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Culture

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Volume 10, Number 2, 1990

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081339ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1081339ar

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)
2563-710X (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Ryan, J. & Robinson, M. (1990). Implementing Participatory Action Research in the Canadian North: A Case Study of the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project. *Culture*, *10*(2), 57–71. https://doi.org/10.7202/1081339ar

Article abstract

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The conclusions affirm the existing global participatory action research literature and extend the models originally developed by Tax (1988) and Hall (1988) to include the two new dimensions of group dynamics and a feminist perspective. The authors hope that other communities and action anthropologists will seek to replicate their methodology and that practitioners will also contribute to the evolving case study literature.

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Implementing Participatory Action Research in the Canadian North: A Case Study of the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project

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The Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project began in 1987 as a joint venture among the Teetl'it Gwich'in Band of Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories, the Arctic Institute of North America of the University of Calgary and the Ministry of Education of the Government of the Northwest Territories. From its inception the project utilized participatory action research methodology, augmented by the group dynamic process and a feminist approach to organization and coordination. This paper provides a case study evaluation of the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project in the context of participatory action research and focuses on the discrete steps taken in the project's development.

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L'auteur relate le Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project, *entamé en 1987 par la tribu Teetl'it Gwich'in de Fort McPherson dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest, de concert avec l'Arctic Institute of North America de l'Université de Calgary et le ministère de l'Éducation du gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Dès ses débuts, ce projet impliquait le recours à une méthodologie de recherche action participante appuyée d'une dynamique de groupe et d'une approche féministe de l'organisation et de la coordination. Cet article constitue une étude des étapes de ce projet qui finalement soutient la littérature sur la recherche action participante, en rejoignant les modèles de Tax (1988) et Hall (1988).*

The evolving literature on participatory research draws heavily on experience in Asia (Tandon 1988), Latin America (Fals-Borda 1982; de Souza 1988), Australia (McTaggart 1989), the United States (Gaventa 1988), and Europe (Fletcher 1988). It by-passes the relevant experience and practice in the Canadian North. Indeed, the global participatory research literature of the 1970s and 1980s appears to have been written in a virtual northern Canadian vacuum. Only Salisbury, et al (1972) writing of the James Bay project have considered the role of local people as researchers in their own communities, albeit in the context of aiding applied anthropologists acting as societal ombudsman in troubled situations between central agencies and local groups. As practitioners of community-based local empowerment projects in the Canadian North, we recognize the need to link our experience with that of others and to contribute to the evolving definition of participatory research. We also see the necessity of tracing the historic roots of participatory methodology and reconciling the various claims to authorship of the method.

Pyrch (1988) has suggested that the term "participatory research" was only coined in the mid-1970s and is closely related to the idea of "action research" of the 1940s. Sol Tax credits the genesis of "action anthropology" to the Fox Project in Iowa, circa 1948-1959, which brought anthropologists from the University of Chicago and the Fox Indians together in a social change process. In his words:

> We went there (the Fox reservation) to study traditional anthropological problems. The malaise of the community and sympathy with individual Indians; interest in social and cultural dynamics; and the ethical considerations mentioned earlier conspired to turn us into actionists (Tax 1988:87).

By 1960, Tax was grappling with the distinction between action anthropology and applied anthropology. His definition of applied anthropology focuses on the application of theory to particular situations, generally upon the request of a dominant power, such as corporate management, government, or aid organization. This notion of a practical anthropology functioning as an applied science really harkens back to the origin and early roots of British anthropology in the 19th Century. Stauder (1974) notes that members of the early British anthropological societies were especially interested in race and slavery issues. Anthropological journals of this period also reflected applied interests and were "filled with articles making recommendations on these questions" (1974:30).

Tax differentiates action anthropology from applied anthropology by noting that while action anthropology still involves the development of theory and the tools of the research anthropologist, it also involves immersion into a problem situation and independent work "to diagnose and to treat the difficulty in all of its aspects" (1960:85). While he does not specifically describe a research role for community members, Tax is concerned that the action anthropologist must serve their needs and promote education as a developmental tool. The ends of action anthropology must be of use to the community, and the publications which result from such research must have community sanction. Furthermore, the action anthropologist disclaims the paradigm of pure science; one is a clinician rather than a pure theoretician. To peers, the action anthropologist often risks being dismissed as a social worker — "he may be suspected by colleagues of deserting the common ideal of building an edifice of theory..." (1988:86). In this atmosphere of misunderstanding or distrust, the action anthropologist predictably faces hostile thesis committees, fickle tenure review committees, and disparaging journal editors.

In developing the concept of action anthropology, Tax never mentions the term participatory research. However, his definition of action anthropology tightly parallels the basic components of participatory research as outlined in the relevant literature of the 1970s and 1980s. Hall, in "Knowledge as a Commodity and Participatory Research" (1988), characterizes participatory research as follows:

1. the problem originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analyzed, and solved by the community;
2. the ultimate goal of research is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people involved. The beneficiaries of the research are members of the community itself;
3. participatory research involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process;
4. participatory research involves a whole range of powerless groups of people: the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, the marginal, etc.
5. the process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development;
6. it is a scientific method of research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality; and
7. the researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, which can lead to militancy on his/her part, rather than detachment (1988:407).

Hall ascribes the origin of participatory research to "the general social science critique of the most recent years" (1988:406). He does not refer to action or applied anthropology in the text of the article, and cites only one anthropological reference. Sol Tax's work is conspicuously absent in the bibliography. Nevertheless, in his concern for social investigation of problems in small communities, it is his view that participatory research is an educational process, and with his realization that it is also a method of community development, Hall and Tax are brothers in thought.

Rajesh Tandon (1988:5-15) has also written on the origins and evolution of participatory research, and he too fails to note the contribution of action anthropology. Tandon argues that participatory research is a general reaction to the cult of expertise, and the rise of specialization and the knowledge industry in the second half of the 20th Century:

> Thus, the narrowing definition of epistemology and the dismissal of feeling and acting as important and legitimate modes of knowing a given reality, found support in the increasing forces of division of labour between the mental and the manual. The new class of intellectuals thought of themselves as thinkers, while the rest of the ordinary people were left out. The gulf between theory and practice widened. All human pursuit, in particular, development actions, became applications of theoretical prin-

> ciples, derived through abstract manipulation of symbols and constructs by these professionally trained, certified and legitimate agents of the dominant system of knowledge production (1988:9-10).

