional Mohawk and Haudenosaunee beliefs (Lemelin, 1997).

The second study, a doctoral thesis, lasted from 2000-2003 and was conducted in Churchill, Manitoba. The purpose of this study was to examine the human dimensions of wildlife tourism with the intent of providing a more comprehensive demographic, behavioural and psychographic profile of wildlife tourists visiting this provincially designated protected area, the Churchill Wildlife Management Area; and to determine the extent to which these aspects of wildlife tourists are related to characteristics of the environmental context of their wildlife viewing experience in a protected area. More specifically, research objectives were set to:

- conduct the first human dimensions study pertaining specifically to polar bear viewers, thereby establishing a baseline inventory;
- incorporate stakeholder involvement from the project's onset; and,
- promote researcher transparency and accountability (e.g., information dissemination) (Lemelin, 2004).

Findings in this study revealed that, similar to other wildlife tourism destinations, polar bear viewers in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area (CWMA) were generally older, well-educated, and relatively affluent. However, an examination of their motivations, wildlife values, pro-environmental behaviour, and specialization levels indicated variations among the individuals comprising the overall sample. Using cluster analysis to derive a typology of wildlife tourists based on selected psychographic indicators, some wildlife tourism archetypes (e.g., specialized wildlife tourists) appeared, thereby supporting earlier typologies of wildlife tourists (Orams, 1999). However, other types of polar bear viewers (e.g., general wildlife tourists) were revealed that appear to not particularly embody the ideals of ecotourism, nor were they exemplary models of wildlife tourism.

The following section describes how the process of *healing the hurt* and the *zeal to deal* were applied in both studies.

## ***Empowering Partnerships and Healing the Hurt***

Rising concerns over past 'research ethics' by non-Indigenous researchers have led Native researchers (LaFromboise and Plake, 1983), applied anthropologists (Hedican, 1995), and proponents of 'community conservation' (Adams and Hulme, 2001) to voice their concerns over the repercussions of research projects in communities. Within the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, both leaders (Benedict, pers. com., 1994), and scholars (Mohawk, 1988) have stated that research impacts reverberate beyond the traditional realm of government and/or academia and back into the communities themselves. What is needed in these studies is research accountability and transparency, which, would, if not eliminate, at least minimize and regulate researchers and their findings in native communities (Lickers, pers. com., 1995). The concepts of capacity-building, respect, equity and empowerment (or CREE) can promote such research accountability. These four concepts are embodied in two pro-

cesses known as *healing the hurt* and the *zeal to deal* (*empowering partnerships*). During both studies, community members and researchers were encouraged to acknowledge the socio-cultural context in North America (past and present) through a process known as *healing the hurt*. Both processes are discussed here.

## **Healing The Hurt**

Before *empowering partnerships* can be initiated, past inadequacies must be addressed by *healing the hurt*. *Healing the hurt* is a process that addresses the different histories and cultural diversity in North America. When properly acknowledged and understood, diversity can result in a ‘creative tension’ contributing to capacity-building, respect, equity and empowerment in partnerships. However, before the concepts of CREE can be implemented, the four stages – denial, anger, introspection and reconciliation – of *healing the hurt* need to be addressed (Lickers, 1994). These concepts are described briefly.

### **Denial**

Denial ensues when researchers and participants become aware of different socio-historical perspectives. This awareness can result in anger or the projection of problems to other parties (Lickers, pers. com., 1995).

### **Anger**

New responsibilities and demands placed upon limited resources can result in perceptions of deprivation. These perceptions (real or imagined) can contribute to rising tension in group dynamics. Rather than suppressing or denying these emotions, *healing the hurt* encourages the partners to vent their dissent. When ‘aggression’ is addressed through frank and constructive dialogues, then past differences and stereotypes can be discarded. Once achieved, introspection can begin (Lickers, pers. com., 1995).

### **Introspection**

Introspection is attained when the partners acquire the ability to see beyond their own socio-cultural parameters. This cultural awareness can stimulate desires by the partners to address past hurts by emphasizing the strength of

diversity and cooperation. This is known as a call to action (Lickers, pers. com., 1995).

