A Language, a View and a Map: Indigenous Culture and Youth Mentoring

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Abstract

This ethnographic research investigates the sociolinguistic climate and practical challenges in accessing and opening local space for Indigenous cultural expression. The author premised this research on two questions: What is the practical process involved in the organization of a community-based cultural mentoring project? Secondly, within the context of this local research, what are the participants' perceptions of the cultural experience? Over the past 120 years, the immeasurable damage of the Canadian residential school system in systematically usurping local Indigenous authority, destabilizing cultural infrastructure and wresting away control of language has effectively eroded and marginalized Indigenous cultural expression leaving thousands of adolescents institutionalized in government care, and resulted in several generations of Canadians culturally removed from their own heritage. This ethnography surveys an investigative path from its early planning through to two series of community-run meetings. The core of the data was drawn from these two sets of mentoring meetings; pilot sessions held in the summer of 2013, and a second set of youth meetings held several months later. Following each set of meetings follow-up interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The central discourse emerging from this research underscores that as a local expression of cultural continuity, mentoring opens inter-generational communicative space for young Indigenous people to enter into the conversation and continuity of their cultural heritage. Under the stewardship of fluent speakers, mentoring is premised on informal fellowship, recognition of local protocol and a communicative ethic that retains local authority over cultural self-expression. Cultural worldview is articulated by the language fluency of the previous generations, and that trustworthy intergenerational

dynamic engages young with the qualitative space of their cultural heritage. Lastly, while

a community context rightfully privileges the authority and lineage of local self-

expression, the socio-linguistic challenges and implications emerging out of this

Indigenous literacy research offer a discerning vantage point informing critical

perspectives on the epistemic authority and production of broad cultural and institutional

discourses.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Canada, the legacy of colonialism, and, in particular, the residential school system, has led to the serious erosion of an Indigenous language presence. Following the residential schools, the combination of parents educated in English and those who for various reasons did not pass on their language has resulted in the erosion of most Canadian Indigenous languages. Outside of a small number of schools, young contemporary Indigenous people, with a disproportionately high number in the child welfare system, are limited in their access to and engagement with the language and culture of their heritage.

Cultural mentoring provides the local context for access to that cultural space. This literacy research had a practical focus that led to the organization of a series of cultural mentoring meetings as a communicative Cree space for local youth. Grounded in holism and communicated between generations of the local community, cultural and language mentoring builds language skills and strengthens identity, and the encounter offers powerful cultural perspectives on the role of language, identity, and meaning-making.

Statement of Problem

Over the past two centuries, at the global level an epistemology of empiricism has steadily imposed a centralizing institutionalized lens across the globe through which the world has methodically and systematically been conditioned. As a project of conformity, this teleology of progress has effected a staggering impact on deteriorating physical and cultural diversity (Harmon, 1996; Harmon & Maffi, 2002). The result of this envelopment has in turn marginalized thousands of cultural identities and eroded the traditions and continuity of local Indigenous communities to the effect of 28 language families' having been extinguished in the last 40 years (Campbell et al., 2013; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Indigenous languages in Canada are also in dire straits. Within the next generations lies the reality of the expression of First Nations cultural identity by people who speak only English or French. Simply, not enough people are learning the languages

(Norris, 2007). It is sad that in our contemporary urban society, many Indigenous youth have not had the experience or influence of their rich Indigenous cultural heritage. Many of these same youth find themselves at risk from the sociological effects of poverty and discriminatory practices (Cohen, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

In this research I investigated the cultural space opened through a local community mentoring project. As ethnography, the research has also served as a sociolinguistic portrait of a local cultural community. By framing the investigation around local expressions of Indigeneity, I sought an understanding of those considerations as very specific social and literacy discourses. The expression of language and Cree worldview highlights both the challenges of contextualizing content within the considerations of its access to the local community and situating the portrayal through a cross-cultural literacy-driven framework.

The purpose of this investigation was twofold. As a bottom-up community-based project, the first was to organize a cultural youth mentoring project. That practical outcome led along a very informative path in my becoming informed about the complex contemporary considerations that overlap and influence the expression of Cree cultural space. The second purpose was to participate in the mentoring meetings with the goal of eliciting the role of cultural ontology informing the experience. In turn, as language education, through mentoring the inter-generational space offers pedagogic traction as a holistic expression and continuity of local practices, protocol and identity. This local ethnographic research, involving a cultural paradigm outside empiricism, became a boundary-crossing linguistic experience that brought into high relief the embodied holism of Indigeneity against the imposed synthetic abstractions of hegemony.

