

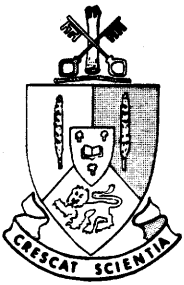
**Developing a Process  
For  
Conducting Educational Research  
With  
The Dakota People of Wahpeton**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Education

by

Leo Joseph Omani  
Indian and Northern Education Program  
Department of Educational Foundations  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan

502000 760/47



**UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN**  
**PERMISSION TO USE POSTGRADUATE THESES**

TITLE OF THESIS Developing a Process For Conducting Educational Research With The Dakota  
People of Wahpeton

NAME OF AUTHOR Leo Joseph Omani

DEPARTMENT OR COLLEGE Department of Educational Foundations/INEP

DEGREE Master of Education

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SIGNATURE Leo J. Omani

ADDRESS Wahpeton Dakota  
Indian First Nation, Box 128,  
Prince Albert, Sask.

DATE August 19, 1992

## Abstract

Historically, research on Aboriginal education issues has ignored the needs of Aboriginal people and disempowered the Aboriginal community. This thesis seeks to offer a corrective to that trend.

The intent of the thesis research was to establish a process for conducting educational research with one Aboriginal community - the Dakota People of Wahpeton - which would enable this community to have a legitimate voice and control over future research that will be conducted on their behalf. A methodology called Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) was utilized because it provided the means for community input and direction. Through the use of CBPR, collaborative relationships were established with 20 Dakota People of Wahpeton, who were identified as the research participants. The interview was used as the primary research method.

The thesis discusses how the conflict between two cultural world views - the Aboriginal view of the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota People, generally referred to as "Sioux", and the contemporary Western view - was

resolved within the process of implementing the Community-Based Participatory Research methodology. This resolution of differences was accomplished by bridging, then mirroring, the methodologies and ways of gaining knowledge unique to these two respective cultural world views. Additionally, theoretical and practical suggestions are offered so that the thesis might serve as a model for Dakota-Nakota-Lakota Community-Based Participatory Research in the future.

In keeping with Community-Based Participatory Research, the voice of the people will be emphasized in this thesis, through extensive use of quotes. Furthermore, the voice of the researcher will be clearly identified so that he may be held accountable for his input.

## Acknowledgements

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A special thanks is also offered to the following for supporting this thesis work: The Chief and Council of Wahpeton, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee, the Dakota People of Wahpeton who agreed to become the research participants for this thesis work, the Dakota Nations of Canada, the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies which provided the Scholarship to conduct this thesis work, and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for the student allowance and other administrative costs.

A special acknowledgement is also offered to my two children, Jason and Carla, for their understanding and the moral support they offered me in completing the thesis. Thanks to all concerned.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Edith Omani, who taught me the values of respect, honesty, independence, and hard work. In addition, the joy of laughter.

I also dedicate this work to my relatives, friends, and others whose feelings I may have hurt in some way in order to reach this level of knowledge. The only thing I can say is, I hope the contents of this thesis will be of benefit to you in the long term as it has for me. Please accept my apology for having been insensitive to your feelings and I ask for your forgiveness.

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## Note on Writing Style

Including one's experiences within a scientific document is relatively new to social science research (Gerrard, 1990; Nunez Molina, 1987; Schick, 1991; Sykey, 1983). This thesis thus becomes part of this new pedagogy which differs from the current predominant Western notion and style for writing a scientific document.

In this study, although the term "the researcher" has been replaced with "I" to ensure accountability for what has been stated, chapters one through five follow - for the most part - a more conventional Western approach to writing a scientific document. The information presented in these chapters, however, may appear repetitive at times. This repetition, modeled on the traditional Aboriginal style of story-telling with its cyclical learning and communication, is intentional to make the thesis more accessible to the Dakota People of Wahpeton.

The concluding chapters of this thesis are presented from an Aboriginal perspective which does not follow the linear approach to writing a scientific document and may even appear iterative at times, as it merges my thinking, intuition, and emotions in describing what was encountered

within the process of developing, conducting and completing this thesis work. The information in these concluding chapters is drawn primarily from the journal of this research study and is referred to as field-notes (see Appendix A). This information could have subsequent implications - for Western thinkers and Aboriginal students - when conducting future social science research with Aboriginal communities.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

My name is Wanmditanka. The translation of this name from Dakota to English means Big Eagle. In contemporary Western culture I am known as Leo J. Omani. The surname Omani is derived from my grandfather's Dakota name MahpeyaOmani which means Walking Cloud. My grandfather was known to contemporary Western culture as Joe Omani.

When I was born, one of our Dakota Spiritual Elders on Wahpeton reserve predicted that I would grow up to learn a lot about the White man's paper, which would benefit our people in the long term. Due to this prophecy I have committed myself to learn within the education system of contemporary Western culture. But, I have always struggled, because the cultural knowledge and history I received from the Western education system did not coincide with the cultural knowledge and history passed on to me by our Dakota Elders on Wahpeton.

I admit that the prophecy to learn more of the White man's paper - so as to benefit my Dakota People

of Wahpeton - has baffled me for the better part of my thirty-seven years. It has only been in the last number of years while at Graduate School that I have come to realize that I am now just starting to fulfill the prophecy which was bestowed upon me. I have come to realize that I am but an instrument for my Dakota People of Wahpeton. My task is to put down on paper their dreams and aspirations so as to regain control of our culture and history; also, to offer them an insight as to how they could succeed within the education system as it now exists today - in this contemporary 'modern world' that has come to be known as North America.