## Action

Action is the final step of *healing the hurt*. Past injustices have been sincerely addressed, objectives, aims and ambitions have been voiced, and the partners are now prepared to act in a mutually beneficial manner (Lickers, pers. com. 1995).

*Healing the hurt* deals with difficult and often controversial issues. For example, one possible application of healing the hurt in protected area management would be addressing past exclusionary practices of Ontario Parks or Parks Canada vis-a-vis indigenous peoples (Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks, 2000). When these issues have been properly addressed, the *zeal to deal* or *empowering partnerships*, in the form of community conservation (Adams and Hulme, 2001) or genuine partnerships (Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks, 2000) can be set in motion.

## **The Zeal To Deal – Empowering Partnerships**

The *zeal to deal* is a call to action for researchers. Together the CREE concepts encourage participatory partnerships and emphasize the strengths of socio-cultural diversity and cooperation, while promoting transparency, flexibility, accountability and understanding. The following section defines the concepts of CREE, and provides examples to illustrate how CREE was incorporated into the two research projects.

## **The Concepts of CREE**

Capacity-building is defined as a process requiring an understanding of the impacts of different historical perspectives and socio-cultural beliefs. In order to accommodate these distinct perspectives, partners may need to develop new skills (i.e., openness and tolerance). Before conducting any field research, the researcher was required to undergo sensitization processes including reviewing literature pertaining to First Nations and local communities and participating in numerous discussions with the principal project directors. Capacity-

building for the doctoral study was facilitated by the researcher's presence in the community from 1997 to 2000. It was during this time that the researcher had the chance to communicate formally and informally with local stakeholders involved in bear-viewing and with the establishment of two protected areas near Churchill (the Churchill Wildlife Management Area and Wapusk National Park). This process provided the opportunity to develop a research proposal that could address local issues of concern. Once the researcher had gained a good understanding of the socio-historical context in Churchill, he was ready to activate respect.

Respect and sensitivity are essential to eliminate past stereotypes. Respect is activated when partners are willing to incorporate indigenous systems of lore and follow local protocols (Lickers, pers. com., 1996). During the masters research, two protocols were implemented: lighting a fire at the woods' edge of the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne, and entering the Haudenosaunee Confederacy through the 'Well' or the 'Eastern Door' (guarded by the Mohawk nation) of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse (Lemelin, 1999). Here two members of the community, Henry Lickers and Lloyd Benedict, invited the researcher into the community. Assisted by Lickers and Benedict, a research topic of interest to the community of Akwesasne was developed. A similar approach was used in the development of a research questions for the doctoral thesis, since the idea was developed in the community of Churchill, Manitoba prior to the actual research phase. This process allowed the stakeholders and researcher to examine various ideas before settling on a few specific research questions (Lemelin, 2004).

Equity is often related to financial resources. However, equity encompasses much more than money. Assets include employment, royalties, knowledge systems, and 'sweat equity'. A 'back and brain approach' was used during the three years master's research in Akwesasne. The 'brain approach' comprised of such academic duties as the translation (French to English) of documents for Akwesasne. The 'back approach' included participation in the Sheek Island reclamation project, the erection of an Osprey Nest, and planting trees in the community. The brain approach in the doctoral research consisted of typical academic duties – conference presentations (e.g., academic, and local meetings) and publications. The back approach including assisting guides and drivers with interpretation and feeding the clientele at lunch hour during the tundra vehicle outings.

According to Lord and Hutchison (1993), empowerment is the awareness to create both capacity and alternatives, and the ability to develop new directions. Since empowerment decreases dependence and increases self-reliance, the goal of any researchers should be then to promote empowerment, and essentially work oneself out a job (Lickers, pers. com., 1996). By highlighting the socio-political knowledge of the Mohawk people, Lemelin (1999) demonstrated that the Mohawk's *naturalized knowledge systems* extended far beyond the traditional realms of the flora and fauna. The thesis demonstrated that the Great Law of Peace incorporated a profound ecological insight within a dynamic system of socio-political understanding, and spiritual/cultural attunement. Empowerment was also assured by providing each interviewee with a chance to make changes or add comments from their interviews. In addition, two members of Akwesasne, Henry Lickers (co-thesis director) and Lloyd Benedict (advisor) actively participated in the authors thesis defense and future publications.