Significance of the Study

This cultural mentoring project will contribute to future sociocultural and literacy research in a number of ways. First, critical literacy orients the theoretical compass of this work. With Indigeneity positioned on the margins of mainstream discourses, critical literacy calls for the individual or educator to engage the tools Freire (1985) called in his invocation to 'read the world'. From that perspective, the context of this local research

leverages open a qualitative space to inform literacy practices and meaning-making expressed through Indigenous language and worldview.

Second, by engaging Indigenous youth with the worldview and language of their heritage, I oriented this research from the perspective of language as resource (Ruiz, 1990). In juxtaposition to mainstream discourses, Indigeneity and mentoring articulate an endemic lineage of lived expression. This heritage includes cultural knowledge and values within a collective narrative. By drawing content from local meaning informing and serving as a trusted, grounded and holistic marker of identity, this research furthers the expression of local language and the knowledge it carries within the cultural community.

Third, a mentoring partnership can serve both as a method of cultural transmission as well as extension of local continuity (McIvor, 2009). Recent mental health research has reported that the expression of cultural continuity, built on a familiarization, affiliation, and engagement with heritage cultural practices, is a critically valuable contributor to personal emotional wellness and resilience (Hallett, 2007; Kirmayer, 2009). Cultural mentoring mediated and delivered internally by members provides young people with a trusted model of cultural values and traditions of their heritage. In contrast to the top-down banking model of public education, a practical, informal, bottom-up cultural mentoring collaboration offers perspectives on community-learning practices to articulate Indigenous cultural transmission (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004).

In sum, cultural mentoring as a local community-based expression allows timely perspective, and the language and cultural content of the investigation open valuable space to inform Indigenous self-expression. In turn, this qualitative paradigm provides a powerful vantage point from which to engage both critical literacy and second-language research in the future. In the following chapter, expanding on these introductory remarks, I outline the theoretical framework and the sociocultural context to position the interpretive lens of this research.

Research Questions

1. What is the process and practical considerations involved in the organization of an urban-based cultural mentoring project?

2. Within the cultural context of this local research, what are the participants' of the experience?

Before moving on, I should note that although these were the orienting research questions, over the course of the planning, organization, meetings with the participants, reflections, interviews and now presenting the written document, the parameter and scope of these original questions has adapted to the practical considerations and realities encountered during the research. In that regard, and following the process and synthesis what appears to be deviation from the questions is more appropriately understood as allowing the narrative of this context to emerge as an ethnographic portrait of a local speech community.

Description and Organization of the Study

The application and implication of this research extends beyond second-language education. The presence of language, and, in this local case, its access, cannot be separated from the surrounding history and socio-cultural context. As a result of those influential discourses, Cree youth mentoring is situated within a range of broad cultural, political, educational, psychological, and literacy spheres of consideration.

Beginning as a sociolinguistic perspective on local cultural continuity, in this research I have attempted to articulate a deeply rewarding cross-cultural literacy journey. Although the research is quite pragmatic—it opens local community space for the cultural expression—it was by no means easy to conduct. I spent a substantial period of time prior to undertaking the meetings with the youth on building an understanding of the social and historical context of Indigenous language, culture, and identity within the Canadian context. Subsequently, and prior to the meetings with the youth (on which I will elaborate in the methodology), I arranged a pilot project to gain a more informed sense of what a youth project might encompass. That pilot project proved to be critical to

the research. As I became more aware of the role of cultural worldview in localized meaning-making, it influenced the qualitative fabric of the research journey as well as the resulting reflections.

I conducted 90-minute meetings as informal sessions with and between four and six people (plus myself as observer/participant). Ultimately, both sets of meetings (pilot and youth) brought together local community members with a fluent speaker under the 'theme' of a Cree context. As a language educator, I understand that this communicative context is the qualitative space that facilitates and expresses culture. Though our overall time together was relatively short, the preparation and the contemporary circumstances of the encounter elicited rich interpretive data.

