KIWEYTOTAHK ISKWEW ISKOTAYOW:
Returning to the Women Fire

by

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Abstract

The literature available on First Nations women from a Euro-Western Canadian perspective has painted a bleak, shortsighted, narrow image of the Native woman. Euro-Western societal structures acknowledge that the Aboriginal woman is at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid, and such structural and societal imbalances continue to marginalize the Aboriginal woman in Canada. In contrast, Indigenous ontological and epistemological systems recognize the Aboriginal woman as being next to the Creator, in a position of reverence and respect. Hence, the Euro-Western and the Aboriginal views of womanhood clash with one another. This research study introduces the Omisimaw Leadership Model as one approach to investigating that clash, and to seeking ways through which that model can be used as a tool in the healing of Aboriginal communities. *Returning to the Women Fire* describes processes of personal transformation through engagement with Indigenous Research Methodologies, and it provides the reader with an understanding of how ancient Indigenous knowledge structures, like the Omisimaw Leadership Model, continue to prevail and help Aboriginal women in personal and community healing, wellness and transformation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE
Introduction

Survival is a word with which I resonate deeply; it has a profound effect upon my total being because, as a descriptor for a particular state of being, it has served to guide much of my lived experience. It is a word that motivates me to seek answers to questions that I have about the Aboriginal experience in Canada today. The socio-economic condition of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada today tells a distressing and painful story (Barsh, 1993; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2005). L. Smith (1999) stated: "For most of the past 500 years the indigenous people's project has had one priority: *survival.*" (p.111). This is especially true to those of us Aboriginal people who are surrounded by and reminded daily of the overwhelming life-depletion created and sustained by the socio-economic conditions of our Peoples and communities. As posited by B. Medicine, "the strengths of survival as unique nations need investigation" (Medicine, 1995, p. 43).

My lived experience however helps me to take a different perspective on the numerous social ills described by non-Aboriginal peoples as a part of the current Aboriginal environment. At times I am in complete disagreement with the problem identification offered in the literature. I agree instead with Meyer (2003), a Native Hawaiian scholar, who asked, "Why don't we see these negative statistics of our people as symptoms of something larger and potentially healing?" (p. 250). I see this question as warranting serious consideration and exploration by

Indigenous scholars because it suggests the possibility of new and original insights, and an alternative pathway to understanding a complex problem. What is this larger phenomenon of which Meyer spoke, and to what did she refer when she suggested that there is a possibility for healing within the negative statistics? It is my intention to add to the growing body of literature that provides a description of how the social ills are a symptom of something much larger. For instance, I believe that many insights can be gained by explaining how the social ills are larger symptoms of ongoing contemporary forms of colonialism in Aboriginal communities. The statistics of numerous socio-economic ills are derived through a Western deficit-model. This model ignores the presence of Indigenous epistemologies and fails to acknowledge the ongoing ancient healing practices in Aboriginal communities. My lived experience is the basis of my knowledge of some of the healing practices that exist in Aboriginal communities. However, in this work, I intend to focus a particular interest on the healing work carried out by Aboriginal women. I propose to work with Aboriginal women in seeking out an understanding of their roles as healers, teachers and model practitioners of health and wellness in Aboriginal communities. Solutions and effective practices addressing women's health needs in Aboriginal communities are often invisible in the current literature; hence, documenting those practices and articulating some aspects of the theoretical foundations of such systems of healing is important and significant in many ways and for many reasons.

In this work, I will build upon previous scholarly efforts completed during my Master's program at the University of Alberta, and will draw particularly upon two Cree concepts for deepened understanding within this doctoral investigation.

The first concept is captured in the word that Cree people use to refer to themselves: *nehiyawak*. Elders continue to state that Plains Cree people are made up of four parts: the emotional, the spiritual, the mental and the physical. This understanding comes from translating the meaning of the Cree word *nehiyawak* into English as "four direction people" (Elder Jimmy O'Chiese, personal communication, April 11, 2008). The root analysis of the word indicates that the number four, *newo*, is embedded within its meaning.

The second Cree concept, *pimatisowin,* has been used by other Indigenous scholars to frame their ideas (Chartrand & Weber-Pillwax, 2010) and to acknowledge the Cree meaning and understanding of life, (Akan, 1999; Goudreau, 2006; Hart, 2002; Louis, 2005; Ouellette, 2002; Young, 2005), as depicted in Appendix A. The reference to this concept *pimatisowin* is a basic element in the work of Indigenous scholars connected with Algonquian language groups as the concept is foundational to Algonquian peoples.

Ouellette (2002) explained that there are several deeply embedded concepts in the Cree word *pimatisowin*. "Within this circle, there are four main directions, four elements, four races, four colours, four seasons and four main teachings" (Ouellette, 2002, p. 48). Elder John Crier pointed out that within Pimatisowin, "we need all four to be in place so that everything is in good balance" (personal communication, April 15, 2008). Akan (1999) and Young

(2005) added that *pimatisowin* refers to an individual being able to walk in a good way. Indigenous scholars have used words like health and wholeness to being fully connected to the concept of balance (Akan, 1999; Goudreau, 2006; Graveline, 1998; Hampton, 1995; Hanohano, 2001; Larocque, 1990; Lightning, 1992; Martin, 2001; Wood, 1996). The theoretical stance in the Cree worldview is that life philosophy strives for balance of the four parts of being human and that sickness and illness results when people "live in an unbalanced way" (McCormick, 2009, p. 338). When there is sickness or ill health, the theory is that something is 'out of balance' (Bent, 2004; Chartrand & Weber-Pillwax, 2010; Wood, 1996). The number four is attached to Cree concepts of balance and the Cree way of life, including ceremonies and daily activities and observations in teachings often display the significance of the number four. I will use the concept of *pimatisowin*, the meaning of life, and its embedded connections to four as wholeness or balance to frame my work.

Background Information

Aboriginal Healing Fund

"On 7 January 1998, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Jane Stewart, in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*..called for a renewal" (Milloy, 1999, p. 304) of the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the Federal Government of Canada. The federal government unveiled a 'healing fund' to address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse perpetrated against Aboriginal students and children who attended or lived in Canada. The money was set aside to support Aboriginal community-based healing initiatives.

As a result, an independent Aboriginal Healing Foundation was formed (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009). The fund was designed to address the 'healing needs' of all Aboriginal peoples affected by Indian residential school experiences, including those emerging needs that were beginning to be identified or referred to as "intergenerational" effects (Deiter, 1999).

Of significance is the fact that issues related to Aboriginal healing, health and wellness had been a priority identified and voiced by Aboriginal peoples themselves for many years prior to this government announcement (Archibald, 2006; Bennett, 2005; Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998). This recognition and statement of the need for healing had come from Aboriginal Peoples representing different linguistic and cultural groups and had been expressed in terms that identified the desperate need for improved living conditions, addressing all areas within Aboriginal societies and communities (Brant Castellano, 2009). At the same time, socio-cultural, political and economic distinctions applied to Aboriginal Peoples must be understood arising from the variety of visions and goals held by the agencies, organizations, and government departments responsible for addressing issues related to healing, and health and wellness in Aboriginal communities. Governments, both federal and provincial, and their respective organizations and agencies tend to hold narrow views about how to support the improvement of health conditions of Aboriginal peoples and communities. As a result, government funding to address the measurably lower health statistics of Aboriginal peoples is usually limited.

Education and Health-related Studies

Within the Euro-Western Canadian educational, or schooling, system, health is studied as a distinct subject area, and in the post-secondary setting, health studies are traditionally limited to the sciences within the Faculties of Medicine and Nursing. Doctors, nurses and a variety of specialized health technicians manage the health needs of individual clients, and hospitals and/or clinics are the sites for addressing these needs. However, most Aboriginal peoples understand health and wellness wholistically; their concept of health transcends Western definitions, categories and boundaries. This is clearly indicated in Indigenous languages.

From the Cree perspective, for example, *miyomahcihowin* is translated as good health, and implies the notion of balance and wholeness. I refer to the Cree understanding of balance of self or wholeness as, ultimately, the balance of the four parts of the human: mind, body, spirit and emotion. Good health, then, is directly related to one's ability to effectively manage and balance the four parts of the human being.

Education, in Cree epistemology, is understood as a pivotal function in an individual's ability to achieve and maintain balance and be in a state of good health. Education is considered to be a lifelong journey of integration of an individual's experiences, a journey that is completed when the physical human body leaves the earth and passes on into the spirit world. An individual is given an opportunity to learn every day. This statement is a recurrent idea expressed by Aboriginal peoples in a variety of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal

gatherings and functions. Therefore, an individual's awareness, willingness, opportunity, application, responsibility and life's outcomes are all encompassed within the personal daily experiences. In this context, Western approaches to education and health can actually hinder, or even undermine, the health and wholeness of Aboriginal peoples because of their limiting structures. Investigating the complexities of the interconnectedness between education and health is important in order to effectively close the huge gap of understanding that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views on the basis of the socio-economic ills experienced by Aboriginal peoples. The need for further study in this area is clear.

The Healing Movement

The current healing movement in Aboriginal communities has had a positive influence on the lives of Aboriginal women, men and children. Yet, this healing movement has not received much mass or popular media attention across Canada, nor has it been adopted or studied as a significant social movement within higher education academies. However, many Indigenous scholars do reference concepts like healing quite readily and consider them to be foundational to their work (Adelson, 2000; Adelson, 2009; Anderson, 2000; Anderson, 2008; Bent, 2004; Brant Castellano, 2009; Bruno, 2003; Deiter & Otway, 2001; Gladue, 2008; Goudreau, 2006; Hanohano, 2001; Ing, 2006; Jaine, 1993; LaDuke, 2005; Makokis, 2008; Maracle, 2003; Martin, 2001; McCormick, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Morrisseau, 1999; Otway, 2002; Steinhauer, 2007; Warry, 1998; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009; Wood, 1996). As this trend continues, Western institutions

including those of higher education will likely be expected to contribute more effectively in addressing the health and educational needs of Aboriginal women, families and communities. In the present Euro-Western Canadian educational system, discussions of the Indian residential school experiences of Aboriginal peoples are only now beginning to enter the curricula of higher education, having an impact on the consciousness and thinking of the adult Canadian student in various ways and with varying results.

There is a large and significant body of scholarly literature that identifies Indian residential schools as an integral part of Canada's educational history and discusses the ongoing impacts of these school systems on the lives of Aboriginal peoples. However, the information base and pedagogical practices of Euro-western Canadian post-secondary institutions are not in place to effectively respond to or manage the emotional fall-outs that erupt or are brought forward in classrooms when instructors attend to this topic. This is true not only in post-secondary classrooms but also in most Canadian public schools where crucial issues surrounding the topic of Indian residential schooling tend to be avoided or ignored. I believe this disjuncture of public information and understanding about the original peoples of this country needs to be addressed, and a significant part of the purpose for this work is that it makes a contribution to that gap in contemporary education. I believe that Euro-western Canadian educational institutions have much to learn by acknowledging the important work that Aboriginal peoples, including scholars, are accomplishing. I intend to show how Indigenous knowledge and practice is a largely untapped source of significant

power to advance effective and accessible contemporary Aboriginal education, knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy.

Aboriginal Womanhood Today

Western society is built upon notions of patriarchy and colonialism (Anderson, 2000; Monture, 2008). The Aboriginal woman is located at the bottom of the economic pyramid in Canada (Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998). This crisis is evidenced by the fact that Aboriginal women experience higher degrees of violence-related incidences than non-Aboriginal females in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010) and reported rates of family violence is three times higher for Aboriginal woman than for non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada, 2010). Reported rates of spousal homicide is nine times higher and, as of July 2009, there were over five hundred cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada that remain unsolved from the last three decades (Amnesty International, 2009; Boyer, 2009). In addition, there is a high rate of personal or familial involvement, directly or indirectly, with the child welfare system and the federal and provincial prison systems (Kleiss, 2005). Aboriginal people in Canada live in third world conditions, die earlier than other Canadians, and face higher rates of suicide, diabetes, tuberculosis and HIV/Aids (Harvard-Lavell & Corbiere Lavell, 2006; Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009; Lachance, Hossack, Wijayasinghe, Yacoub & Toope, 2009). These statistics point to an alarmingly high stress level in the lives of Aboriginal women.

The Omisimaw program

There is a huge knowledge gap between Euro-Western health and education systems; additional and perhaps deeper and more significant gaps exist within each system in terms of the capacity within each to effectively respond to the crises that Aboriginal people of all age groups must face daily. In my own work and efforts to address some of the gaps, I have been able to carve out space for educational programming oriented to the needs of Aboriginal people, specifically Aboriginal women, on inter-generational issues that have arisen in Aboriginal communities as a result of historic and sustained colonial abuse, trauma and violence.

In 2001, I designed, developed and implemented personal development programs specifically for Maskwacis Cree girls and women in my community; I referred to these programs as *Iskwesis* (girl) and *Omisimaw* (eldest sister). Since 2008, I have been offering the Omisimaw program. The objective of this program is to provide a learning space for Aboriginal women to relax, reflect and rejuvenate. In addressing the continued marginalization of who we are as Aboriginal women in Canada today, I rely upon and integrate into my program information based on a large assortment of theories that relate directly to women's healing, health and wellness, I work directly with the Aboriginal women who are usually parents; hence, I focus on the parent portion of the triangular school-community-parent relationship within the Euro-Western education system. As a part of this program, and in response to the women's requests for take-home materials, I developed a workbook to accompany and enhance the face-to-face

section of the Omisimaw program. This program has served as the foundation and guide in my graduate studies and it has helped me formulate research exploration.

Researcher Location: Koywasketik - The River Bend

Before I begin this part of my journey through a graduate program, it is important for me to introduce myself in order to honor my Cree heritage (Steinhauer, 2007). Hanohano (2001) and Meyer (2003) indicated the significance of name and place in research. Keewatin (2002) specified the importance of the researcher answering the question: "Where are you from?" (p. 2). Identifying the researcher's location is a traditional practice followed by Indigenous scholars, both currently and historically. I begin this way to honor my ancestors and to state a context that provides meaning about my geographical, territorial, tribal, familial, ancestral, cultural, linguistic, political, historical and contemporary understanding of a part of my identity.

I am a Cree First Nations woman residing on a First Nations reserve and a member of the Samson Cree Nation[1] that is centrally located in the province of Alberta. I live on the *Maskwacis[2]* Cree territory, specifically on *Nipisihkopahk[3]* alongside the Battle River, by the *koywasketik* [river bend]. This site remains an important landmark in my community with legends and oral stories attached to it. My father, Roy Louis, reminds me "that the area where we live was one of several

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[1] Samson Cree Nation is one of four reservations located in central Alberta in the hamlet of Hobbema, Alberta. Samson is the largest reserve of the four reserves. The other reserves are Ermineskin, Louis Bull and Montana. Further details are described later in this document.

[2] Maskwacis is the Cree term that acknowledges the four First Nations communities and is translated as Bear Hills territory.

[3] Nipisihkopahk is the Cree term for land of the willows and is used interchangeably to refer to the Samson Cree Nation reserve, which gained reserve status in 1899 and registered as reserve number 444 under Indian and Northern Affairs Canada guidelines.

sacred sites that Elders identify along the Battle River" (personal communication, June 6, 2007). The Battle River is a major tributary of the North Saskatchewan River and it flows in central Alberta and western Saskatchewan.

There are three Treaty regions: Treaty Eight in the Northern Alberta, Treaty Six in Central Alberta and Treaty Seven in Southern Alberta. The Battle River is located in the Treaty Six region. The Treaty Six region extends into two provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan. My ancestors were signatories of Treaty Six, one of the numbered treaties that were established during the colonial settlement and lands development of the country now named Canada. Those commitments or signings, signed in 1876, made me a Treaty Six member.

My two Cree names are *Kihew Iskwew* (Eagle Woman) and *Chanak*[4] and my English name is Claudine Louis. My parents are Roy Louis and Nancy Yellowbird, and my grandparents are Jacob Louis and Sara Howse (maiden name) on my father's side, and Louie Yellowbird and Mary Crier (maiden name) on my mother's side.

As an Indigenous scholar, it is important to acknowledge my paternal and maternal relationships as a part of the declaration of my personal location. This is an important Cree principle embedded in the term *wahkohtowin*, which means honoring kinship and relationships to one another. Kinship is a term in Cree that implies location. Indigenous scholars Absolon and Willett (2005) talked about the

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[4] Chanak is the name of my great-grandmother, Betsy Samson Natchewaysis, who was the sister of Joe Samson and the niece of the great Cree leader Maskepitoon, who promoted peace. Betsy was a medicine woman and mid-wife in the Maskwacis territory. She had lived experiences during the time of the buffalo and lived to be 104 years old; she had over 250 grandchildren. Chanak was part of the *Mitewin* (medicine) society in Cree territory.

significance of researcher location, stating: "location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life" (p. 98). Location clearly becomes a term that is multi-dimensional and multi-layered as it attempts to situate Indigenous scholars' lenses and reference points. Indigenous scholars hold historical locations that privilege individual, familial and community understandings of the exact nature of particular historical events. "Location forms the basis of representation and is integral in writing and representing oneself with respect" (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 111). L. Smith (1999) commented, "Through this form of introduction you locate yourself in a set of identities which have been framed geographically, politically and genealogically" (p. 126).

In speaking my own thoughts or presenting any formal work associated with my own thinking, the importance of identifying myself, my genealogy and the territory from where I come, is an expectation that is held by our Elders and community people; it is a tradition that is recognized and attended to by Indigenous scholars (Akan, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Akan, 1999; Hanohano, 2001; Otway, 2002; Rice, 2003; Steinhauer 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Wood, 1996; Wood, 2001) on Turtle Island[5] and beyond. Declaring location is also about focusing on my ecological identity that describes my responsibilities and relationships with my ties back to the land. For example, the importance of stating my connection to the land was best summarized by the late Clive Linklater, my

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[5] Turtle Island is the term Elders and traditional knowledge holders apply to the North American continent. It is a term that is connected to many creation stories from various Indigenous communities in both Canada and the United States.

teacher and mentor, who told me "I come from the land and the land is where I will return" (personal communication, 1989).

Paskwa Moostos Nahmetohk – **The Present Day Buffalo Dance**

> People who have undergone colonization are inevitably suffering from concepts of inferiority in relation to their historical cultural/social background. They live in a colonial society that is a constant and overwhelming reminder of the superiority of that society over the underlying Indigenous one. A person or society may enter the stage of rediscovery and recovery for many different reasons. It may be out of curiosity or desperation, by accident or coincidence, to escape, or because of fate (Laenui, 2000, p. 152).

I begin with a partial description of Laenui's (2000) first phase of decolonization: rediscovery and recovery. Part of my own rediscovery and recovery was listening to the stories of my paternal and maternal families' ceremonial responsibilities within the Maskwacis territory. One particular story that my paternal aunts shared with me was the buffalo dance. Although this ceremony is no longer performed because of the virtual extinction of the buffalo, it is important to mark its' continued existence and relevance in our family today.

My paternal great-grandmother lived in the mid 1800s during the time of the buffalo. She used to dance the Buffalo Dance. The stories told by my paternal family tell me that historically, the women would sing and dance in prayerful celebration before and after a buffalo kill. The Buffalo Dance was performed to honor and celebrate the buffalo in recognition of the sacrifice it gave in providing for the survival needs of the whole community. The buffalo was a pivotal provider for the people of the Plains, notably the Plains Cree, until the late 1800s

when the threats of the herds' extinction coupled with the federal government legislation transformed the economic sustainability of my ancestors.

As the Director of Education for our community in the 1990s, I recall when Chief Victor Buffalo and numerous Band Councilors would refer to education as the "New Buffalo" in public forums. I heard the use and expression of term within the Maskwacis community before I was introduced to it in the literature. The common use of the term has expanded on the western Plains and has been used in several documents. For example, in an Alberta Learning document entitled *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners* (2005), the resource guide asks a question about the buffalo:

> 'How did the buffalo help to sustain the lives of prairie tribes?' Invariably, the answer is quite simple. The buffalo help[sic] to sustain the lives of my ancestors. All parts of the buffalo were used. For example, the buffalo skins were used for clothing and shelter, pemmican was made from buffalo meat, buffalo were killed in large numbers by running over a cliff. (Alberta Learning, 2005, p. 89)

Stonechild (2006) wrote a book called *The New Buffalo: the Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, analyzing the challenges within Euro-western Canadian higher education as it related to Aboriginal Peoples. Stonechild (2006) states:

> In the past, the buffalo met virtually every need of the North American Indian, from food to shelter; this animal was considered to be a gift from the Creator intended to provide for the people's needs. Today, elders say that education, rather than the bison, needs to be relied upon for survival. (p. 1-2)

Education is the new buffalo. These words have become accepted as truth in Aboriginal communities, as I have heard the statement repeated by many Aboriginal people, young and old, and has expanded to non-Aboriginal

communities. For example, The Alberta Teacher's Association (2006) printed a teacher resource guide called *Education is our buffalo: A teacher's resource for First Nations, Métis and Inuit education in Alberta*. This raises the question of whether the definition of education is to be applied merely to "schooling" or whether the meaning of education encompasses a broader definition. Numerous scholarly articles and books written by Indigenous authors have repeatedly stated the importance of education to Aboriginal peoples and these works have also outlined both the issues and challenges of education (Barman, Herbert & McCaskill, 1986a; Barman, Herbert & McCaskill, 1986b; Battiste, 1999; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000; Cordero, 1995; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Fettes & Norton, 2000; Kirkness, 1992; Medicine, 1995; Menzies, Archibald & Smith, 2004; Stonechild, 2006). Indigenous scholars have identified a hope in education as a means of survival, similarly to how the buffalo was a means of survival for Aboriginal Peoples historically. Castellano et al (2000) explicitly stated the hope and promise of education:

> Aboriginal peoples have an unquenchable hope in the promise of education: they believe that it will instruct them in ways to live long and well on Mother Earth and that it will instill in them the wisdom and the capacity to carry their responsibilities in the circle of all life. This hope is rooted in a fundamentally spiritual understanding of the universe and has been repeatedly frustrated in encounters with colonial society. (p. xi)

Akan (1999) wrote, "Just as the buffalo were once our source of survival, education will provide for our necessities" (p. 19). O'Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe and Weenie (2004) stated that "education became the 'new buffalo' as a way of ensuring the future and survival of Indigenous people" (p.30).

Contemporaneously, education has been the main method for Indigenous people in regaining economic sustainability of their lives.

Indigenous scholarship has added to the wealth of knowledge and the depth of understanding in relation to Indigenous meanings of education. Recently, there has been a large volume of scholarly effort presented by Indigenous female scholars (Bruno, 2010; Martin, 2001; Sinclair, 2013; Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2001a). I would suggest that these Indigenous women who are engaging in a variety of educational settings today in Canada, including those classifications of formal, non-formal and informal learning, are participating in the modern interpretation and expression of ancient Indigenous ceremonies, similar to the ancient Buffalo Dance. In this way, those ancient ways have been, and are being, revitalized and realized within Aboriginal communities. This research is offered as acknowledgement of how Indigenous women, as healers and teachers, have been and continue to be engaged in honoring and celebrating the spirit of survival of their peoples and communities.

Research Focus

The focus of this study was to seek out and analyze Cree perspectives on health and healing by listening to Aboriginal women in Aboriginal communities. A metaphor that was introduced in the formation of an Aboriginal women's

research group[6] applies well to this research study: Aboriginal women are the sinew in Aboriginal communities. Traditionally, sinew was derived from animals that were major food sources for Aboriginal peoples, specifically the buffalo in the south and the moose in the north. For the Cree people of Maskwacis, the buffalo was the major staple for food and other sources of supplies supporting daily lives of the people. Sinew is the tendon that binds the larger muscles of the animal's body together. It is used as thread and cord, and acknowledged as the source of strength, power, vigor and resilience of the animal. In Aboriginal communities, strong, healthy Aboriginal women participate in many different roles, and this participation can be likened to the sinew that binds the muscle and protects the heart of the community. With this foundational understanding of women's roles in communities, the research study focused on Cree women.

The Cree women, as representative survivors of the negative influences of the dominant Euro-Western culture on Aboriginal communities, shared their stories of individual survival by determining how their own reconstruction of Aboriginal womanhood is a way of helping themselves, their families and their communities to return to wholeness. These stories are examples of transformation moving through the self, the family and the community.

An Elder/traditional knowledge holder guided the overall direction of the work as it brought together ancient and contemporary concepts of health and healing. The Elder assisted in the analysis of the overarching and foundational

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[6] The research group was a women's gathering entitled "Women as Sinew in Communities" hosted by the SSHRC –CURA project, lead by Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, held at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta in November 2009.

Cree words and concepts, like those related to natural law that were used to understand and the meanings embedded in the four different parts of the Cree womanhood model (depicted in Appendix B), and the relationship of these parts to wholeness of being.

This research process sought out those pieces of knowledge that will benefit my community and other Indigenous women. Perhaps more importantly, the work investigated the healing modalities within the Cree culture and revitalized Indigenous knowledge processes that may have been dormant in my own life as the researcher. My work is intended to add to the rather limited body of scholarly research that directly focuses on the integral relationships between Aboriginal education and health, and, in particular, on those aspects being brought to the forefront of knowledge by Aboriginal Cree women.

Research Questions

In this research study, I have focused on the interconnections between two broad disciplines: education and health. I investigated this interconnection by exploring how a Cree womanhood model, hereinafter called the Omisimaw Leadership Model (in Appendix B) and described in detail in Chapter 3, supports the healing, health and wellness of Aboriginal women. I asked the following questions:

1. How does the traditional understanding *Girl-Child, Sacred Woman, Warrior Woman* and *Wise Woman,* as described within the Omisimaw Leadership Model, apply to the contemporary lived reality of Aboriginal Cree women?

2. How can the application of meanings embedded within the model assist Aboriginal communities as a tool for healing and a return to wholeness?

Sub-questions that I used as guides to assist me in delving deeper into this inquiry included:

1. What are the Cree words for *Sacred Woman, Warrior Woman* and W*ise Woman*? (the Cree word for Girl-child is already known)

2. What pedagogical approaches and systems of learning are furthered or enhanced by the Cree womanhood model in its application within Aboriginal communities and/or in assisting Aboriginal women and men to return to wholeness?

3. How can this model support or enhance Aboriginal education?

Definitions

Within this work, some terms are used that might require clarification for more effective communication and comprehension between the writer and the reader. Such terms and clarifications include the following:

Aboriginal or Aboriginal Peoples: Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution recognizes and defines the term *Aboriginal* to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Other subcategories such as On-Reserve, Off-Reserve, Urban and Rural are further markers that derived from the Indian Act, federal government legislation 1876, that originally created a legal definition of *Indian,* and assigned categories of identities, including *Treaty Indian*, *Status Indian* and *Non-Status* or *Bill 31 Indian* to Indian identities. For the purposes of this study, Aboriginal was

used to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Other words that were used interchangeably with *Aboriginal* throughout this study will be Indigenous and First Nation.

Colonization: Colonization is a very general term and describes a process of a nation bringing in its own people to colonize or 'settle' another land base, identifying a relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Memmi, 1965). The use of the term colonization is the systematic oppressive power and control exerted by Europeans/settlers on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Although Canada is now a country, Aboriginal people today are still suffering the effects of the past years when colonization was the process underway, therefore; colonization has not technically stopped. In this work, I am focusing on the effects of colonization on Aboriginal women (Settee, 2011), therefore; I state colonization as an ongoing process.

Decolonization: The deliberate attempt to un-do thought, processes and systems that maintain colonial status quo by revitalizing appropriate Indigenous ways of being. The use of the term decolonization is this work is stated as "coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (L. Smith, 1999, p. 39).

Healing: The process of Aboriginal Peoples recovering from the effects of collective, familial or individual trauma as experienced from a variety of colonial institutions, which includes the Indian residential schools.

Indian Residential Schools: A residential boarding school where Aboriginal children were forcibly sent to as mandated by legislative means of the

Federal Government of Canada's educational policy of assimilation of Aboriginal children into Euro-western ways (Churchill, 2004; Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Schissel & Wotherspoon (2003) state the assumption of the Indian residential school's educational policy "was the notion that Aboriginal children would have to be separated from their families and culture in order to gain full exposure that would allow them to assimilate into Euro-Canadian culture" (p.21). The Indian residential schools had specific relationships with various religious denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, United Church and Protestant, extending over one hundred years. This work pays attention to the Indian Residential schools located in Alberta between the late 1800s to the late 1990s.

Local Control of Education: The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) "Indian Control of Indian Education" (1972) document asserted the rights of Indian parents to determine the kind of education they wanted for their children. This position paper was in direct opposition to the White Paper developed by the Liberal government to integrate Aboriginal Peoples into the Euro-western Canadian society. The two important principles of education proposed in the NIB document were parental responsibility and local control of education. The term local control of education applies to Aboriginal peoples who are leading, guiding, developing, teaching, determining and participating in educational learning programs related to Aboriginal community development.

Traditional Education: Those educations systems used by Aboriginal education that were intact and in practice prior to implementation of

European/settler systems. The term refers to the ways in which Aboriginal children engaged in learning. It refers to systems that utilized Indigenous languages and were specific to territories and peoples. It is an educational process and systems that have survived a variety of colonial attacks.

Traditional Knowledge: Ancient knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples which they continue to value, acknowledge, reference, incorporate, and integrate within themselves as individuals and collectivities, to guide their learning and understanding of the world.

Western post-secondary institution: To refer to any higher educational institution in Canada that grants university degrees.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHER PREPARATIONS

Wawiyewin – Getting Ready

In Plains Cree traditional teachings, thoughtful preparations for cultural events are vital. Time is needed beforehand to ensure that all the pieces are in place before any ceremony happens. The commitment required to carry out any cultural activity requires some preparatory time by individuals leading it. As the researcher, I experienced several learning opportunities during this research study that have prepared me to complete my rigorous exploration. There were two significant works in which I participated that helped me in my journey. The first piece was the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) *Healing through Language and Culture* Research project that began in 2006 and the second piece was the traditional teachings I experienced and received from the Elder/traditional knowledge holder involved in my study.

Community University Research Alliance: Healing Through Language and Culture

I have been fortunate to work with several Indigenous graduate students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, and Elders and traditional knowledge holders on a Community University Research Alliance (CURA) project entitled *Healing through Language and Culture*. The CURA project was funded by a Social Sciences Research Council of Canada (SSRCC) grant which afforded me the time to grow and develop as an Indigenous scholar. I was a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) on the project. There were three other GRAs and the experience

allotted me a space like no other where I could participate in critical dialogue

sessions. I gained powerful knowledge and understanding about the past,

particularly the Indian residential school experience in Canada.