In this intellectual atmosphere, participatory research represented the democratization of research and a rejection of the domination and hegemony of an intellectual elite.

Tandon also broadly parallels Hall and Tax in his notion of the determinants of participatory research, namely:

1. local people have a role in setting the agenda of inquiry,
2. they must participate in data collection and analysis, and
3. they must have control over the use and outcome of the whole process (1988:13).

In essence, all three authors are describing a social science research methodology that empowers people, focuses on working with small groups, views education as its chief tool, contributes to social transformation and has a broad geographic sphere of practice. Whether or not one styles this as action anthropology or participatory research is ultimately unimportant as the methodology is remarkably consistent. Interestingly, at least one writer, Robin McTaggart of Deakin University, Australia, has recently used the term "participatory action research" (1989), an hybrid which finds favour with the authors, and will be used for the duration of this paper.

Having taken this diversion to examine the academic literature, we must now return to our original question, why does the literature of participatory action research ignore the rich experience of the Canadian North? Only one of the authors we have reviewed cites or acknowledges the northern Canadian experience of the last thirty years. Two experienced Canadian practitioners in the Northwest Territories and northern Quebec, Keith Crowe and co-author Joan Ryan, attribute the lack of reference to both a lack of community need to publicize participatory research results in academic journals and the general unwillingness of academic editors to value the applied results of this research (personal communication 1990). Consequently the project reports and evaluations have tended to remain in the grey literature held in Indian band offices, community language and cultural centres, and economic development officers' filing cabinets.

Many young practitioners have laboured within northern communities as socio-economic advisors, community-based planners, community developers and "consultants" unaware of their connection to the global literature and experience. Again and again in the Canadian North, the tools of participatory action research have been recreated in the process of community economic development, land-use planning, mega-project planning, linguistic and cultural research and local curriculum development.

As consulting anthropologists for a wide range of northern community clients, the authors have collectively provided forty years of action anthropology services. While the work has been varied, the basic tools of the trade have been remarkably constant:

- a commitment to the community controlling the process, from setting the research agenda, through consultant and trainee selection and project development, to budgeting and annual project review;
- a commitment to community ownership and control of all research products and their use. This meant that copyright was retained by the community;
- a strong and continuing reliance on the capability of community adults as trainee researchers, teachers, writers and project advisors;
- a shared commitment to advocacy on behalf of the community on issues of its choosing;
- a commitment to a group dynamic and consensual process of decision-making and a feminist interrelational approach; and
- a commitment to working oneself out of a job within a specified time.

In the following sections of this paper we use the example of the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project in Fort McPherson to demonstrate how participatory action research works and to provide a northern Canadian example of this methodology for the evolving literature.

THE ORIGIN OF THE GWICH'IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PROJECT

As this paper is being written, the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project, located in Fort McPherson, on the banks of the Peel River, is entering its third year of operation. It has recently been acknowledged by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Education as "one of the most successful community-based projects ever undertaken in the Northwest

Territories" (Colbourne 1990), and its success has already inspired other Northwest Territories communities and research organizations to seek replication of methodology and results. The Gwich'in Language and Cultural Project began as a Gwich'in initiative in the early 1980s when community members Sarah Stewart and Sarah Jerome began the Loucheux[1] Language Project in Fort McPherson. The Loucheux Project depended on various federal and territorial government summer employment grants for its funding and eventually was forced to close down operations in 1984. When the project ended, the community maintained the oral history tapes, a few curriculum booklets and teaching poster sets that had been assembled. Consequently, there was an audiotape and archival base to build on when the training program began in 1988.

In 1987, the Arctic Institute of North America, a research institute of the University of Calgary, began implementing a new five year research plan, which included a proposed community-based social science research development project. The proposed social science project had the committed support of a private foundation for a research co-ordinator's salary and travel budget support from the core funds of the Arctic Institute. It lacked a community joint venture partner.

The search for a partner community began in November 1987 when the authors travelled to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, to meet with representatives of the Government of the Northwest Territories ministries of Education, Culture and Communications, the Dene Cultural Institute, the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories, the Northern Heritage Society and the Dene Nation. All of these groups saw a need for the project and enthusiastically endorsed it in concept, and the Ministry of Education immediately (and remarkably) committed to fund trainee salaries, provisionally estimated at $100,000 per year (assuming four trainees at $25,000 each).

At these initial meetings, each of the above organizations recommended that we approach Fort McPherson in the Mackenzie Delta region with the partner project concept. Fort McPherson was seen to be the most likely community to work with the Arctic Institute in developing the project because of the recently expressed interest of Chief James Ross in getting the old Loucheux Project going again.

The Deputy Minister of Education, Mr. Joe Handley, offered to carry a copy of the Arctic Institute project proposal to Fort McPherson on his next trip to the community, and in December he wrote the Arctic Institute to say that the community was interested in meeting with the authors to discuss a joint project (Handley 1987). Chief Ross next offered to fly to Calgary for a discussion of the proposed project, to have a tour of the Arctic Institute and to give a seminar. This meeting took place in early February 1988 and led to the signing of a joint agreement entitled "Building Skills Towards the Development of a Cultural Classroom"[2]. This agreement between the Band and the Arctic Institute set out six tasks for the director of the project:

1. with the trainees, to review and consolidate the materials already prepared by the existing Fort McPherson Loucheux Language Project;
2. to instruct the trainees in the preparation of classroom curriculum materials based on traditional Gwich'in themes or folklore;
3. to instruct the trainees in the presentation of model or pilot teaching units in the cultural classroom (an established feature of the Chief Julius School);
4. to integrate elders into the cultural classroom activities;
5. to work with various organizations and community members towards the development of an integrated education plan (pre-school to Grade 12) for Fort McPherson, emphasizing cultural teaching units in Kindergarten to Grade 12, and possibly adult literacy;
6. to assist graduates of the Project to implement it anew in other regional Gwich'in communities.