In my role as ethnographer, the Indigenous participants 'provided' my access to observations of that space and the role of language and culture within that social context premised between generations of the local speech community. From within a cultural worldview, and my understanding of how language and literacy serves to engage and facilitate meaning-making, this ethnography is a sociolinguistic portrait of my access to that space.

I have categorized the findings into three themes. The first relates to the organization of cultural mentoring and its current local social-demographics and community considerations. The second theme is the role of the mentor as the access point to open the critical qualitative space for 'content' to be explored. The third theme builds on this access to qualitative space applied to meaning-making, second-language learning and expression of cultural literacy. Along the way throughout this portrait is the input and feedback of the participants during this cultural encounter. I conclude the findings with final reflections and literacy-related implications which serve both as an expression of local Indigeneity and offer an insightful sociolinguistic microcosm within a global paradigm.

Context of the Researcher

My interest in this research emerged from my personal experiences with making meaning through language, culture, and identity. I am a child of immigrants, and German is my first language. The first four or five years that speech was my primary linguistic

reference point. It was not until I went to kindergarten that I recall being a linguistic and cultural 'in-betweener.' Recognizing this duality, I made the connection that a second fluency—perhaps not such a profound realization as German and English are rather closely related—nonetheless provided an early tool for practical critical ethnography. Studying French through university and then along the way picking up basic communication of Mandarin and Korean have helped me to retain a heightened sense of attention to language-oriented details with respect to dialects, local knowledge, and cross-cultural communication.

Upon completion of my undergraduate degree, I was keen to combine my second-language teacher education and these interwoven threads of language, culture, and identity to explore further. I lived in Asia for the better part of the next decade. The global experience of teaching both French and English in South Korea and Taiwan opened a rich realm of cultural and history-related observations: I wondered what was behind the profound influence of a Confucian social philosophy on Korean families, social roles, and norms. What was the deeper, historical relationship between Taiwan and motherland China that, in part, might explain the tireless work ethic and independent entrepreneurial spirit driving the local economy? How has the Hindu island of Bali found itself nestled in a 17,000-island archipelago that comprises the largest Muslim country in the world? Living and watching as a visible and linguistic minority, I queried and experienced some of the cultural variables of living in a culturally homogenous (96% Korean) country where 40% of the 45 million people share a family name of Lee, Park, or Kim. (These surnames refer to clans that traditionally related members through a distant common paternal ancestry. Later these clans came to settle in various locations around the peninsula while retaining the lineage of names.)

Sociocultural questions brought me back to Canada to pursue my master's degree in second-language acquisition (SLA) and pedagogy. After the Far East, I returned to Canada and moved to northern Manitoba to teach junior high at a community school. Equally fascinating, though somewhat closer to 'home,' this community brought another localized expression that overlapped identity with the roles of culture and language. This context drew my attention to the reality outside my classroom and into the wider

sociolinguistic landscape and the complexity of issues that interweave Canadian history, politics, Indigenous language, and identity.

In retrospect, my own path crossing languages, communities, and cultures, and most recently, this local research has exposed me to a comprehensive sense of the historical context and contemporary landscape of literacy issues in and beyond language classrooms. This opening chapter has included an introduction to a simple idea that spans a broad and multi-layered landscape. Due to the intrusive history of social, political, and educational institutions, the local expression *Indigenous cultural identity* necessitates working through a number of challenges. In this research I investigated the process of opening that access and, as a language and literacy investigation, engaging young people with their cultural heritage through inter-generational cultural mentoring.

As I move into and position the theoretical framework, I address relevant sociolinguistic considerations, historical and institutional factors, and various discourses that inform the contemporary challenges involved in gaining access to Indigenous self-expression. Positioning the frame of the theory and the historical context, I have embedded this research in that qualitative expression to draw attention to the juxtaposition between Indigenous expression and mainstream practices to underscore the crucial role of cultural ontology, local knowledge, and literacy in self-expression.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociolinguistics

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 5.6)