At one of the CURA research team meetings held in November 2006, Elder John

Crier stated that the GRAs would be likened to 'canaries in a mine' (November 1,

2007). I received his caption of the work to be done on the project as a cautionary

note, particularly because investigations lead us to looking at our past relationship

with the churches, notably the Catholic Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province

(Grandin Oblates), a co-investigator involved in the CURA project. As an

Indigenous researcher, I had access to church documents and materials, which

could help me to re-search[7] activities that occurred in and around my community

from the late 1800s to the late 1970s.

I took special interest in the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province

Archival Photograph Collection that was accessible through the Provincial

Archives held in Edmonton, Alberta, and my search led to me fascinating

photographs that told a story of the activities and involvement of the Catholic

Church in the Maskwacis Cree community, as well as other sites of interest in

Alberta. Often, the photographs would name the non-Aboriginal people, but not

name the Aboriginal person, persons or families. I recall feelings of shock and

disbelief at the countless numbers of nameless photographs of Aboriginal people.

This strong emotion stirred within me as I gathered more and more photographs,

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[7] The intentional alternative spelling of terms such as re-search, re-tell, re-experience and so on
will be explained later in this document during the discussion on Indigenous knowledge systems.

recognizing that the namelessness and un-naming process laid the groundwork toward the objectification of Aboriginal people. I knew that each of the Aboriginal people in the photographs had names, first in the Indigenous languages (in my case, Cree), and then in an English translation. However, notations of personal identities were missing from the photographs. It appeared that over time, from the mid 1900s onwards, efforts were being made to begin naming the Aboriginal people in the photographs. Nonetheless, those names of Aboriginal people that were penciled on the back of a photograph represented a rudimentary process that was not transferred or updated to a typewritten format in the photographic documentation of the Catholic Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province Archive.

Camille Piche, a co-investigator of the CURA project, opened his house to the graduate research assistants to begin dialogue on the numerous church records to which we would have access for our research. We were given the opportunity to look at dictionaries and documents pertaining to the Cree language. At this informal dinner meeting, Camille shared that Hobbema was a publishing site for the Oblates missionaries; therefore there were quite a few materials prepared on behalf of the Oblates in their efforts to Christianize the Indigenous communities. This was an astonishing realization for me at the time. I became conscious of how the proximity of my community to a metropolis like Edmonton could affect other Aboriginal communities in Alberta. Of course, this particular point alone warrants deeper investigation, however, it will not be the focus of my work. I do remember very strong feelings that surfaced within me when I heard this news. I remember

walking away from that meeting thinking that there remains an opportunity for the Maskwacis community to regain such publishing resources and capacity, an opportunity for publishing that would come from Indigenous people themselves. It was unexpected that the discovery of publishing facilities in the early 1900s in my home community opened my mind to potential opportunities that could be explored in the future for Aboriginal people.

Religious Groups and the Indian Residential Schools

In 1894, changes to the Indian Act mandated the compulsory attendance of Aboriginal children in residential boarding schools. The schools were called industrial schools or mission schools; later they were known as Indian residential schools. All schools were aligned with different religious orders and were funded by the Government of Canada. They included Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, Baptist, Mennonite and non-Denominational. In Alberta, there were 33 Indian residential schools: 22 were Roman Catholic, whereas the other 11 schools were of other religious denominations (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007).

In the Maskwacis Cree territory, Cree families were forced to align themselves with different religious orders during many transitions, which included the period that introduced the 'education for assimilation' policy in a church run facility known as the industrial school, mission school or residential school. The federal government's educational assimilation policy was exposed in Duncan Campbell Scott's assertion that "our objective is to continue until there is

not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian Question" (RCAP 1996).

Archival Photographs

With the newfound knowledge that Hobbema was a publishing site, I selected several archival photographs that spoke loudly to the Oblate missionary work of Christianizing the Indians.

Figure 1 – OB 2587: Indian family, Ermineskin Indian Residential School, no date. (From the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province.)

As I studied the pictures, it seemed to me that the individuals in the photographs appeared thespian. The Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province Archivist granted the CURA project permission to use the archival photographs for research purposes. Several of these photographs became standing images within the CURA research project; they were placed on the informational brochure and research posters.

In my analysis of the archival photographs, I recognized that I would be offering an Indigenous perspective; a viewpoint that had been silenced in the Eurocentric historical accounts of Canada. As I gazed at the photographs, I felt

great sadness because I have a lived experience that is consciously engaged in the

uncovering of the painful and traumatic legacy of the Indian residential schools.

Figure 2 – OB 2520: Priest with Indians in front of Ermineskin Indian Residential School, no date. (From the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province.)

The archival photographs provide an inaudible descriptive story of the

development of the settled community of Hobbema. The turn of the century was

an obviously tumultuous and turbulent time of great change and profoundly

experienced by the Maskwacis community. Catholic records indicated that there

was some resistance in the Maskwacis area regarding the Christianization of the

Cree people. For example, a story recorded by the Catholic priests tells of a few

"Battle River Crees" who chased them out of the area. The priests retreated to

Duhamel, about thirty kilometers east of where the Maskwacis Cree settled. Based

on Oblate records (Breton, 1968), the priests returned to the area several years

later. Relationships were re-established between the Oblate priests and members

of the Maskwacis community in order for the Indian residential school and church

buildings to be constructed. The Ermineskin Indian Residential School was

constructed and became operational in 1898.

Although the photographs represent the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province Archival Photograph Collection, they provide a window into a piece of unwritten history. For example, in the OB 7479 image, the Oblate Father is seated in front of a canvas tent with a Cree family from the Hobbema area. It became apparent to me that the priest's commitment to Christianization is verified in the photograph. Both parties were known to value visiting, and strong relationships were formed over time. These relationships were important for the Oblate priests because a huge personal investment of time and effort was required on their part in order to speak, read, write and record the Cree language. The collection of archival photographs support this fact, and it warrants additional analysis beyond what I can offer in this work.
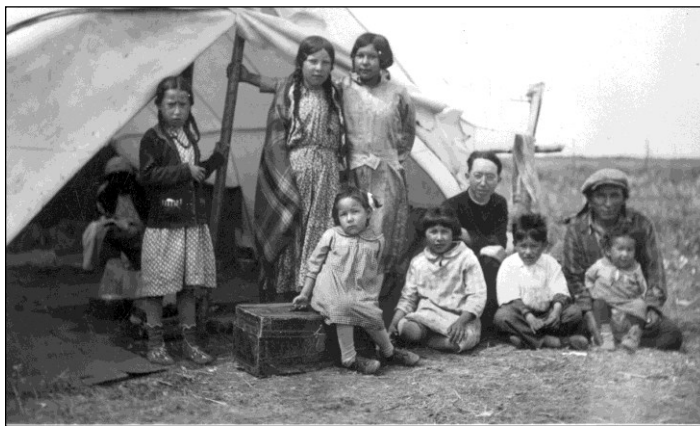
Figure 3 – OB 7479: Hobbema – Catholic Priest with Hobbema Indian Family, no date. (From the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province.)

What is important is the manner in which the archival photographs sparked discussion, reflection and memory for community members and other viewers. For instance, in March 2008, at a presentation about Indian residential schools, Ermineskin Cree Nation Elder Gordon Lee looked at the OB 7479 archival photograph (Figure 3, from the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province)

and identified the Cree man as Narcisse Brown. This part of the research process allowed for the community to exert agency by identifying previously nameless Aboriginal people. After hearing the name of the Cree man, the photograph took on a deeper meaning for me; it came to life and the shell of objectification dissipated from the image.

Presenting on the Indian Residential School Experience

In the fall of 2006, I was invited by the Wetaskiwin Regional School Board to present information on the Indian residential school experience in Canada as a means of increasing policy makers' historical understanding of the present day complexity surrounding Aboriginal issues within the K-12 public educational system. I prepared a short presentation briefly outlining the educational policy development and the historical account of the Indian residential schools, sharing personal information from my knowledge of my family's experiences with that system. Little did I know at the time that this research-supported presentation would afford me the opportunity to make twenty-five presentations in the span of five years, from 2006 to 2011. I continued to develop the presentation based upon the feedback I received from each workshop presentation, workshop participants, family members, other Aboriginal peoples and Elders/traditional knowledge holders about Indigenous knowledge systems and processes. At each presentation, I learned to hear my responses as these led me to explore new directions within the topic itself, digging deeper each time I returned to the presentation.

My Grandparents Stories of the Indian Residential Schools

Part of my responsibility as an Indigenous researcher is to locate myself within my work. For this reason, in my presentations on the topic of Indian residential schools, I shared personal stories about my grandparents' experiences. My parents did not attend the residential school as the educational policy at their time of schooling had moved away from full-time residence to day-schooling and then toward integration. However, in my research, I began to delve into the Indian residential school topic using my families' experience as a focal point as a way of understanding how the assimilationist policy affected me.

Researching my grandparents' experience brought me to the distinct awareness that I must tell the story from both my fathers' and my mothers' sides of the family because they each had different experiences with the Indian residential schools. My paternal grandfather shared with me a few sentences of his experiences with residential schools, whereas my maternal grandmother never spoke once to me about her experiences. Therefore, it did not cross my mind that my maternal grandmother had ever attended residential school. I had held this belief until I was in graduate studies and decided to critically examine the impact of residential schools on my family. The strange dichotomy of the stories of each of my grandparents adds a critical dimension in my own understanding of myself, so I found it necessary to share both sets of stories.

My grandfather's story of the Indian residential schools would start with a story of his first train ride. He said he got on a train, by himself, as a little boy in Hobbema, and he stayed on it for a very long time until he was told to get off in

Brandon, Manitoba. He said that he stayed at the Brandon Indian Residential

School for one full year. My grandfather told me that the first thing they did when

he arrived at the school was to cut off his braids. I recalled the pain in his voice as

he shared this senseless violent act with me as a little girl. He went on to state that

often times he was hit for speaking his Cree language; the priests or the nuns

would tell him to speak English. Again, the silence in between his sentences

introduced me to the pain he carried about these incidents. After a year at

Brandon, he boarded the train to Edmonton and was taken to the Protestant Indian

Residential School. He attended the school until grade five, which was the highest

grade offered to Aboriginal students at the time. When he finished grade five, the

staff told him he was educated. He would laugh after he would say that sentence

because he did not believe what the priests and the nuns were telling him. This

reality made him stand firm in his hope for me to go as far as I could with my own

education. He would look me straight in the eyes and tell me, "*keep going to

school; go as far as you can*." Those words kept repeating in my mind and fuelled

my motivation to continue as I journeyed forward in my doctoral studies.

Although both my paternal grandparents attended residential schools, I did

not hear any stories about my Granny or paternal grandmother's experiences.

Granny only told me that she met my grandfather at the Edmonton Protestant

Residential School, now known as Poundmaker's Treatment Facility just south of

St. Albert, Alberta. I recalled the loving sound in my Granny's voice; it was one

of thankfulness for having met my grandfather. And, there was no other

discussion about the kind of experience she had at the school. So again, in looking

back, I realize now that I had blindly accepted her silence as a sign of approval of the schools, and I had not critically explored this aspect until entering into my doctoral studies.

When I was the Director of Education for our community in the late 1980s, I had commissioned the Samson Cree Nation Education department to go to the Provincial Archives in Edmonton, Alberta, and gather photographs of students who attended the Indian residential schools in the Hobbema area. A Catholic Indian residential school was located on the Ermineskin Indian Reserve and I knew it was the school that my mother had attended until grade eight. The only inkling I had that my maternal grandmother ever attended the Indian residential school was a photograph I received from a staff member who was responsible for collecting the archival photographs for the department project. The staff member pointed out my grandmother to me as I looked at the picture. I was amazed because I had not heard any stories of the Indian residential school from her, but the photograph served as proof that she had actually attended the schools. In the photograph, my grandmother was sitting among a sea of about fifty young girls who all had short hair, styled the same, and who were all dressed alike, sitting with four nuns, seated in the centre of the photograph. I had not thought more about that photograph until I began my doctoral work and my research work with the SSHRC-CURA *Healing Through Language and Culture* project.
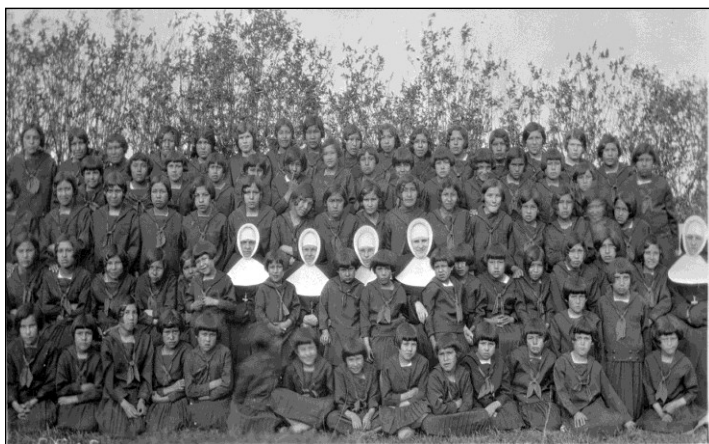
Figure 4 – OB 2557: Hobbema – Indian girls at Ermineskin Indian Residential School, 1932. (From the Missionary Oblates, Grandin Province.)

Ermineskin Indian Residential School - Nokum Yellowbird

The image on the left is a close-up view of the OB 2557 from the Missionary Oblate, Grandin Province Archival Photograph Collection entitled, *"Hobbema – Indian girls at Ermineskin Indian Residential School, 1932."* The girl in the picture is my *nokum*, or maternal grandmother. Her name is Mary (Crier) Yellowbird. People within the Maskwacis community knew her by the Cree name of *moniyaskwew*, which is translated from Cree to English as *white woman*.

With each presentation that I gave on the Indian residential schools, I shared *Nokum's* story. I would start out by saying her name in English and Cree, pointing out that she was an orphaned white girl adopted by the Crier family from the Maskwacis area. The scholarly literature recognizes the adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal parents, however, seldom is the reverse reported, which was the case for *Nokum*. This point I found in my presentations served to connect me with the non-Aboriginal audience. I would say to the

audience that little did *Nokum* realize that she would be experiencing the Indian

residential schools. She had assimilated to the Cree culture, speaking Cree

fluently and knowing the traditional cultural ceremonies, practices and protocols;

the Crier family was also knowledgeable of traditional medicine. Although she

attended the Ermineskin Indian Residential School, she maintained and

participated in the practice of Cree traditional cultural ceremonies. During my

years of growing up, I recall that *Nokum* refused to speak anything but Cree, and

this was definitely the case while she was on her deathbed. When she was lying in

a hospital bed, dying from liver cancer, she had asked my aunt Sophie, "Who are

those white people standing at the door?" My aunt did not respond to her at the

time; however, after her passing, my aunt and I discussed this event and

understood those two white people to be her biological parents. To date, I have

been unable to locate *Nokum*'s biological family; her biological mother had come

from England and her biological father had come from France.

A Symbol of Confinement – Nimosum Louis

One day in 2007, my aunt on my father's side handed me a tattered and

worn 3" x 5" faded cardstock card that resembled a present day business card. As

I looked at it closer, I could see the centered, bold, black font in capital letters on

the top of the card that read "TREATY TICKET". On the left were typed the

words, "Name," "Band" and "Band No." Below those words was a series of five

columns in three sections. These columns were created to track the number of

exits that my grandfather made from the reserve to off-reserve lands. The sample

card below lists my grandfather's name as "Jacob Louis", his band name as

"Samson" and his band number as "327". The writing is my paternal grandfather's. Although the writing is blurry, I can clearly see my grandfather in my mind and feel his presence in my heart when I look at this card.
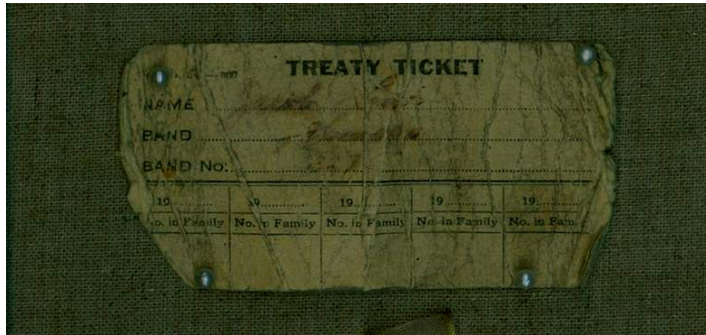
Figure 5 – Treaty Ticket: Jacob Louis, Samson Band, Band Number 327. (Personal property, family archive.)

As I held this sample ticket in my hand, it dawned on me that the reserve was like a prison. I immediately recalled *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View* (1989), written by Indigenous Scholar Howard Adams. I had read this book in 2001, before I entered graduate studies; however, it had not conjured up as much emotion as I felt while holding my grandfather's treaty ticket in 2007.

Adams (1989) highlights the development of the reserve system and critiques the federal government policies that worked against Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Canadian history requires an understanding of how the Eurocentric Western ideology promotes the "peacemaking myth [which] is an epitomizing characteristic of Canadian national identity and history" (Regan, 2010, p. 34) that denies the settler as the colonizer and Aboriginal Peoples as the colonized. In order to connect that theory within my own family experiences, I reflected on the story that my aunt reported to me when she handed me the treaty ticket. She stated that the Indian Agents handed out these cards to the Aboriginal people who

resided on the reserves. I thought about the powerlessness, humiliation and sadness my grandfather must have felt as a result of this government policy. My grandfather needed to use these tickets in order to leave the reserve. He was born in 1902, and this "Treaty Ticket" system was initiated between the 1920s and 1950s. The cards were introduced by the federal government as an administrative method of recording the movement of Treaty Indians on and off the reserve, and it was an assaultive procedure that stifled the freedom of movement of Aboriginal peoples. The cards were handed out to the males, mostly fathers of families. Consultation did not happen between the federal government and Aboriginal people. The patriarchal administrative policies were implemented so as to generate a numbering system. In my families' case, my grandfather received a band number and my grandmother and their thirteen children all fell under that number. My father, who is the third youngest of his siblings, remained under my grandparents' band number until he turned eighteen years of age. My father received his own band number at eighteen. My father was born in 1945. He did not have to use the Treaty Ticket system as an adult; however, he does recall my grandfather's desire to eliminate such policies of imprisonment by attempting to build positive relationships with the non-Aboriginal community. As I reflect upon my grandfather's goal, I can only imagine the difficulty and the immense strength of character he chose to share with non-Aboriginal peoples in not allowing these assaultive federal government policies to define who he was as a Cree man. That goal has now been passed onto my father as he holds that commitment to continue to build positive relationships with the non-Aboriginal community.

My father gave me a photograph of my great-grandfather during my doctoral studies. My paternal great-grandfather's name was Louis Natchewaysis. In my father's research, Natchewaysis was recorded in the English record books when Samson became a reserve. Previous to settler contact, Aboriginal people usually had one Cree word to identify themselves. Several name changes happened within my family when the Indian Act policies mandated a recording and numbering system for Aboriginal people who were residing on reserve. The first change happened when the Cree word/name was translated and recorded in English. Aboriginal men and women were given an English Christian name to supersede the Cree name. *Natuawasis* was my paternal great-grandfather's Cree name; however, Natuawasis was changed to the Anglicized version of Natchewaysis. The second change happened when an English surname was introduced and my paternal great grandfather's name was recorded as Louis Natchewaysis. He was given a band number, which was #32. When my paternal grandfather went to Indian residential school, the priests recorded his name as Jacob Louis because Natchewaysis was too difficult to pronounce and too long to spell. Somehow, the link between my paternal great grandfather's first name and the determination to use it as a last name was made at the discretion of non-Aboriginal individuals responsible for recording Indian registry. The act of re-naming individuals and families, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, created not only ongoing bureaucratic confusion, but also tremendously complex, profound and lasting impacts on the individuals' and families' identities for generations to come. Personal identity and interconnections

to family and community shifted to accommodate the introduction of church and state in Aboriginal communities.

This numbering system still exists today; I still hold an official Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) ten-digit number that is used to identify me in government records. I keep my own number because I am not married. I still maintain my grandfather's church-imposed English surname of Louis. Really, the original family name on my father's side is Natchewaysis [English recording] or *Natuawasis* [proper Cree word pronunciation]. When the Cree word is translated to English, it means *'healing child'*. Learning the meaning of my family's Cree name was deeply healing for me. In uncovering the Cree meaning of my paternal family name, I felt the Cree meaning settling within me and I experienced a deep sense of peace because I connected the meaning of the word to my individual responsibility.

Disentangling the Canadian federal government assimilative policy's numbering and recording system is a part of my personal decolonization journey. In my own healing and return to balance, my understanding of being Cree has little to do with this extraneous foreign system. However, this number is a necessary component and connection to funding and identifying federal government responsibilities. Although I live on reserve in a band-owned house with my children, I cannot claim any part of the house as an asset because, under the Indian Act, the collective band owns houses and individuals cannot claim their houses or homes as assets. I also receive post-secondary funding from the federal

government to attend university but, beyond that, the benefits do not exceed the limitations that I face daily as a result of being an Aboriginal woman in Alberta.

Working with the Elder/Traditional knowledge holder

An important part of my research preparation has been working with an Elder/traditional knowledge holder. Cleansing oneself and opening up oneself to learning is an unwritten and unspoken Cree traditional preparation activity. As a learner, I was encouraged by the Elder/traditional knowledge holder to become familiar with the story of the land, and to record a traditional story. These two foundational processes of this research study were to ground me for the full extent of the research study. In the following section, I describe the results of my work in carrying out the processes assigned by the Elder.

Re-Collecting Maskwacis Cree history & Storytelling

Most history books and stories of the land are provided through non-Indigenous perspectives. There is definite need to provide Indigenous perspectives on Canadian as well as regional and local histories; Indigenous histories and stories of our lands have been invisible, ignored and/or disregarded. As Indigenous scholars bring back Indigenous history through their written words, these become pivotal in addressing Eurocentric ideology. Indigenous scholar, Maracle (2003) asserted that a necessary part of self-discovery is answering the question, "Where have I come from?" (p. 71). To answer this, we need to remember, and in most cases, re-learn and become re-connected to our own histories.

As I started out on my graduate study, I began by asking my father questions about our land. Immediately, my father shared with me many stories passed down from his father, Jacob Louis, about the Maskwacis Cree territory. The Elder/traditional knowledge holder had understood that that it was important for me to know the history of the land because that knowledge would help me to answer the question, "Where have I come from?" (Maracle, 2003, p. 71). I worked at weaving together written and oral sources on the Maskwacis territory, realizing that those oral stories come from my paternal family. The second task assignment given by the Elder/traditional knowledge holder to me was to record an oral story and engage with the Cree language. The Maskwacis Cree territory history is provided first then the process of recorded a Cree oral story is stated second in the next few pages.

In fulfilling these directives from the Elder, I recognized that this section of my work would also add to the limited literature base, and simultaneously provide a written account of the Maskwacis territory from an Indigenous perspective. Further, I recognized these activities as a way of giving back to my family and my community. Perhaps, it could be developed and expanded over time and used in our Maskwacis First Nations schools.

The Maskwacis Cree territory

In Cree, *Maskwacis* means 'Bear Hills'. The Maskwacis Cree participated in the signing of Treaty Six with the Crown at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt in 1876. It was an agreement that acknowledged that the European settlers were to live in peace with the First Nations peoples.

Keeping with the patriarchal colonial focus, the names of some Aboriginal men were included in the historical written accounts of the Maskwacis territory by non-Aboriginal people. *Maskepitoon*, whose name translates into English as "Broken Arm" was one such historical figure and one of the original inhabitants of the Maskwacis territory. He was a Cree Chief whose people were dispersed across a large geographical area, living as far east as Southern Saskatchewan, as far south as Northern Montana, as far north as Edmonton, and as far west as the Kootenai Plains of the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

When *Maskepitoon* died in 1869, *Kanatakasu* was chosen to take his place as Chief. After *Kanatakasu's* death, Chief Joe Samson and his followers lived, travelled and hunted in the same areas as his predecessor, *Maskepitoon*. Treaty annuity payment records verify that Chief Samson and his followers received Treaty payments in 1878 at the Tail Creek Reserve, located east of the town of present day Ferintosh, Alberta.

Based upon the stories told by *nimosum* [my grandfather], Jacob Louis, the Maskwacis Cree people travelled and lived between four main lakes: Dried Meat Lake, Buffalo Lake, Gull Lake and Pigeon Lake.[8] The Battle River ran through the Maskwacis territory, and served as an important waterway and highway system for the people prior to Euro-Western expansion.

Catholic Church leaders in the late 1880s referred to the Cree population located within the regions of those four main lakes as the "Battle River Crees" (Breton, 1968). The Battle River Crees suffered direct assaults upon their

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[8] Roy Louis, personal communication, January 2002.

previously independent lifestyles and dealt with terrible individual and social impacts of imported diseases, starvation as a result of the buffalo extermination, and aggressive assimilationist policies enacted by the Crown.

Of the four lakes that the Maskwacis Cree people would move between, Pigeon Lake was recognized and recorded by the Crown as a fishing station for the Maskwacis Cree people in 1889. The land base known as the Maskwacis Cree territory became separated and parceled out amongst the Cree families into four reserves. Maskwacis Cree Chief, Joe Samson, engaged in negotiations with federal government officials to settle on a land base recorded as the Samson Reserve in 1889. Chief Baptiste Piche negotiated on behalf of families and settled the Ermineskin Reserve in 1885 and Chief Muddy Bull negotiated on behalf of families and settled the Louis Bull reserve in 1889. Chief Bobtail went to the Treaty Seven signing at Blackfoot crossing in 1877 and requested an adherence to Treaty Six on behalf of the families who had been left out during the settlement and re-allocation of land within the Maskwacis territory. Based upon his efforts, the Montana Reserve was established in 1909. Hence, the four Cree reserves comprise what is now known as the Four Band Reserves in central Alberta.

Each of the four First Nations in the Maskwacis Cree territory has a Cree name to identify its respective land base: Samson is known as *Nipisihkopahk* (land of the willows); Ermineskin is known as *Neyaskeweyak* (an opening in the forest); Louis Bull is known as *Kisehputinow* (on the edge of the hill); and Montana is known as *Atihkahmehk* (across the river).

Cree family names were recorded in government records in an English or anglicized format. Families were assigned into one of the four bands within the Maskwacis Cree territory. Each individual Indian received a number that translated into a Treaty Status number in Canada's Indian records. Treaty Status guaranteed the Maskwacis Cree certain rights and privileges as outlined in each specific treaty agreement. Treaty Six had the "medicine chest" assigned to it, acknowledging the fiduciary obligations of the Crown to include health care as rights. Other obligations of Canada that are recognized as rights in the treaty include education and infrastructure development on reserve lands. Treaty annuity payments also are a part of the Treaty and are paid out at $5.00 per head yearly, $10.00 for each Councilor and $15.00 for the Chief. These amounts were negotiated in 1876 and they remain the same into the present.

Recording a Cree Oral Story

A second part of my work assigned by the Elder/traditional knowledge holder who accepted to guide me through this research study was to translate a Cree traditional oral story into English. This assignment was to facilitate my re-engagement with the Cree language.

I grew up hearing from Elders/traditional knowledge holders' that the culture is in the language. Although I am not a fluent Cree speaker, I had the fortunate experiences of learning to understand most of the Cree language through my relationships with my fluent Cree speaking grandparents and parents. Although there are many Cree words with which I am unfamiliar, I am fully aware that as an adult, I can re-learn my language. In the same way that Catholic

priests and nuns learned the Cree language when they came over from Europe to Canada, I have the same hope that I will re-learn my Cree. I know, listening from the Elder/traditional knowledge holder that I worked with and from other fluent Cree speakers, that I will be remembering my language and not re-learning it.

In engaging with the Cree language in any way, I know that understanding relationships is key because this knowledge affects how Cree individuals address each other. The Cree term *wahkomakan* means 'relative'. In the Cree culture, the way I relate to or recognize my first cousins on my father's side is different from the way I relate to or recognize those on my mother's side. For example, I relate to the children of my father's brother and the children of my mother's sister as my brothers and sisters. My father's brother(s) and my mother's sister (s) I relate to as my father and my mother. Additionally, traditional adoptions of persons having relationships other than dependent child to adult parent still happen quite regularly in the Cree community; for example, a person could adopt another individual as his or her parent or sibling. In working with the Cree language as a meaningful part of this study, this knowledge about how relationship and kinship systems function within Cree culture helped me to understand how language implicitly specifies types of relationships and behaviours associated with those relationships. Further, and pertinent to this work, I learned that many Cree words depicting aspects or concepts of Cree culture and knowledge cannot be fully translated into English, do not exist in the English language, and/or are ignored in the English language world. Learning through my experiences with my Cree grandparents, parents and Elders is complex, with layers of meaning to be determined as I walk

between two sets of realities expressed in two systems of words and meanings, trying to integrate new understanding into a language that communicates my own newly acquired knowledge.

The first step was to hear the story in Cree. The Elder/traditional knowledge holder audio-recorded the story, and I listened to the recording repeatedly, night after night, immersing myself in listening to the Cree story as it was shared in Cree. Next, I sat with the Elder/traditional knowledge holder and he translated the story into English. I recorded the translation in my journal and then typed it on my computer. I handed over the English written version of the story to him and he checked the story for errors, deletions and omissions. The purpose of transcribing this story was to help me learn the Cree language.

The intended outcome of the project was to share this Cree story with a group of grade seven students in a neighboring town. On the presentation day, the students listened to the story as it was told in Cree by the Elder/traditional knowledge holder. I translated it into English so the students could understand it as they were not Cree speakers. I was very nervous about my translating abilities, however, I did the best that I could and the students were able to grasp the story based upon my translation. After that, the students were asked to create a visual representation of the storyline for a classroom project.

The Elder/traditional knowledge holder had indicated to me that this activity would allow me as a researcher to realize the importance of our Cree traditional stories and the opportunities available for students, like myself, to record them for future generations. Also, I was told that in the Cree worldview,

balance and harmony are important, and therefore, offering a story about boys during the research preparation phase would bring balance to my completed study, which focused on research and work with Aboriginal women. Below is the English translated version of the traditional Cree story I worked with.

Cree boy's story - a Cree boy and a whale

A very long time ago, it did happen and it was. The boy grew up orphaned, he lived with his grandma and he played with the other boys that were 10-15 years old. The time when a young boy's voice changes is a time when the older people take notice. During this time, the boys were not afraid to go and tell their grandparents. The boy would go through the camp, a little village. Tipis were made out of buffalo hide. They had places for boys that would be taken away for 4 days. And some of them would learn how to survive; how not to get lost in the forest. They would learn hunting skills and how to respect nature. So this boy told his grandma that when the time comes for his voice to change, he would take himself to the hill and fast and that he already chose a spirit that would have pity on him; that spirit was the eagle.