In September 1988, a complementary legal Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Education, NWT, and the Fort McPherson Band. This agreement was similar in detail to the Band / Arctic Institute agreement, but it emphasized Dene rather than specifically Gwich'in culture, and omitted reference to any expansion of the Project to other communities. It also stipulated the establishment of an umbrella committee to represent the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Arctic Institute and the Band to make policy and oversee the project in collaboration with the local advisory committee (Band, Community Education Committee, Chief Julius School). In a review of the Memorandum conducted for the Band by the authors it was suggested that the Band (rather than the Ministry of Education) retain copyrights to all material produced as a result of the agreement. This suggestion was accepted and formed an additional clause of the Memorandum.

The two agreements described set out the core or original objectives of the project. Although the signing agencies were the main source of funding, facilities and direction, each agency represented diverse elements, and many other groups such as the Dene Nation, Dene Cultural Institute, and individuals contributed to an endeavour remarkable for its spirit of cooperation, adaptability and dedication to a common cause.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO THE GWICH'IN PROJECT (FORMULATED BY JOAN RYAN, DIRECTOR)

A preliminary draft of the proposal which developed into the Gwich'in Project stated: "the goals of the project are to provide native people with skills which will allow them to recover local control of education and to start on the road to full self-government. Another goal is to provide a model project which can be utilized in any community" (Ryan 1987).

Initially, the training project was designed to operate in two phases. The first was to focus on oral history collection, which would include interviewing, taping, videotaping and mapping, doing genealogies, creating profiles of local heroines and heros, and establishing an archival system for all the documentation. Phase two would provide the training for transcribing, translating, standardizing, and reformulating the data into usable curriculum units for the school. Implicit in both phases was the understanding that Gwich'in and English literacy training would be provided throughout.

A central notion of "recovering control" by the community involved the establishment of an advisory elders' council which would also restore an important socializing role to them.

In the initial draft, I wrote:

> "Developing technical writing skills for Band purposes, grant applications, annual reports, briefs, court submissions, etc. allows the Band to control its own situations. Leadership and administrative skills involve a need to be firmly rooted in the past while tackling the future. Biculturalism implies a need for bilingualism and a balanced strength emanating from knowledge of self and an acceptance of others. Such skills are required for self-government and can be taught through the cultural centre in any community" (Ryan 1987).

Finally, I noted that the Program was in fact a "process" which should be capable of replication with some adjustments for variations in language and customs in other communities.

I have always been committed firmly to the group dynamic approach to community development projects. My experiences in community action groups, in institutions and in many native communities have consistently affirmed that things work better when people make their own decisions about what they want to do, how, when and with what assistance.

My anthropological relativism has informed the development of my feminist perspectives. The combination of these with the group dynamic approach boded well for the development of a Gwich'in community project. Sharing power, working on a truly egalitarian basis, and ensuring that the group process is kept in balance by continual evaluation requires time, a freedom from manipulation, the ability to work within the experience and knowledge of the group members, and a commitment to one's own wisdom. Inevitably, many of these internal processes take time and personal effort to develop and maintain.

This method of working involves the sharing of power by ensuring that each person has an equal right to make important decisions by consensus - not by majority opinion, or vote. It is a process of establishing a bond, a loyalty to the group and to the project which supersedes individual competition. It guides decision-making toward the optimum functioning of the project and its goals, rather than by focusing on individual ones. It also develops a collegial commitment which defends against external criticism. The group develops its own identity (the Gwich'in Gang) and may invest in some visible ways of demonstrating them (e.g., sweat shirts and program Christmas cards). The process is predicated on the integrity of the staff and group members to ensure that all major decisions are made by the group, that communication is open, and that evaluation is ongoing. Further, the focus is on the pool of group strengths rather than on individual weaknesses.

This process takes time and integrity to put in place; the danger lies in preempting the decision-making process in the interest of efficiency. Additionally, the consensual process sometimes results in decisions which may not work because they are made in the absence of direct experience or knowledge of group members. However, another basic premise is that people have the right to extend their own experience and knowledge by making mistakes and then addressing the outcomes.

The feminist perspective includes all of the above assumptions and goals in terms of sharing power, enhancing strength and group loyalties. To it, however, is added the basic rule of "breaking the silence" in order to discuss and resolve conflicts. As well, the approach of focusing on individual strengths which contribute to the group and its work, is extended by the rule which prohibits self-denigration as well as negative statements about others.

The group dynamic approaches work well within most native communities because they have parallels within the Dene traditional political process. Consensus has long been a means of decision-making about the most important issues within communities. Group strengths were also important even when competitiveness was acknowledged, and internal cohesiveness in the face of external criticism still remains within the Dene mode of dealing with others.

Less familiar to the Dene are the feminist aspects of the approach, especially the concept of male/female equality and access to shared power, as well as "breaking the silence". Many Dene groups have institutionalized public avoidance of conflict even when public gossip about the same problems is general. This was one of the harder mechanisms of group maintenance to introduce and work with. Finally, the effects of missionization and schooling have taught at least two generations of adults to denigrate themselves, their abilities, their strengths and their wisdom. In attempting to restore a perception of self as valid and in control, and as having expert knowledge, we focused on the latter and underlined the many positives of their own knowledge and their access to other local experts. Vocabulary played an important part in this reaffirmation and occupied a great deal of daily time. (You have that information, think about it; you can do it but if you need help, ask "X" to work with you; you don't have to ask me, make your own decision and tell me, etc.) It was only after participation in several southern conferences where the reception of the Gwich'in presentations was warm and enthusiastic that the trainees finally internalized the vision of themselves as the "experts" in their own culture.

PUTTING ONE'S INTEGRITY WHERE ONE'S MOUTH IS!

It was with some trepidation that I headed into Fort McPherson in July 1988. By that time, we had the support of the Chief and Council, Dene Nation, Dene Cultural Institute, the Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council and the Board of the Institute. These were a lot of "watchers" and while I knew that the process would work, I was also aware that the community development process takes time and we had allowed only two years from start-up to the time when the trainees would have to be ready to take on all tasks.

The Chief introduced me to the community in July 1988 and this allowed me to talk to people in the community about the project and also to take an inventory of what tapes and materials were on hand. It was a credit to the originators of the Loucheux Language Project, Sarah Stewart and Sarah Jerome, and their co-workers that so much had been accomplished in the past on such meagre funding. As well, the chief and I were able to talk to people about the establishment of a local advisory council and an elders' council. These two councils would ensure that local directives were reflected in the program and that local control of the project would be firmly established. We asked each organization (Band, Local Education Authority, Chief Julius School) represented on the local advisory council to appoint a bilingual delegate who was interested in seeing the language and cultural centre re-opened with a new mandate.