In academia, individual researchers generally have an ongoing intellectual curiosity in regards to exploring a variety of topics beyond the specifics of a particular project. For myself, that interest is situated at the nexus of identity, language, and culture. This broad intersection is generally referred to as *sociolinguistics*, however to define it is a challenge. Hymes (1974) stated "The term 'socio-linguistics' means many things to many people, and of course no one has a patent on its definition" (p. 195). The subject covers a range of interrelated disciplines that includes ethnography, anthropology, sociology, human sciences—both quantitative and qualitative approaches—the sociology of language contact, code switching, dialects, and language practices and policies. More closely related to Indigeneity are the historical context and fallout of loss and the shift to majority languages and localized efforts at revitalization. In addition, these complex topics are value laden, and their implications reflect contemporary and ongoing political economy. Jaworski and Coupland (1999) referred to this interpretive area as "language use relative to social, political and cultural formations . . . [and] language reflecting social order but also language both shaping social order and individuals' interaction with society" (p. 3). These cultural, social, institutional, and political constructs are linguistically driven and patterns begin to emerge with exposure to and across a variety of contexts. In turn, exploring these contextual connections and the culture of their construction has oriented my academic interests.

This research is premised on a literacy project working within the cultural capital of a local Indigenous community. In addition to the data immediate to the mentoring process, a broad Indigenous social and cultural narrative is concurrently the research context that I have sought to articulate through the lens of critical literacy. As the literature review and findings will illustrate, the contemporary challenges that the cultural presence and future continuity of Cree faces begins to emerge from a critical reading of

the sociolinguistic context. These factors inform an understanding of politics, history, the role of institutions, and their influence on the construction of Indigenous cultural identity. Therefore, the attempt to open qualitative space for a practical expression of cultural continuity is far from being merely an exercise in second language learning.

In addition to investigating the immediate challenges that Indigenous cultural and language expression face, this literacy research is positioned at a vantage point from which to observe broad language-driven discourses that have social, political, and educational implications. Consequently, concurrent to informing the topic of colonized Indigeneity, this sociolinguistic research leverages open local meaning through the expression of cultural worldview. This subtle dynamic, engaged through an internally-led oral process such as cultural mentoring, becomes heightened by the cross-cultural juxtaposition between the expression of local micro discourses embedded within the hegemony of macro social and cultural discourses. As ethnographic and second language research, engaging with multiple discourses situates the participant in a discerning position from which to interpret and reference personal, cultural and critical meaning. I refer to this form of situating and applying multiple representations of meaning across language and culture as a form of figurative literacy. In order for the Discourse of this research to find its reference point and gain traction, in the following pages this theoretical framework begins to orient this local context in terms of some of the issues that invoke Indigenous cultural literacy. Specifically, this orientation is intended to give the reader a general account that frames the role, function, ability, and potential implications of meaning-making made possible through the cultural expression of worldview and a mentoring project.

Following this introduction, the first the remainder of this chapter arranges the theoretical framework across thematic sections. The second section outlines the process of meaning-making in reference to the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1962). The third section introduces the topic of literacy and expands into critical literacy before I outline some key tenets related to critical theorist Paulo Freire (1970). The fourth section moves to the role of Discourse and includes an overview of social discourses that reflects larger narratives held in place by hegemony, and I share my second language learning

perspective on its methods. These processes illuminate the process by which ideology frames and molds social discourse. The fifth section of the theoretical framework returns to the role of Indigenous language, and I look into how cultural narratives, defined internally by the history of a speech community, provide a culturally based worldview that informs a speech community with a set of naturalized referents from which meaning-making is oriented. The final section of the theoretical framework serves two purposes. First, in articulating some of the differences between Indigenous and Western paradigms of meaning-making, I contextualize the literature review that follows; second, I open methodological space for positioning the qualitative voice of this cultural narrative.

Sociocultural Theory

As a theoretical starting point, this cultural mentoring research is grounded in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky; 1962, 1978). This theory of mediated knowledge is premised on interpersonal communication, with a focus on the social and cultural elements integrated into the learning process. Key tenets of sociocultural theory include mediation, regulation, internalization, and the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotskian theory of constructing meaning, language serves as the mediating tool of meaning-making, and cognitive development and higher mental functioning develop through a communicative social process and the interpretation of symbolic tools.

Such constructions are not fixed and are therefore the communicative nature of meaning-making is under constant negotiation through the transaction and mediation of the speakers and their communication. From this perspective, "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially-based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or group holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The development proceeds from outward-oriented social speech and works inward to private speech and, finally, internalized verbal thought. Vygotsky (1978) said, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; the first, between people, and then inside the child" (p. 57).