The next day the boy left and got to the hill. He would sit facing south. He called the eagle to come and it did. It grabbed him by the shirt. The eagle picked him up by the shoulders and he flew really high. That's when the boy could see lots of blue water; it was the ocean. Then they saw a big round rock that was as big as a house. The rock was quite a ways from the shore of the ocean. The eagle dropped him off on the rock. From all the heat of the sun, the boy fell asleep on the rock. During his dream, he had a whale come to him and give him four gifts. One was a spear for fishing with rawhide rope at the end of it. Another was a bag made out of buffalo stomach, a third was another bag for water and the fourth was a rock knife. The whale gave instructions to the boy for the use of the four gifts.

The boy hunted the fish, he gutted the fish, sundried the fish and put the fish in his bag. On the fourth day, the whale opened his mouth and asked the boy to go into his mouth. They raveled a distance to a bay in the ocean and the whale told the boy that that was where he would drop of the boy. The whale addressed him as my grandson. The whale told the boy that the earth would tremble and during this time he was not to open his eyes.

When the boy woke up, he started off on his journey back home. Back home, his grandmother approached special people who were capable of finding lost people; however, they were not able to locate the boy.

The boy would sleep and then he would get up and start back on his journey. And, all of a sudden, he would feel the earth tremble. He would go against the wall of the rock and he would fall asleep often during the tremble. Then, he would start to dream. He heard a voice narrating his vision and his journey. The old voice was teaching him about the sky. He kept thinking about what it could be that was making the trembling and he remembered not to open his eyes. So, this was the first tremble.

The boy would sleep and then he would begin his journey again. When he got up, all at once he heard this tremble again and he would fall asleep. He began to have a dream and a vision. The old voice would start to talk about the earth, plants, etc. Then, he would wake up and eat fish and continue walking. The boy would keep up with this.

And, all at once he would hear this tremble again. He went against the wall with his eyes closed and he fell asleep again and the old voice began to talk to him that there was no limit to how high the sky was in the universe. The old man was teaching him lots of ways; all about the herbs, water, plants, stars, about how to live and how to help people.

Then he heard the voice tell him about the winged animals; all kinds of winged species. Then, he heard the voice tell him all about the four-legged animals; wolves, coyotes and bears. He was told how to hunt the animals and how to use the medicines to help heal the people. Then the boy would wake up and eat his fish and continue walking on his journey.

Then, in the distance he could see a sparkle; a light smaller than the size of needle. He walked toward the light and he noticed that it was getting bigger and brighter. He kept walking toward the light.

Then his grandmother had a dream about the boy coming out of a mountain. The old woman told three young scouts about her dream, the shape of the mountain and instructed the scouts that it would take two days to get there. The scouts set out toward the mountains to look for the boy.

During this time the boy was continuing his journey back home and he continued resting and sleeping. All of a sudden he felt something trembling and the boy thought he should open his eyes. He opened one eye and saw hundreds and hundreds of buffalo. There was a lot of dust rising in the distance.

The boy woke up and saw the sliver getting bigger and he was happy that he was getting out. He thanked the Great Spirit for the journey and he greeted the sky, the birds, the animals and he asked them all to welcome him back.

On the hill, he saw three men riding and he recognized them. He told them to summon the old men, to make a sweatlodge and to make a tipi. One of the scouts

was asked to keep the young boy company while the other two were asked to go and get the old men. The boy walked in the tipi where the old men were gathered and they greeted him. The young man was asked about his vision quest and they Elders asked him, "What spirit came to you?" The boy shared his vision.

The boy became an old man; each time the boy fell asleep, it was one year. The boy grew old. He was asked for advice and he was asked to heal many people from sickness. And this is how it was.

Summary

I realized that there was preparation required on my part as a researcher and I trusted in the guidance given by the Elder/traditional knowledge holder and in my participation in the Community University Research Alliance project *"Healing through Language and Culture"*. I was preparing and being prepared for my research journey and these activities helped to position me in that preparedness for the work. At the time of my immersion in these activities, however, this process of personal preparation was not apparent to me. Only in retrospect did I recognize that this preparatory time was extensive, foundational and a necessary part of my doctoral studies journey. This part of the research process helped me to critically analyze the many complex layers embedded within the research findings.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous knowledge systems embrace the relationship between knowledge and events and life or earthly experiences. For instance, the ancient Cree understanding of time that occurs in conjunction with the cycles of the seasons and the moon is still applicable to present day ceremonies. Each cycle of the seasons and the moon occurs with visible, as well as invisible but sensible parallel transformations on the earth. These specific observable events that take place on our landscapes are often reflected in animal behaviors that translate those changes on Mother Earth. In central Alberta, for example, we experience distinct and observable events on the land that coincide with the seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter. We see that spring represents new growth; that summer is the time for fullness of growth, completion, celebration and ceremonies; that fall is a time of completed growth and harvest, with preparation for a time of retreat into yet another seasonal cycle beginning with winter as that time of withdrawal and introspection.

Since the new millennium, significant Indigenous scholarly contributions to the disciplines of education and health have emerged. I would like to offer the reader a cyclical frame that aligns these seasonal changes with the content and shifting nature of the literature, both written and oral, and that carries the potential of movement just as there is movement with the cycle of seasons. In respecting the ancient spirit of Cree time as cyclical, I will frame the literature based upon a model of the four seasons, beginning with winter and ending with fall. I will focus on providing my interpretation a literature review of written sources to be

reflective of the natural order of seasons: winter, spring and summer, and on oral traditions at the end of the fall section.

The Colonial Winter Storm

Writers, like Battiste (2000), Churchill (2004), Grant (2004), Haig-Brown (1988), Miller (1996) and Milloy (1999) have provided readers with clear descriptions of the Federal Government of Canada's assimilative policy directive for the education of Aboriginal peoples. The colonial, patriarchal and oppressive nature of assimilation has had a negative impact on the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada and can be described as a winter storm.

Indian Residential Schools

It is only in recent times that the Indian residential school experience has gained prominence in mass media across Canada, thereby impressing upon the global consciousness the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. In Canada, the residential school was not an immediate process. In Canada's historical development, institutional schooling was introduced to Aboriginal peoples from around the early 1600s in Eastern Canada and in the late 1800s in Western Canada (Chrisjohn &Young, 1997; Deiter, 1999; Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Industrial schools, mission schools, day schools and residential schools were all attempted with varying degrees of success; however, the full force and movement of the residential schools happened when federal government policy invaded all aspects of life for Aboriginal peoples (Barman et al, 1986; Churchill, 2004; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). For the most part, the historical

development of Canada coincided with concerns of ownership of the land and resources (Adams, 1989), and Aboriginal peoples were in the center of those government debates. The Federal Government of Canada needed to address the 'Indian problem' (Milloy, 1999, p. 3). Churchill (2004) acknowledges that Captain R. H. Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879, in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. The military environment caught the interest of government officials in Canada and it became the template for all residential schools in the U.S. and Canada. The "Aggressive Civilization Policy" by President Grant in the U.S. was of interest to Canadian government officials because similar goals were expressed "to fit the Indians for civilized life in his own environment" (Barman et al, 1986, p. 8). Canada's own Gradual Civilization Act of 1854 eventually evolved into the Indian Act of 1876. Over time, the Indian Act underwent several updates to accommodate the "necessary" drastic measures of enforcing assimilative education policy on Aboriginal peoples. From the mid 1800s to the early 1900s, treaties and reservations were established; so, the assimilative nature of the educational policy was in full force as Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from the centre of Aboriginal families.

Deiter (1999) provided an example of just how aggressive this policy was during the late 1800s and early 1900s. She reports that Chief Starblanket in Saskatchewan lost his chieftainship from Indian Agents because he refused to send his children to residential school. Government officials removed ration supplies from him and his family. They indicated to him that his chieftainship and

food supply would be returned to him once his children went back to residential school. Facing starvation, Chief Starblanket sent his children back to school.

The Canadian Federal Government policy, legislated through the Indian Act, demoted Aboriginal parents and adults to the status of wards of the federal government. And with that pretext, Aboriginal parents were asked to sign their parental responsibilities over to the residential schools. In addition, the Indian Act attacked the "Indian" in the Indian and re-arranged their traditional lands and environment to ensure dependency. As a result, a dysfunctional, dependent relationship between the Aboriginal peoples and the government flourished from this point in history onward. In Western Canada, the reserves were created and the Plains people could no longer freely hunt the buffalo.

Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott's administrative reign over Indian people from 1913 to 1932 included specific educational policy directives that are now infamous. Indigenous scholars, Kirkness (1992) and Churchill (2004) exposed and examined the colonial thinking of government officials and the federal government's education for assimilation policy.

As Canadian settlement moved westward, so did the establishment of these educational institutions, which ultimately reflected particular relationships between church and state (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Sadly, schooling or education was the lowest priority on the educational institution's list; there were very few hours spent on academic pursuits (Barman et al, 1986a; Kirkness, 1992). Imprisonment resulted if an individual resisted; however, government policies

were structured to encourage the lesser situation of individual and collective loss of Aboriginal identity. "Everyone had to conform to a rigid set of standard rules: pray, learn, pray, obey, pray, eat, pray" (Guss, 1993). Part of "obeying" for Aboriginal students was participating in manual labour activities while at these schools. The doctrines from the churches considered hard physical labour an important part of building up one's strength and it matched the federal government's concept of preparing the Indian to fit into the emerging industrial society (Milloy, 1999). That objective persisted in both statement and practice for as long as Aboriginal peoples remained on the margins and refused to adapt. For example, the goal at the Kamloops Indian Residential School was to prepare the Indian child to be the 'helper' of the farmer and not to compete with European settler farmers who held land near Aboriginal populations (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Throughout the Indian residential school existence, little focus was paid to schooling (Barman et al, 1986a; Barman et al, 1986b) and more attention was given to attacking Aboriginal identity and this notion was supported by federal government legislation beyond the Indian residential schools. For instance, if an Aboriginal student wanted to gain a university education, s/he could do so as long as s/he relinquished her/his Aboriginal identity (Helin, 2006). Other examples of assimilative attacks included "outlawing Aboriginal forms of government,…bans on Aboriginal traditions, customs, dances and forms of culture,…making it illegal for an Indian to retain a lawyer,… barred from pursuing university degrees or a professional calling,…" (Helin, 2006, p. 99).

In the province of Alberta, there were 33 residential schools; 22 of which were administered and operated by the Oblates of Canada, a Roman Catholic religious order of priests, often with the assistance of women's religious orders such as the Sisters of Providence (Fort Chipewyan, Grouard and Wabasca). There is a need to analyze the relationships that were established by the Aboriginal peoples and communities with the differing religious orders, and how these relationships were structured on various lands traditionally held by Aboriginal peoples. Since many questions remain outstanding, there is a need to fully explore these relationships in order to more fully understand the historical relationships that fed into the impacts and foundations of Aboriginal education as this has unfolded across Canada. Although aspects of this work will be related to these historical situations, this study will not delve directly into these particular topics.

Indian Residential School Student Stories

Perhaps this reprehensible period in Canada's history is most powerfully conveyed through the deeply personal and heart wrenching stories of the Indian residential schools survivors themselves. Various Indigenous writers (Acoose, 1995; Fontaine, 2010) have provided vivid personal accounts of their own residential schooling experience. Re-telling and re-experiencing these particular educational events are extremely emotional for both writers and the readers. I become witness to these Indigenous women's educational journeys as I read the descriptions provided by their first-hand experiences. As a reader, I am given the opportunity to share in their pain as they candidly describe various learning experiences within residential schools, most of which are negative. Grant (2004)

interviewed fourteen native women and recorded their stories in a book entitled *Finding My Talk: How fourteen native women reclaimed their lives after residential school*. Their experiences within the residential schools encompassed a wide variety of relationships ranging from "that of being the favourites or 'pets' to that of being brutally abused" (p. ix).

From the sources that I have read, student stories include but are not limited to the following: runaways, stealing, students hunting or participating in deviant behavior to supplement food sources, school burnings, bartering, pain of home visits, trauma of leaving home, gangster-ship or counter-cultures, punishment for speaking native language, cutting off braids, implementing uniformity and rigid structure, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, involvement in extracurricular activities, labour intensive activities such as brush clearing, farming, cleaning (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999) and finally, recognizing that the students were both survivors and resilient (Nichol, 2003; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). Several student survivors have indicated that their residential school experience was not as bad as some of the severe cases reported in the literature (Grant, 2004; Jaine, 1993); however, those comments should not take away the fact that the schools generally carried out systems of harsh mental, physical and emotional discipline on vulnerable populations of the very young, the ill and the starving, whose very condition resulted from the colonizing agenda of Britain and the take-over of territory and resources of the "new" Canada (Adams, 1989).

Cultural Genocide

Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) argued that the "history of relations between Aboriginal peoples and formal education in Canada is largely a history of cultural genocide" (p. 35). The residential school experience of Aboriginal peoples is an example of a terrible experiment in "the worst and most blatant form of schooling - as a tool of control, exploitation, and destruction" (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 35). Chrisjohn and Young (2006) compiled a list of primary sources of individuals who experienced residential schools. Those primary sources included books, journal articles and testimony supplied during the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Hearings across Canada in the late 1990s. Chrisjohn and Young (2006) categorized and listed the abuses as crimes under the following headings: "physical abuses, psychological/emotional abuses, enforcing unsuitable living conditions, church inaction and governmental inaction" (Ibid., p. 49-51). Both Chrisjohn and Young (2006) and Churchill (2004) argued that all of these encroaching policy directives were indeed genocidal. So, for the most part, the residential schooling experience hosted conditions that permitted the colonial winter storm to linger for Aboriginal peoples in North America.

The Decolonizing and Healing Spring Showers

Only as I began study as an Indigenous graduate student did I begin to purposely engage with ideas surrounding decolonization. Like many other students, I was challenged in the graduate program to begin uncovering the cobwebs of thought that I had unconsciously chosen to let lay quiet for many

years. Other Indigenous scholars have shared some of their experiences with

colonialization (Larocque, 1990) and indicated that decolonization of themselves

became a necessary part of their return to wholeness. Just as rain brings new

growth to Mother Earth, I describe this section as healing spring showers because

it implies the hope of healing from colonization.

Decolonization

At the end of Memmi's (1965) groundbreaking and preliminary analysis

of colonialization, he stated that "If he ceases to be colonized – he will become

something else" (p. 153). Indigenous scholar, L. Smith (1999), suggested

particular parameters around understanding the meaning of the word

decolonization in Indigenous communities:

> Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a
> total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge.
> Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and
> then coming to know and understand theory and research from
> our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (L. Smith, 1999,
> p. 39)

Decolonization is a word to encourage social action and change amongst

Indigenous peoples and within Indigenous communities. "It speaks to the

possibility of undoing colonization, reclaiming human rights and revitalizing our

languages, cultures and humanity" (Rebecca Sockbeson, personal communication,

April 2007). Decolonization is the awareness of colonialism and its influences on

the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Discourse of Denial

Battiste (2000) maintains that invisibility of Indigenous peoples history, culture and language in the present day educational system promotes colonial hegemony and cognitive imperialism. "Cognitive imperialism is a form of cognitive manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values…denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (Battiste, 2000, p. 198). The hidden curriculum in the Euro-Western Canadian school system maintains invisibility of Indigenous peoples; without history, they offer no contributions to the greater Western society. Therefore, a dominant discourse of denial continues to permeate the Western Canadian school system by continued dismissal of Aboriginal people's epistemologies, worldviews, traditions and experiences. Cultural oppression and marginalization of Indigenous peoples permeates the literature.

Inter-generational Impacts

As Indigenous scholars of this country, we know that the far-reaching tentacles of the Indian residential school system will be experienced by upcoming generations in the present Canadian education system. As Indigenous peoples in Canada, the reality of the Indian residential schools continues to affect the new generations as many survivors continue to tell their stories. For example, Indigenous scholar, Acoose (1993) provided a deepened understanding of the personal and familial experiences of the residential school system:

> The effects of this long-term imprisonment and abuse are very extensive and deep-rooted. Institutionalized and legally sanctioned abuse began with my great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers and, as our legacy as Indians, it was carried out into my grandparents' lives, passed on to my father and his brothers and sisters, and then to me. (p. 4)

The idea that these negative effects were carried on through multiple generations is amplified here, thereby implying that residual effects can be found in Aboriginal families today. Another Indigenous scholar defined the impacts of the residential school in terms of the inter-general impact as:

> The loss of nurturing parents; loss of parenting skills; loss of identity; low self-esteem; the inability to think independently; the lack of unity within families and communities; the loss of language, culture and respect for self; and finally, the loss of spiritual values have left communities in chaos. (Deiter, 1999, p. 78)

Unfortunately, this definition can lead a reader to believe that traditional education and traditional knowledge concepts have totally evaporated due to the colonial devastation impressed upon Aboriginal children, families and communities. However, the research on resilience and resistance argues against such a claim (Bent, 2004; Deiter & Otway, 2001; Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003; Nichol, 2003; Wood, 1996; Wood, 2001), and there have been many Indigenous scholars who have written about Indigenous knowledge systems and its applicability in the contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples.

Resistance and Resilience

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded a research document entitled *Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy* (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003) that discussed the impacts, the resistance and coping strategies,

and the survivors' resiliency. Dion Stout and Kipling (2003) have used the term resilience "as the capacity to spring back from adversity and have a good life outcome despite emotional, mental or physical distress" (p. iii). In a qualitative study, Nichol (2003) confirmed that resilience of residential school survivors was promoted by two factors: "spirituality and a happy childhood" (p. 69). "These children came from homes where they saw their parents and grandparents as competent people and loving parents" (Ibid., p. 69). Therefore, the theory of resilience argues that "not all was lost" as had been previously indicated in concepts related to inter-generational effects. In fact, Haig-Brown (1988) confirmed that Aboriginal students had the ability to report and identify aspects of traditional education, traditional knowledge and Aboriginal epistemology because these children had this knowledge prior to entering the residential school system. Hence, many Aboriginal children, youth and adults have demonstrated through the generations that they held, and continue to hold onto and live, this knowledge today. Although resistance and resilience may not be visible to the eye, I have seen the evidence of its existence in Aboriginal homes and communities today.

Decolonization and Healing

Another document prepared by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Archibald, 2006) was *Decolonization and Healing: Indigenous experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland* (Archibald, 2006) built her argument upon previous research by Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran on historic trauma theory (HTT), Judith Herman's post traumatic stress disorder theory (PTSD), and Poka Laenui's five processes of decolonization: (1)

Rediscovery and Recovery, (2) Mourning, (3) Dreaming, (4) Commitment, and

(5) Action. This study will not be exploring these concepts in depth; however, it is

important to note the existence of such theories. Archibald did acknowledge that

the colonial practices impinged on Indigenous peoples in ways that involved deep

losses and that "Learning about the history of colonization, mourning the losses

and reconnecting with traditional cultures, values and practices are becoming

recognized stages of the healing process" (Archibald, 2006, p. 49). This is not to

say that Indigenous peoples themselves experienced colonization but the impacts

of colonization of their lands were broad and have continued to be deeply

traumatic and wounding for many generations.

Healing: Individual and Collective Responsibilities

In Goudreau's (2006) study, various definitions and understandings of

healing were collected from an Aboriginal point of view. She explained that

"healing is both a personal and societal recovery from oppression; … it is a

growing process; … it is bringing balance or harmony into one's life and …

participation in traditional activities aid in recovery" (p. 13). In her explanation,

healing is a personal journey. Wesley-Equimaux (2009) comments that:

> Currently, First Nations women (and men) are on what has been termed in
> the United States and Canada 'a healing journey' which can also be
> described as the process of discovering and escaping the temporality of
> traumatic life experiences and creating a new social reality out of
> unfavorable circumstances. (p. 25)

The healing journey is a term used in Aboriginal communities. Both

Goudreau and Wesley-Equimaux pointed out that healing includes recovery,

although neither one mentions the time involved in such a process. Carolyn

Kenny interviewed 140 Aboriginal women between the ages of 18 and 84, and her work has provided some valuable insights on healing. In her work, an Elder makes the comment on the process of healing and the important part women play in the recovery process. "When women heal, the family will heal and when the family heals, the community will heal and when the community heals the nation will heal" (Margaret Lavallee, Red Willow Lodge, Anola, Manitoba, as cited in Kenny, 2002, p. 71).

Morrisseau's (1999) book is another example of personal healing. He shared with readers his emotionally painful journey as he recalls memories of his life. In Chapter Four of his book, *The Healing Journey,* Morrisseau argued that "Native healing is done on the intrinsic level: healing is a matter of the heart not just the 'head' (p. 16). The examples provided by these authors confirmed that the healing process begins at the individual level and then extends out to the larger community. This concept is parallel to biological cell growth in that the cell grows over time and impacts other components.

The 1970s were an important time of awakening and healing in Aboriginal communities across Canada. Indigenous scholar, Maracle (2003), identified the birth of the healing movement in Aboriginal communities, which occurred in the 1970s, and he discussed some positive community development examples lead by Aboriginal women during that era and leading up to the present. Anderson and Lawrence (2003) dedicated a book to showcase the important healing work completed by Aboriginal women in Canada, entitled, *Strong Women Stories: Native vision and community survival.*

Indian Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) awakened the Canadian Aboriginal collective consciousness to the possibilities responsibilities to education. This document is still widely cited four decades later. It is still recognized by Aboriginal peoples because it is an excellent example of the awakened collective consciousness. One of the recommendations for improving education for Aboriginal peoples proffered in this historical document was that of publically declared local control of education. This declaration was in response to the federal government's patriarchal standpoint in dealing with Aboriginal people. Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (as cited in Bent, 2004) argued that "there is evidence that local control of community institution and cultural continuity may contribute to better mental health" (p. 32) in Aboriginal communities.

Some Native organizations have also used the term 'healing' in various aspects of their work. For example, The Nechi Institute is an Edmonton (Alberta) based training, research and health promotion institute that promotes the Aboriginal Healing Movement on a variety of their promotional materials and documents. Another example is The Aboriginal Healing Foundation newsletter, *Healing Words,* which "address[es] the work that is needed in Aboriginal communities to heal and to educate…and create awareness about residential schools and their oppressive effects" (Bruno, 2003, p. 64). Wood (1996) stated that within Native culture is the notion that turning to family, community, nature, culture and spirituality for strength and inner peace aids in the health and healing of individuals and communities. Therefore, all these sources confirmed that

healing is a notion recognized and used quite readily by Aboriginal peoples at the individual and community level. RCAP commented on healing:

> The idea of healing suggests that to reach 'whole health' Aboriginal people must confront the crippling injuries of the past. Yet, doing so is not their job alone. Only when the deep causes of Aboriginal ill health are remedies by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together will balance and harmony - or health and well-being be restored. (1995, p. 109)

RCAP stated that the meaning of the word 'individual' and 'community' needs to extend beyond Aboriginal peoples to include non-Aboriginal peoples. Therefore, it is important to turn to theories that have discussed the details of colonial relationships (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1970; Memmi, 1965) and to acknowledge existing systemic barriers that promote divisions. Barriers such as racism, sexism, paternalism and classism need investigation and analysis, particularly in the lives of Aboriginal women in Canada, as ways of addressing the deep causes of Aboriginal ill health.

Dilemmas and Contradictions of 'Healing'

Chief Clarence Louie argued that while the federal government primarily funds, supports, promotes and maintains social programs in Aboriginal communities, federal funds to support economic development initiatives are almost non-existent, thereby privileging sickness and ill health. At a speech given to Aboriginal people on the Montana reserve in Hobbema, Alberta, Chief Louie critiqued the rampant welfare reliance in Aboriginal communities. "I am not here to talk about healing and wellness. Let those other guys do that. I am here to talk about creating opportunities and creating jobs" (Chief Clarence Louie, personal communication, March 20, 2008). In this perspective, economic prosperity is

separated from individual health and wellness. Memmi (2006) questions how Euro-Western economic models that were developed by the colonizers are utilized by the decolonized, arguing that present economic development models are disappointing. However, "nothing can replace a people's need for self-governance" (Memmi, 2006, p. 139). Warry (1998) pointed out that the results of community healing would be Aboriginal self-determination and self-government and that individual and community healing must precede any proposed economic development models.

Nadeau and Young (2006) argued that "the word *healing* implies a process that often legitimates and maintains victim-oppressor position…and has often distracted people instead of focusing on individual and communities self determination…" (p. 88). Indigenous scholar Bruno (2003) analyzed the victim-oppressor relationship and documented a sub-theme in her research called *The Oppressed Oppressing.* She identified that "Aboriginal people are oppressing each other" (p. 63). Freire (1970) stated, "during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'" (p. 27). Regrettably, internal racism or self-hate (Fanon, 1963) is a destructive tool that permeates Aboriginal country. Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) offered the term 'internal colonialism' (p. 25), suggesting that the colonization is an ongoing and deepening process whereby the dominant group maintains control over the subordinate group.

In order to break up this abusive cycle, Freire (1970) outlined two important concepts that offered suggestions for prevention: praxis and

conscientization. Praxis involves "Reflection and action…reflection–true reflection–leads to action" (Ibid, p. 48). Conscientization (Ibid, p. 49) suggests that it is necessary for a critical consciousness to emerge; being aware of the existence of colonial relationships and then finding ways of moving out of it are the benefits behind the use of the theories because "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors" (Ibid, p. 38). Foley (1999) stated, "some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it" (pp. 1-2). Indigenous scholar Laderoute believes that "education and consciousness-raising will help to promote change" in Aboriginal communities (2007, P. 302).

The discussion on healing includes challenges such as self-hate, internal colonization and focusing too much on the victim-oppressor relationship. The theory of praxis and conscientization does not acknowledge the emotional struggles that could strongly influence student learning, teacher-education programs, curricula and pedagogy. In addition, there are differences of opinion about the priorities of community healing. For example, some Aboriginal leaders believe the focus should be on economic development, whereas others state Aboriginal communities should focus on healing first, and then economic self-sufficiency would follow. These dilemmas require further investigation.

Decolonizing Education

Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) indicated that Indigenous scholars have articulated the need to decolonize education:

> The strongest advocates for decolonization have been Aboriginal scholars and community members, who emphasize that indigenous people can regain control over their lives, identities, and cultures only when they are able to achieve autonomy from Eurocentric thought and institutions. (p. 27)

Battiste and Henderson (2000) argued that there is a need to uncover the deeply embedded nature of colonial hegemony in thought, language, knowledge and institutions; therefore, effective decolonization demands that "new structures and forms of social interaction" be "created around indigenous knowledge and world views" (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 27). Menzies et al (2004) affirm that education and schooling must be transformed and transforming; "Political, economic, and social changes also need to occur in the wider community context" (p. 2). Hence, the need to encourage dialogue and create engagements with educational institutions in the decolonizing process is urged by Indigenous educators. This is done both individually and collectively, and is suggested by and for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and communities.

The history of the Aboriginal peoples and the history of the Indian residential schools are two such topics that require redress:

> the general public and, in many instances, Aboriginal people themselves, must be given enough information about their history to recognize the often illogical nature of the convictions some people hold on Indigenous people and an opportunity to revise their beliefs. In order to change opinions held about Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people alike, a highly coordinated information campaign is needed to publicize accurate, reliable and valid historical facts and bring them to schools, social institutions, mass media and political organizations. (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009, p. 81)

Archibald (2006), herself an Indigenous academic and scholar, challenges educators to consider reasons for decolonizing education. She wrote, "Learning

about the history of colonization, mourning the losses and reconnecting with traditional cultures, values and practices are becoming recognized states of the healing process" (p. 49). Indigenous scholar, Larocque (1990), personally experienced and described these three stages in her own the healing process. Individual application is one thing but the question remains, how would these stages of healing apply to the classroom, to teaching and to curricula? Those questions warrant deeper analysis.

Archibald (2006) assisted the Aboriginal Healing Foundation by providing insights into therapeutic models, processes and systems that displayed some effectiveness in Aboriginal communities. Archibald explained her understanding of decolonization as it applies to historic trauma theory:

> …decolonization, a process that involves addressing historic trauma and unraveling the tragic after effects of colonization. Historic trauma theory argues that individuals can be traumatized by events that occurred before their birth. Thus, a relationship exists between history, the social, economic and political environments, and individual experiences. It follows that therapeutic approaches to healing that incorporate Indigenous history will more effectively address root causes. (Archibald, 2006, p. iv)

Decolonizing education would include the necessary re-write of curricula to include Indigenous history, to make it visible. Including Aboriginal people in the history books would help in the healing of historic trauma. Ignoring Aboriginal presence in the history books only supports colonial perspectives and maintains continued harm.

One aspect involved in decolonizing educational processes, practices and institutions is to acknowledge that there is limited room for orality (Weber-Pillwax, 2001b) in academia because of its reliance on literary forms of

knowledge translation. Current Euro-Canadian teacher-student interactions revolve around text, privileging a structure of learning that may hinder potential areas for student growth and development. Decolonizing education would include the necessary development of acknowledging orality and of educational goals around this area. This is a huge barrier to overcome in bridging Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal divides and there is a need to fully address improved knowledge translation between the groups.

Indigenous scholars have shown in their work how healing has occurred and their analysis provided important information for education to consider. Including student voice, acknowledging lived experience and supporting traditional knowledge and Indigenous knowledge systems within the Western Canadian education system are some examples offered through their rigorous research studies (Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Bruno, 2003; Goudreau, 2006; LaDuke, 2005; Maracle, 2003; Mihesuah, 2003; Nadeau & Young, 2006; Otway, 2002).

The Bright Summer Sun of Traditional Education and Traditional Knowledge

Aboriginal peoples had their own systems of education prior to European contact. This education system has been aptly referred to as Traditional Education (TK) by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars worldwide (Allen, 1986; Anderson, 2000; Barman et al, 1986a; Battiste, 1995; Battiste, 1999; Castellano et al, 2000; Graveline, 1998; Haig-Brown, 1988; Hampton, 1995; Kirkness, 1992).

Traditional knowledge systems provide warmth, growth and nourishment to

Indigenous peoples, just like the sun does for Mother Earth.