The "real power" in the program rested with these two groups because they were the ones who advised us when things bogged down. They were the people who made policy decisions and who helped us out of administrative tangles when things became complicated. Their presence and activity made it possible for me not to make any policy decisions which would affect the direction of the program. If conflicts arose within our own group about ways to proceed, we would simply call a meeting of the councils and leave the decision-making to them. They took the responsibility for their own centre and thus the decisions were culturally appropriate. Once policy was set, then William George Firth (language specialist) and I made decisions about how and when training components were done. Naturally, there were a few times when people would have preferred me to make the decisions and times when I wished I could! To be able to work this way, it is necessary to hold to the basic belief that the local people know how things should be done in their own ways and no outsider has equal wisdom. Further, it also means that one must be able to hear what is being said and able to take the time for the process to work.

COMMUNITY SELECTION OF TRAINEES

The trainees were selected by the local advisory committee with Joan Ryan sitting in as project coordinator and Mike Robinson sitting in for the umbrella committee, the Arctic Institute, Ministry of Education and the Band Council. The persons selected had to be reliable, willing to commit themselves to the full two year program, and able to speak and/or understand Gwich'in. The committee interviewers were also able to ask questions about financial expectations and childcare.

There were 14 applicants, only two of whom were men. One man had done considerable transcribing for the Loucheux project, but he was rejected by the committee as "unreliable". Once all the applicants had been chosen, we developed a rating system for strengths and weaknesses of each candidate that enabled us to rank them. We then told the top four (Effie Blake, Neil Colin, Rosie Firth and Emma Robert) that they had been hired as cultural trainees and the fifth person (Margaret Peterson) was hired as the office manager. She had indicated she wanted to be a cultural trainee but because of her office experience the committee asked her to do that work. Eventually, she became bored with the office work and was so clearly aching to be a trainee that Joan agreed to take over most of the office work herself, except for payroll and accounts. This "flexibility" resulted in both working overtime but Margaret Peterson turned out to be one of the most capable trainees.

Later, the Gwich'in Project was asked by the Chief if we would train Ruby Koe as an office manager since she had gone on a Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) training program in Yellowknife but wanted to come home. After discussions with the trainees and local advisory committee, the Gwich'in Project contracted with CEIC to hold her training program in Fort McPherson. Ruby became office manger. She loved typing the old time stories because "I can hear what my elders are saying" and she became a very good archivist dedicated to preserving the materials and tapes.

Another person dedicated to maintaining Gwich'in language and culture was also wanting to come home! Based in Inuvik, William George Firth was an interpreter for the regional language bureau of the ministry of Culture and Communications. Fluent in the language he had taught himself, he had also become literate through courses given by linguist John Ritter in Fairbanks at the University of Alaska summer school. At his request, the regional director asked if we would allow him to help in the program. If so, they would move him to McPherson and second him to us on a half time basis. Again, after discussions with trainees and the local advisory committee, Joan was able to accept the generous offer of Culture and Communications. Thus, in year one, the Gwich'in Project inherited two very capable young people at no cost to the project. In retrospect, we wonder what we would have done without them. With William there we were able to schedule all mornings during the first year and three mornings a week during the second year for instruction in Gwich'in literacy. As well, in year two, William worked on editing the curriculum units and the old time stories, as well as on the transcriptions of the many interviews.

Thus, serendipitously, by the end of year one we had a staff of three: Ruby, William and Joan and five trainees. This was to prove a very good team. Additionally, we hired contract workers: David Anderson recatalogued all tapes, developed a system using Pro.Cite to upgrade bibliographies and catalogue over 500 maps acquired from the Dene mapping project developed by Dr. Michael Asch at the University of Alberta. With William Koe, he laminated all maps and overlays, thus making them accessible to the land use planning group and other community members. Ernest Bonnetplume did some contract transcribing, as did Rebecca Francis.

PROFILES AND EXPERIENCE OF TRAINEES

The trainees' education and age reflected the changes between generations experienced as a result of contact with outsiders. Fort McPherson was missionized in the late 1700's by MacDonald, a well-revered Anglican man. He settled at Fort McPherson, eventually marrying in and raising his family there. He was the first person to attempt to translate the bible into Gwich'in. People talk about the two ways of reading Gwich'in: MacDonald and Ritter. Ritter, a linguist by training, has simplified the orthography and is part of a movement of linguists and language bureau specialists attempting to "standardize" the orthography for Alaska, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Quite apart from our ambivalence about "homogenizing" regional language differences, there is no doubt that the Ritter orthography is a much easier way to learn to read and write the language. For the older trainees used to the MacDonald form, it was very difficult to shift from one orthography to the other. For the others the

confusion was less for two reasons: 1) the Ritter orthography is closer to English vowels and consonants, and 2) they came to the written form without the interference effect of knowing how to read the MacDonald bible or orthography. There were differences within the group in educational experience, both in school, in jobs and in travel outside the community. Emma had lived in the south for 20 years, Margaret had worked in other native communities, Neil and Rosie had gained a few years of residential education while Margaret and Effie had completed grade 10. Emma was the mid-point with grade 8. With the exception of Margaret, the women were widows re-entering an educational work process after many years of raising children and working in their homes. All are expert sewers and makers of traditional mukluks, moccasins and parkas. Neil, the only male in the group is a land person, having raised his family in the ways of the bush. Emma returned to the community after her husband's death and was readjusting to community ways. All trainees and staff, with the exception of Joan, had been raised in traditional ways. The diversity of the group allowed us to maximize strengths and in doing so we were able to create a "pool" of skills from which the community could draw.

One of the highlights of the training period was a 10-day trip with several students to Rock River during February. There, with the help of two elders and the skills of the language specialist, Mary Effie Snowshoe, as well as their own skills, trainees "reclaimed" their bush memories and experience and found they could still do many things. This trip was rated as a great success by all; it increased confidence and renewed motivation for the training program. It also did a lot for the students as all day to day activities, from the start of setting up tents, making them cosy and warm, setting up stoves, and collecting wood and water were done cooperatively. Additionally, both boys and girls went hunting and all participated in skinning, butchering and drying meat, as well as cooking it, under the supervision of the elders. Elders told stories, which trainees taped and photographed and when the road closed due to high winds, a feast was held! The one planned feature of the camp which did not happen was language immersion. People are so used to speaking English to each other that in the harsh February reality of cold tent raisings, English instructions were better understood by all!