The goal of the doctoral study was to produce the first social inventory on the human dimensions of Churchill's polar bear viewing industry. The study also provided the opportunity for community members, stakeholders and wildlife tourists to present their comments and voice their concerns regarding polar bear viewing in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. These perspectives were then 'given voice' through various presentations (e.g., conferences, informal presentations in Churchill) and publications (e.g., journal articles, newspaper articles).

## Discussion

The goal of this article was to demonstrate how *naturalized knowledge systems*, *healing the hurt* and the *zeal to deal* promoted applied and cooperative research approaches among various stakeholders. Demanding an enormous amount of physical energy and 'time commitment', applied participation to community research often extends beyond the traditional parameters of traditional academic research projects, delimited by standardized timelines. In this last section, we discuss some of the challenges encountered and opportunities created by these two projects.



## Challenges

*Empowering partnerships* can be confronted with a multitude of issues, which, if improperly addressed, can obstruct the process of *healing the hurt* and *empowering partnerships*. Some of the difficulties that were faced are:

- socio-cultural barriers were often difficult to overcome;
- spatial and temporal differences (e.g., communication, distances, and differences in communal, academic, and bureaucratic paces) created some communication problems;
- accountability, responsibility, and transparency required personal perseverance and integrity;
- this type of research implied contract work – a type of financing that made budgeting unpredictable for both graduate students and community representatives;
- project directions were transformed by the appearance of new actors or new local demands; and,
- research is dynamic – topics and themes can be transformed with the appearance of new stakeholders.

## Opportunities

*Empowering partnerships* promote transparency and accountability in research. They are an attempt to give something back to the community, beyond the traditional thesis copy or token consultation (Lickers, pers. com., 1995). During *empowering partnerships*, stakeholders are kept informed of developments and findings throughout the study. At the conclusion of the study, researchers are required to disseminate the findings in various formats, which may include traditional presentations, open houses, poster sessions, and writing research summaries outside of traditional academic journals. To summarize *empowering partnerships*:

- recognizes that local community knowledge extends far beyond the ecological awareness of the flora and fauna – indeed, NKS incorporates all forms of knowledge systems including socio-political knowledge, local expertise and spiritual understanding;

- promotes equitable partnerships, which will in turn stimulate external networks with numerous partners including academia, governments, private sectors and the media;
- ensures that trust and integrity become firmly embedded, and research mandates are fulfilled;
- encourages an applied and multicultural approach to research;
- promotes the concept of researcher responsibility: responsibility extends far beyond a commitment to humanity, it extends to all constituents of Mother Earth;
- validates social sciences as part of ecosystem management;
- highlights the need for multi-method analysis (questionnaires, behavioural observations and interviews) and interdisciplinary approaches (history, anthropological, environmental sociology); and,
- requires that publications and research materials are subject to participant review and made available to all partners.

While *empowering partnerships* require larger investments of time and finances by researchers, the contributions to the community and to the researcher on the long-run far outweigh any negative drawbacks on the short-term (Lickers, per. com., 1996).

## Conclusion

This article illustrates how *empowering partnerships* were created in two small graduate research projects. However, the contributions of *healing the hurt* and CREE are not relegated to applied research, for the benefits of this approach were highlighted in the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks (2000) report:

*“Healing, building respect and co-operation will shift Parks Canada and its Aboriginal partners away from attitudes and actions based on asserting rights and toward attitudes and actions based on accepting responsibility. Setting such an example can only inspire Canadians as whole to make similar*

*shift. As Canadians' respect for Aboriginal peoples grows, so too does our understanding of the traditional ethics and uses of Aboriginal peoples within national parks. Developing true partnerships between Parks Canada and Aboriginal peoples will ensure the protection of these sacred places and sets an example for other Canadians to follow.” (Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks, 2000: 15).*

While specifically referring to Aboriginal peoples and Parks Canada the strength of the process is that it can apply to any partnerships requiring joint-management of protected areas. Thus, the achievement of empowering partnerships is not that it provides ‘proof’ that this approach ‘works’, its contribution is that it has created the space for a set of community participation that takes many forms and allows for the possibility to achieve different results (Adams and Hulme, 2001).

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