Aboriginal Worldview

> A worldview is essentially a frame of reference by which an individual understands the world. There are four main elements which influence the way in which a person views the world. These elements are: one's unique life experiences, one's family experiences, one's cultural experiences, and one's sense of sharing in a universal humanity. (Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, 1993, as cited in Wood, 1996, p. 7)

Aboriginal worldview recognizes the relationship to the Creator, to the

land, sky, sun, stars, moon and all two-legged and four-legged creatures, big and

small. The Aboriginal worldview described the intricately interconnected

relationships in the web of existence. Many Indigenous scholars repeat this

Aboriginal truth in the literature today (Akan, 1999; Alfred, 1999; Allen, 1986;

Anderson, 2000; Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000;

Ermine, 1995; Graveline, 1998; Hanohano, 2001; Hampton, 1995; Lightning,

1992; Littlebear, 2000, Martin, 2001; Wilson, 2003). Nadeau and Young (2006)

stated that spirit is a prominent concept in indigenous knowledge and helps to

bring understanding to the ecological forces in nature. Martin (2001) wrote:

> We are taught that there is a spirit in all of 'creation' and that in order to live peacefully and in harmony, we must respect and recognize that spirit as a part of ourselves. 'Holistic' is a way of naming this over-riding notion of interconnectedness. (p. 16-17)

Various Indigenous scholars have documented how the difference in

Eurocentric and Indigenous worldviews has created immense challenges for

education (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Littlebear, 2000; Martin,

2001; McLeod, 2002). As an Indigenous educator, dialogue is necessary across

cultures in order to achieve an articulation that provides clarity across these two views.

Traditional Education and Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous scholars have indicated that traditional education systems existed prior to European settlement in Canada. Hampton's (1995) analysis of Indian education begins with traditional education. He stated that the evolution of education is as follows: "(1) traditional Indian education, (2) schooling for self-determination, (3) schooling for assimilation, (4) education by Indians, and (5) Indian education *sui generis* [of its own kind or genus; unique in its characteristics]" (p. 8). Although Indian education has evolved over time, spirituality is a constant thread that runs through the system: "The first standard of Indian education is spirituality" (Hampton, 1995, p. 19). Martin (2001) pointed out that the "concept of spirituality is embedded in Aboriginal languages" (p. 21). Hence, Indigenous languages are directly tied to traditional educational and Indigenous knowledge systems, and spirituality is embedded within the traditional knowledge (TK) and Indigenous knowledge (IK) systems.

Ermine (1995) pointed out that, "The word for mystery usually refers to a higher power and also connotes our own deeper selves in humble connection with the higher mystery" (p. 107). This humble relationship between me and a higher power or Creator is part of IK, and spirituality becomes part of my research journey. "Other names for Indigenous knowledge (or closely related concepts) are 'folk knowledge,' 'local knowledge or wisdom,' 'non-formal knowledge,'

'culture,' 'indigenous technical knowledge,' 'traditional ecological knowledge,' and 'traditional knowledge'" (Battiste, 2002, p. 7).

Inwardness

Inwardness is an important Cree traditional teaching. The process of self-discovery can begin by asking four important questions suggested by Indigenous scholar, Sylvia Maracle (2003): "Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? What are my responsibilities?" (p. 71). Cajete (2000) stated that the process of asking ourselves questions is called the "cycle of visioning," and it represents seven stages: "asking, seeking, making, finding/having, sharing, celebrating, centering" (p. 191). Learning to ask, "What insight do I need to gain from this experience?" becomes an important analytical tool the researcher can refer to in the research process. Indigenous knowledge systems teach students to look within to find the answers. Ermine (1995) wrote, "This inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self or the being" (p. 103). An example that the Elder/traditional knowledge holder shared with me was a story of a student who asked him a question. He said the student looked at the teacher, and then looked at him, waiting for a response to his question. The Elder/traditional knowledge holder waited and replied to the student with a question: "What do you think the answer is?" This story describes how a teacher can nurture inward knowing in the student/learner.

Contemporary Culture and Revealed Knowledge

Challenges arise in identifying how Aboriginal cultures have changed over time. Determining how traditional education is contemporary and available for Aboriginal students in education must be taken up at all levels of schooling, paying attention to the difference between a "contrived culture… and …the real culture" (Medicine, 1995, p. 44). Issues of stereotyping and romanticizing (Francis, 1992) traditional knowledge or indigenous knowledge must be avoided; however, complete annihilation, avoidance or dismissal of it and its use must not be the final result at the end of the continuum. McLeod (2002) challenges post-modernist theory that questions the activity of tradition by arguing that a Cree narrative memory exists today. Memory is not extinguished (Hampton, 1995) and prompting events can help bring knowledge to surface. In the book *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision,* Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) said:

> Many Indian people and elders have said that we don't lose knowledge. Knowledge, like a cloud, comes in and out of being. Knowledge comes to us when we need it. It evolves and develops. When things are needed, they come. It's true. So the map in our heads is really what we have to begin to deal with. (p. 190)

Cajete reminds me, that I have a map in my head. Other Indigenous scholars have referred to the encounter as "re-member", "re-telling" and "re-living" (Allen, 1986; Battiste, 2000; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002Hampton, 1995; Mihesuah, 2003; L. Smith, 1999; Stewart-Harawira, 2005) traditional knowledge and indigenous knowledge, indicating the strength of orality (Weber-Pillwax, 2001b) that exists within Aboriginal communities today. Steinhauer (2007) cites Castellano's description of Indigenous knowledge, which includes

three categories: traditional knowledge, empirical knowledge and revelations or revealed knowledge.

Cellular Memory

The concept of cellular memory is a form of revealed knowledge. "The basis of this concept is that knowledge is carried in our cells and through various means may be revealed or brought to our consciousness" (Kinuwa cited in Steinhauer, 2007, p. 72). Steinhauer-Hill (2008) wrote, "our ancient ways live with the new ways. Our ancestors are right here with us" (p. 121). She continued:

> Traditional Cree wisdom and knowledge have survived thousands of years. Although colonialism has affected access to Cree ways of knowing for many Cree young people today, the knowledge systems remains. As Indigenous scholars we are forced to revisit this sad time of our history as we articulate our story and identity. If we go even further back in time and reposition the light on our ancient ways of thinking, we realize we are in an auspicious time (p. 131)".

Steinhauer-Hill (2008) asserted that "contained in our cellular structure is ancient Cree wisdom passed down physiologically over thousands of years. Our cellular memory recalls the Cree context of our language" (p. 136). Cellular memory theory maintains that the memory of our ancestors remains in our blood and is a part of who we are as Indigenous peoples. This theory supports arguments presented by other Indigenous scholars (Allen, 1986; Battiste, 2000; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; Hampton, 1995; McLeod, 1992; Mihesuah, 2003; L. Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2001b).

Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders

"Education in the traditional setting occurs by example and not as a process of indoctrination. That is to say, elders are the best living examples of what the end product of education and life experiences should be" (Deloria, 2001, p. 45). This statement provided the reasoning behind the involvement of Elders in a variety of events in the Aboriginal community. Indigenous scholar Ermine (1995) cites "Couture (1991a, 208) [who] has said that 'elders are familiar with Energy on a vast scale, in multiple modes, e.g., energy as healing, creative, life-giving, sustaining" (p. 104) referring to the status of inner knowledge abilities. A good Elder or teacher will use four teaching principles to "inform, teach, guide and encourage" a student (Gareau, 1991, as cited in Akan, 1999, p. 18). Hanohano (2001) encourages Indigenous researchers to look to Elders as a source of valuable knowledge in three areas: "traditional stories, ceremonies and values" (p. 44). Hence, Wilson (2007) suggested that one of the principles of Indigenist research should be that researchers work with Elders or traditional knowledge keepers because of their deep understanding of the IK system.

Indigenous scholars have worked directly with Elders to obtain Indigenous perspectives on education and health and their scholarly works have provided researchers with great insights for future research (Akan, 1999; Lightning, 1992; Hanohano, 2001; Sockbeson, 2011; Weber-Pillwax, 2001b; Wood, 1996). One Elder whom I did not meet but wish I had was the late Lionel Kinuwa, a Lakota Minneconjou (Sioux) who taught graduate courses at the University of Alberta in the First Nations Education graduate specialization in the mid-1990s. Keewatin

(2002) summarized Kinuwa's teachings in her dissertation, and Steinhauer-Hill (2008) used his ideas to frame her research study. Lionel's words reminded me that words in Native languages are thousands of years old and are interconnected; therefore, it would be important to investigate words in Indigenous languages further.

Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages are the doorway to understanding Indigenous epistemological frameworks (Akan, 1999; Battiste, 1999; Cordero, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Hanohano, 2001; Lightning, 1992; Martin, 2001; McLeod, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001b). Battiste (2002) stated that "Language is by far the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge" (p. 17) and that "The first principle of any educational plan constructed on Indigenous knowledge must be to respect Indigenous languages" (Ibid, p. 18).

Skutnabb-Kangas' (2000) comprehensive analysis of linguistic disempowerment theory recognizes the perceived need for linguistic homogenization by many nation states, like Canada, in efforts to support globalization. She identified several methods that are used to prohibit the use of mother tongue languages in order to support dominant language use, for instance, English. "Reducing the number of languages reduces the pre-requisites for self-determination" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 311). Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) links languages to self-governance and boldly likens all these particular homogenization strategies to genocide. Fettes and Norton (2000) stated that "it has been a cold 130 years for Canada's first languages, and the thaw is still

awaited" (p. 29). Canada's disregard for the original languages of this land displays a continued lack of respect for the First Peoples of the land. The colonial relationship that the Federal Government of Canada continues to uphold with Aboriginal peoples permeates the entire present school system, from kindergarten through post secondary.

Challenges for Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge

Nadeau and Young (2006) stated that "Traditional Knowledges are unique tribal customs, practices, and knowledge systems including environmental, herbal, medicinal, spiritual, architectural, cosmological, as well as ceremonies, songs and dances" (p. 88). Battiste and Henderson (2000) caution against creating singular definitions of TK and IK for a variety of reasons, mostly to acknowledge the complexities involved within the topic. Akan (1999) and Lightning (1992) have cautioned against separating and compartmentalizing knowledge because it is more important to acknowledge the whole self, to strive for ideals of harmony and balance. The concepts of wholeness, harmony and balance are echoed in Indigenous languages.

Issues of tribal differences, varying notions of time and space, and the number of Indigenous languages justify not providing only one definition (L. Smith, 1999).

"Indigenous knowledge is an adaptable, dynamic system based on skills, abilities and problem-solving techniques that change over time depending on environmental conditions, making the taxonomic approach difficult to justify or verify" (Battiste, 2002, p. 11). "Native Ways of Knowing, Indigenous ways of

knowing, traditional ways of knowing – each relates knowing to place, knowing to a specific place" (Warner, 2006, p. 162). Name, place, and the spiritual and cultural connections to these locations are of significance in Indigenous knowledge systems.

It is indeed necessary for Indigenous scholars to take up the challenge that is best described below:

> The process of opening ourselves up to what might have been the cultural definitions present in the Americas before Columbus is something we may be interested in exploring so that we may do better at educating those learners in the continuum of education. This process must allow again for the role and function of the Elders, traditional people, ceremonial people, Medicine people, and the use of Native languages as a manifestation of Native epistemology. (Cordero, 1995, p. 37-8)

Locating sites within the current Western Canadian education system for engaging with traditional knowledge systems becomes a huge challenge for educators to address. Traditional knowledge systems are ancient yet not utilized or rarely utilized within the current Euro-Western Canadian educational system. Decolonization would encourage the access and use of traditional knowledge for the benefit of learners.

Falling Leaves: Aboriginal Women Reconstructing the Educational Landscape

Over two hundred and fifty years have passed since there was contact between the European settlers and the Plains Cree women in the territory now known as Alberta. Since that time, Aboriginal women have experienced many changes. This change is similar to the change that occurs during fall as Aboriginal women in Canada are reconstructing the educational landscape.

Traditional Roles of Indigenous Women

Paula Gunn Allen's book, *The Sacred Hoop* (1986), documented the crucial role that Indigenous women have played in traditional societies along with their continuing contemporary contributions to their communities and to Indigenous scholarship. She supported the notion that American Indian societies can recover the sacredness of the feminine. She confirmed that, prior to European contact, the role of the woman was held in high esteem in traditional American Indian societies. In many instances, Gunn Allen reported, Indigenous tribes were matriarchal.

Swampy (1981) a Cree woman scholar from the Maskwacis Cree territory documented the traditional roles of women. She recorded the viewpoints of several Cree women Elders. Her work is significant to me because she was one of the first Cree women in my territory to write using a Plains Cree perspective, but many of those women in her study have since passed on and the information they shared is so vital to my work. Interestingly, she mentioned some of the rites of passage for young Plains Cree girls and the important shifts they make as they move into womanhood.

Another groundbreaking text was written by Indigenous scholar Anderson's (2000) called *A Recognition of being: Reconstructing Native womanhood*. Anderson's work added to the literature base about the traditional roles of Aboriginal women. Womanhood, from an Indigenous perspective, is based upon a strong identity "every Indigenous society had a sense of a woman's power and position within the community" (Anderson, 2000, p. 57). In addition,

she reported on how the role of Indigenous women has changed in contemporary Western society and challenges Indigenous women to consider reconstructing their identities.

Colonialism

Colonialism has been and continues to be a mitigating factor for the continued destruction and demeaning treatment of Indigenous women worldwide. Indigenous women scholars have vehemently 'written back' on the topic and have stated that previous analyses of Indigenous women have been based upon oppressive, patriarchal models (Acoose, 1993; Acoose, 1995; Allen, 1986; Anderson, 2000; Bruno, 2003; Goudreau, 2006; LaDuke, 2005; Larocque, 1990; Maracle, 2003; Mihesuah, 2003; Sette, 2011; L. Smith; 1999). Acoose (1995) challenged readers to "consider the white constructs of Indigenous women who have been variously portrayed as creatures of nature, temptresses, or femme fatales, Indian princesses, easy squaws, or suffering, helpless victims" (p. 74). The variations are incomplete, one-dimensional, inaccurate, unrealistic portrayals and the romanticized images can be as harmful as the negative images. Such portrayal of Indigenous women continues to prevail in contemporary colonial literature.

Indigenous Female Scholarship

Indigenous female scholars have written about the triumphs and the ongoing struggles in Aboriginal communities along with significant challenges yet to be resolved (Allen, 1986; Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; LaDuke, 2005; Settee, 2011). Presently, Aboriginal women play a prominent role

in the healing movement within Aboriginal communities (Maracle, 2003; Mihesuah, 2003). Anderson (2000) and Anderson and Lawrence (2003) documented stories of personal and community healing, community development, and new issues and matters of importance to Aboriginal women, men, families and children. Goudreau (2006) stated the importance of looking at how culture, language and traditions have assisted and continue to assist Aboriginal people in the healing process.

In spring 2008, an entire *Canadian Woman Studies Journal* was dedicated to Indigenous Women and Indigenous scholars entitled: *Indigenous Women in Canada: The voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis women.* Valaskakis, Dion Stout and Guimond (2009) dedicated an entire book, *Restoring the Balance: First Nations women, community, and culture,* to the topic of Indigenous women and how they are actively contributing to and transforming their communities. Settee (2011) shares stories of fifteen Aboriginal women in her powerful work entitled *The Strength of women: Âhkamêyimowak.* These works and many others have identified the impressive energy exerted by Indigenous women toward confronting and transforming the colonial story.

Feminist Theories

Feminist theories have aided in the critical analysis of the system of patriarchy. "Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Dorothy Smith, a feminist scholar, informed the scholarly debate by positing that the "sociology of women offers an understanding of how those worlds are organized and

determined by social relations immanent in and extending beyond them" (D. Smith as cited in Lather, 1991, p. 106). Feminism has helped social science research in arguing for the recognition of other ways of knowing and places gender at the center of the debate, highlighting the complexities that are embedded in that analysis alone. Although these feminist theories warrant deeper analysis, this study will not focus on this area.

Indigenous Responses to Feminist Theories

Indigenous women scholars have stated that colonialism is the key component in deconstructing the negative imagery of womanhood. Indigenous scholar Devon Mihesuah (2003) cautioned that there are two important points that must be clarified and separated from other feminist theories: "The first is identity politics … [and the other] is the issue of authoritative voice" (p. 6). Feminist scholars have highlighted gender in their analysis however; Indigenous women scholars have indicated that colonialism is at the center of the debate. Green (2007) has called for an Aboriginal feminism, which she described as follows:

> Aboriginal feminism brings together the two critiques, feminism and anti-colonialism, to show how Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by colonialism and by patriarchy. It takes account of how both racism and sexism fuse when brought to bear on Aboriginal women. (p. 23)

Universalizing or stating representation of all women is problematic in feminist theories and is a consistent theme that appears in both feminist and Indigenous writings (Green, 2007). The multi-heritage Indigenous voices represent individuality and uniqueness and have added to the complexity of writing from an "Indian perspective" (Mihesuah, 2003, p. 7). There are many

different tribes and communities and this diversity is celebrated, opposing the notion of a singular Indigenous standpoint. From my experience working and living in an Aboriginal community, I have observed clearly that Indigenous communities respect and accept those voices of Indigenous women who are connected and involved with their communities. Their authority of voice is based upon their lived experience and reality in confronting ongoing colonization.

Gender, Identity and Labour

In the exploration of identity in relation to women, it is important to acknowledge the research conducted by non-Indigenous feminists who focused on both paid and unpaid labour of women. Their analysis has helped to uncover the multiple aspects that exist in a woman's identity. Grace and Guthro (2000) advocated that women are "multiple subjects who assume contemporaneous positionalities including identities as lovers, workers, daughters, partners, sisters, activists and friends" (p. 8). These positionalities include analysis of gender by both paid and unpaid work, reporting that women's work is based upon both professional and personal identities. Women's work extends beyond the professional scope toward the personal identity. Grace and Guthro quote Rosenberg's three traditional categories of "women's work in the homeplace: wifework, motherwork and housework" (Rosenburg, as cited in Grace & Guthro, 2000, p. 8). Acknowledging the shifting identities of women and the diversity of definitions for womanhood is to recognize and locate these in the political, social, cultural and historical intersects of each woman's life. It is helpful to understand

the complexities and positionalities of Indigenous women's identities in this research.

Indigenous Women and Health

Since the turn of the century, there has been an increase in the scholarly literature available on Aboriginal people, education and health from an Indigenous perspective (Adelson, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Archibald, 2006; Bent, 2004; Deiter & Otway, 2001; Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998; Dion Stout & Kipling 2003; Wood, 2001; Young, 2005). A few research studies conducted by Indigenous scholars have focused on Aboriginal women's health (Bennett, 2005; Goudreau, 2006). Recently, the *Canadian Journal of Native Education (CJNE)*, a scholarly Indigenous research journal, dedicated the 2006 Volume 29(1) to the theme "Indigenous education: Creating and maintaining positive health." Bent (2004) implemented quantitative approaches to glean insight into Aboriginal women's perspectives on health issues. Only one research study currently provides the model that investigates those intersections of Aboriginal womanhood, health and education. Goudreau's (2006) award winning research positively connected traditional knowledge to health and healing in Aboriginal women.

Contemporary Challenges for Aboriginal Womanhood

L. Smith (1999) stated "A key issue for Indigenous women in any challenge of contemporary indigenous politics is the restoration to women of what

are seen as their traditional roles, rights and responsibilities" (p. 152). Wood

(2001) further elaborates:

> Women in Aboriginal ancestry have often inherited, and inhabited, a dual legacy. On the one hand, Aboriginal women have often found sustenance and strength in living a life deeply immersed in their rich cultural and oral storytelling tradition…However, for many Aboriginal women, there also exists a well-documented legacy of another sort – this being their historical experience of having been legally marginalized and socially disempowered…[and] a growing body of documentation that speaks of life experiences commonly punctuated by painful losses, separations, abuses, and not surprisingly-identity confusion. (pp. 2-3)

Wood (2001) analyzed three Aboriginal women's stories, including her own,

using a narrative methodology to highlight success, empowerment and coherence

that resulted as having triumphed over systemic barriers and oppressive systems.

Voyageur (2008) documented the 'quiet revolution' occurring in First Nations

communities as more Aboriginal women enter the political sphere and gain

increased political, social and economic power. She described how these women

navigate gender, race, and politics and manage their multiple roles. Bruno (2003),

Bruno (2010) and Martin (2001) focused on the challenges and accomplishments

of Aboriginal women in Western post-secondary institutions and the shifting

positionalities that result in self, family and community. Each of their rich studies

provided several suggestions to Western post-secondary institutions in making

efforts to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Goudreau (2006) discussed the cultural re-constructions of Aboriginal

womanhood and identity as a result of participation in traditional activities like

hand drumming, adding to the knowledge base that these activities promote

health. Anderson (2000) and Anderson and Lawrence (2003) focused on the many

complexities and realities of Aboriginal women who hail from a multitude of individual and collective identities and the emerging dilemmas that require positive responses. Anderson (2000) suggested a new model for Aboriginal women to consider in reconstructing Native womanhood which would entail the following: (1) resisting negative definitions of being; (2) reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; (3) constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and (4) 'acting'.

Aboriginal Student University Experiences

Studies have indicated that Aboriginal students struggling with the present Western Canadian university experience acknowledge that there are some problems with what constitutes knowledge as Indigenous knowledge systems are often ignored (Castellano et al, 2000; Martin, 2001; L. Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2007; Wilson, 2003). An area of frustration for Aboriginal students is the disjuncture of how knowledge is separated at the university level: "the separation of knowledge into professional expertise and personal growth, is an insurmountable barrier for many Indian students…in traditional society the goal is to ensure personal growth and then to develop professional expertise" (Deloria, 2001, p. 43). In traditional education, knowledge is transferred from teacher to student focusing on developing the skills, abilities and talents of the learner so that those can be openly shared for the purpose of serving others. For this reason, the traditional education system emphasizes an inward journey. However, this process changes once the Aboriginal students enters the Western Canadian educational system. Aboriginal students endure conflict in what constitutes

knowledge, the purposes of it and how it is transferred. This epistemological divide creates a barrier that students must navigate if they are to survive in the Western post-secondary education system (Acoose, 1995; Bruno, 2003; Bruno 2010; Martin, 2001; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Wood, 2001). All of this conflict and anxiety is carried in Aboriginal students' bodies while engaged in the processes of schooling.

Personal Graduate Student Experience

I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by a group of loving and supportive Aboriginal women who are in graduate studies at the University of Alberta. Our gatherings have provided me with encouragement to continue on this path that I have chosen while at the same time helped me to recognize that we, as Indigenous graduate students, all carry heavy loads in terms of our individual responsibilities to ourselves, family, community and school. I realize that the responsibilities of being a learner include great sacrifices. Much of my graduate student experience has been challenging and deeply emotional. I have shed a lot of tears through just surviving as a single mother raising five children. Although I will not be researching this particular aspect in my research, I would like to use this space to write about the loads that we, who are Aboriginal women graduate students, carry. I would like to put forward a brief challenge to the literature on women's work and to point out that an Indigenous perspective is missing in that discussion. I speak to this only indirectly as the topic is broad and lies outside of the scope of my work.

Conceptualizing Aboriginal Womanhood

My mother taught me a womanhood concept to think about when I became a woman. Although my mother did not use the words womanhood concept, model or theory to discuss her thoughts about the nature of Cree women's roles, she did introduce me to words that stuck with me through my adolescent years. For example, she used the words 'sacred' and 'warrior' to emphasize specific aspects of women's responsibilities. Over time, I have used the following words to understand the full capacity of her teachings: girl-child, sacred woman, warrior woman and wise woman. My mother was passionate about her work and sought answers to the many complexities of Aboriginal reality. Although she is no longer with us physically, she continues to be my teacher in my life. She was a community leader who introduced several new initiatives into our community, all involving the health and development of self, family and community. From her teachings, I have learned that as an adult, I carry these four parts of myself with me daily. After her passing, I learnt that her Cree name was *Omisimaw*, which means eldest daughter. In her honor and memory, I have named this ancient Maskwacis Cree concept of Aboriginal womanhood, the Omisimaw Leadership Model.

My mother's life and teachings have been the seed of this work, a seed that has been growing steadily for several years. There were also other women, like my aunts and my female friends and colleagues, who have helped me to conceptualize a model for thinking and talking about Aboriginal women's experiences in their own and other communities.

It is not my intention to compare this conceptual model to current psychological theories of development but, rather, to add to the existing theoretical base of knowledge to help explain Indigenous knowledge systems and Aboriginal women's development. This work offers a significant contribution to the literature about Aboriginal women's development and the connections between education, health and healing.

Iskwewak- The Women of Influence in My Early Years of Life

In order to explain the evolution of the Omisimaw Leadership Model, I must first share information that will provide insight into the political, cultural, historical and social intersections that have influenced my life. I would like to share how women, like my mother and grandmothers, have explained the different aspects of the Omisimaw Leadership Model so that it can be understood accordingly in this research study.

I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by many loving women and the most influential were my mother and *nokums* (my grandmothers). My mother was the primary role model in my life. She passed away in May 1998 at the age of 47, from cancer. At the time of her death, she held a position of band councilor for our community so the loss was deeply felt not only within my small family but also within the larger community. She was a trailblazer, driven to help those who were less fortunate. She often relayed stories to me of her family's poverty and how she knew first-hand about the difficulties that individuals experience as a result of not having access to needed resources.

My mother was the younger of two children from the late Louie and Mary Yellowbird. My mother was raised in the Cree culture; *nimosum* (my grandfather) was an *oskapayos* (helper) for traditional knowledge holders in the Maskwacis area, and my mother attended and participated in ceremonies as a young child and adolescent. My mother attended the local Catholic residential school located on the Ermineskin reserve until grade eight. The day-school only went to grade eight and, if Aboriginal families wanted further education for their child, off-reserve school settings were offered to Aboriginal parents for their children's education through the federal government's integration policy in the 1960s. *Nimosum* (maternal grandfather) did not allow my mother to go off reserve, so she obtained a job at a local grocery store. She was 16 years old and employed as a cashier at the grocery store when she met my father, and that was the year *nimosum*, her father, died.

My mother gave birth to me when she was 17 years old; she had married my father two months earlier. We lived with my father's parents so I was given a lot of attention from my paternal grandparents, Jacob and Sara Louis. They had already raised their family, and my aunts tell me that they spoiled me and provided me with a lot of love. My grandmother sewed much of my clothing and my aunts would treat me like a little doll, dressing me up in dresses and bonnets made by my grandmother and then taking my photograph. These were all indicators of the great love and family care that was bestowed upon me as a child.

During my early school-age years, my parents, my younger brother and I grew up in a small house about 400 metres away from my paternal grandparents.

Although we had our own house, I still chose to spend quite a bit of time with my paternal grandparents. My paternal grandmother, Sara, taught me many traditional activities like beading, sewing, cooking, tanning hides and caring for a house. I had the privilege of being fully loved and supported by her. To her, love was the cure and answer to any of life's challenges. I thank her for planting that seed in my heart at an early age. My maternal grandmother, Mary, encouraged me to participate in many Cree traditional activities like feasts and Sun Dances and Tea Dances, which were her favorite. She believed in the healing powers of the Cree ceremonies and supported them by participating in them. Often times, she was asked to sit as an Elder/traditional knowledge holder and help perform the Maskwacis Cree girls' rites of passage ceremony with other Elders/traditional knowledge holders in the area. Usually, she was more comfortable speaking to me in Cree than English.

My maternal family believed in the Cree culture and my paternal family believed in the Christian religion, hence I grew up with both traditions. My parents would continually state that there was only one God, one Creator, one Higher Power, and one Great Mystery. I grew up knowing that there was a being greater than me and I accepted, believed and experienced that reality as my truth. I have shared this summary of the women who have influenced my life because I want to offer a reference point for the model I intend to share in this work. Next, I turn to my experience in graduate studies to indicate how the model was fully realized.

The Full Realization of the Omisimaw Leadership Model

Before I entered graduate studies I did not have a name for what I envisioned in my mind nor did I even consider it to come from an Indigenous knowledge system. However, I have recognized that its existence pre-dates my own and I would like to explain how I came to recognize and work with it in my research study.

I returned to the University of Alberta to enter graduate studies in 2003. As I entered into discussions with other students, I began to question why I had a model for framing my understanding of womanhood and others did not. I openly shared my mothers' teachings with others and I had incorporated these teachings into my own adult education programming by now. However, it was not until beginning my doctoral studies in 2006 at the University of Alberta that I seriously reflected upon how this Cree model of the four aspects of womanhood came into more clarity in my mind: Girl/Child, Sacred Woman, Warrior Woman and Wise Woman. This four-part model of the different aspects of womanhood forms the theoretical basis of my work. From my participation in the CURA Healing Through Language and Culture research project, I was able to experience and work with Elders and Cree traditional knowledge holders who helped to guide the visual representation of my thinking so as to continuously respect and honor Cree cultural teachings. I connected with Cree cultural teachings as an Indigenous graduate student and I experienced decolonization. This learning experience helped me to realize that the concepts of Aboriginal womanhood that had been shared with me by my mother were actually ancient Maskwacis Cree teachings

that have survived and served our Aboriginal women for centuries. Before the end

of 2010, I asked my niece, a talented artist, to create a painting of the model

(Appendix C). Since that time, I have used the visual depiction of the Omisimaw

Leadership Model to describe the four aspects of the woman self. The next section

introduces and describes the four aspects of the model in greater detail.

Girl-Child

Girl-Child sits in the east. She is innocent, trusting and eager to learn; she

is described as the little girl who is playful and able to laugh at herself; she is the

one who is full of life; she is present in the moment, willing to learn about herself,

others and the world around her; she is filled with laughter, joy and happiness.

And most of all, she knows how to have fun in a safe way.

Sacred Woman

South is the doorway for Cree traditional ceremonies therefore, it is an

important direction. Sacred Woman sits in the south. From my mother's

teachings, I learned that Sacred Woman was to be revered. She was the one who

was to be respected; she was the one who held many different forms of power; she

was the one who held the responsibility for the continuance of the community,

particularly because of her ability to bear children.

Warrior Woman

Warrior Woman sits in the west. She is a visionary leader, assertive, bold,

courageous, honest and strong; she is the one who develops boundaries; she

speaks up about injustice and does not tolerate violence or abuse. Often, she is the

defender of the home fire and children; she reminds people about the importance of respecting themselves and others. She perseveres and continues to work through challenges brought forward in life.

Wise Woman

Wise Woman sits in the north and is the source of great wisdom. She is the strong intuitive nature and is described as the woman who knows the answers to the challenges that we face in our lives. She is the woman who provides direction when we need it. She is the gentle inner voice we hear within ourselves when we go to a quite space and listen. She is the wellspring of love, kindness, compassion and understanding.