Trainees did not differ much from other people re-entering the work place; they were excited, pleased to have been accepted and fearful about whether they could do the job. We spent the first week getting to know each other, defining what our tasks would be and evolving ways to work together. From the start, we laid down some basic ground rules: everyone would work together; each person was free to ask for help from others; no one could put another person down, including themselves; we all shared responsibility for decision-making and we all shared power. In major decisions, we would have to reach consensus before any commitments were made.

This approach took a while to put into operation. Recalling their school days, people wanted the project coordinator to give directions and make decisions, which I had to refuse to do if we were to be true partners. It took time to help people rephrase statements like, "it's too hard, I can't do it" to a less negative "I'm having difficulty with this, can some one help me?" Slowly, confidence increased as the group responded to each other's difficulties and successes and the "I can't do it" became "It's hard but now I understand and I'm so proud of myself for getting most of it right". By the end, the statement was "I've really worked hard and I can do it really well."

While these may not seem like major changes, they were. They helped people who had known each other all their lives bond together in a different supportive way. They became the "Gwich'in Gang". There were ups and downs; the lone male trainee walked out one day because of his feelings about his ability to learn different ways and because of his sense of isolation as the only man in the group. He came back the next day determined to "help the young people in this community" and partly resolved his isolation by developing a joking relationship with the women and by establishing his own territory at another working table. In analyzing the success/failure of this process, one would have to question whether it is fair to expect one man to integrate in a group process with five women (even though women in the workplace often face this same problem).

Other issues also arose from the differences in age and gender. Joan was in an ideal position as an "older woman" to deal with all the women but relationships with the older man [Neil] and the younger man [William] had to be constructed differently. Neil eventually chose to call Joan by a Gwich'in diminutive of "aunt", i.e., a term of respect for an older woman, while William and Joan chose to be collegial and called each other by first names. The older man and the women also had some feelings about being taught by a young man. However, his

expertise and enthusiasm were so extensive that this never became a significant source of conflict.

There were also some guarded conflicts which arose among the women. Differences in individual styles which varied from sustained silence to constant talk, and which arose from different lifestyles, were sometimes discussed with Joan or William but rarely with each other. This was probably a good strategy for avoiding open conflict as it allowed Joan to raise matters with individuals during evaluations. This was always done in the context of how the group was working together, what might be done to make it better, etc. Thus, individual behaviours never became a focus of criticism or confrontation. As well, this allowed staff to defuse situations before they became problems and it also allowed William and Joan to discuss some work frustrations openly with the group. All such conversations were confidential within the group and soon people were able to realize that they could feel free to say when they felt too pressured or stressed. On several occasions, people chose to take work home for a few days and this was encouraged when people were feeling "down," sick or simply tired.

Finally, the training program was always suspended at the request of the trainees whenever anything important to the community was going on. For example, when the land selection meetings were held and federal government officials came to the community to hear the elders and chiefs, the trainees always attended to photograph and videotape the proceedings. This gave the project a visibility in the community which added to the perception that it was contributory and culturally appropriate. In addition, trainees learned a lot about the land claim, the selection process and land use planning. Initially, some of the women felt that these meetings were not important for them because these were matters better (and traditionally) left to the men. However, after watching their own women councillors and the female chief from Arctic Red River, Grace Blake, as well as the two women staff from the Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (Allestine André and Jane Henson), they became more interested in their own potential political roles.

Another medium which brought the trainees into the domain of the public was the radio program we did on CBQM every two weeks in order to keep the community informed about our activities. Emma and Neil were well familiar with the operation of the radio station because they were on the board of directors and frequently on the air as volunteers. None of the others had any experience. Initially, those without experience did not want to speak Gwich'in; the reason given was that they would make mistakes. When asked if it were more acceptable to make mistakes in English, the answer was "yes"! So, the program was done in English for awhile (except for presentations by William, Emma and Neil.) However, as many people stopped William on the street and told him how proud they were and how good it felt to hear a young person speaking his own language, and as the trainees gained more confidence in their own language skills, a shift was made. By the end of year two, everyone was speaking in Gwich'in on the radio. One off-shoot of this was that several young adults came to the centre to see if they could learn Gwich'in too and the community began to use Gwich'in names for the Band and stores and some activities. A small but significant return.

GROUP ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS

All decisions affecting the program were made as a group. This included decisions about pay, work hours, benefits, bonuses, holidays, participation in school and/or community events. Bonus decisions were interesting. Trainees chose to have time off with pay at Christmas and Easter and for one month of summer rather than to have a year-end cash bonus. This was culturally appropriate because these are times when there are feasts, gatherings and fish and berry camps. Further, three people with children were able to have the same holidays and to be home with them. Of note is the fact that even though by the end of year one people recognized the diverging levels of skills and productivity within the group, when asked whether they wanted those differences reflected in rates of pay for year two they said, "No. We started in this all together and we're going to finish all together. Everyone is doing their best." This was gratifying because part of the process of group dynamics is achieving the bonding and loyalty, and the acceptance of each individual's worth for what it is.

There was no problem with absenteeism and there was no attrition, both of which facts establish this program as relatively unique among training programs. We did have some problems with tardiness on occasion, usually when people were getting tired. This was discussed with the group and was remedied by both individuals and occasionally by Joan suggesting that people come in at 10:00 a.m. or take two hours for lunch. In comparison to the rates of attrition and absenteeism from the Arctic College courses, CEIC up-grading, lifeskills and other train-

ing programs in the community, we were at 0% while they were closer to 70%. We account for the differences in rates by the differences in approaches. The other programs, in spite of some very good staffing and the participation of trainees who were self-selected, were ruled and regulated by bureaucratic edict; ours was ruled by participant consensus and had community backing and visible outcomes.