The backdrop of situating learning as social meditation produces learning through collaboration. The linguist Halliday (1979/1980) reminded us that "a child/learner is not an isolated individual, and learning language is not a process of acquiring some commodity that is already there. Learning language is a process of construction" (p. 8). Accordingly, learner involvement with and including knowledgeable members of a speech community provides a zone of proximal development, an interactive, mediating domain through which individuals socially construct knowledge. Later, as Wertsch (1985, 1991, 1998) and Hatch (1983) explained, this scaffolded interaction that works between higher-level and novice language speakers requires more than just social interaction and mutual collaboration between learners. Specifically, as a learner becomes acquainted with a specific Discourse, an equally critical aspect of the learning process involves the sociology of entering a community of knowledgeable practitioners and being surrounded by valid and trusted sources of the symbolic tools to be acquired (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). These *communities of practice* (Lave & Wanger, 1991) can be informal, a family or cultural community, or represented by formal institutions such as schools. In either case, situating the learner in a socialized context influences the development of learning behaviors and speech habits. These communities of practice, as sources of various forms of formal or cultural knowledge, are therefore instrumental to sociocultural meaning-making. A mentoring partnership recreates and opens a context that engages interaction, social mediation, and the exchange of language and cultural knowledge. Beyond any particular specific topic to be learned, it stands to reason that a learner's exposure to a variety of contexts and communities of learners would imply a greater opportunity of developing and refining more nuanced and discerning interpretive literacy skills.

Literacy

The term *literacy* typically refers to the mastery of skills, processes, and understandings in making meaning from and through written text. Literacy has been traditionally understood to be a fixed body of language and communication skills or an individual, internal capability—culturally neutral, universal in its features, and developmentally accessible (Luke & Woods, 2009, p. 9). In the last two decades this

definition has expanded to include sociological, historical, anthropological, and linguistic factors that influence research on the role of language and literacy in everyday life (Street, 2003). Broadly speaking, Williams (2004) noted that literacy

> examines the deployment of literacy practices in society, and has its origins in sociology and anthropology, . . . away from a focus on the individual, characteristic of the previous psychological approaches, and toward a focus on the social. The broad approach accordingly concentrates upon the meanings and values of literate behaviour in social contexts. It is compatible with the notion of communicative competence, although it espouses a more critical perspective. (p. 576)

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy involves understanding the relationship between language and meaning across a range of social practices and disciplines, including cultural studies, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and ethnography (Norton, 2007; Pennycook, 2004). Across these various fields of research, critical literacy addresses the process of how socially constructed, negotiated practices produce meanings (Luke & Woods, 2009). These meanings emerge from a range of contexts. Informally, they can grow out of networks in the home or local community; conversely, meanings can also be produced and distributed more widely as products that represent formal educational or political institutions (Fairclough, 1992; Heath, 1983; Norton, 2007). Street (2007) referred to this wider approach to how meaning is made and communicated through language as *social literacies*: "In practice literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and therefore, so do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions" (p. 17).

Awareness and identification of language as the product of a particular context and speech community, which imbues exposure with meaning, is the essence of critical literacy. In turn, applying a lens of literacy to the role of context and agency, critical discernment involves interpretive flexibility and cognizance of multiple perspectives. Consequently, to position this culturally specific research into a broad historical context, it is necessary to build a trail towards some of the highlights that inform Canadian social Discourse which, in turn, reveal how marginalized languages face larger forces that subordinate them within particular social frames of reference.

Paulo Freire

Critical literacy was born of Paulo Freire's (1970) community-based work with marginalized rural Brazilian communities. His approach to understanding the social effects of language raised awareness and class-based consciousness in that he recognized how economically driven interests work to structure and stratify a society through power relations. Freire also described what he referred to as the *banking* model of education, whereby schools and educators, representative of the larger sociopolitical network, dispense codified knowledge, skills, and language to the learner (Freire, 1970; Tett & Maclachlan, 2006). Informed by a Marxist reading of local sociopolitical Discourse (Voloshinov, 1973), Freire taught these speech communities that beyond the immediate literal meanings of words, to become critically literate involves a figurative and contextual understanding of specific Discourses. Engaging language analysis through dialogue and culture circles, Freire's students worked to locate themselves within the power structure of their local economic and political context through the identification of Discourse as it related to the structural realities they faced. This discerning form of literacy involves not just "reading (and writing) the word," but also figuratively "reading (and rewriting) the World". This literacy reveals how economic control and political privilege create a framework for the construction of social and class stratification. Language becomes the tool that informs definitions and enables those boundaries (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35).