Applying the Omisimaw Leadership Model to the Literature

The majority of current literature on Aboriginal women falls into descriptions of either sacred woman or warrior woman; however, there are few descriptions of wise woman and girl-child. There remains a huge void in explaining the totality of this model and this research study will contribute to the literature on the topic of Aboriginal women.

CHAPTER 4: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) is a newly developed field within academic research that is gaining more visibility in academia as Indigenous scholars contribute to the topic (Brown & Strega, 2005; Bruno, 2003; Martin, 2001; L. Smith, 1999; Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2001b; Wilson, 2003; Wilson, 2007). Like Wilson (2003), "When using the term Indigenous research, I am referring specifically to research done by or for Indigenous peoples" (p. 20). IRM utilizes "An Indigenous Research Paradigm [which] is made up of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology" (Wilson, 2003, p. 14). Indigenous scholar L. Smith (1999) stated that:

> The arguments of different Indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. (p. 74)

Smith continued to argue that 'Western' systems of knowledge are based upon the Enlightenment project and modernity that provided no theoretical space, or even recognition of theoretical space for concepts related to relationality as described above. In fact, there was an obvious disconnect evident in most Western systems of knowledge about the importance of relationality. Relationality, respect and reciprocity (Wilson, 2003) are specific principles inherent in Indigenous research. These three "R's" provide a foundation upon which Indigenous researchers can build.

"An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability" (Ibid, p. 137). IRM is also a methodological framework within which I will position myself and my work. I will use IRM to guide my decision-making as the research process unfolds. I trust in the word 'unfolds' because, as a researcher, I am not fully aware of the road ahead on my research journey, yet I anticipate that those aspects of my experience will add to the richness of the research process and contribute to the outcomes of the research. As a researcher, I will uphold several principles that will guide me. Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999, p.31) presents several important principles that are inherent in IRM. These include:

(a) the interconnectedness of all living things,
(b) the impact of motives and intentions on person and community,
(c) the foundation of research as lived indigenous experience,
(d) the groundedness of theories in indigenous epistemology,
(e) the transformative nature of research,
(f) the sacredness and responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity, and
(g) the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes.

Brown and Strega (2005) have argued that the above principles have important implications for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers to seriously consider when conducting research. They argued that research must be critical and possess an anti-oppressive quality to it. Research then, must make attempts to dismantle oppression. Engaging in research that will positively impact my community is a responsibility that I carry. And, as such, each of these principles is enacted daily in every aspect of my work. Whether I am thinking, doing or just being, I am engaged in these activities as enactments of the principles. As an Indigenous scholar, I would add that it is imperative that I make

efforts to honor and validate the indigenous voice of my ancestors and my community, as I am accountable to them.

Wahkohtowin[9] is a Cree term that can be used to convey or grasp the deep meaning of relationality as it presupposes a particular worldview and knowledge system. LeClaire and Cardinal (1998) defined *wahkohtowin* as "s/he is related or connected to her/him" (p. 401). Although, the Cree term has been used to describe a person's relationship to another, *wahkohtowin* is a fundamental concept to Cree people as is evident in the following citation by Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, Cree Scholar, who said "When I hear the word *wahkohtowin* – it's like being blanketed by my ancestors; love has been shared" (personal communication, January 15, 2008). It is a word that acknowledges the connections I hold to my ancestors and I feel deeply comforted, supported and loved with this knowing as I conduct my research.

O'Reilly-Scanlon et al (2004) argued that *wahkohtowin* can be a research methodology. The researchers, two who are non-Aboriginal and one Aboriginal, incorporated culturally appropriate practices and processes such as the pipe ceremony and sweatlodge ceremony, to help guide their research. O'Reilly-Scanlon et al stated that *wahkohtowin* can help researchers to work across universities and across race in efforts to engage in meaningful relationships "because it highlights the importance of community" (2004, p. 30). Although various scholars have problematized the term community, relationality was the concept that guided these researchers in their work. In this context, they applied

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[9] Wahkohtowin as a noun is translated as "s/he is related or connected to her/him" (p. 401).

the term relationality to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in their research study as a way of working across cultures.

Respect is a term that carries multiple layers of meaning for the Indigenous researcher and is embedded in IRM (Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Wilson, 2003). L. Smith (1999) provided an accurate foundation description of *respect* as it is understood within Indigenous communities:

> The term 'respect' is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct. (p. 120)

As I have worked in Aboriginal communities, I have heard Elders describe the importance of respect. The degree and manner in which I engaged with the word respect in terms of how I understood or perceived my own relationship to my research was a mindful and timely process that unfolded and provided deeper meaning as I persisted and pressed onward. My unfolding understanding of respect cautioned, and continues to caution me, about the significance of not limiting myself or my work to one particular method, as understanding of IRM continues to grow as I continue to engage with it. In fact, these awarenesses and reflections are important parts of my preparations at the onset of my research (Wilson, 2007). Researcher preparations are not often articulated in the current literature and I have dedicated Chapter Two to delving into this topic in my own work, as it became a foundational piece of experience that I gained on the research journey.

What happens during my focused engagement with research is just as important to me as the researcher as are the anticipated outcomes. I expect to be transformed while I am on this research journey. Rice (2003) indicated "the process is the methodology" (p. 181). Absolon and Willett (2005) echoed the same point by stating that "Aboriginal research methodologies are as much about process as they are about product" (p. 107). The research process evolves throughout the entire research project. Therefore, through temporality, the shifting that occurs within the process would bring forth, unfold, enfold, add and transform layers of research, knowledge and information to the existing research project. The process is just as important as the end result. Indigenous research allows for research layers and concomitant knowledge to unfold, both for the research itself and for the researcher. Steinhauer-Hill (2008) discussed the complexities of these processes as loop to loop communication, double loop and triple loop communication (pp. 105-108). Weber-Pillwax (2003) refers to "fractal images and patterns where the trails on the land…repeat themselves or are repeated in total consciousness" (p. 181). The researcher moves inward and outward, forward and backward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Hence, there is movement for not only the research project but for the researcher, too.

Indigenous scholar Steinhauer-Hill (2008) talked about rigor involved in research and she employed the five steps of Indigenous analysis in her work: (1) saturation, (2) incubation, (3) analysis, (4) illumination, and (5) adaptation (p. 117). She described Indigenous analysis as follows:

> Indigenous analysis requires that researchers rely on their Indigenous intelligence. Indigenous intelligence operates in its fullest capacity when

mind-body-spirit-heart synchronously engages. The Cree concept of *mamatowisowin*, the capacity to be or do anything to be creative, is part of Indigenous intelligence. The four aspects of mind-body-spirit-heart provide the outward ways of our intelligence, our ways of being-seeing-relating-thinking. Harmony, balance and chaos, circle and cyclicity are all qualities of an Indigenous analysis. (p. 133)

The weight of this responsibility is a heavy burden to bear so it is important for the researcher to be prepared for such a task. Courage, honesty, patience and trust in the process are key ingredients used by the researcher while on the research journey.

Many Indigenous scholars articulate that research must be transformative. Steinhauer-Hill (2008) identified that the mind-body-spirit-heart synchronistic connection creates personal transformation. Wilson (2003) declared "If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (p. 249). Potts and Brown (2005) discussed the components of anti-oppressive research citing the transformative makeup of IRM:

> [Indigenous Research] methodologies are openly critical of and oppose the status quo and are committed to a transformative agenda to build a more just society. Such research methodologies call for critical inquirers to practice in their empirical endeavours what they preach in their theoretical formulations. (pp. 281-282)

Although IRM considers the individual researcher capability, Indigenous scholars have pointed out that the researcher is not disconnected from the community (Bruno, 2003; Hanohano, 2001; Martin, 2001; Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003). The transformative nature of research is not only an individual experience but will eventually extend out to the family and then the community.

Knowledge gained in these researcher experiences provided great insight into research processes. "For knowledge to flourish, scholars need to see Indigenous knowledge as a new *sui generis* (self-generating) [sic. *sui generis*: unique] path, as a new opportunity to develop greater awareness and to develop deeper truths about ecologies and their forces" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 39). Indigenous knowledge explorations carry the potential for new paths to be uncovered and it becomes the accepted responsibility of the scholar (Steinhauer, 2007). In addition, Indigenous scholars have cited that knowledge gained in research is intrinsically connected to the lived experience of the researcher (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; L. Smith, 1999; Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Young, 2005). This new path of knowledge includes my exploration into my own lived experience, uncovering its relationship to the research focus, all the while having accepted this responsibility by completing this work. Steinhauer (2007) provided a good summary on IRM:

> Relying upon a research methodology that permits and supports my efforts to draw on and include the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and spirituality of our people in this work is one way that I am able to honor the knowledge that is available to me from my own way of being and knowing. Grounding my research in this Indigenous research methodology, and therefore within this particular knowledge system, assisted me in ensuring that my research would maintain the integrity of the participants and the communities with which I engaged. (p. 62)

Dreams as a method in IRM

Dreams are one particular method that may be associated with IRM. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have highlighted the significance of

dreams in research and in education. Ermine (1995) described the powerful force of dreaming:

> Our progenitors knew and believed in the power of dreams; it is only through dreams that sacred undertakings are attempted. Dreams are the guiding principles for constructing the corporeal. Dreams, the voice of the inner space, give rise to the holy and prescribe all ceremonies on the physical level. (p. 108)

Ermine (1995) continued by saying, "It is through dreams that the gifted in our Aboriginal communities 'create' experience for the benefit of the community through the capacity inherent in mamatowisowin" (p. 108). Brody's (1981) research highlights how dreams played an important role for the hunter when they were out hunting. Dreams informed the hunter about how and where to access a kill. Cajete (2000) stated that one of the foundations that underlie Indigenous education is the dream. He said, "The third foundation is the visionary or dream tradition based on an understanding that one learns through the visions and dreams" (p. 184). Cardinal (2001) described how Elders used dreams to help them in decision-making by allowing time for answers to come through a dream. As an esteemed Aboriginal Elder, Dr. Joe Couture said, "Dreams instruct us, guide us and teach us" (Alberta Mental Health Board, 2006, p. 7). In my own journaling about my dreams, several powerful dreams and images have come to me that I use to anchor and guide me. These recordings of my dreams have been referred to as data sources in my work.

Acknowledging Interpretative Research

The subjective dimension of qualitative research is best understood in the interpretive sociology and the radical humanism approach (Burrell & Morgan,

1979, pp. 28-32). Since "all knowledges are forms of social constructions…"
(Lincoln, 2002, p. 14), the symbolic, interpretative nature of social science has
associations with earlier historical theoretical understandings of the "idols of the
mind" (Hekman, 1986, p. 17). A qualitative research paradigm that utilizes lived
experience in the research design is known as phenomenology. "Phenomenology
aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday
experiences," (Van Manen, 1997, p. 9) and it argued for legitimacy within
academia to generate knowledge from that experience. Van Manen (1997) added
that hermeneutic phenomenology is a social science research framework that
examines the lifeworld of individuals.

People tell stories and live their lives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have
called the storytelling aspect of research narrative inquiry. There are two
distinctive features of narrative inquiry. The first one is the "three dimensional
narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and
social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (p. 50). The second
aspect of narrative inquiry that is congruent with my understanding of the world is
called "four directions of inquiry: inward and outwards, backward and forward"
(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Although phenomenology and narrative
inquiry are distinct and separate research methods, they are both identified as
interpretative research.

Indigenous scholars identified that research was something that was done
to Aboriginal people (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Battiste &
Henderson, 2000; L. Smith, 1999), usually with no tangible benefits or

transformative results for Aboriginal people and community. Phenomenology and narrative inquiry research methods inform aspects of my research approach as it facilitates the involvement of Aboriginal research participants in both creating/sharing/collecting and observing/interpreting/analyzing research data, thereby impacting individuals and communities.

The Soaring Eagle Approach —
Data Collection Process and Analysis

In Indigenous Research Methodology, the data collection and analysis evolved in a spiraling manner, like an eagle circling in large circles from the ground toward the clouds moving higher and higher toward the sun. The research was organic, as it flowed in a manner that was culturally appropriate with Plains Cree processes. For example, the number four is a significant number within the culture; hence, the research process comprised four main components, which I have called research phases. The details of each phase are identified below. In each phase, I gathered the data and continually analyzed the research materials by moving from the first through to the fourth phase; however, due to the enormity of this project, there were actually five phases that took place.

Based upon Cree cultural traditions, moving in a clockwise direction, spiraling higher and higher, allows me, as a researcher, a broader, more distanced "eagle-eye" view of the data. Concurrently, as a researcher, "I" (my personal reflections, my introspections, and my inward view) am very much a part of this research process and I cannot be separated from it. Sockbeson (2011) asserted:

> Unlike any other form of research, IRM affords us as Indigenous Scholars
> to serve as the data while intellectually gazing inward and outward to

articulate in the English language our ways of knowing and being, in the context of our contemporary realities. (p. 26)

The rigor and stamina necessary for a researcher to manage the constant movement, both inside and outside of oneself, requires that autobiographical narratives serve as an important primary source of data analysis to locate vital benchmarks achieved in this study. In Cree traditions, the vertical plane is important and acknowledged, and it is my responsibility as researcher to share this perspective too.

Just as the eagle is able to soar higher and higher vertically, the vertical movement of this data is presented in the upcoming chapters as analysis of the research unfolds. In Cree ceremony, each direction is significant and acknowledged. The horizontal process in this research design is presented on the paper in a horizontal fashion. Therefore, the Omisimaw Leadership Model provided the overall framework with which to review all the data sources and information while I was on this arduous journey–moving forward, horizontally and vertically.

Cultural Protocol

Indigenous scholars (Hanohano, 2001; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008) have discussed cultural protocol in their studies. Hanohano (2001) stated "Protocol is the process that acknowledges and recognizes the mana (spiritual essence or power) or the being or entity at hand" (p. 62). Steinhauer (2007) discussed the importance of remaining humble while on the research journey and that "protocol is much more than just handing over a package of tobacco or the

presentation of material gifts" (p. 95). Steinhauer-Hill (2008) has asserted, "Indigenous protocols are acts that are carried out to maintain balance and affirm our connectedness and identity with the environment" (p. 53).

I used culturally appropriate methods that honored and respected processes of IRM. Therefore, the first step that I initiated was to make necessary offerings for a safe learning journey for myself, my family, the research participants and my community. I offered tobacco to the four elements: water, land, air, earth. Then, I visited with an Elder/traditional knowledge holder with whom I had previously established a trusting relationship, and I offered him tobacco, which he accepted. I requested his support and involvement while I engaged in the research process. Finally, I offered tobacco to the Aboriginal women who agreed to participate in the research and share their experiences with me while on this journey.

Research Phases

Originally, I envisioned completing this work in a condensed period of time. However, the process took much longer and it surfaced unexpectedly at times, specifically in the beginning and at the end of the research process. I participated in four major phases that unfolded during the research journey.

The first phase of the research process was participating in the CURA project called *Healing Through Language and Culture*. I focused on analyzing the personal research journal entries that I have maintained since the onset of the CURA project in fall, 2007. I immersed myself with knowing various theories posed by other Indigenous scholars from a period of four years from 2007 to 2011. The analysis of my lived experience, those archival photographs and my

presentations are the focal point in this first phase of this study. This information is shared in Chapter 2.

The second phase was working with an Elder. It was important to form a strong relationship; therefore, several visits were necessary in order to establish a safe and trusting working relationship where knowledge could be shared. Usually, I would be open to the process and engage with the Elder based upon discussions and teachings that would arise during each visit. At times, I would hold a question or the general idea about a question, and then the Elder would help me determine how to help me move toward the answers. The Elder provided direction to me on this necessary and important phase of research. I was asked to perform specific tasks, seek out answers to help guide my research and ensure that I had a solid foundation from which to work. Part of that process is shared in Chapter 2.

The third phase was working with four Aboriginal women who were interested in participating in two learning circles to share their insights, learn traditional knowledge and co-create culturally appropriate pedagogical models on Aboriginal women's development. At the request of the women themselves, they engaged with the Elder to conduct a teaching/learning circle for my research. Thus, three research-learning circles were completed. The women responded to the broader research question that I had posed, but they determined the direction, flow, content and length of the research circle themselves. This was a disadvantage in the approach that I used because I allowed the participants to go where they needed to go and the discussion moved into looking at sub-questions

that the research participants decided upon. This information is shared in Chapter 5.

Finally, the last phase was analyzing all the major sources of data. I searched for themes and created meaningful units by organizing the themes into clusters. This information is shared in Chapter 6.

Community Selection

The community with which I engaged was the Maskwacis community. The Maskwacis community is located in central Alberta and has a population of approximately 15,000 members. The Maskwacis community is 70 kilometers south of the city of Edmonton. It is located between two neighboring towns: one to the south called Ponoka and one to the north called Wetaskiwin. The Maskwacis community comprises four First Nations: Samson, Ermineskin, Louis Bull and Montana. A Chief and councilors govern the Maskwacis community for each of the four First Nations. Each of the First Nations has one Chief, so there are four Chiefs in total. The size of each of the political councilor representation is dependent upon the size of each of the First Nations. For instance, the Samson Cree Nation is the largest of the four bands, followed by the Ermineskin Cree Nation, then Louis Bull and finally, Montana. Therefore, Samson has 12 councilors, Ermineskin has 8 councilors, Louis Bull has 6 councilors and Montana has 4 councilors. This political bureaucracy creates challenges for the Maskwacis community, such as consensus building on social issues.

There are close kinships amongst each of the four bands. Familial relationships extend into each of the four bands. This particular aspect is

emphasized when there is a death in the Maskwacis, as relationships can be seen amongst the four neighboring First Nations. Cree cultural ceremonies such as Feasts, Tea Dances, Chicken Dances, Ghost Dances, Round Dances, Sweatlodge ceremonies, Pow wows, Give-aways and Sun Dances are regular occurrences within the Maskwacis community and continue to honor the Cree principle of *wahkohtowin* (kinship).

Participant Selection

I sought the support, direction and guidance of an Elder/traditional knowledge holder to assist me while on my learning journey. Contacting him and coordinating visits was part of the relationship building process. I met him almost bi-weekly and he provided the overall support for the research project, guiding my research preparation. In addition, traditional teachings were shared at regular intervals and repeated over the span of my research work.

The research participants consisted of four Aboriginal women. In order to respectfully engage participants for the third phase of research, formal letters were prepared that explained the details of the research project and I invited Aboriginal women who were employed in a variety of fields, particularly those women who had displayed some involvement in the Aboriginal community. I made contact with each of the woman by telephone to explain the research topic and the primary research question. Then, I gave the formal letter to the research participants and shared the research question with them. In addition, these women were representative of the Maskwacis 'community' from the Hobbema Four Bands. Each woman displayed some involvement and leadership by either

participating in, implementing, and/or supporting local control of education or community development programs. All women were of Cree descent and from Alberta. They each had knowledge of the Cree language; however, it was not a pre-requisite to participating in this research project. Although the language analysis was a small part of my work, it revealed itself as an integral component that supported my own deeper understanding of Indigenous Cree knowledge as the research unfolded.

All research participants were willing to contribute as teachers/learners/researchers and committed to meeting together for a minimum of two 'learning research circles'. I had previously well-established relationships with each of the Aboriginal women in the research study; hence, the participants were all comfortable with me and with each other. This past relationship created a solid foundation that allowed the participants to comfortably move toward discussions and accept the situation of being audio-recorded.

Participants

Five individuals participated in this research study: one male Elder/traditional knowledge holder and four Aboriginal women. I provided an overview of the study to the participants and they each signed a consent form, acknowledging that they all had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They also had time to decide whether they wanted their names to be made known; all chose to show their names. Through the following section, I am honored to introduce each person who engaged with me in this work.

Elder/Traditional Knowledge Holder Joseph Deschamps

Joseph is a well-respected spiritual leader who resides on the Louis Bull Tribe, fluent Cree speaker, and knowledgeable of the Cree cultural ceremonies within the Maskwacis community. He is an Elder/traditional knowledge holder. Joseph has dedicated his life to Cree culture and language preservation. He participates with neighboring communities promoting Cree culture, history and identity, and has assisted various universities, organizations, agencies with historical and archival research and documentation. He served several terms as Councilor for the Louis Bull Tribe. Joseph is married and has several children and grandchildren.

Roberta Bearhead

Roberta grew up in Pigeon Lake. Her maternal relatives were tribal members of the Samson Cree Nation. Roberta speaks Cree fluently and is knowledgeable of Cree cultural ceremonies and practices. Roberta is in her late forties and has been employed both on and off the reserve. Currently, Roberta is living and employed off-reserve.

Heather Buffalo

A member of the Samson Cree Nation, Heather works for her community and is aware of the social realities of her community. Heather is not a fluent Cree speaker. She is in her mid forties, and lives off reserve but has lived both on and off the reserve. Heather is actively involved in her community and serves in a leadership capacity in various community social events. Heather completed her Masters in Business Administration from Athabasca University.

Glenda Swampy

Glenda is a member of the Samson Cree Nation and a fluent Cree speaker. She is in her early fifties and a single parent of three adults. Glenda works for the banking industry, assuming a managerial role within the corporate structure. Glenda has lived both on and off the reserve and she has worked for her community in various managerial positions. Actively involved in her community, Glenda volunteers for community events.

Cheryl Threefingers

Cheryl was raised on the Louis Bull Tribe. Cheryl passed the exam for Cree as a second language, understands a lot of Northern Cree and Plains Cree despite not being a fluent Cree speaker. She has worked for her community in a managerial position for Louis Bull Tribe Education department and as a coordinate for Child Welfare. Cheryl is currently employed at the local federal minimum-security prison however is on long term sick leave. She has been working with program development and teaching/facilitating Aboriginal males for over fifteen years. Cheryl is a single parent of one adult daughter and is actively involved in community cultural events and ceremonies. She resides on the reserve.

Selecting Methods

In brief, my research methods included analysis of archival photographs, personal journal entries and learning research circles. In the CURA *Healing through Language and Culture* project, I gathered several photographs that directly informed my experience with the Indian residential school topic. In

addition, I recorded in a journal my thoughts and experiences during my research journey.

I used two large group interviews with the four Aboriginal women that I have called learning research circles. I recorded three learning research circles of the Aboriginal woman. The first two learning research circles were amongst themselves as women, whereas the third learning research circle included the Elder/traditional knowledge holder. The first two were recorded but the third was not.

The male Elder/traditional knowledge holder made the decision not to be interviewed at the onset of the research project. I was encouraged to listen intently to the teachings while in his company, and to be present and in the moment as pre-requisites to each visit with him. I had to maintain focus and be open to any theme or topic that might emerge during my time with him. After each visit, I returned home, recorded in a journal and prepared entries on my thoughts, feelings, experiences and understandings of the teachings shared with me. I relied upon my journal entries and dreams as data sources during the research process, and as such, I shared and discussed those contents with the Elder. The notes collection were entitled "Elder's teachings", and were woven into the final analysis in Chapter 6.

Learning Research Circles

For the learning research circles, I incorporated the talking circle method (Martin, 2001). I audio-recorded these sessions, transcribed them and allowed for member checks, giving participants the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the

transcriptions (Lincoln & Gobi, 1985). Other Indigenous Scholars utilized research circles (Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008) in their studies. I referred to this large group interview as 'learning research circles' for several reasons.

The first reason is that as the women come together, the direction of the topic was determined in large part by the individual who began the conversation. The first speaker helped to create a focus for the other women regarding the discussion around the research topic. This process supported the ability of each of the women to share personal narratives, lived experiences and stories, which built upon the initial concept brought forward by the first speaker. The sharing of their individual stories deepened the connection amongst each of the group members and each member takes a specific learning away from the gathering that is significant and unique to her current reality. In this way, the participants can inform and instruct one another.

The second reason why I refer to the group interview as a learning research circle is that the learning research circle became a non-threatening environment that served to help remind participants how Indigenous communicative processes such as the talking circle function. The learning research circle gave each research participant an opportunity to share her ideas and thoughts in a safe environment that was consistent with their way of being and knowing.

The third reason for the use of the term learning research circle was that the participants themselves indicated that they wanted to hold another research

circle once the second learning circle was completed. Several of them indicated their interest in having one more circle because they felt that the discussion they held during the second learning circle was incomplete. When I shared with the participants that I was working with an Elder/traditional knowledge holder, they expressed interest in holding a learning circle with him to engage in productive dialogue about the research project. Each of the four Aboriginal women indicated their willingness to build their own awareness and capacity to engage within Cree ways of knowing and being; thus, they saw additional research circles as an opportunity to grow and learn. This knowledge surfaced and became a part of their own awareness and knowledge upon completion of the second circle.

A fourth reason for the use of the term learning research circle was that there was a synchronized event that surfaced after the completion of the second circle. During one of my visits with the Elder/traditional knowledge holder, he indicated interest in sharing a traditional teaching with the women I interviewed. In addition, one of the research participants asked me if it was possible to have another session with the Elder/traditional knowledge holder as a follow-up to the second learning research circle. The meaningful connection of these two requests led me to coordinate a third learning research circle in which the following objectives of the research project were truly crystallized: to better understand how Aboriginal communities can return to wholeness, to revitalize Cree ways of knowing and being, to recommend changes to the educational systems, and to celebrate Cree ways.

Location of Learning Research Circles

The location of the first and second learning research circle happened in my home residence, located on the Samson Cree Nation reserve in Hobbema, Alberta. In Cree traditions, it is customary to invite people into one's residence when hosting a ceremony. Since I viewed the research process as a ceremony (Wilson, 2003), I felt it was my responsibility to open my home to the participants as these women were joining me on this quest. Part of Cree traditions is to offer your guests the finest, caring for them while they are in your company, so I ensured that there was a small meal prepared prior to each learning research circle. The timing of the first and second learning research circle was determined by each of the women's availability. This was especially challenging as the women were very busy and their responsibilities did not allow for much gathering time. Both of the learning research circles were held during the day as this was important for a couple of the participants. They felt that the daytime supported their focus and energy required for the discussion. In Cree tradition, certain ceremonies are held during different times, days or months of the year so, in this instance, it is important to note that the women felt that the day time best supported the learning research circles.

The location of the third learning research circle was near the home residence of Elder/traditional knowledge holder Joseph Deschamps, located on the Louis Bull Tribe in Maskwacis, Alberta. It was held in the sweathouse lodge a few hundred yards away from Joseph's home. The third learning research circle began with a sweat lodge ceremony. Normally a sweat requires several hours of

preparatory work that the Elder/traditional knowledge holder is responsible to manage. The women attended the Cree ceremony gathering and when it was done, the participants sat outside the lodge in the sweathouse building to listen to teachings from the Elder/traditional knowledge holder.

With regard to research locations, I agree with Steinhauer (2007) who reported that, "For the Indigenous researcher, acting in a culturally responsive and responsible manner comes from a constant state of respectful being" (p. 98). In Cree traditional teachings, the concept of respect is quite extensive. Maintaining good, positive relationships, and values like sharing/caring, love, honesty/truth, compassion and humility are all embedded within the understanding of respect. As a researcher, it was important for me, first and foremost, to be respectful. A part of that respect is humility in relationships with others. I invited the participants to my home as a sign of humility because I am seeking information from them. The location of the third learning circle was at the sweat lodge site. The learning research circles planned and carried out during this research project supported the place of Cree ceremony in the process and as well honored Cree cultural processes of relationship and knowledge sharing. Further, the learning circles experience allowed me to fully respect the ethics of my own community.

Working with the Omisimaw Leadership Model

The depiction of the Omisimaw Leadership Model allowed me to communicate the research question to the participants and the Elder/traditional knowledge holder in a visual manner that was non-intrusive and allowed them their own space and time to interpret meanings in their own ways. I displayed the

painting of the Omisimaw Leadership Model during the first learning research circle with the four Aboriginal women and I shared the model with the Elder/traditional knowledge holder for our first visit only.

Summary of Process: Learning Research Circle Number One

The first learning research circle happened in my home residence. The women slowly arrived at my residence and made their way in. I prepared a light meal and welcomed each of them into my home, offering food and beverages. As each woman arrived, they joined in light discussion with each other about their respective families. The discussion remained very informal until one of the participants asked when the interview was going to take place. One of the research participants had not yet arrived, however, due to time constraints and pressing family matters, it was agreed by the other three ladies that we start the recording of the learning research circle.

The women began with a traditional sage smudge and an opening prayer. The circle happened around my kitchen table. I began to discuss the research project and I introduced the consent form along with the research question. I provided an overview of the start of my research journey, indicating my initial resistance towards the Indian residential school topic, and how I determined the importance of this analysis within my own personal healing journey. I asked the research question and looked at them to begin the discussion.

I had assumed that the research circle would automatically move in a clockwise direction, starting from one speaker and then moving on to the person seated to the immediate left until the circle was complete; however, this was not

the case. I expected this particular approach because I had become so used to this process at work and with my Indigenous colleagues at university and it did not occur to me that it might happen in other ways. During the first learning research circle, there was dialogue between only two participants at the onset. The third research participant did not join the discussion until it was almost over. The fourth research participant arrived late while the other women were sharing their thoughts. When she joined the group, I stopped recording and provided a brief overview, repeating the research question, sharing the consent form, discussing my research journey and informing her of the research circle process. She listened for a few minutes and then joined the circle with a response. I noted this variance in my research journal and realized the importance of providing opportunities for learners to learn and utilize Cree ways in everyday practices.

Each research participant was recorded separately. In total, there were thirteen recordings to indicate the number of times the research participants participated in the process. Each participant shared at least twice, a few of them shared three times. The length of each of the recordings ranged from two to ten minutes.

Summary of Process: Learning Research Circle Number Two

The second learning research circle happened in my home residence in the late morning, two months after the first research circle. Again, the research participants' schedules were very busy and full, leaving them with limited availability. Each was employed full-time and held a leadership role within her

family structure. This reality is an indication of the multi-faceted roles that these women fulfill in and around the community.

Again I used a similar process, whereby I invited the women into my home and then shared food and beverages with them as each one arrived. Informal discussion took place first and when one of the women raised the question, we prepared for a formal discussion that was audio-recorded. At the second learning research circle, I did not display the visual Omisimaw Leadership Model; instead, the women provided the direction of the discussion.

One of the ladies began by asking a question to the group. This question was different from my initial sub-questions; however, I did not disrupt the process, I allowed the discussion to move forward. She asked about health and how it relates to women in the community. The women did share the majority of their answers in a clockwise manner; however, there were a few instances where participants would jump in out of sequence and answer based upon the desire to share a response or idea. The second learning research circle lasted an hour and a half, with the participants asking their own questions at the end of the learning research circle. I audio-recorded and later transcribed each of the 22 individual responses or statements.