In terms of hours worked, Margaret (who had chosen to be a trainee and office manager) did all office work after 4:30 p.m. or on weekends, as did Joan. As well, William and Joan had preparation and reports to do which were deferred initially to "after hours". This skewed the concept of egalitarianism and group responsibility until people gained more skills, Ruby became available, and work became more individualized. Eventually, it was possible for William and Joan to have half a day to deal with their own non-teaching workload, Ruby took over the office full time and the trainees were able to help with reports. Trainees were not involved in day to day decisions about purchasing supplies or paying bills, nor did they deal with the budget except that they received a copy of it at quarterly report times. However, they were involved in making policy decisions about where monies should be spent. For example, putting quarterly payments in term deposits created funds which were used to help two people attend summer courses and to bring in a consultant for a videotaping workshop.

Requests for services from the community, Band Council and school were received frequently. Initially, we tried to respond to these, but eventually the demand outgrew the time available for activities outside our program, especially in the first year. Expectations that we could do "everything cultural" were too high. Therefore, we decided to keep our own learning time intact except when significant events requiring our participation were announced well ahead of time. We were able to respond to the request to videotape and record the land selection meetings, to photograph two Alaskans and their dog teams leaving for the Brooks Range, and we committed ourselves to a quarterly open house and regular teas for elders, and to some school trips with the students.

At each stage of the project, decisions were made about changes needed, new directions and goals. The latter were reviewed regularly and evaluations were on-going. Individuals wrote out their own evaluations in terms of how they felt about their work, its pace and its direction and then William and Joan discussed these with each individual. People became better at doing this as time went on, and as trust developed, real feelings and perceptions were shared. On two occasions, one when Joan was feeling frustrated and one when William was, we asked the group to consult with us about our feelings. This occasionally happened when one of us was pushing the pace too fast or when expectations became higher than could be met; then people retreated into silence and slowed down even more. "Breaking the silence" allowed us to examine what was going on and usually remedies were available.

The "fit" among the "Gwich'in Gang" was in place early and external groups and agencies were supportive of the project. This support was both moral and material; we were able to accumulate donations of a computer, videocamera, a laser printer and filing cases from the Aboriginal Languages Directorate. Our quarters were offered by the school principal when the old centre building (condemned) was not eligible for repairs necessary for new occupation (for example, repair of a leaking gas furnace). As well, he lent us equipment and lounge furniture. The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre's archival section provided us with archival quality boxes, envelopes and a grant to catalogue our maps, books and photos. Later, we received a grant from Culture and Communications for the elders' workshop and for transcribing the tapes on hand. The Ministry of Education paid the trainees and administrative costs of the project. The Arctic Institute provided my salary and the project truck, the Language Bureau paid William, and CEIC paid Ruby. Had these resources not come together at the same time and in the same place, the project could not have fared so well nor accomplished so much.

It is worth noting that the preparation time needed for participatory projects is lengthy, at least a year before start up. However, the work done and the negotiations in this pre-project phase are critical to any such project since they provide the base of support and ensure that a local committee is in place from the start.

Having described our preliminary negotiations, our theoretical perspectives and the establishment of a local committee, the budget and the selection and training process, it is now time to discuss what we actually did in the program.

PROGRAM IN YEAR ONE

As indicated above, the first year was spent establishing the process, on Gwich'in and English literacy and on developing skills in interviewing, recording, photographing and videotaping.

The files contained many tapes, only a few of which had been transcribed into Gwich'in or English. We made a decision to standardize them so that they could be used in the school. This was an uncomfortable, if realistic, decision. The tapes often were repetitive and although they were initially transcribed as they were told, these transcriptions were not necessarily in standard format or spelling. In making the decision to standardize, we were removing some of the colour of the language of the story teller and some of the nuances. On the other hand, we thought that we could not fill books with which children would learn to read with English or Gwich'in that was not standard. Eventually, the trainees became quite good at standardizing materials in both languages but the decision to do so still remains debatable. It was important too for us to discriminate between the spoken language and the written one and we had to reassure people constantly that they could speak in any way they chose but that we would write in standardized form.

Photography and videotaping initially were done using automatic settings despite the flexibility of the equipment to be handled in diverse ways. This was one area of limited interest where it became clear that both the trainees and the community preferred colour prints and wanted to obtain duplicate slides and photos. As well, most photography, with the exception of the portraits for the elders' book, had to be undertaken in relatively public and pressured circumstances. No one wanted to have a complex camera which they might or might not be able to work. Workshops were held in both these media and by the end of the project most of the trainees had mastered the equipment and were voluntarily using it for community events.

In October 1988, the Dene Cultural Institute (DCI) approached us and asked if we would be willing to do a pilot study for them to collect information about the traditional use of plants and animal parts for healing. The main goal of the pilot was to develop methodology that would be culturally appropriate in any community which wished to collect this information. Since we were just starting to do the training for interviewing, taping and transcribing, we decided that this project would provide a focus for our training in research techniques.

The Dene Medicine elders' council was set up by approaching every elder in the community to ask them if they were willing to talk about traditional healing with us, or if they could identify their "experts" in this area. After all elders had agreed to help us, we listed the "expert" names which had come up many times and asked those individuals if they would agree to become a working council with us on the project. They agreed; Julia Koe, Mary Wilson, Mary Vittrekwa, Peter Vittrekwa, Mary Firth, Sr., Bella Ross and Eunice Mitchell became our elders' council.

Preparation for fieldwork among the elders included discussions of culturally appropriate approaches, setting up appointments for discussing the medicine project, for pre-interview sessions and for the actual interviews. Payment was also discussed with the elders and the rate of $25 per interview (time indeterminate) was agreed upon.

Preparations also included learning how to operate the tape recorder, recharge batteries and take notes. Some actual practice interviews, transcriptions and translations were done using friendly relatives. A part of the preparation that was very time consuming was to create an all-inclusive list of items we wanted to ask elders about without creating a set of questions. The trainees would have preferred to do a questionnaire but it was William's and my preference (and eventually theirs) that they use a checklist, using a conversational, open ended approach and that they be free to insert questions for clarity or follow up. Not surprisingly, after about three interviews with elders in their homes, trainees did not want to go to interview them again and elders had said that they had told them "everything" they knew. They felt they were bothering the elders.