Following the pioneering work of Freire, critical literacies have progressed in the development of interpretative tools used to identify, name, and rename the world (Mey, 1986; New London Group, 1996). Working across a variety of contexts, including minority language and political metaphor and the analysis of the social, cultural, and semiotic dimensions of discourse, texts, and communication, Fairclough (1989, 1992), helped to establish the interpretive path towards critical language awareness. These forms of literacy incorporate critical perspectives articulating the fluctuating nature of both how particular relations (cultural organizations, patterns, power structures, beliefs and values) are constructed and represented and how they are communicated. According to Luke (1997), such practices work to develop awareness of the linguistic implications

embedded in structural patterns and complexities and "reshape literacy (education) in the interests of marginalized groups . . . excluded from access to the discourses and texts of dominant economies and cultures" (p. 143). Luke and Woods (2009) outlined some of the foundational tenets of critical literacy, which include (a) a focus on ideology critique and cultural analysis as a key element of education against cultural marginalization and domination; (b) a commitment to the inclusion of working-class, cultural, and linguistic minorities; Indigenous learners; and girls and women marginalized and disenfranchised by schooling; and (c) engagement with the significance of text, ideology, and discourse in social and material relations and everyday cultural and political life (p. 11).

In applying a critique of the socializing effect of language that Halliday (1974) called *a social semiotic* (p. 17), he suggested a functional approach "to look into language from the outside and, specifically, to interpret (functions of) linguistic processes from the standpoint of the social order" (Halliday, 1978, p. 3). The work of discourse analysis, which "recognizes the value of non-experimental and non-quantitative methods in managing evidence" (Davis, 2004, p. 21), has suitable application to the sociology of communication and expression, including those of minority languages and worldviews positioned on the periphery and structure of the cultural mainstream.

Discourse analysis therefore is a useful tool "since the study of language in use, as a goal of education, a means of education, and an instrument of social control and social change, is the principal concern; . . . indeed its raison d'être" (Lomax, 2004, p. 133). In turn, an examination of the language of a particular speech community provides insight into the social and cultural order, both in and outside of the community. This application of critical literacy opens insightful space that considers the historical centrality of language to framing both local and cultural identities.

Discourse

Literacy and language carry communicative meaning in two ways. One carrier is referred to as *discourse* which is the common, everyday communication across most forms of speech communities. Second, and more revealing, is that language is the vehicle for *Discourse*, referring to specific communication combined with the social practices of a community of speakers (Gee, 1990). This second, 'big-D' *Discourse* is context

specific. It covers a multitude of examples; for example, Grade 4 classroom language, terminology and discussion about globalization and terrorism, or even a client-counselor or patient-doctor conversation. In such examples the context binds meaning with the language. In turn, *Discourse* can also include culturally contextualized examples framed by parameters such as individual ethnicity, heritage, and local history. Individual Indigenous languages, informed by context and worldview, are another example. Big-D *Discourse* therefore uses language with meanings specific to the context. By extension, from within that specific context, a particular framework of internal reference emerges that is expressed through the specific language and its internally-referenced meanings.

Emerging from a specific context, critical literacy investigates Discourse, which is understood as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network" (Gee, 1990, p. 143). Consequently, Discourse, with its mutually-agreed upon language and definitions, in turn, expresses and facilitates a form of membership among the speakers who use its words. This linguistically driven expression can be applied to a variety of forms of membership: a spouse, a team, a political party, a classroom student, a legal client. Discourse therefore, as "embedded in a medley of social institutions" (Gee, 1990, p. 143), is language specific to any community of speakers who participate in and use agreed upon language and definitions within a given context. Understood in such a way, context-specific Discourse articulates the tools of one's socially mediated "identity kit" (p. 142). In turn, access and literacy within a certain Discourse reflect the social power of its speakers:

> Discourses are inherently "ideological." . . . They crucially involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods. . . . One must speak and act, and at least appear to think and feel, in terms of these values and viewpoints while being in the Discourse; otherwise one doesn't count as being in it. (p. 144)

As a result of this embedded meaning, Warford (2011) pointed out, "Sociolinguists refuse to de-contextualize language into the tidiness of the printed sentence, preferring to see it as a living thing that cannot be separated from its actual use in human interactions in a given cultural setting" (p. 78). Discursive literacy is therefore a valuable tool of

discernment when it is applied to the discernment of embedded meaning within a variety of language-driven contexts.

Social Discourse

The study of applied literacy grew out of the field of linguistics, which itself emerged from the pioneering work of Saussure (1983). He reasoned that language, to which he referred as *langue*, is a socialized entity of fixed symbolic units and objective meaning and is equal to all speakers. In contrast to this written from, the individual has agency over personal speech, what Saussure called *parole*. From a perspective of social change, if the speech, the *parole*, of the members of a particular community becomes contested, that social discourse, the speech, has the potential to become fixed in language. Social power and politics therefore become implicating factors that govern the *langue* in a society and reflect who has the authority to define, regulate, and disseminate its traded value.

During the 1920s the political currents of their Marxist context influenced the work of Russian linguists. They gained insight into the applied meaning and communication of language in a less static light than that of Saussure (1983); instead, these linguists interpreted communication as a socially constructed process generated by political implications (Jones, 2004). Voloshinov (1973) spoke to the limits of the fixed structuralist approach and defined language as "not the relationship of the sign to the actual reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the relationship of sign to sign within a closed system already accepted and authorized" (p. 58).

Applied to the development of critical literacy, the social and political structure that frames the parameters of communication, its discourse, and situated practices that influence the socialized process of meaning-making became a focus of study. Sourcing the roots of meaning making, either embedded as an objective quality of language itself, as Saussure (1983) discussed, or, as Voloshinov (1973) described it, as a communicative currency with political value, involved two distinct approaches: "Saussure's is based on an understanding of the social as what binds people together, Voloshinov's as what keeps them apart" (Joseph, 2004, p. 351). The tension in this dichotomy is that Saussure's somewhat romantic view of language is at the cost of recognition of the historical forces

that facilitate its presence. Meanwhile, Voloshinov's critique is a rather strict class-based perspective that tends to overlook the personal and relational factors that socially position and inform individual identity.

Language, embedded in social context, is continuously being reconstructed and shaped by agency and dialogue (Giddens, 1979). Bourdieu (1991) reminded us that the use of language, signs, and symbols reflects a representation of social and political power. Gumperz's (1982) work with Discourse showed that contextual cues, critical in cross-cultural communication, if uprooted, leave gaps of understanding. Consequently, when the meaning-making context of a shared language is not common to the interlocutors— the subjects who exchange messages—it implies that the context is not balanced in terms of the neutrality of meaning. This phenomenon of meaning disconnect among communicators as a result of contrasting construction location reflects a privileged, uneven playing field. Gee (2008) made an interesting comment regarding the linguistic implications of the presence and role of overarching social frameworks:

> The most striking continuity in the history of literacy is the way in which literacy has been used, in age after age, to solidify the social hierarchy, empower elites, and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values, norms, and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their self-interest or group interest to do so. (p. 61)

Therefore, imposed Discourses, introduced through centralizing practices such as colonialism or globalization, disseminate imported meaning onto a local speech or cultural community and oblige its speakers to conform to the language.

Dispensing Social Discourse

Although the theoretical frame of this local research was guided by the validity and expression of local knowledge, it is noteworthy to reiterate the implications of mainstream and marginalized discourses. In the case of minority-language communities, the imposition of a colonizing language brings with it invisible socializing frameworks of to what and how the incoming language and its definitions refer. These politically driven discourses work in subtle ways to socialize the effect of language and communication. In Bruner et al.'s (1956) research into sociolinguistic theory, he recognized a continuum between language and thought: mould theories and cloak theories. Mould theories

characterize language as "a mould in terms of which thought categories are cast," whereas cloak theories offer the role of language as "a cloak conforming to the customary categories of thought of its speakers" (p. 11). Joseph (2004) concurred with the hierarchy in the entrusting and deploying of language within a society:

> In modern societies, exposure to tribal elders has been institutionalized into systems of 'education,' but the fundamental principle remains unchanged from the earliest human groups . . . It determines who stands where in the social hierarchy, who is entrusted with power and responsibility. (p. 348)

Gee's (2008) points regarding both the ideology of specific Discourse and the socializing roles of literacy, and the investigation of a minority community marginalized by political assimilation or culturally by language suppression, create a juxtaposition that powerfully informs critical interpretations of Discourse.