Summary of the Process: Learning Research Circle Three

The third learning research circle occurred at the Elder/traditional knowledge holder's sweathouse located on the Louis Bull reserve. The women arrived and participated in a Cree traditional sweat lodge first. The Elder/traditional knowledge holder and I were the other participants in the sweat

lodge, along with a helper who watched the entranceway. For two of the research participants, this sweat lodge ceremony was their first experience and they expressed their thankfulness for participating in the process.

Upon completion of the sweatlodge ceremony, the women sat outside the lodge in a small building that was enclosing the sweat house. The traditional knowledge holder began discussions about how women have ten gifts and how powerful they are because of their ability to give and carry life. He talked at length about the teachings he had received about women and from women regarding their various responsibilities. His teachings took an hour; he spoke both Cree and English.

Once he was finished his lecture, each woman was given the opportunity to ask questions and he replied to each question. As a way of closing the question and answer time, the Elder/traditional knowledge holder suggested they set up a tipi as a summer time activity because the tipi is a symbol of womanhood in Cree traditional teachings.

I attempted to audio-record the third session, particularly the Elder/traditional knowledge holder's teaching session and the questions posed by the participants. However, there were technical difficulties with my recording equipment. The Elder/traditional knowledge holder stated that the reason for the technical difficulties was that the session was predestined not to be recorded, so I wrote in my journal after I arrived home to record my thoughts and feelings about the experience. I also contacted each of the research participants by phone, asked

for brief text responses to this whole process, and then saved each of those responses in my journal entries.

Trustworthiness

I compiled an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), keeping a written record of my journey that includes journal entries, dreams, meetings (both formal and informal), "Elder's teachings" notes and transcriptions of the three learning circles. The archival photographs and Omisimaw Leadership Model were other data sources. Member checks (Lincoln& Guba, 1985) were used to confirm participants' words and to assist in confirming research themes. This process was deeply beneficial to me and to them, each woman shared individually with me her sense of positive energy that she felt as a result of the time I set aside to speak with each of them to review her contribution to this research study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS OF LEARNING RESEARCH CIRCLES

Analysis of Findings from the Learning Research Circles

My research question was "How does the traditional understanding of the Omisimaw Leadership Model of Girl/Child, Sacred Woman, Warrior Woman and Wise Woman apply to the contemporary lived reality of Aboriginal Cree women, and how can the model assist Aboriginal communities to heal and return to wholeness?" I had a series of sub-research questions outlined as follows:

(1)   What are the Cree words for Sacred Woman, Warrior Woman and Wise Woman?

(2)   What pedagogical approaches and systems of learning are furthered or enhanced by the Cree womanhood model in its application within Aboriginal communities and/or in assisting Aboriginal women and men to return to wholeness?

(3)   How can this model support or enhance Aboriginal education?

In the research process that unfolded, I did not use the above sub-questions in the learning research circles. I provided little direction to the research participants after I introduced the large question in the first learning research circle and the sub-questions surfaced from the research participants themselves. This process honored the direction and wisdom of the group. The questions were both explicit and broad. The sub-questions asked by the research participants concentrated on teaching responsibility, program design and health-related issues of Aboriginal people.

In the first learning circle, the common opinion and thought amongst the group on the first large question—how the model could be used as a tool for healing in Aboriginal communities—was reflected in Cheryl's statement, "So, yes this model can be used, and I think it is used every day, I don't think it's in the formal sense that it's used…So, it's already being done, it's just not in the formal sense."

One of the sub-questions asked during the first learning research circle was "Who is going to teach the model?" For example, Glenda asked "Like are we going to depend on the schools to teach it? Or are we going to continue to teach it?" The question, "Who is going to teach it?" was answered by Heather when she said, "So to introduce this concept into the schools, it's never too late." Glenda answered by stating she would send her nieces and daughter for training "and continue the verbal teachings."

Later, during the first research circle Glenda asked, "Are we designing it for Aboriginal women? Are we designing it for First Nations women? Are we designing it for Cree?" The questions around program design were answered by Sherry who stated "I'd like it be as Cree as possible." Therefore, the purpose of this analysis is to reveal how Indigenous knowledge has survived through time and is presently being shared in the Maskwacis Cree territory by exploring several themes that were offered by the participants.

The majority of the themes were gained from the first learning circle. Those topics began on page 128 and ended on page 151. The discussion was rich.

They talked about the Omisimaw Leadership model and the sub-themes were located from this first learning circle.

The second learning circle focused on exploring health related issues. Those discussions started on page 152 under the heading *Investigating root causes of illness*. It began as a participant, Cheryl, stated that the issue of health is related to our discussions about healing and she shared that she is really struggling with her own health. She introduced the topic by saying, "So that's something that weighs heavily on me, yeah, the connection between health and like, wholistic health".

Although the question was not explicit, the topic of health was initiated and that influenced the ensuing direction of the discussion. I did not expect the discussions to go where they went, and the depth of thought reflected in the statements was also surprising. It was helpful that the participants knew one another prior to participating in this study, and this may have lead to the necessary comfort, ease and safety that they demonstrated in sharing responses that otherwise would not have been possible.

After transcribing the first and second learning research circles, I analyzed the transcripts for general themes. Each research participant had separate transcripts. These transcripts were handed to each of them for review of errors, omissions and deletions. Participants returned the transcripts and then I used these to search for major categories. There were four major themes that surfaced in this research study and these are discussed in the next few pages.

Stating Wahkohtowin

In this research study, the research participants began an exploratory search for connections to Cree traditional teachings by performing a mini-genealogical analysis of their respective families. The process unfolded naturally. Identifying one's family relationships and familial connections is a practice embedded with *wahkohtowin* because kinship ties remain foundational to an individual's knowledge of themselves. This method can be viewed as a means of understanding how Aboriginal ways of knowing and being prevailed beyond assimilationist educational policies of the Indian Residential schools' attempts to abolish traditional education practices such as participating in, experiencing, and stating family connections.

Usually, the participants referred to either their paternal or maternal extended families in determining their connection and disconnection to traditional education. As the learning research circle progressed, they discussed two main areas of how they analyzed their connection and disconnection: the influence of the Indian Residential schools and affiliated religious denomination, and the existence of traditional education and Indigenous knowledge systems in their families. In this work, stating '*wahkohtowin'* means an individual's paternal/maternal search of their connections/disconnections to traditional education.

Paternal/maternal search of connection/disconnection

to traditional education

Several of the research participants shared their paternal or maternal history to identify their disconnection and connection to Cree traditional ways. Glenda reflected on her paternal families' connection to the church as a result of the Indian residential school:

> Well, when I look at it in terms of healing, I mean I've come a long way from healing myself as a child. And I can only go on my own experience, I can't relate to anybody else's experience. So growing up, like my parents, I mean my parents split up when I was very young, so I moved to my grandmother's house, and then we were split up as a family. Half of us went to this grandparents and the other half of us went to the other grandparents. I went to the grandparents where the grandmother, my grandmother on my, my dad's mother, she wasn't a traditional woman at all. She, I don't ever remember doing anything traditional with her, except that she made me, she taught me how to pluck a duck and clean it and clean a rabbit and, you know, and do a muskrat, because she used to say down the road you could be really poor and these are the things that you have to live by so you should learn how to, you, that was her idea of teaching us how to survive. You should know how to clean a duck and a rabbit and cut meat and that type of stuff. But she was not traditional at all in terms of, I never ever seen her smudge. I never ever seen her go to any kind of traditional ceremonies, not even a pow wow. I don't think we ever went to a pow wow because she grew up in a residential school. Like her parents died when she was very young and six years old she went to residential school. Her uncle gave her away to my grandfather when she was 15, so other than residential school, she had no other experience until she married my grandfather.

Heather participated in the organic process of family history analysis and offered her knowledge of her family history to the rest of the group:

> on my mom's side they were very traditional and very cultural and they do participate in ceremonies and stuff. But on my dad's side they were more affected by the residential school. He was in residential school from when he was seven. On my dad's side they weren't as cultural; they were more farmers.

The influence of the church through the Indian residential schools was recognized as a piece of vital information in determining how they were affected by colonialism but also how traditional education remained in their lives. Feelings of sadness, loneliness and anger appeared in the tones of their voices as they shared their family stories and as they talked about their family experiences with the Indian residential schools. It has been recognized in the literature that historic trauma permeates Aboriginal communities today as a result of the Indian residential schools in Canada (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009). In this context, there remains a continued use of traditional education/indigenous knowledge systems within their families today.

Although the Maskwacis Cree community experienced colonialism, the women who participated in this study all agreed that the Cree traditional educational knowledge system is still used within their respective families, and that stating *wahkohtowin* (kinship ties) is about identifying with either their paternal or maternal families connection to existing Indigenous knowledge systems.

Honoring Sohkastwâwin

Resilience has long been a theory that Indigenous scholars have offered to the literature to acknowledge the immense strength that resides in Aboriginal communities today (Dion Stout, 2003) as a result of enduring the Canadian Government's imposition of paternalistic policies of colonization. Resilience was a theme that surfaced in the research, yet there seemed to be a deeper understanding of the term than is normally discussed in the literature. In the

learning circles, the Cree word *sohkastwâwin*, the act of having resilience, was explored deeper to refer to relying on a well-spring of untapped strength. Honoring *sohkastwâwin* in this research study means to recognize that the research participants have survived cultural and linguistic genocide as a result of the Canadian federal government's education for assimilation policy of the Indian residential schools that their families experienced. In that regard, strength is deepened because of their commitment to passing on Cree knowledge and ways, and incorporating Cree knowledge into their present and future lives, despite the attacks they have and continue to experience on their Aboriginal identities. They are more than just survivors.

Surviving cultural and linguistic genocide

Glenda asked a question at the onset of the learning research circle about how the model is going to be taught; however, she prefaced it with knowledge of the strength of Aboriginal women by saying:

> We've all lived this, because we've had grandmothers that lived through - like the dirty thirties, the residential school, you know that type of stuff…I didn't have to live through those hard times…when I think a lot of times it's because our grandmothers lived through really hard times, it kept them strong.

Heather responded to Glenda's question by stating:

> Well I think it's about moving forward right? Regardless, change is constant and it's continuously moving forward and you gotta remember the hardships that people endured in the past are completely different from what we're dealing with today, and who's to say we're not dealing with hardship? It's again based on perception, yeah like back then like our grandmothers, grandfathers deal with those types of hardships but their life was more simpler right? Today our life is, you know with technology much simpler but, there's still hardships. We still have to teach our children about those different phases and how we deal with hardships, the

choices that we make. At the end of the day when you look at this model it's about moving from the child to the adult woman to the wise woman with grace and understanding that regardless hardship is going to be part of it.

Surviving hardships builds strength. Although the research participants did not use the term genocide in their discussions, the women introduced the idea that persevering and managing hardship over time deepens the present meaning of the concept of resilience. As expressed by Heather, resilience does not only apply to those individuals who survived cultural (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Churchill, 2004; Chrisjohn, 2006) and linguistic (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001) genocide attempted by the Indian residential schools; resilience is a concept that explains how Aboriginal peoples have survived attacks on their Aboriginal identities throughout their histories since the arrival of the Europeans and the settling colonizers. Resilience provides an explanation to how Aboriginal peoples have survived historic trauma (Yellow Horse Braveheart, 1989, as cited in Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009).

Resilience empowers the lives of Aboriginal people today; they can refer to it because they have survived the federal government's intentions of cultural and linguistic genocide. The peoples' ability to withstand and endure historical and ongoing challenges confirms a strengthened positive collective self-image and self-esteem. As Sherry stated, "it's about recognizing and understanding that as Cree people, we're strong." During the learning research circle, there was agreement from all of the women that Sherry's statement was true for all of them. The positive energy generated from these words lifted the spirits of the participants. Hence, this finding raised an important question that holds huge

potential for effective educational practice with Aboriginal students: If Aboriginal people were given the information that their personal worth and ability needs to be coupled with the concept and experience of resilience, and *sohkastwâwin*, would self-esteem be fostered much effectively and quickly in classrooms? This work does not address the question directly but it clearly points the way towards a deeper understanding of the foundational principles underlying our survival as Aboriginal peoples.

Kirkness (1992) and Hampton (1995) introduced a conceptual framework that demonstrated how, since the late seventeen hundreds, education had shifted and changed for Indigenous peoples with the settlers' movement across Canada. Both Indigenous scholars stated that the educational policy of longest duration was that one reflected in the traditional education/Indigenous knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, yet that system has been and continues to be ignored and unrecognized by the Euro-Western Canadian educational institutions. I refer again to participant Cheryl, who said "…this model can be used, and I think it is used every day, I don't think in the formal sense that it's used, …it's already being done, it's just not in the formal sense". She also shared "I know that as I've gotten older what I've realized is the impact that my grandmother had on my life and the impact that ladies in my past have had".

This latter statement points to the fact that traditional teachings have endured regardless of attempts, such as those carried out by the Indian residential schools, to abolish them. Each of the research participants at different times reflected upon the women who had influenced their lives, mostly speaking about

their mothers' and grandmothers' influences of Indigenous knowledge. The research participants all agreed with Cheryl in realizing the existence or presence of traditional education or Indigenous knowledge in their contemporary daily lives through their involvement in traditional activities.

As re-affirmed by the research participants, the traditional education systems needs to be acknowledged as being alive and well in Aboriginal communities today. The women discussed the continuing existence of these education systems as demonstrated by the people's participation in traditional ceremonies, stating that such examples confirmed that traditional education systems continue to thrive. Sherry stated, "As Cree women we have strong ceremonies." Therefore, recognizing and honoring the meaning and presence of *sohkastwâwin* in the lives of people today is a way of opening the doors to exploring the immense strength that lies untapped within the reservoirs of Aboriginal peoples in Aboriginal communities today.

Experiencing Kiskeyihtamowin

Efforts have been made in Aboriginal communities to revitalize (Alfred, 1999) and reconnect to Indigenous knowledge systems (Cajete, 2000), Aboriginal epistemology (Ermine, 1995) and traditional ways of being (Martin, 2001). In the Maskwacis Cree territory, those efforts include re-learning the Cree language and participating in Cree cultural practices. The Cree concept of *kiskeyihtamowin* refers to knowledge and learning; it carries more meaning that the English concept of revitalization. Experiencing '*kiskeyihtamowin'* involves the exploration and engagement with all aspects of Cree epistemology, and in this work, I focus

specifically on principles and methods of engagement with Cree epistemology, and on learner responsibility.

Cree epistemology

Lifelong learning is an educational and life philosophy of the Maskwacis Cree territory. Heather, who is in her mid-forties, stated:

> And that it's never too late to learn. Even at my age I'm still learning. Like I'm learning my language, I need to learn my language and I can understand some but to speak it, it's I'm not confident there, but still.

Re-learning the Cree language has become an important adult learning endeavor for Heather. Adults like Heather, who are not confident in their abilities to speak Cree, can understand the language yet do not speak it. The lack of confidence prevents the continued use of the Cree language and this represents challenges for the transfer of knowledge. The participants did not discuss methods of re-engaging or re-learning the Cree language; only to point out that the loss of fluency becomes a potential barrier for knowledge transfer.

Cheryl articulated the concept of Cree epistemology when she shared the following with the group:

> If the one Elder said trust the process and things work out the way they do for a reason. When things get difficult for me that's what I remember because there are days where my frustrations overwhelm me. So, I think for the younger ones that are coming up, yeah they're going to come and seek out answers, but at the same time, to be the biggest teaching is for us to teach them that they have the ability to learn and that not everything is from 9 until 3:30 in the curriculum. What you do in the evening, what you do on the weekends, who you spend time with, who you listen to, how often you speak your language, all of those things are part of this too.

Acknowledging the existence of a universal intelligence or of something or someone that is much greater than the human being is an important part of the

Cree epistemological base. I, too, have heard many Elders talk about the

importance of trusting that things work out for a reason and that there is learning

embedded within the acceptance of that process for all learners involved with it.

Cheryl also noted that learning happens throughout the day and is part of the lived

reality of individuals who are participating every day in re-learning Cree

traditional practices. Heather agreed and added:

> If anything, like for me, it's about continual learning and continual
> teaching. If I want to grow, the choices I make, the people I meet, doesn't
> matter where I'm at, I'm always going to learn something new and I'm
> always going to learn something that's going to either change my life or
> affect it in a good way or a bad way. But I'd rather choose good. You
> know, sometimes we go through life and we, we're dealt cards that are
> like, like why me? Like real shitty cards, but at the end of the day you
> come through it, you become a stronger person. So that light that's shining
> in the middle, like that light that's shining inside me, I want to share that
> with other people.

The concept of free will and choice is another dominant belief in Cree

cultural tradition. Individuals have a choice. Heather stated that there is an

opportunity for individuals to learn how to become strong as a result of the

challenges they face. She referred to the diagram of the Omisimaw Leadership

Model when she talked about the light shining in the middle and thus applied the

model to herself. Heather interpreted the light in the center of the model to

represent the spirit. From the learning circles, the participants drew a deeper

insight into Cree epistemology, sharing what I am referring to as their ideas about

the principles that guide the attainment of knowledge and the methods through

which they attain knowledge.

Principles

There were several guiding principles and codes of conduct that underlie

kiskeyihtamowin, as discussed by the women. One of the first principles

mentioned was the term respect. Cheryl said:

> And I think that the way I understand healing is that, you know, it should
> be personal growth and it should be on your terms because I look at my
> sister in laws and they have a different concept of what warrior woman is
> than I do. But if I'm going to be respectful then I have to honor their
> perspective for themselves, because I have no business to judge it…I have
> enough of this to know that respect is a foundation out of all of this.

Heather stated "…I don't sweat, you know, it's just something that I was

raised with, I respect that, and I respect others who do." The discussion of respect

incorporated ideas related to individuality. Cheryl's thought concluded the large

group discussion on the topic of diversity in Aboriginal communities by stating

that "the only thing that is generic to all of this is that [of] respect, because I have

to incorporate these different perspectives." Individuality and individual choice is

not seen as a challenge; rather it is welcomed with the understanding that

individuals bring gifts, talents, skills and abilities that would potentially benefit

the larger group.

Another principle introduced by one of the women was the notion of

humility. Glenda talked about how she viewed her grandmother:

> But she never really considered herself totally truly knowledgeable enough
> to, *[pause]* how do you say that? That her words would go down in
> history; I guess, kind of, you know, that type of concept. Because they
> were never, they're humble. I think they were humble, you know they were
> humble. And they lived this life, they gave us, they instilled the concept of
> tradition in us.

Heather shared:

> Well, at the end of the day for me, and you're looking at the model, I'm
> still attracted to the light in the middle and maybe because the light inside
> me resonates and I know I, I teach a lot of people through my actions, not
> being idolized in that sense, but we were talking about this earlier, about
> humility and how not to be, not to have the attitude that you're greater than
> God, and we're not.

She summed it up by saying: "So walking with my light and teaching others is, like through action, is something that I guess we have to do as women. Carry ourselves with grace, and just be humble about it, respectful." Hence, the guiding principles of respect and humility were those identified as having significant impact and direction in how knowledge is transferred from one person to another.

Method

The women discussed how knowledge of the Cree ways is acquired. One of the ways that received much attention and discussion was the transfer of indigenous knowledge within their families around the girls' rites of passage ceremony. This important topic of discussion took place at the first learning circle and focused on the ceremony as practiced in the Maskwacis Cree territory today. Three of the research participants had not had the opportunity to experience this ceremony in their upbringing; however, they all agreed that there were families within the Maskwacis Cree community who still carried out the ceremony. Sherry noted, "there wasn't very many people who did it [rites of passage ceremony]. There was the odd family that did, though they were the families that lived at the other end of the reserve." Glenda stated, "I've done it myself, it was done for me, and I've done it for my daughter and my granddaughters." Sherry stated:

It's Cree, but it's not practiced a lot of other places. So I think our young women are very fortunate that, the ones that are able to go through it. Because you do learn a lot, you may think you're not but then you get to be, I don't know, about 45 or something and you think 'oh yeah' *[laughing]*.

This traditional Cree women's ceremony is being remembered and

becoming more visible within the Maskwacis Cree community than was common

in previous years. Heather commented:

Like my nieces when they became women, I'm so thankful that my sister carried that out for them. Well it was because of my mom right? But I'm thankful that they did that, they participated in that. Because I was, I never did that. And for some reason my mom saw the importance afterwards. Not when we were younger, but afterwards. And I think she seen the need for it to come back.

Cheryl explained her experience:

When I had my daughter, I did what I could to try and encourage her to follow this, and I don't think I'm unique in that. I never went through the puberty ceremony but I made sure she did. And was it perfect, or was it the way it was supposed to be? No, but again what I have learned over the years is that if you trust the process and things happen when they're supposed to, that's what healing is about anyway.

Glenda shared the following views on the topic:

And for me now I have like a daughter, and I have granddaughters. I went through the, I wouldn't say I went through it, but I know when I first got my time, went and stayed home from school, you know, cleaned up. But, I don't remember us having a feast either, like the way they do it now. We didn't do it. Like when my daughter first had her first period, and kept her in the house, I got women that came in and, you know, showed her different things and, then the kicking the sticks thing, that was total new thing to me and I think I first seen it at ___, and I'd question 'what does that mean?' and no one seemed to really know until when Caitlyn had her first period, and what's her name, ___, I asked her, because I had seen it before, and no one really gave me an answer at the time when I asked. And she said you're kicking it because you're kicking away your childhood but, you know, you're having fun doing it because now you're going in to a new part of your life. That's how she explained it to me too…So it was kind of like, even that, even there's different concepts between tribes as to how they handle, how they handle the coming of age ceremony. I had two

sons and I never, ever knew there was a coming of age ceremony for men, and I never did that for them, so you know, it wasn't until I learned with my daughter all this stuff. But, you know, those types of things I think should be made clear to us to what's appropriate and what's not appropriate to teach them at that point.

The women in the study all agreed that even though they did not have the opportunity to fully experience the traditional Cree girls' rites of passage ceremony, their children or grandchildren are now experiencing it. I understand from these statements that the women are gaining knowledge of Cree traditional ceremonies by participating in them, supporting them and encouraging others to experience them. This suggests that the prevalent method through which *kiskeyihtamowin* happens is experiential learning.

Learner responsibility: Attitude, acceptance, willingness and openness

In gaining access to knowledge, education systems must ultimately acknowledge the responsibility of the learner in the overall process. In this study, the women shared that it was their purpose, as women, to re-learn Cree traditional ways. The women are in their mid-forties and early fifties, and they stated their views on the responsibility of this task. Their discussions are represented here.

Sherry talked about learner responsibility by stating the following:

See and I think that, even us here, although we recognize not being raised in the most traditional sense with pipes and feathers and sweetgrass everywhere, we've all participated, we've all either been the ones to go out and get the help to come in and help, or we've been kokom's helper or, we were those women that did the ceremony, like Glenda as a young woman.

Learner responsibility is clearly stated above. The learner accepts the responsibility of preparing for, assisting in and carrying out the Cree traditional teachings. The learner accepts responsibility in two ways:

- willingness to learn how to access all the necessary resources to help carry out the ceremony

- willingness to learn how to carry out the traditional Cree teachings

Once the learning happens, then the learner can move toward becoming the teacher.

The women who participated in this study all agreed that they were engaging with the Cree traditional educational knowledge systems in addition to holding numerous other responsibilities within their families, and the community. By experiencing *kiskeyihtamowin* (knowledge, learning) and re-learning Cree traditional ceremonies, the women in the research study reminded each other of the philosophy, principles and methods in which they would engage while they accept and fulfill their learner roles.

Recognizing Pasikowin

The women in this research study identified several challenges in determining how the Omisimaw Leadership Model could be used as a tool for healing in Aboriginal communities. There were questions and concerns brought forward by the group. In order to understand this section, the Cree word *pasikowin* is used to refer to the act of standing up to the challenges faced by Aboriginal individuals with the Euro-western education system regarding the topic of Indigenous knowledge systems. It could be viewed as a 'challenge'

between two parties and in this sense it is meant to explore the space that exists between Euro-western education and Indigenous ways of being and knowing. In recognizing '*pasikowin*' (the act of standing up), this section will acknowledge the effects of diminishing Cree knowledge transfer in the face of ongoing colonization, recognize the challenges of Western academic structures, and investigate the root causes of illness.

Diminishing knowledge transfer

The transfer of Indigenous knowledge has sustained its roots in moving from parent (the teacher) to the child (the student). In the context of learning Cree traditional teachings, the teacher would be an individual knowledgeable of specific teachings related to the culture. Therefore, there would be a continuation of the specific knowledge and it would reside within a family over many generations. Given the disruptions of this Cree traditional teaching process due to the colonization experiences of Aboriginal people, it was reasonable to anticipate that the research participants would question how the knowledge of the Omisimaw model could be transferred within the community from one generation to another. For example, Glenda asked the other women the following question: "How are we, like myself…How am I going to instill that in my daughter and my granddaughters?…How would I do that? Or how would you do that? How do we do that?" In this quote, the question of personal or public responsibility surfaced immediately and the participant responses to this question have been shared briefly in other parts of the chapter. A significant note to me was the constant awareness and personal location of each woman in relation to the hardship each

one had endured and that made each of them strong, highlighting their sense of

their individual and collective *sohkastwâwin* [strength].

Glenda asked another question to the group of women, about how to

accept the challenge of teaching the model:

> I'm thinking how do I as the oldest person in my family, oldest woman in
> my family, how would I introduce this concept to them? Like if I had to
> introduce this concept to them, to see their thoughts on it. But you know, I
> guess, I don't know, that's kind of where I'm coming from. How do we do
> it as individuals, like, why are we relying on the school system to teach it.
> Our parents never relied on the school system to teach, I mean not our
> parents, our Grandmothers never relied on the school system to teach us,
> they taught us. So how do we, how do we do it?

In Cree, the word for eldest sister is *Omisimaw.* Embedded within the

question framed by Glenda is a series of other questions to consider. For example,

where would the oldest female members in the family go to learn such traditional

teachings if their families had experienced cultural/linguistic genocide and did not

have access to Cree traditional teachings? How would individuals re-connect with

cultural teachings and with whom would they connect in order to re-gain access to

Indigenous knowledge systems? These are important questions for the Western

academic systems to seriously consider in their educational programming if they

are to play a supportive role in addressing issues related to the diminishing

strength of Cree traditional knowledge transfer systems within Cree Aboriginal

communities.

Ongoing colonization

Colonization continues to raise challenges within the Aboriginal

community and these were described by the women in the circle. The effects of

colonization are experienced outside and inside the reserve. Cheryl recognized

that even though the Omisimaw model is being used in the Maskwacis Cree

territory, "somebody is going to find fault with it." This statement points to the

reality that individuals in Aboriginal community will provide critiques, which

may have damaging and harmful consequences for the teacher/learner. She goes

on to say, "I found out about lateral, now it's called lateral violence; when I went

to school it was lateral oppression." Cheryl indicated that individuals who find

fault with any form of teaching of traditional education in Aboriginal

communities express various forms of lateral violence, which have been defined

as "Sabotage, backstabbing, the put downs, internal racism, gossiping" (Native

Counselling Services of Alberta, 2006). Lateral violence within the reserve is a

product of the ongoing colonization that these women experience. Sherry

commented:

> a lot of loss happened when someone tells you you're thinking too white,
> when you know you're not white, and you're thinking too Indian when
> you're in a white world. So it's like you never kind of, you kind of never
> really fit in any of the worlds.

Sherry was confirming that there are painful, negative feelings that arise as

a result of not being able to fit into either a non-Aboriginal or an Aboriginal

worldview. Her statement is an example of how continual discounting of the

differences between worldviews maintains the colonization experience, leaving

the Cree individual, in this case with a sense of not belonging in either the

Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal world.

The research participants discussed their awareness of the stress that arises

from ongoing colonization. While referring to her grandmother, Sherry said, "She

always used to say I was thinking too much. I was thinking too white, that I was forgetting about my Indianness because all I wanna do is work." The workforce became viewed as a locale for participation in colonization. Sherry's grandmother critiqued her personal priority of wanting to work and she argued that Sherry was forgetting about her Indian identity. Aboriginal women, particularly those who are single mothers (Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998), face the difficult reality of working to support themselves and their family (Brant Castellano, 2009; Deiter & Otway, 2001) and they must face attacks on their Indian identity (Hampton, 1995).

As the work demands and family pressures on the women's lives increased, so did the stress they experienced. During the circles, the research participants recognized that there is a huge variation of viewpoints on the roles of Aboriginal women as this was evidence amongst the variety of roles each of them are engaged in. The range of their responsibilities was from the individual out the community (Brant Castellano, 2009; Deiter & Otway, 2001).

Sherry continued to speak about her discussions with her grandmother by saying, "You were always provided for; I said there's nobody there to provide for me, I have to provide for myself." Glenda shared, "We all want to have a career, we're all career oriented, we want to have the brass ring at the end of the day type of thing, at least I do…we have to multi-task to take care of our families." All the women in the research study were single, independent women and they clearly stated that their employment empowered them to care for themselves, their children and their families. The women experienced stress from carrying numerous responsibilities; they worked inside and outside the home,

simultaneously maintaining other responsibilities and roles within their families

and their community. All of their responsibilities and choices were carried out

within the personal contexts of their mutual desire to participate in and re-learn

Cree traditional ways.

Heather shared with the large group that she attends church. She said:

Going to church, sometimes I disagree with what happened in the past, well I disagree with a lot but I still go to church today, I still go because I want to pray, and I want to be with other people who are praying, because you know like group prayer is more powerful than, well, I think it's powerful. But I take away what I need to take away.

Heather acknowledged the past events that happened between Aboriginal

peoples and the church when she stated that she disagreed with what happened in

the past. Her own connection to the church is heavily influenced by her parents'

involvement through the residential school system because her parents attended

the Ermineskin Indian Residential school (EIRS), and they were regular attendees

to the local catholic church in Ermineskin after the EIRS was closed.

The media events of the past few years about the residential schools have

highlighted the church's role in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. However,

regardless of the negative reports about the church, Aboriginal people continue to

attend church in a manner similar to Heather. Heather states that her basis for

continuing to attend church is to partake in the power of group prayer and, in this

manner, she finds the experience relevant to her Aboriginal community.

Challenges to Western academic structure

There were severe disruptions to Indigenous knowledge transfer in

Aboriginal communities that the women expressed have since become a major

challenge to address. They described Indigenous knowledge transfer as slowly

diminishing in Aboriginal communities and questioned how Euro-western

educational institutions could address that. For instance, Glenda reported:

> We were blessed as far as having our teachers, our mothers, our
> grandparents, our parents. We were blessed to know what was right and
> what was wrong and today's kids they don't know. They don't know what
> this is all about, so we have to teach them and introduce it, you
> know…because you know like this would be a really awesome thing for,
> especially the younger ones to know, to learn because these kids are
> having kids, they don't know. Like, it's like kids having kids, and yet it's
> the ones up here raising these ones, but then the ones up here were in the
> residential school. So it's like, it's going to be a whole re-educating all
> over again. That's a lot of work.