After discussions with staff and trainees and with Joanne Barnaby, Executive Director of DCI, we decided to call our local advisory committee in and ask them what to do next. The participant elders asked if they could meet as a group in our working room once a week. This would reduce their feeling of isolation and individual fear of being incorrect on information, as well as take away the distractions of children running in and out and of televisions blaring. In other words, if they worked as a group, they could explore with each other, reaffirm their knowledge and arrive at consensus. Wednesday afternoons thus became a wonderful time of shared information, story telling and companionship. Long after the project was ended, our elders continued to come to work with us voluntarily on whatever was underway or simply to have tea. Not only did this help us but it also brought elders into the school on a regular basis.

As the data were gathered, they were recorded and translated so at the end we had a small collection of descriptions of plants and animal parts used for curing. We intended to do an extended material

collection but this did not happen for a variety of reasons. We spent a day at the elders' conference organized by the Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council (MDTC), DCI and ourselves, verifying the data with elders from four other communities. This allowed us to say that the information we have is correct not only for our area but also for the region, with one or two exceptions. The data were actually rather sparse since the Delta people have long been missionized and medicalized. Nevertheless, the pilot succeeded because it established that the methodology not only worked but is culturally acceptable.

In November 1988, the Chief and Mayor asked us to undertake a research project for them. GNWT Tourism had asked for a history of the Dempster Highway which would help them decide where to put some interpretive sign posts. With one exception, the consultant reports they had received did not mention anything of the existing human communities, i.e., the Gwich'in. Therefore, the Mayor and Chief were asking us to do the research. After the usual discussions, we agreed since it did fit within our mandate. As well, this project would bring $20,000 discretionary dollars into our account which we decided to use for travel and expenses for appropriate conferences and courses. Subsequently, we spent part of the winter and spring on the road with elders, collecting information about gathering sites and winter camps, caribou camps and other spots of interest.

The money earned from this project allowed one person to attend courses at the University of Alaska; two to attend the archivists' course in Yellowknife; two trainees and two elders to attend the International Participatory Research Conference in Calgary; three trainees to attend the Aboriginal Women's conference in Lethbridge; one trainee to attend an economic conference in Inuvik; William and all trainees to attend a workshop with John Ritter in Whitehorse; and all trainees to attend a sustainable economic development workshop in Kluane. Finally, all of us attended the first International Northern Literacy Conference in Yellowknife in the Spring of 1990. At all conferences attended presentations were given by the "Gwich'in Gang" — an accomplishment none would have predicted. Most of these presentations were done in Gwich'in with simultaneous translation provided.

Year one ended with the elders' workshop. This workshop was organized by Allestine André and funded by DCI, MDTC, GNWT Culture and Communications and ourselves. The workshop was attended by ten elders and one coordinator from each Gwich'in community. Each day, elders gathered to tell stories, show traditional ways of working with hides, fur, fish and meat, and discuss how to make things such as drums, snowshoes and traps. Discussions were held on current projects and matters of concern such as the Dene elders' package and the formation of a regional elders' council. Lunch was provided and each evening there was a feast. School students participated in all events and trainees documented all activities. For the elders, the workshop was a gathering which brought them together with old friends and which reaffirmed their expertise and the value of the knowledge they have to pass on. For the trainees, it was a chance to learn more about their own culture and to test their documentary skills. For all of us, it was a wonderful way to end our year.

PROGRAM IN YEAR TWO

In September 1989, we all met at the Arctic Institute's research station at Kluane Lake, Yukon. Here we were able to reconnect in a leisurely way while at the same time learning what non-native researchers were doing in the north by attending a small conference on sustainable economic development.

On our return to Fort McPherson, we spent the remainder of the month reviewing project policies and getting back into a routine. The working schedule was changed for year two to accommodate the goal of getting some of the transcribed materials into curriculum units. Literacy training continued, with William doing three mornings a week and I doing two mornings a week on English literacy. Literacy training focused on standardizing texts and on creating a series of primary booklets on fish, animals and birds as well as on a series of "how to" books based on the elders' workshop, e.g. "how to make dry meat".

We also decided to transcribe all of William Nerysoo's stories and put them in a book as a memorial to him (William died in the fall of 1989). We standardized them in the language in which he told them. This book was presented to the Nerysoo family in February 1991 and is a collection of six Gwich'in and four English stories.

William Firth had also worked on a junior dictionary throughout the two years with the elders and trainees. We had it illustrated by Billy Wilson and it went to review. As well, William submitted a more extensive and corrected alphabet to the printers.

We worked on several old time stories in addition to Nerysoo's and had them illustrated. When

each was ready for the printer, Joan developed teacher guides for the materials and we asked the Chief Julius school grade 2-6 teachers to test them out for readability and for activity interest. Two teachers used them extensively and reported that the children enjoyed them. Apart from classroom use, the stories were used for the "artist in the school" program and children read and illustrated several of the stories with beautiful pastel screen prints which were exhibited.

The idea of producing curricular materials and guides from oral history is a good one. However, in our case it was not an efficient nor particulary productive one since trainees are not teachers and they are in a difficult position to know what classroom teachers can do with the material. The other issue is that if these materials are to be used for teaching reading and/or in the whole language program, they need to be revised by teachers or curriculum experts. For social studies, where the activities can be focused, (e.g., students can walk and map a trail described in the story), then the potential is unlimited for creative teachers. The ideal situation would be to have a Gwich'in teacher work on creating the materials with those who have done the interviews.

As the end of the training program approached, we had to talk about what the trainees could expect by way of employment in the next few years as a result of the training. The program was successful enough that the Centre has now been designated a regional learning and language centre. As of September, the Beaufort Delta Divisional Board of Education (BDDBE) has an agreement with the Gwich'in Learning and Language Centre to provide language workshops for the Gwich'in communities of Aklavik, Arctic Red River, and Fort McPherson. Funding is at approximately the same level as it was for the training program. It is administered by the BDDBE and by the board executives, who are elected as educational community representatives. The Centre will be accountable for quarterly reports and accounts to the BDDBE. The original intent was to maintain local control by having regional Gwich'in community representatives oversee the Centre. This did not happen and the results of this decision will be the topic of another paper.

Grants were received also from the NWT Archival Association to employ Ruby to maintain the archives and to catalogue photos. She also continues as office manager. A grant was received from GNWT Culture and Communications to provide travel funds for regional community members to attend language workshops and for transcribing tapes.