In light of what has just been stated, this thesis has been written from a cross-cultural perspective. It provides information that could be beneficial to the two cultures dealt with in this study.

The next section of this thesis provides an overview of the remaining part of this chapter. The chapter concludes by presenting the main purpose for this study, the statement of the problem and the subproblems, and the significance for this study.

### Overview

The purpose of this section is twofold. First, for the benefit of the Dakota People of Wahpeton, the importance of educational research is discussed. Second, for the benefit of the academic community, information is provided on how Band-Controlled Schools came into being, and when the Dakota People of Wahpeton decided to take control and operate their own Band-Controlled School. A discussion of the number of studies that the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee has been involved with since 1977, and the results of these studies to-date will follow. This section will conclude with an account of how the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee came to agree to participate in this study.

### The Importance of Educational Research

The primary purpose for conducting educational research is to generate 'new knowledge' for teaching, learning and administration (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 4). Borg and Gall (1989) claim there are four main types of knowledge generated by educational research:  
description of educational phenomena; prediction of

educational phenomena; information about the effects of improvement-oriented interventions; and theories (pp. 9-10).

According to Borg and Gall (1989), educational research can be categorized by the phenomena being investigated (p. 31). The following are some major topics investigated within a classroom setting: learning processes; cognitive abilities; student personality and motivation; programs for the learning disabled and the gifted; subject matter instruction relating to reading, mathematics, and writing; and classroom teaching methods (Borg & Gall, 1989). Other major topics investigated within the field of education are as follows: school climate; administrative leadership; school finance; teacher education; and curriculum development (Borg & Gall, 1989).

The topics pertaining to educational research have never been thoroughly investigated from a Dakota perspective. It is important to ascertain how educational research could be implemented for the benefit of the Dakota People of Wahpeton. This thesis will address that concern.

How Band-Controlled Schools Came Into Being, and  
When the Dakota People of Wahpeton Decided to Take  
Control and Operate Their Own Band-Controlled School

In December of 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (known today as the Assembly of First Nations) presented a policy paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* to the Department of Indian Affairs. The Minister of Indian Affairs accepted this policy paper and since 1973 the Department of Indian Affairs has allowed Indian bands to take control and operate their own Band-Controlled Schools.

The Dakota People of Wahpeton made the decision in the 1977-78 school year to take control and operate their own Band-Controlled School. In the 1985-86 school year, the Wahpeton Band-Controlled School was re-named and called Wahpeton Dakota School. At present, the Wahpeton Dakota School offers a multi-graded program from Kindergarten to Grade Six.

**The Studies That the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee  
Has Been Involved With Since 1977, and the Results of  
These Studies To-date**

In the past 14 years of operation, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee has been involved in conducting a number of studies relating to the internal operation of Wahpeton Dakota School. These studies have produced the following documents: (a) *The Wahpeton Band Education Program Review* for the 1977-78 school year; (b) *The Wahpeton Band Education Program Evaluation* for the 1978-79 school year; and (c) *The Wahpeton Band Education Annual Report* for the 1982-83 school year. In addition, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee in 1986 participated in the "National Review of First Nations Education", with a final report that was released by the Assembly of First Nations in June of 1988.

Furthermore, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee is currently involved with the Prince Albert Tribal Council (PATC) located in north-eastern Saskatchewan (see map attached to Appendix B) in a district wide education survey entitled the *Prince Albert Tribal Council District Wide Improvement Project, 1991,*



*Individual Profile.* Wahpeton Band is one of the twelve Indian bands in the Prince Albert Tribal Council.

A questionnaire for the *Prince Albert Tribal Council District Wide Improvement Project, 1991, Individual Profile* education survey has been developed for the following groups: Band Councils, School Committee Members, Education Staff, Parents, Students, and Community Members. The intent of the district wide education survey is to identify the people's views relating to their school's philosophy, climate within the school, Indian language and culture, administration, monitoring and evaluation, instruction, and curriculum.

Yet, since 1977, despite all the progress and knowledge gained to-date from conducting or participating in these studies and in managing a school, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee is still encountering problems. Students leaving the Wahpeton Dakota School to attend Junior High and High School off the reserve, tend to drop-out of school in grade seven, eight, or nine. This issue of drop-outs was noted in the Wahpeton Band's *Curriculum Development Proposal* in 1986 which stated:

In November, 1985, Band Members conducted an indepth appraisal to identify their needs in education. The analysis revealed that what the Band had envisioned when they established Wahpeton Band School had not evolved .... The high school drop out rate remained at 90 percent. (p. 2)

For students who attend the Wahpeton Dakota School, parents continuously express the concern that their children are behind in their age-grade level. This concern was also noted in Wahpeton Band's *Curriculum Development Proposal* in 1986 which stated, "Elementary school students across Canada still scored ninety five to ninety nine per cent above Wahpeton students on standardized achievement tests such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)" (p. 2). In addition, education staff for the Wahpeton Dakota School have also expressed concern over the stress involved in teaching a multi-graded classroom.

As previously stated, the Wahpeton Dakota School Committee is currently involved in the *Prince Albert Tribal Council District Wide Improvement Project, 1991, Individual Profile* education survey, which may provide some insight into their present dilemma. Studies completed to-date involving the Wahpeton Dakota School