When Glenda referred to 're-educating', she was referring to the re-

education through Indigenous knowledge within the Aboriginal community. She

referred to the disruption of Indigenous knowledge that has occurred in some

families, and in some instances, described the disruptions as having occurred over

many generations. Each woman commented that the Euro-Western Canadian

schools could be involved in the re-education process; however, they also agreed

it would be difficult to adopt this Omisimaw model in a school setting. They did

not describe what those difficulties might look like or how they would surface in

the Euro-Western Canadian schools if the model were to be used to attend to

Indigenous knowledge transfer.

The women explored ideas about how to incorporate this model into other

areas outside the discipline of education. Heather suggested that the field of

counseling be considered for re-educating and transferring this knowledge to

others:

> To introduce this concept in the schools I think it's necessary and it needs to happen. Like you've been in family circles, you know, it doesn't necessarily have to be in the schools. Like you can do group sessions and family sessions and just have it you know, like available.

The model of family circles is used in the human services areas of psychology, counseling and restorative justice, outside the scope of the schools. Heather's suggestion of having group and family sessions would involve teaching the Omisimaw Leadership Model and/or having it available in a written format for participants to view for themselves.

Another idea suggested was to think about moving the model into the business field and commercializing it. Glenda offered:

> I don't know how long something like this would take. Maybe it's gonna be a fight I think. So I think it's going to have to be something that's going to have to be individualized, or, you know, a company offering it as…I mean, you don't really want to commercialize it, but it is a healing tool and there's a lot of healing tools out there that are commercialized and you pay a fee to go in and you know, to go and get the help you need.

When Glenda was referring to a "fight," she was talking about the difficulty of getting the Omisimaw Leadership Model into the Euro-Western Canadian education system. Despite the difficulties that may arise, Glenda suggested that there be individualized training and perhaps a training group providing a service by teaching the model to others.

Participants expressed a concern about the diversity, such as different tribal affiliations and/or different traditional teachings, which exists within Aboriginal communities and wondered how to transfer Indigenous knowledge within the Euro-western educational system. Sherry talked about recognizing the source of the information for the model:

I think it does not matter where we come from, it not about, as long as you're in Hobbema practice Hobbema; it's who you are….if I'm going to participate in something, recognizing that yes there are other tribes out there, I think that whatever it is I learn or whatever it is I'm presenting to the ones that come up behind me, I like it to be as Cree as possible, because they're Cree women, or they will be, the ones that aren't there yet will be Cree women.

The research participants acknowledged the diversity within Aboriginal groups by discussing how each Aboriginal community performs ceremonies differently. Although there is diversity within Aboriginal communities, Cheryl stated the importance of respect and pointed the participants back to the importance of place and origin of teaching. Sherry stated that the Indigenous knowledge transfer in the schools could be maintained through the model "to maintain as much Cree as you can." It was agreed by the women that potential items of discussion about the Omisimaw Leadership Model and the Cree womanhood teachings were broader than what the research questions and research study were originally exploring.

Challenges of Engaging with Traditional Knowledge

Several of the participants described their challenges in engaging with traditional knowledge. In the context of her own family's problems with diabetes, Glenda talked about the high rates of diabetes in Aboriginal communities today. As she discussed her family's health history, she indicated, "all of us have it." She shared her own experience of taking medication:

Since 2004 I had to start taking medication….and you know what it was? It was when I sundanced, I just, you know all that fasting, it totally, totally got my body out of whack. I never sundanced since and I don't fast anymore, cause of that fasting, you know, just really wrecked my whole

metabolism, where it got to the point I had to take mediation for my diabetes, whereas before I didn't have to.

My own personal knowledge of the Cree Sundance is that it is a strenuous activity that demands commitment, sacrifice and preparation. Glenda shared that she had been committed to participating in it and had known that it demanded a sacrifice however, paid little attention to preparation. The consequence of Glenda's fasting however resulted in her having to take medication to manage her diabetes. A reader could easily misinterpret this end result expressed by Glenda to mean that participation in a sundance has devastating results. However, it is important to point out here that Glenda realized how not having direct access to traditional knowledge impacted her preparation phase.

For instance, one aspect of preparation for such ceremonies as the sundance is having plenty of upfront discussions with Elders/traditional knowledge holders about the purpose, intention of attending/participating in the ceremony. In addition, it is also the time to ask questions, clear any doubt and to state any specific individual health needs. In Glenda's case, there had been no discussion before her participation in the sundance. Traditional knowledge had not been accessed nor had Glenda been given knowledge about how to effectively prepare for such an important physical, mental, spiritual and emotional task. Glenda stated that she supports Cree traditional activities and she recognizes the limited opportunities to engage with traditional knowledge. She affirms that this experience taught her the consequences of that reality, and that from now on, she will seek out Indigenous knowledge as she has many things to learn.

Sherry talked about how there are different communities that have made allowances for diabetics by offering a small meal after each day of dancing. Sherry said:

> See, for me, I guess I cheat because like around _____, they'll let u have a light meal when you sundance. The time you go in, you don't have to fast until the time you come out, umm, and once the sun goes down or whatever or after they are done for the day, you can have like a piece of fruit or you can have something, so that's where I've gone to sundance. See I'm diabetic too, usually the day that you have the full dancing day, that one is hard but in the evening you have something to balance out your sugars…I don't think I would be able to do a Maskwacis sundance because they are still very strict.

Sherry discussed managing her diabetes and eating fruit to balance out her sugars after dancing at a Sundance and described it as cheating, not as being supported by Elders/traditional knowledge holders. She talked about how Cree traditional practices in various locations across the Plains have changed in order to adapt to the health needs of the participants. The knowledge and awareness of the different traditional practices and the developing contemporary accommodations of traditional practices is important information for the ceremonial preparation of potential participants. Clearly then, limited or no access to such information would impede an individual's preparation for participation in Cree traditional activities. Again, access to that specific knowledge is dependent upon information being shared between individuals at any given point in time. This learning circle allowed for participants to learn that particular reality of those community-specific differences.

Heather stated her opinion on the variations in community as it relates to the Sundance traditions of Cree people:

> See, I don't think they tailor it basically just on if you're diabetic or not, again, customs, whatever, comes from different territories right? So, like, they'll do things differently, we're gonna do things differently. It's gonna be like that all over.

Each Aboriginal community maintains certain traditions and Heather firmly believed that decisions are based on factors that are determined by the territory. These factors could be familial, political, economic, historical, or other bases not identified by Heather, and not explored further in this study. Indigenous knowledge transfer concerns and issues tend to be region-specific and often relate to the fact that each Elder/traditional knowledge holder holds certain teachings and uses certain pedagogies. This topic also will not be taken up further in this study; however, it holds an opportunity for deeper exploration.

Investigating root causes of illness

The second learning research circle, lead by the women's questions from the first circle, focused on two health issues and the crisis state of illnesses and diseases experienced by Aboriginal peoples. The women shared their perspectives on the topic of health by stating there is a need to uncover reasons for the high rates of illness in Aboriginal communities today. They talked about two health issues, specifically diabetes and sexual abuse, and the need for individual and community healing.

Diabetes

After Cheryl talked about the importance of personal health in the second learning circle, she commented that history affects the health of Aboriginal people. She said, "Even our older people, their health is affected by our history

and we are passing it down." Cheryl's was referring to the history of the Indian

Residential schools experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Cheryl went on to

question how that reality would affect the younger generations, given that the

majority of the Aboriginal population is young. She continued, "That's something

that weighs heavily on me, yeah, the connection between health and like,

wholistic health, not even just body issues but all of it because as far as my

maintenance goes, I'm struggling." The Indigenous concept of the word wholistic

health is the mind-body-spirit-heart (Steinhauer-Hill, 2008) synchronistic

connection whereas the general use of term health implies the mind-body-spirit

understanding of health. In this context, emotion is the missing piece from the

present health care systems' understanding of health. The slight variation in

understanding health and wholistic health warrant deep exploration. By what was

said, there are many layers to uncover; however, for the purposes of this study, I

am only offering it here as an acknowledgement that Aboriginal peoples hold an

understanding of wholistic health that is the mind-body-spirit-heart connection.

The women initially focused on a discussion about the high rate of

diabetes in Aboriginal communities. Sherry said:

> So many of our people, like, I think there are 5 of us sitting here and I
> think of the 5 of us, 3 of us are diabetic and there's more and more. What,
> like, a hundred years ago, diabetes wasn't something that was heard of and
> our people were a lot more active.

Sherry connected the high rates of diabetes to the historical changes that

Aboriginal people have experienced over time, especially the decline in their rates

of physical activity. She continued by stating: "Adult on-set diabetes is showing

up in young children and it would be because of the sedentary lifestyle." Heather

asked: "…like kids today, do they go out and play? No." Heather recognized that

the lack of exercise has had detrimental impacts on the health of Aboriginal

children and is one of the contributing factors to the high rates of diabetes that

Aboriginal people are experiencing in Aboriginal communities.

Sexual abuse

As the discussion of physical health progressed, Sherry introduced the

issue of sexual abuse as a root cause of illness in Aboriginal communities. She

said:

> I really think when you're talking about health, although you were talking
> more about the physical part of health, something that I would love to see,
> and something, like I know I don't have the capacity to put it together, but
> I would really like to see, you look at all of the these people that are drug
> addicted and alcohol addicted…a lot of times, we need something to deal
> with the absolute root, which in my mind is sexual abuse.

She also commented on the current denial that exists within Aboriginal

communities about the topic:

> Like you can talk about people, leaders that have stolen hundreds of
> thousands of dollars, you can talk about how badly people treat one
> another, how slanderous we are, how violent we are, but, you cannot talk
> about somebody who is perpetrating against anyone. You cannot. Men
> will not talk about it, women will not talk about it. Nobody will. Even our
> elders will not talk about it. When I say elders I'm talking about people in
> their 60's, 70's, 80's will not acknowledge it.…If our people would even
> acknowledge that its' rampid [sic] in the community we could at least get
> to that point then, I think that our future, might have, there might be a
> future? …Unless we can start to acknowledge that it's there and that it's
> alive and well and that I think that that's where we need to start.

Cheryl added that, based upon her work experience and her own

knowledge of presenting on the topic of sexual abuse, she recognized the

following:

> I've done presentations on what you're saying and you're right, the taboo is multi-generational. And, when I admit that I was victimized as a child by a family member, I can see in the audience, triggers. I can see people being triggered and I've had people come up and say thank you for being honest.…the issues are incredible and the after effects of the things that you're talking about, they are alive and well.

She continued on with the discussion of sexual abuse by asking: "Is it a popular topic? No. Is it uncomfortable? Hell, yeah." She shared that her years of experience in dealing with the topic have helped her to recognize that when individuals are not prepared to talk about the topic, it is usually because those individuals themselves have avoided addressing their own issues. She reaffirmed, "If they haven't dealt with their own stuff, that's when the sweeping under the rug occurs." The cycle of denial continues when individuals choose not to talk about the topic. Sherry stated that alcohol/drug addictions, over-eating and gambling are all symptoms of sexual abuse and she believes that "if we could get to the root of it, it would be…amazing." Based on her years of working in the correctional field, Cheryl agreed, offering, "…. the programs that I've delivered, when you begin to peel back the addictions, it's sexual abuse, often, at the root." She posed an important question to the rest of the women by asking: "How could I help if I haven't dealt with my own stuff?" Sherry stated:

> I firmly believe, I don't care what anybody says, that the sexual abuse thing, although residential school had an impact, um…, we also had a choice once residential school was gone, to stop it. And, we have not done anything to correct it or whatever, I think that it is now our problem and that we're the ones that need to change it. And if I had any idea how, I would try but, I think that would alleviate a lot of the health.

Sherry's comment that "if I had any idea how, I would" suggests that there is no clear understanding or knowledge about how to address the issue of sexual abuse,

but it also indicates that she holds onto a willingness to find solutions. Through

years of work experience in which she was dealing with the topic of sexual abuse,

Cheryl developed frustrations with funding and political/leadership

misunderstandings of how healing works. She shared the following on the topic:

> Some of our current organizations are crisis-oriented…if you see one
> victim and you do the safety thing and remove them from the home, then
> what? And, then you get politicians who don't see healing the same way
> that hands-on front line people do. Even though those front-line people
> have made those recommendations, when you look back in the literature,
> they're all there, but, these politicians, which is where the dollars are
> coming from are not following through with true healing…where's the
> support?

The deficit-model of health that currently exists within the Aboriginal

community directly impedes continued support of individuals most in need. The

topic of sexual abuse is a sensitive topic that is still neither openly discussed nor

effectively addressed in Aboriginal communities, and the women in this learning

circle all agreed that there is a definite need to address it. They also are clear in

their beliefs and understanding that there is a recognizable connection between the

denial of sexual abuse and the poor health presently experienced by Aboriginal

peoples today.

Individual/Community healing

The women talked about the importance of both community and

individual healing and they discussed several examples of each. One of the first

examples shared by the women was the positive example of how Hollow Water, a

community in Manitoba, was addressing healing. Based upon Sherry's personal

knowledge of the community's history, she shared the following with the group:

I think it took them 10 or 15 years before they could actually implement their plans [to implement a healing program for the community] and it took them 10 to 15 years to develop their plan and to put the people in place. Then they were able to start their plan but I'd be interested to know where they are at today.

Sherry also suggested the following regarding community healing:

Heart would go along way and I think that in any community you could find 10 like-minded people and I think that those 10 people could be a core and that they could at least start the process.

Although *community* healing would be the ultimate goal, the women confirmed that *individuals* should begin the process of healing first. In order to have a successful healing program you must have first, as Sherry stated: "those individuals go through their own personal, because you would have to go through your own significant, hard, healing to get to where you could help others." Cheryl shared that, as a health care provider, it is important to help the community but more important to take care of the self first:

How do you still help, but at what cost to yourself? And, I think that, that's the struggle for myself. Either I'm not letting the pain go or somehow I'm retaining it or something but, my maintenance isn't up to where it should be or else I wouldn't be having these health issues. It's all connected, I know that.

She recognized that there are issues she needed to address because she is struggling with her own health, and she expressed the necessity of self-care as paramount in the helping field.

Individual healing was described as a process that requires time and a personal commitment to healing. Sherry said: "it would probably take 5 years of full intense therapy, walking through all that crap and crying every day for 5 years, I would be exhausted." Human beings are emotive. Unfortunately, there is

very little support offered within the Euro-western educational system to allow

learners to safely release strong negative emotions and cry in the classroom.

Learners are left to deal with negative emotion on their own, beyond the

classroom walls and this is a weakness in the current Euro-western educational

structure.

In the end, Heather agreed with the other women and summarized

individual healing as follows:

> It's every day right? It's every day we have to do our own learning and our
> own growth, to challenge oneself. Change is always happening, and each
> and every one of us has certain skills and gifts….It's all individual, you
> know, and like growth, we still have to do our healing, everyday, it's
> continuous. We come across something, we think things are going our
> way, are going great, and then we come across a little stumbling block and
> it's, again, it's an opportunity for growth. And, I don't know if you'll
> every stop growing until the day that the Creator takes you, but, it's those
> awarenesses'. If you can help other people with what you have learned
> then, great.

The connection between learning, healing and growth were all suggested

by the women as necessary and important channels of consideration in one's daily

life. Individuals must be willing to partake in personal growth opportunities so as

to improve the overall community.

As the research circle progressed, the women in the research study did not

have any difficulty in identifying the many challenges that existed and the need

for *pasikowin* (the act of standing up). They discussed the concerns about

diminishing knowledge transfer in Aboriginal communities and they raised an

important question of "who" is going to address the concern. The contemporary

realities of addressing ongoing colonization are experienced in both the non-

Aboriginal and the Aboriginal community, which makes it problematic. They also

recognized that the challenges posed by Western pedagogical, curricular and instructional structures undermined the transfer and perhaps survival of Indigenous knowledge. Finally, they discussed health and sexual abuse as the root causes of illnesses in Aboriginal Cree communities.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

My doctoral studies research journey began with a desire to explore healing, health and wellness, that space that exists between the disciplines of education and health. I was asking the question: "How can the Omisimaw Leadership Model be used as a tool for healing in Aboriginal communities?" The question itself is positioned within two distinct Western social sciences and yet, in an Aboriginal worldview, these two concepts of education and health are not separate, but are seen as parts of the whole human learning experience and integrally connected with each other.

Through my doctoral work, I have determined that Aboriginal women can use the Omisimaw Leadership Model effectively to help them, as individuals and groups, to understand themselves, their families and their communities, and to realize that ancient Indigenous knowledge systems are still alive, meaningful and essential in contemporary Aboriginal society. As an educator, I am aware, and this work confirmed, that pedagogical and curricula reform is required in the current Euro-Western model of education if learners are to benefit from Indigenous knowledge systems. In the following section, I will review the Omisimaw Leadership Model in relation to the research study, and thus weave together my work and summarize the findings.

Omisimaw Leadership Model

My research has confirmed that the Omisimaw Leadership Model is based upon an Indigenous knowledge concept that exists in the Cree world and supports the lived reality of Maskwacis Cree women in their overall health. The Omisimaw Leadership Model represents knowledge that has been used for healing in the lives of Aboriginal women in the Maskwacis territory for centuries. The Maskwacis Cree traditional teachings reflected in the Omisimaw Leadership Model have been affirmed through Maskwacis Cree traditional teachings in families through the example of the girls' puberty rites of passage ceremony. The rites of passage ceremony is the experiential learning space where these Cree traditional teachings, like the Omisimaw Leadership Model, are still taught to young girls. This research study highlights the strength of Aboriginal women, the existence of traditional knowledge systems, considerations for Euro-Western educational systems to help transfer Indigenous knowledge, and challenges that Aboriginal women face as they remember and return to Cree traditional teachings.

Anderson's (2011) book entitled *Life stages and Native women: Memory, teachings and story medicine* "explores how changing roles and responsibilities throughout the life cycle of girls and women shape their identities and their place in Indigenous society" (p. 6). The book addresses the life cycle of girls and women, an area that I did not explore in this research, primarily because the teachings are not based solely on a cyclical model. Although I had anticipated more detailed discussions about each of the quadrants of the Omisimaw Leadership Model, the women, as participants in the research study, moved away

from my initial research question and into other areas of interest related to health, healing, and the model. The focus of most of this research process has not been on details of the Omisimaw Leadership Model, but on the discussions that derived from the participants learning circles and those based on my own research journey. I am aware that this shift in focus could be viewed as a limitation of the study, especially from a Western academic research perspective; however, the Elder/traditional knowledge holder, in guiding the work, encouraged me to remain with the process in whatever way it unfolded, as the Maskwacis Cree perspective would be it was meant to be. Cajete (2000) confirmed this way of being and doing, in his statement that "All events and energy unfold and enfold in themselves…[this] is a part of the Indigenous ways of knowing" (p. 190). The end of this unfolding pathway was difficult to predict, however, I trusted in it and followed along the way. Pulling together the threads of information and knowledge that shaped the outcomes of this research study is the sharing and transferring of traditional knowledge teachings embedded within the Omisimaw model.

The lived reality of the Aboriginal women who participated in this study verifies the extensive responsibilities and identities that they hold in their families and community. They work inside and outside the home and they are committed to engaging with Cree traditional knowledge within the Aboriginal community. Their schedules are full and the stress they live with is high. The challenge then is for Indigenous women to implement self-care strategies in their daily lives to

effectively manage the high levels of stress. Self-care becomes a necessity of their survival (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Bent, 2004).

When we talk about healing then, we are also talking about restoring the teachings of women to a place of reverence and respect (Valaskakis et al, 2009). Based upon these two values alone, there is a huge amount of work required locally and globally in order to achieve such a goal. My research has confirmed that Aboriginal women have used and continue to use a variety of methods to assist them in their healing; returning to traditional knowledge sources was often referenced in ways that pointed to the significance of that practice as a foundational principle underlying women's healing journeys. In this context, the participants agreed that teaching the Omisimaw model in the schools would be one way of preserving and ensuring the transfer of Indigenous knowledge. They were keenly aware at the same time that many challenges would have be addressed within the Euro-Western educational systems in order to facilitate that process, and this understanding, based on everyday lived experiences and common knowledge in Cree communities about mainstream schooling processes, has been supported by many Indigenous scholars and traditional knowledge teachers. (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Bruno, 2003; Cajete, 2000; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; G. Smith, 2000; Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007).

In naming the Omisimaw Leadership Model, two specific points need to be clarified. First, the use of the term 'model' is a foreign concept within a Cree way of knowing and being. By using the term 'model' in this context, I have

simultaneously inserted a limiting effect on the potential for a deeper and broader understanding of the traditional teachings related to Cree womanhood. However, and secondly, my purpose in undergoing the process of naming and visually depicting that traditional knowledge was to make that particular set of Indigenous Cree knowledge and ways visible to the Euro-Western educational system within which our children are immersed daily.

The subjugation of Indigenous knowledge has created invisibility. Strega (2005) stated that "Subjugated knowledges and the possibilities of other 'truths' that might break the hold of hegemonic discourse are of particular interest…" (p. 220). The subjugation of Indigenous knowledge has been invisible not only to non-Aboriginal people but also to Aboriginal people, all of whom have been impacted by colonization. Revitalization of traditional cultural practices and re-engagement with Indigenous languages are ways of returning to and/or remembering Indigenous knowledge systems. In this study, uncovering the Cree words for the Omisimaw Leadership Model and referring to Cree language terms for significant concepts relating to the learning circles was an important activity that occurred at the onset, and again at the very end, of this research journey. In 2006, I confirmed from family who are fluent Cree speakers that the Cree word for girl/child is *iskwesis, for* sacred woman is *kihceyihtakwan iskwew*, and for wise woman is *iyinisiw iskwew.* Yet, members of my family did not know the word for warrior woman. It was not until 2012 that I confirmed the Cree word for warrior woman from Sylvia McAdam, one of the founders of the Idle No More movement, who stated that warrior woman is translated as *okichitaw iskwew*

(McAdam, 2012) and it has a story attached to it. There is much to be gleaned from understanding the connection between a Cree term and a traditional story; however, I will not be investigating this aspect of Indigenous epistemology as it is beyond the scope of my work. I simply state that this connection exists based upon what McAdam reported.

I have determined that this research and work with the Omisimaw Leadership Model has helped me to make this traditional education/Indigenous knowledge concept about Cree women visible and accessible to others.

Learning Research Circle Themes

Indigenous scholar Martin (2001) used the talking circle to collect data from research participants during her research study. I made the assumption that the research participants in my research would be familiar with the talking circle method. I did not use the word 'talking circle' in my work; rather, I chose to introduce the 'learning circle'. I thought that the dialogue of the participants would gently move from left to right in a circle, following 'the way of the sun' (Elder John Crier, personal communication, October 2006) and it would be the natural approach for the research circle in this study. However, the discussions did not follow that format. In the beginning of the first learning circle, the research participants shared their answers to the research question at random. The discussion jumped and moved around from speaker to speaker. Near the end of the first learning circle, the research participants' responses were shared in a clockwise direction. The periodic use of the talking circle method to share research participant responses was evident in the second & third learning circles

too. This was how I quickly realized the importance of labeling this particular process 'learning research circles'. I believe that the learning research circle provided the Aboriginal women with an opportunity to learn and engage in Indigenous practices, like the talking circle, thereby reinforcing its use in daily life. Labeling the learning research circle themes in the plains Cree language gave me an opportunity to investigate deeper, richer understandings of the English terms. The four major themes that surfaced in the research were introduced in Chapter five of this work: *Sohkastwâwin*, *Wahkohtowin*, *Kiskeyihtamowin*, and *Pasikowin*. In the following section, I will explore each theme by braiding in Indigenous knowledge concepts and understandings, connecting that knowledge/understanding with pedagogical approaches that might be used in classrooms.

Wahkohtowin

The first theme of *wahkohtowin* is about relationality and exploring all the intricate facets of relationality. In this research study, *wahkohtowin* was elicited and given expression through participants honoring their paternal and maternal lineages. In conducting a mini-genealogical search of lineages, each participant also established their connection/disconnection to traditional knowledge sources. This meant that participants identified how the church, through the Indian residential schools, affected their respective maternal and paternal families' engagement with traditional knowledge (Fontaine, 2010; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Young, 2005). In addition, the participants identified the lands/territories from which their paternal/maternal families came, and realized that the land helped to

locate the influences in their genealogical searches and understanding of themselves, as individuals and as members of communities.

Acknowledging the Ancestors and the Land

In Indigenous traditional teachings, the concept of relationality extends beyond blood relationships and explores other forms of connections and relationships. Indigenous scholars have long echoed this reality (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Littlebear, 2000; Wilson, 2008). For example, Cree traditional teachings discuss an individual's connection to the natural elements: earth, air, fire and water (Jimmy O'Chiese, personal communication, 2008). Indigenous teachings encourage individuals, when they meet strangers, to state and locate their connection to the land because it provides a contextual understanding, particularly for other Indigenous peoples, of present and ancestral relationships.

The histories of Indigenous peoples existed for millennia prior to the settlers' arrival in North America; nonetheless, present school programs and curricula promote only Eurocentric accounts of history, and acknowledge only the written one. Adams (1989) asserted that Aboriginal stories of the land help to address the Eurocentric historical accounts of Canada. As a means of addressing the Eurocentric history of Canada, non-Indigenous scholar Regan (2010) introduced the concept of unsettling the settler in Canada by asking, "How can we, as non-Indigenous people, unsettle ourselves to name and then transform the settler – the colonizer who lurks within – not just in words but by our actions…?" (p. 11). A very simple answer to Regan's question would be to encourage students

to search for the land/territories from which their respective maternal and paternal families came from prior to settling on Turtle Island in order to locate themselves in connection with an originating land base. This genealogical search aids health. Adelson (2000) reports that, "A sense of health is ultimately rooted in what it means to 'be Cree', and being Cree has everything to do with connections to the land and to a rich and complex past" (p. 25). Connecting individuals to the land would honor kinship ties and relationality because the land is our mother. Understanding and honoring Wahkohtowin would lead to teaching approaches that honor the relationships between individuals and their families as well as their relationships with the land and other natural elements, thus assisting students in restoring healing and maintaining a respectful acknowledgement of their ancestors and the land from which they originate.

Sohkastwâwin

The second theme, *sohkastwâwin*, recognizes and asks us to honor the resilience of Indigenous peoples as individuals who have survived cultural and linguistic genocide. Hampton (1995) asserted:

> Indian children face a daily struggle against attacks on their identity, their intelligence, their way of life, their essential worth. They must continually struggle to find self-worth, dignity, and freedom in being who they are (p. 35).

This struggle is a reality experienced by Aboriginal learners daily in the present Euro-Western educational system and, in turn, it has created enormous strength in Aboriginal students. Indigenous scholar Wesley-Esquimaux (2009) highlighted the enormous strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples and noted that:

"According to James Neill …. Resilient individuals and communities are more inclined to see problems as opportunities for growth" (p. 26). Shifting one's thought pattern towards a positive mindset is a concept echoed in Indigenous teachings. Turning a negative experience into a positive one is accomplished through the traditional teachings that encourage individuals to locate the learning gift from each particular experience.

Locating Gifts

As Cree people, we recognize the concept of gifts in two specific realms in education: individual gifts and gifts obtained through learning experiences. First, Indigenous traditional teachings hold that every individual has specific gifts, talents and abilities. People are born into this world with those gifts and those gifts need to be nurtured so that they can be shared and everyone can benefit from them (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Valaskakis et al, 2009). In this regard, the responsibility of the teacher is to nurture those gifts and the responsibility of the learner to fully express and share those gifts with others. Second, there is an opportunity for individual learning from every experience that that individual encounters in life. Learning to ask, "What have I learned from this experience?" is a responsibility of the learner. Locating or developing a positive response deepens the learning and is an example of maturity on the part of the learner because learning from both positive and negative experiences brings a gift of knowledge with it. This method of 'locating gifts' in individuals and in recognizing that individuals can and do accept 'gifts' that come through learning experiences confronts the current problem-solving model approach that places blame on native

students not having 'success' in the formal education classrooms (Steinhauer,

2007). Understanding and honoring *Sohkastwâwin* through teaching approaches

locates and enhances the gift in each learner, focuses on a positive outcome and

determines what knowledge has been gained from each learning experience.

Kiskeyihtamowin

The third theme of *kiskeyihtamowin* is about supporting the various

methods of how knowledge is gained and how students experience learning.

Friesen and Friesen (2002) stated the difference between Native and non-Native

teaching/learning methods:

> One of the primary differences between traditional Native ways of teaching/learning and the contemporary EuroCanadian style has to do with individuality. While both traditions make claims about respecting individuality, Native communities respect individual differences within the bounds of cultural norms. Young learners are accepted as individuals, and are afforded a great deal of leeway in developing themselves. They are not expected to progress in the same direction or at the same rate of speed as their peers, and when their talents have been developed, they are expected to benefit the community. (p. 32)

While some aspects of these statements are true about Cree learners,

discussions that create or are based on a binary between Native and non-Native

learning styles are to be avoided. Hodgson-Smith (2000) reports on numerous

research studies conducted on learning styles, identifying the commonalities,

differences and contradictions between those studies (pp. 159-165). Nonetheless,

the recognition that it is the individual who lies at the core of the analysis is

significant. Individuality in this sense is not defined politically, legally or

economically; it is based upon the previous notion of 'locating gifts' of the

individual, and as G. Smith (2000) described, "Individuals have a responsibility to

share knowledge with the group" (p. 218). In addition, the concept of individuality in this research context is not meant to undermine nor diminish considerations of the meaning or place of collectivity in the discussion.

In this study, exploring Cree epistemology was discussed by reviewing principles, methods and learner responsibility. The principles of respect and humility (Hanohano, 2001; Steinhauer, 2007) guide the teacher/student relationship. Learner responsibility was expressed and outlined by paying particular attention to the attitude, acceptance, willingness and openness in the learner.