Margaret has been accepted, has received funding, and is attending Yukon College; Effie was funded for summer school at the Inuvik branch of Arctic College. Neil will do part time work with the on-the-land cultural program in the school. Rosie, Emma and Effie will continue to interview the elders, and will assist William with language workshops in the other communities. William is the half-time coordinator of the regional centre. Joan spends some time in the Centre when asked to help with specific work. The weakest link in the program, but the one which should receive the most attention in 1991, is curriculum development.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study of a northern participatory action research program has exemplified several things:

1. The project was defined initially by the community which had, in fact, been working on it, but needed help in obtaining funds, and some training, to do what they wanted to do;
2. The concept of a "joint venture" was a critical part of making the connection and getting the old project renewed and properly funded;
3. Because it had defined and supported the initial work, the community was fully behind the Chief in becoming a joint venture partner;
4. Control of funding by the Gwich'in was an essential ingredient to maintaining control of the project and to their ability to be flexible in both time and budgeting;
5. The group dynamic process and feminist approach with the trainees ensured the sharing of power and also affirmed the underlying Gwich'in cultural dedication to local control by consensus;
6. The fact that local control of the project was secure regardless of the sources of funding, allowed for Gwich'in political solutions to be effective where bureaucratic ones faltered;
7. The program also enhanced the process of social change where desired; for example, the re-establishment of the roles of the elders as active advisors not only enhanced their status in the community but also forecast the general move in Denendeh to establish a NWT elders' council. As well, there was a heightened sense of pride, the enjoyment of television exposure of the elders' workshop, and a move to reclaim tribal designations of self within the community;

8. The fortuitous combination of people involved was an accident but should be considered in the planning phase by other projects (i.e., is the "fit" right?). In this case, we had a foundation wanting to contribute the coordinator's salary to a native project, the Arctic Institute wanting to get joint ventures with northerners in place, the availability of funding from an Assistant Deputy Minister who knew our past work and wanted a "showcase", the availability of a coordinator with long experience in facilitating community development and local control of projects, a community that was a self-starter, a young man with linguistic skills wanting to preserve the language, a school principal who wanted to collaborate and who was enthusiastic about cultural programming, and a group of people who were ready to do something new for themselves and their community; and
9. The general level of support from tribal and government agencies also enhanced the project and this was unusual support. The only "fight" we had with government was securing the deposit of our quarterly cheques, a process that seemed — and still seems — to demand extraordinary assertiveness, diligent monitoring, and the ultimate exhaustion of bureaucratic process, and finally Gwich'in political intervention.

Although Joan was not in the community as an anthropological researcher, and the temptation was often there to pursue some interesting research (such as the effect of the opening of a local bar on community drinking patterns), she did remain in her role of applied anthropologist. Also, Joan denied herself her more usual role of activism and advocacy. Therefore, the definition and acting out of one's role in a given project seems, of necessity, to constrain other roles.

If we return to theory, and Hall's definition of participatory research (1988) as outlined above, we see that this project met all of the prescriptions. The problem originated in the community, the beneficiaries were the local people, the community participated in the entire process, power was acquired by trainees and shared, self-confidence was gained, and trainees became more reliant and aware of their own abilities, the "reality" was Gwich'in, and the researchers learned a great deal from participation.

Tandon (1988), in paralleling Hall and Tax (cited above), added other criteria, which we also met. Local people did set the terms of reference for the research, they did the data collection and analysis, and they hold the copyright and control over all other components. The coordinator did do herself out of a job, which was part of the design plan.

In addition to affirming the existing participatory research literature and providing a northern case study of its application, we have also extended the model by incorporating the two dimensions of group dynamics and a feminist perspective. We think the latter made the project as successful as it was because it enabled the local group to share power and take control of their own work. This power and control reinforced Gwich'in traditional styles of thinking and doing, and made them functional and critical within the project itself. In turn, this allowed the project to proceed in a culturally appropriate way, thus ensuring community support and understanding. As well, the participatory nature of the process enhanced and strengthened an individual sense of self as well as providing a group identity, collegiality and acceptance.

The test of the methodology lies in its ability to be replicated. Currently, the same methodology is being introduced in Lac La Martre in the Dene Traditional Justice Case Study where the component parts and circumstances are somewhat different.

TRANSITIONS AND ENDINGS

In this transition year, Joan will return to the community at the request of William to help with start up, do further computer training, and do training of the coordinator on budget matters, a task that could not be done until we knew who the staff would be. No doubt there will be some unforeseen hitches and the fact that we are now into our second quarter without the funding in place has forced the coordinator to lay people off for the summer and has constrained him from hiring for the fall. The delay of funding was caused by the enforced shift of the project and budgetary control to the BDDBE. This was not a Gwich'in decision and their inability to retain control, though they attempted to do so, was disappointing.

As this is written, the Dogrib and South Slavey people have asked for similar projects to begin in their area. The training for participatory research on Dene traditional medicine and on Dene traditional justice systems has begun in the Dogrib area and we await funding for the Slavey area the following year under joint Band/DCI/Arctic Institute sponsorship. Other spin-offs are the requests by the Dene to have participatory action research methods taught as a credit course in the new Native Studies program at

Arctic College; this matter is now under negotiation with DCI[3].

The training program ended with a graduation feast attended by over 300 community people, Gwich'in people from Arctic Red River, Inuvik and Aklavik, politicians and agency representatives. Certificates of appreciation were given out by trainees to all who had supported and helped us. Certificates of achievement were given to trainees by Deputy Minister Joe Handley and M.P. Ethel Blondin, and canvas briefcases made by the Teetl'it Gwich'in canvas shop were presented to graduates by Mike Robinson as gifts from the Arctic Institute.

NOTES

1. "Loucheux" was the term given the Gwich'in by the French fur traders; it means "slant eyed". Once the project began, we made a decision to use only the tribal name "Gwich'in" and to ask all other agencies in town to change also. It is wonderful now to hear the Band office phone answered "Teetl'it Gwich'in Band" and to see the new Co-op store sign read, "Teetl'it Co-op". This is a small change but it reflects the growing awareness of the right to control one's own designation by the use of traditional names rather than imposed ones.

2. The project agreement document was negotiated in February 1988 before the Gwich'in Language and Cultural Program selected trainees and got underway. Over the next two years, several important modifications were made respecting scheduling and content of the project, and these were not reflected in the original document.

3. This course was initially taught during the Winter 1991 term in the Yellowknife program centre of Arctic College.

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