Individualized and Experiential Learning

In Cree traditional teachings, learning is individualized. Since each individual is unique, the learner has to make many interpretations and decisions that are exclusive to him/her. Everyone lives in his or her own unique way. Differences are honored and the expression of those differences is allowed (Cajete, 2000) and supported in the classroom by instructors. Friesen and Friesen (2002) stated "Native learners typically develop concepts and skills by repeating tasks in many varying situations instead of in a classroom laboratory setting" (p. 31). Youngblood-Henderson (2000) described the importance of experience:

> Experience is the way to determine personal gifts and patterns in ecology. Experiencing the realms is a personal necessity and forges an intimate relationship with the world. In the Aboriginal quest for knowledge, such experiences are focused on helping one understand the nature and structure of a particular realm, on how realms interchange yet remain related, and on how language may create an elegant way of explaining an implicate order composed of complex systems of relationship and interdependence. (p. 265)

Donald (2009) discussed the idea of the "pedagogy of the fort," stating that classrooms are much like forts, with insiders and outsiders. He challenges the pedagogical practices of the Canadian educational system to consider experiential and land-based learning opportunities for students. Steinhauer (2007), writing specifically to schooling experiences of first Nations Cree children, had several suggestions for changes to the education system, listing nine recommendations and stating specifically that, "We need to incorporate an experiential learning environment [for the students]" (p. 265). Therefore, providing learners with opportunities outside the boundaries of the contemporary classroom would broaden their scope of learning. There are challenges associated with using a 'one-size fits all' approach to teaching and learning, so there is immense responsibility placed on the teacher to be able to provide a variation of supports to the learner. Understanding the sources of *Kiskeyihtamowin* would result in teaching approaches that respect the uniqueness of individual learners and then utilize an experiential learning approach to teaching so as to widen the scope of learning beyond the classroom for the learner.

Pasikowin

The fourth theme of *pasikowin* recognizes the need for the act of standing up by Aboriginal peoples about the ongoing challenges that must be addressed in the Euro-Western educational system regarding the transfer of traditional knowledge systems. There were several sub-themes identified in this work: diminishing knowledge transfer, ongoing colonization, investigating the root cause of illnesses by looking at specific health related challenges such as diabetes

and issues related to sexual abuse. In addition, the participants identified challenges the Euro-Western educational system could address in the support of the transfer of Indigenous knowledge. Yet, in the end, the challenge is about focusing on solutions, on accepting the challenge as a one to be addressed, not avoided or ignored. Accepting the challenge to assist in the transfer of Indigenous knowledge would place the education system in an optimistic stance of seeking solutions and positive outcomes for Indigenous learners. Ultimately, the focus is on the individual for leadership and responsibility relating to Indigenous knowledge transfer.

Accepting the Challenge

The research participants recognized that it was the responsibility of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, as well as of the collective Euro-Western educational system, to address the issues related to the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and to become aware of the issues that surround such a complex topic. Maori scholar, G. Smith (2000) cautions Indigenous people to be aware of "new forms of colonization," (p. 215) and calls for Indigenous people to adopt an "anti-colonial" pro-active position of resistance in order to protect and respect Indigenous knowledge. He also cautions against the "commodification of indigenous knowledge," (p. 217) which leads to allocating funding on a per capita basis and taking power and control over Indigenous knowledge out of the hands of Indigenous people. G. Smith (2000) talks about the Maori experience by stating that:

> We are also trying to move away from conventional teaching methods, which used Maori perspectives in token ways simply to enable Maori

children to feel good about themselves. It is not just that Maori knowledge is marginalized in the conventional school curriculum, but there are also structural problems with the way that learning is carried out. The key challenge being presented by Kura Kaupapa Maori is with respect to what learning is taking place: what is being learned? That question had not previously been asked with Maori interests in mind. (p. 221)

It would be important to be able to identify the kinds of structural limitations that marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems and are enforced by the Euro-Western educational system. Smith's question, "What is being learned?" becomes significant as issues of Indigenous knowledge transfer continue to grow.

Researchers have suggested changes to the Euro-western educational system in order to better meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. For example, Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) recommended five educational policies to the Euro-Western system in support of the needs of Aboriginal learners:

The policies that we discuss include making children's lives better by providing a context of (1) emotional and physical safety; (2) achievable day-to-day tasks; (3) democratic education; (4) forums for personal and collective justice; and (5) a comfortable physical environment. (p. 147)

The above recommendations have been placed in the hands of school administrators and teachers to support Aboriginal learners, all within the framework of the existing Euro-Western educational structure. Yet, as necessary and prerequisite as these recommendations are, they do not address the questions and challenges relating to the transfer of Indigenous knowledge. Friesen and Friesen (2002) cite Smith in discussing research about how to better accommodate the needs of Aboriginal learners in mainstream Canadian schools:

Smith (1997) has formulated six intervention elements for educational policy reform in this regard. He suggests that educators working with First Nations' communities need to: (i) support parents' rights to have a say and participate in the education of their children; (ii) encourage students to

maintain their distinct identity, culture, and language; (iii) have access to trained Aboriginal teachers (including elders), to help them maintain cultural and language traditions; (iv) be ready to mediate socio-economic and home difficulties; (v) design classrooms and schools to accommodate extended family structures; and, (vi) try to base all of their plans, actions, and vision on Indigenous values. (p. 144)

Each of these recommendations warrants deeper analysis and further research. Battiste (2000) critiques the Euro-Western Canadian educational system stating the importance of retaining Aboriginal languages; "Where Aboriginal knowledge survives, it is transmitted through Aboriginal language" (p. 199). Therefore, it would be important to use Aboriginal languages in the education system to encourage the sustained transfer of Indigenous knowledge. Sanford, Williams, Hopper and McGregor (2013) provide a record of the work of Lil'wat scholar Dr. Lorna Williams who showed how Indigenous principles have decolonized the teacher education program at the University of Victoria. Her work is a hopeful example of the potential for changes to and within the Euro-Western Canadian educational system and much learning can be gleaned from such an approach. Although the challenges of Indigenous knowledge transfer are vast, there is hope in the work of scholars like Williams for improvements in the education system serving Aboriginal learners. One individual addressing the challenge may be overwhelmed; however, as shown above, larger group efforts can provide solutions. Understanding the numerous complexities and the heaviness of the weight of the issues can be discouraging. *Pasikowin* can lead to teaching approaches that encourage students to identify themselves as leaders who can learn to see difficulties as challenges to be overcome by a collective or group

effort; they learn to move with and access the tremendous power that has been, and still is, a part of the traditional knowledge system held within the collective.

After The Third Learning Research Circle

My research study focused on the discussions derived from women participants. However, the research participants raised questions relating to the Cree man, and about the process of the writing and recording the Cree boys' story as Plains Cree epistemology. In Cree thought, the discussion of women is also a discussion of men in some form because of the holistic view of humanity. In this regard, and clearly a missing component for the critical interpretation of deeper levels of meaning in the data collected here, additional research in connection to topics covered does need to be conducted for the Cree male perspective and role.

In addition, there are opportunities for further exploration of the use of the Omisimaw Leadership Model in the Euro-Western educational system. Additional research could be conducted around questions related to:

- How can the Omisimaw Leadership Model inform teacher-education programs?
- How can the Omisimaw Leadership Model be used as an administrative model to help inform the work of administrators?
- What structures need to be challenged in the Euro-Western education system in order to use the Omisimaw Leadership Model as a tool for (Cree?) students to understand themselves on the learning journey?

Research Journey

Indigenous scholars have identified that the research journey is both challenging and rewarding (Sockbeson, 2011; Steinhauer, 2007; Steinhauer-Hill, 2008). It carries with it the responsibility to the self, the family, the community and the rest of society. I have definitely been transformed by seeking out answers to my questions, and I share my insights uncovered during this research journey, in the following section.

CURA Analysis of the Indian Residential Schools

The CURA project highlighted the work of the Catholic churches in Aboriginal communities. In the Maskwacis area in Hobbema, there was a Catholic residential school located on the Ermineskin reserve, called the Ermineskin Indian Residential School. The school was constructed in 1898, and church records documented its official operations from 1907 to 1974. There was a span of time from 1898 to 1907 during which the Sisters of Assumption and others were involved, but the responsibility of the school was transferred to the Oblate Missionaries by 1907.

The federal government and First Nations entered into agreements to form Indian reserves across Canada before the turn of the twentieth century. Cree families were beginning to align themselves with Euro-Western religious traditions. After the turn of the century, the imposition of the Indian residential school system was legislatively supported and entrenched in federal government policy; therefore, there is room to question Cree families' ability to choose a denomination. Was it really a choice when Cree children were forcibly sent to

Indian residential schools? Aboriginal families faced 'forced religiosity' as they surrendered their children to the Indian residential schools. In the Maskwacis area, the Cree families sent their children locally or to neighboring cities. The local Indian residential school was Catholic, whereas the school in the city of Edmonton was Protestant. It is important to acknowledge that previously formed relationships had a bearing upon the limited choice available to the parents. Prior relationships, either historical or current, with non-Aboriginal individuals who represented various religious denominations, had a direct impact upon Cree families' relinquishment of their children to the residential schools. This was evident in both my paternal and maternal families because it determined which Indian Residential schools my parent's families attended. This reality is often absent from the current literature about the Indian residential schools and is an important finding in the CURA *Healing through Language and Culture* research project.

Another important research finding is acknowledging how the interactions between the Oblates influenced Maskwacis family life. For instance, marriages were arranged amongst Aboriginal family groups prior to Euro-Western contact. This process changed when the church denomination used the Indian residential school system to further its cause of Christianizing the Indian. There is a huge assortment of marriage photographs in the Oblate Missionary Grandin collection for the Maskwacis community. When the Catholic Church arrived in the Maskwacis community, one of the functions of the church was to encourage marriages particularly between children who had attended the school. This

intervention on the part of the Catholic Church changed the Cree traditional process of arranged marriages. Cree families were separated and aligned based upon religious affiliations. Hence, a much narrower identification marker of the family resulted and it changed the social relationship structure within Aboriginal communities, highlighting the influence of the church in an individual's life.

An outcome of my own learning from the CURA project was recognizing that the pain, trauma, and cultural and linguistic genocide that Aboriginal peoples have survived is important to acknowledge in the healing process. Also, that there is a silence of space that surfaces when the Indian residential school topic is raised and finally, that the Aboriginal student survivor disclosures require a safe, secure, supportive environment. These three areas of related knowledge alone warrant pedagogical and curricula changes within the Euro-Western educational system so as to address the topic respectfully.

An important research finding from the CURA project was uncovering and experiencing the various healing modalities that occurred in working with various Elders/traditional knowledge holders and Indigenous knowledge systems. There was a consistent theme focusing on connection and re-connection to the self, the family, the community, the land, and the various multi-faceted explorations of relationships that eventually extend outward to the cosmos versus the dis-connections or dis-ease of these same relationships. The teaching approach by various Elders/traditional knowledge holders was gentle, loving and supportive and they provided safe learning environments, which allowed for the release of any negative emotional attachment. Values such as respect, compassion, caring,

sharing, honesty/truth, kindness and love were encouraged amongst the CURA research team. These values sustained me on the research journey.

Personal Healing of IRS experience

For thousands of persons, the reality of the Indian residential school experience is definitely not over, much to the dismay of many Canadians. At the onset of my doctoral studies, I reluctantly began a critical exploration of the assimilative Indian residential school educational policy. This reluctance stemmed from knowing that I would have to face and feel ugly feelings of sadness, anger and hopelessness. I looked within my own family structure and I increased and deepened my personal awareness through firsthand accounts of residential school experiences from both sides of my family, as well as from family members through marriage.

A wave of healing swept through the room as I calmly explained to my children's paternal grandmother that it was not her parents fault for not picking her up from the Indian residential school. For years, she held a belief that her parents did not want her when in reality it was a federal government sanctioned policy that forced her parents to send her to Indian residential school and leave her there for years. She carried this unwanted feeling and belief that her parents did not care about her and unknowingly passed it on to her children, her son, my children's father, without even knowing it. I share this new awareness with my children to break the cycle of irrational beliefs, and to instill compassion in them towards understanding harmful behaviors of individuals. In addition, I share this information with my children in my own hopes to 're-claim parenthood', my

responsibility to my children. Parenting was not an opportunity available for many Aboriginal parents in the generations before me. This is where and how healing can happen. Freedom surfaces when individuals release the negative emotional attachments. By analyzing their connection and disconnection to Indigenous knowledge, Aboriginal people can determine how they are survivors of the Indian residential schools' attempt to "save the man, kill the Indian" and firmly claim their strength and resilience.

I acknowledged the lingering effects within my own life, particularly feelings of grief and anger. During the research process, I gave myself permission to release those negative feelings. As I gently worked through the emotions, compassion grew within me. There are many generations of Aboriginal peoples who did not have the opportunity to unravel the effects of cultural and linguistic genocide within themselves and the lives of their family, friends and community members. I can see and understand how Aboriginal people blamed, and many continue to blame, themselves for the oppressive, abusive, painful and violent acts that they experienced within the walls of those schools. Indigenous people live with the intergenerational effects of those experiences. The pain can be so deep and overwhelming that avoidance appears like a simpler answer than actually allowing the feelings to surface in our lives, especially when the larger society does not actively promote a healthy release of pent up negative emotions, even or especially for children.

Those who have experienced oppression, in turn learn how to oppress, and a dysfunctional, unhealthy and destructive cycle begins and flourishes if it is

permitted to continue. Without any intervention, the cycle expands and grows. This is where and how colonialism, in all its forms of abuse, is felt personally and collectively in the lived reality of Aboriginal women (Green, 2007). Aboriginal peoples have survived through racism, oppression and genocide (Sockbeson, 2011). Oppression is learned and the hope of education is that oppression can be unlearned. The challenge for education is to help raise the consciousness of humanity to break destructive, oppressive cycles, intervene, and return human beings to a place of balance, health and wellness. The Omisimaw Leadership Model is grounded in traditional teachings and knowledge that can support experiences of personal transformation and moving forward in positive, healthy directions.

The use of the word genocide conjures up strong emotion and I have determined that the outcomes of the Indian residential school experience were cultural and linguistic genocide, historic trauma and inter-generational trauma. The realization that there were Indigenous children who did not survive this educational system conjures up the silent, sacred space, which stems from the Plains Cree word *nitahyahtamowin,* which is translated in English as 'dies thinking about it'. I am certain that a deep longing remains from those losses, a longing that has yet to be fully resolved in Canadian society, and a fact that continues to be diminished or discounted by Canadian consciousness through the Euro-Western education system.

Elder/Traditional knowledge holder Support

Thinking in Cree and being guided by Cree cultural values like humility has strengthened my connection with my responsibility as an Indigenous researcher. The Cree philosophy resides in the language; therefore, seeking opportunities to analyze the root words in the Cree language is an important process of understanding the philosophy and I am motivated to participate in re-learning my Cree native tongue.

The Elder/traditional knowledge holder reminded me of the importance of thinking positive thoughts and ultimately seeing compassion and love in every event experienced in my life. An attitude of gratitude helps to shift the mind towards the positive. I am thankful that the Indigenous Peoples Education Program, Department of Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, at the University of Alberta supported my work. The support offered by staff in the program and the department was deeply appreciated and I recognize the gift in this experience alone.

As I recorded that Cree boys' story, I recognized the responsibility of the Indigenous researcher. I knew that community members were seeing me in a position to help the community in three ways. One of the ways was in re-writing the history of the community to include an Indigenous perspective and so it was important to include stories of the land. Another way was in honoring the ongoing practice of *wahkohtowin* and in recording the family genealogy. Although this could have been and was to some extent a painful process, there was healing in that activity. Finally, the third way in which I think as an Indigenous researcher, I

helped the community, was in contending with the onerous task of recording oral storytelling so that the larger community could continue to engage with these stories.

As a researcher, I am challenged to manage the social, political, economic, gender, class, legal, relational and historical divisions that exist in an Aboriginal community. Perhaps these classifications need exploration so that deeper meanings can be generated. Regardless, the complexities are immense and researchers must be prepared to deal with that complex and often bureaucratic tangling of Aboriginal policies and implementation strategies, distinct from the unraveling of layers of meaning within the inter-connected knowledge and traditional teachings aspects. Without adequate preparation, new researchers could be misled and misrepresent the complexities that underpin and shape an Aboriginal community. More exploration and discussion is absolutely essential here amongst researchers.

Learning is Emotive

The Euro-Western educational system acknowledges the mind-body-spirit connection; however, Cree traditional teachings stress the mind-body-spirit-heart connection (Steinhauer-Hill, 2008). There are two distinctions here. The first one is that the concept of spirit is acknowledged first. Then, the second point is that heart is added. Heart has also been characterized as emotion. Normally, the Western social structures and institutions avoid and/or ignore the impact or function of emotion. It is usually the negative emotions that can be challenging to address in any classroom. The late Maskwacis Cree Indigenous scholar Walter

Lightning (1991) confirmed in his Master's thesis that learning is emotive (p. 16).

The risk of losing the mind-body-spirit-heart connection results in "heartless,

insensitive, inhuman behavior" (p. 21) and inappropriate, harmful human

behavior is in fact "anti-life" (p. 18). In order to honor the human being, the

emotive part of the self must be addressed. Teachers then, hold the responsibility

of honoring and managing the emotion that appears in the classroom.

In order for emotion to be managed in the classroom, certain safety nets

will need to be put in place. Emotions like anger, sadness, loneliness, guilt and

shame are examples of very strong negative feelings. These negative emotions

can easily surface when students begin discussing certain topics. Subject matter

can serve as triggers for students' negative emotions and teachers must be ready

and willing to effectively manage the energy in the classroom.

Indigenous knowledge systems have encouraged individuals to connect

with their heart by sharing what lies on their heart and what comes to their mind.

Traditional practices like the talking circle can honor and manage such strong

emotion, and it is for this reason that teacher education programs re-think

preparation of both their personal and professional identities. As I have learned in

my own healing work, I can only help others if I attend to my emotional issues

first; I also learned that negative emotions require a safe space and enough time to

be addressed for positive resolution. The ability to safely release strong negative

emotional attachment is called 'heartwork' because it is hard work and is

dependent upon one's ability to honestly speak that which is in their heart and talk

about the pain and hurt they have been carrying in their lives. This process can be

developed to re-think curricula planning and coursework for the betterment of all learners involved.

Based on my findings, I would recommend, in no particular order that:

1. Indigenous graduate students be supported by higher educational institutions to investigate Indigenous knowledge systems by searching through meaning in their Indigenous languages, because the meaning-making process expands current English knowledge and understanding of an Indigenous term or a concept;

2. Higher education institutions support graduate students to work with traditional knowledge holders/Elders who are viewed as knowledgeable and/or experts in their respective communities, and that they work together in the co-creation and analysis of Indigenous and Western knowledge and knowledge structures synchronistically;

3. Indigenous graduate students help to re-write their community histories to include the oral stories of their traditional territories;

4. Indigenous graduate students help to preserve Indigenous stories by translating the stories from the Indigenous languages into English and that both sources be used in the curriculum of studies within the provincial K-12 school system;

5. Teacher education programs and schools encourage pre-service and existing teachers to continually address their own negative emotions and release them through regular inner work and self-care healing processes so they can be helpful to students;

6. Effective teacher education programming support the professional identities of teachers, by exploring pedagogy with the goal of creating safe learning spaces where strong emotions in the classroom can be effectively honored and managed;

7. Teacher education programs incorporate Indigenous knowledge practices which safely and securely honor the emotion of others in a respectful, dignified and peaceful manner, so as to aid in healing;

8. All Canadian K-12 and higher education institutions address the topic of the Indian residential schools to aid in abolishing the discourse of denial that exists on the topic;

9. Teacher preparation programs address the concepts of *sohkastwâwin, wahkohtowin, kiskeyihtamowin* and *pasikowin* with the objective of transforming or enhancing teaching approaches to better meet the needs of their Aboriginal students; and

10. Additional research that addresses topics and issues that affect Indigenous male students and Indigenous male teachers.

Conclusion

As an Indigenous researcher, I found myself rigorously cycling through the data that I gathered, experienced and participated in while on this research journey that started in 2006. The process of searching, uncovering and making meaning out of the many complex layers of this work has been physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting. My work has deepened my spiritual

strength because this strength has sustained and carried me through this research study. I have relied upon the soaring eagle approach to help me as a researcher.

The Euro-Western educational system has failed Aboriginal people. The fire became a symbol of the overall work I was accomplishing in this research study, the topic of which is 'returning to the women fire'. I had not anticipated that I would be experiencing strong negative emotion while in graduate school. In this doctoral studies journey, I learned two useful strategies to address these negative emotions: one strategy was building a fire, and a second strategy was learning how to forgive. Although I experienced many negative emotions, the traditional knowledge holder/Elder reminded me to focus on the positive and to actively commit to feeling gratitude in the hope of positively shifting my mind-body-spirit-heart connection. I have become more familiar with what positive emotions are by recognizing, naming and experiencing them.

Further, I am compelled to ensure that my work will have a positive impact on my family and my community. In my family, I am convinced of the importance of practicing *wahkohtowin* and I will continue to share the knowledge that was passed down to me within my family. In my community, I am hoping that we can expand on the written history of the Maskwacis community and continue to challenge the provincial curriculum to include the Indigenous voice. I recognize that this doctoral experience afforded me the opportunity to name an Indigenous knowledge concept that has existed in the community for centuries, and I named the model after my later mother. She is an example of those brave,

courageous Indigenous women who have blazed a trail for the rest of us. They have prepared the pathway on which I now walk.

My research study has taken me back to the women fire. In Aboriginal ways of knowing and being, the fire is one of four natural elements that we are comprised of; the other elements are water, air and earth. My relationship to the fire is a reminder of my own spirit. The symbol of the fire is a powerful image and it has many connotations. The fire has two meanings that are important for me: one is transformation and the other is passion. The image of the fire is a reminder of the enormous work that is necessary in restoring women to a place of respect and reverence in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. I am passionate about continuing my work with the Omisimaw Leadership Model, as I believe it has potential for helping to transform individuals understanding of themselves and the societal transformation of the respect and reverence towards women.

I have hope for the future and I want to encourage young Indigenous people, by saying, *ahkameyimok* [persevere and try hard]. I leave you all with a dream that I had while on my doctoral studies journey and I share it as my hope for the future:

Dream on the March 2008 Full Moon

I dreamt I walked towards my dad's house where I had seen a bee hive. I went to go and get it from off of the poplar tree that was tall, growing on the bank of the river bend. I walked up to the tree, gently pulled the beehive from the tree branch and carried it with two hands. As I began walking on the road back to my house, I noticed that the clouds were moving in and it was getting overcast and grey.

I started to pull pieces of the beehive off and to my amazement I found a glass shaped hive underneath the outer shell. The glass was very smooth and I liked the

feel and look of it. I realized that there was honey inside the glass and I attempted to drink some. The honey was very sweet tasting and I moved the glass away from my lips to look inside and I saw that the honey filled the glass about one third full. I squinted my eyes and looked closer at the glass jar and I noticed that there were little tiny black bugs in the honey, so I started to pour the honey out. I drained the honey out of beehive shaped glass jar. I walked into my house just before it rained.

As I looked outside my kitchen window into my back yard, I saw that it was raining beehives. This is so weird, I thought. A small quiet voice inside my head told me that something is not right with this picture. "This is impossible!" I said out loud to my children who were inside the house.

I looked outside my kitchen window again and I noticed that the beehives were turning into fireballs right before they landed on the ground. I got frightened but in no way did I think that my house or my children in the house were in any kind of danger because there was a large tipi that was somehow protecting my house.

I checked on my children and noticed that everyone was okay. I looked out the kitchen window again and I noticed that there were pumpkins on the ground that were all smashed up so that my whole backyard was full - a sea of orange pumpkin squash. Then, I saw these Indian people coming out from this mashed pumpkin floor as if they were being born new adults; they looked so beautiful. Most of them had long flowing black hair and their hair seemed to flow in the wind as they arose out of this orange pumpkin sea floor.

Slowly they were rising up; singly and in couples; they were all happy. It was like a new birth. I felt a deep sense of peace.

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Appendix A: *Pimatisowin* – Circle of Life Philosophy

SPIRIT

EMOTION

MIND

BODY
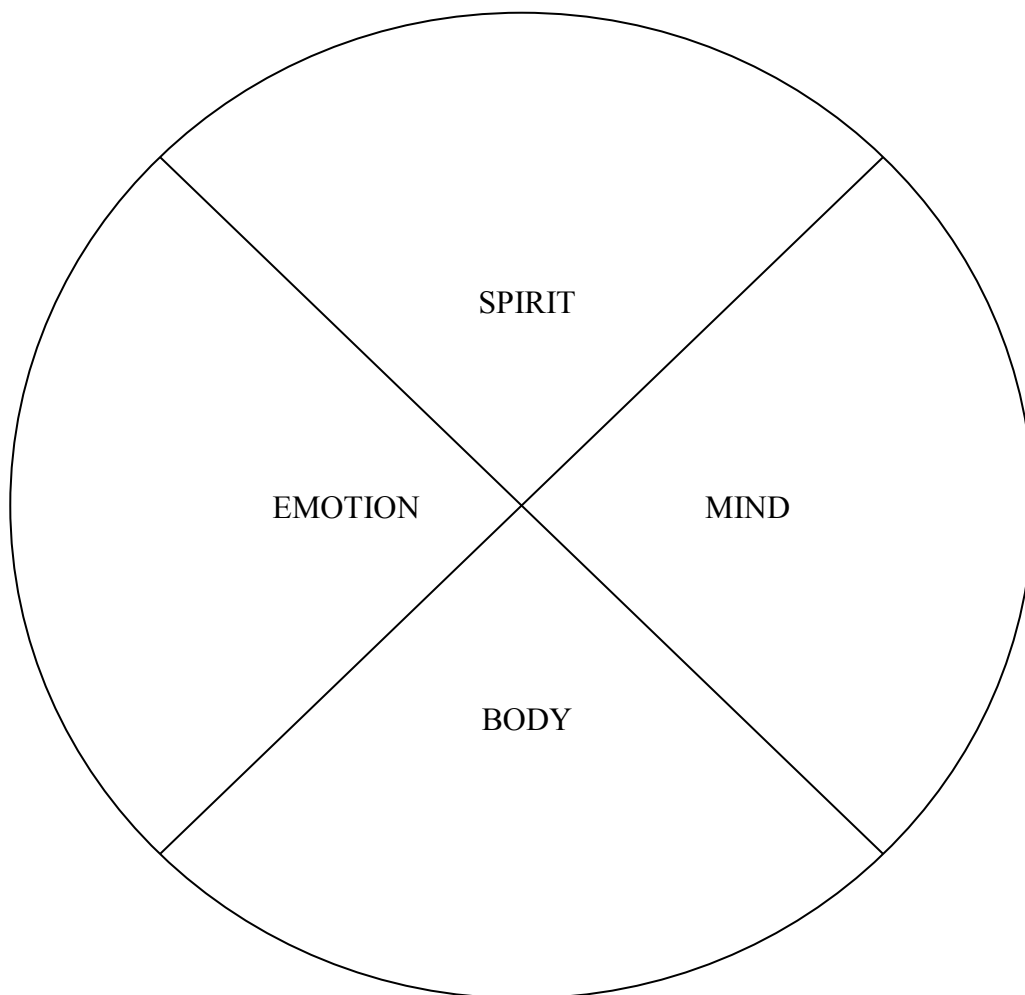
Appendix B: Omisimaw Leadership Model

WISE
WOMAN

WARRIOR
WOMAN

GIRL/
CHILD

SACRED
WOMAN
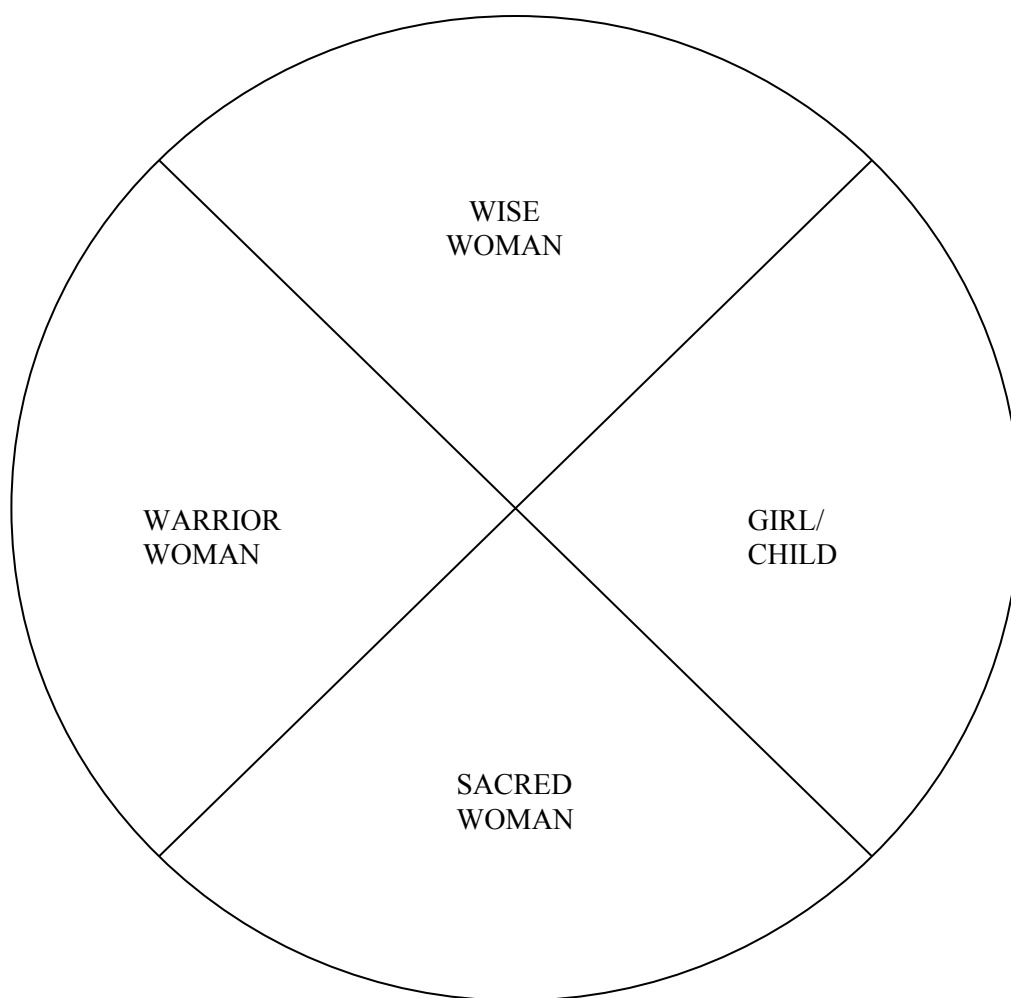
Appendix C: Visual Depiction of Model