Foucault and the 'Episteme'

Emerging out of the post-structural period, Foucault's (1977, pp. 27-28) recognition of externally imposed socializing forces that influence the psychology of social discourse onto speech communities made important sociolinguistic contributions. His linguistic archaeology articulated that the *episteme*, the invisible structure, is embedded within the political and philosophical values that govern a given society. This protocol reflects power-framing and normalizing-subjectivity reference points communicated through the social Discourse. Public Discourse is a value-laden code melded into language-driven templates. History, science, and health yield examples of embedded language that is authoritatively disseminated as 'fact'. Although these constructs are self-referential and serve the inner logic of the rationale, often they are based on an assigned meaning by those in control of Discourse. For example, esteemed physicist Smith (2001) commented, "I contend, in fact, that the Darwinian model has proved worthless as a biological paradigm, which is to say that Darwinism is not truly a scientific theory, but indeed an ideological postulate masquerading in scientific garb" (p. 222). In this example knowledge is assigned validity, but there is compelling evidence, not always readily accessible, of the fallacies of these institutionalized accreditations.

In political terms, the governing ideology emerges under a particular motif that is dispensed through the public Discourse. Played out across the chronology of history, this privileging subjectivity echoes the essence of the Orwellian notion that the one "who controls the past controls the future (and those) who control the present control the past" (Orwell, 1949, p. 32). Some political examples have historically included the framing of public perception through leveraging space open by separating the 'good' from the 'bad,' 'us vs. them,' democracy and freedom vs. terror. In each case these binaries, which frame, define, and lead to implications, are embedded Discourse that correlates political and economic motivation (Edelman, 1964, 1998; Fairclough, 1999; Wright, 2009).

As citizens, we are the intended audience of the public Discourse. This mediated information, communicated through media, politics, or academia, contours the shape of public discussion and essentially by directing attention, molds mass perception. In turn, the embedded episteme has the institutional heft to override local authority which leads to centralized control of cultural and linguistic self-expression (Foucault 1980; Gramsci 1978; Habermas 1979). Consequently, local language is undermined when external forces redefine Discourse and meaning, traditionally under the domain and authority of the local community. Language shift thus begins through a top-down imposition of *langue*, in Saussurian (Saussure, 1983) terms, by formal means (through politics, academic institutions, or propaganda) or a variety of other conditioning methods (through media, technology, popular culture) that mediate discourse bringing new language and meanings into a speech or cultural community. I will look closer at the effect of hegemony and its constrictive influence on local Indigenous language vitality in the literature review in the next chapter.

Cultural Discourses and Local Meaning

Although it is certainly a complex process, as a base reference point, it is necessary to outline critical literacy applied to socialized Discourses to understand the homogenizing power of language. It works to serve notice of the effect when language and meaning are detached from the history of local communities. However, it is precisely from the expression of locally derived meaning that the content of this qualitative

research is drawn. Specifically, language and mentoring practices are embedded in the values and cultural worldview that imbues the local narratives.

> A worldview consists of the principles we acquire to make sense of the world around us. Young people learn these values, traditions and customs from myths, legends, stories, family, community and examples set by community leaders. The worldview (cognitive map) is a summation of coping devices that have worked in the past [but may not work in the now or future]. . . . The worldview [allows a people who self-identify] to make sense of the world around them, make artifacts to fit their world, generate behaviour and interpret their experiences. (Kawagley, 1995, p. 8)

Worldview serves as the informal framework of communication as well as informs the quality of information traded within a collective community. This collected mosaic of information has been chronologically and collectively constructed by the group members (individuals, kin, family, community) in relation to history, lineage and locality. The information transmitted, the currency of cultural knowledge, is grounded in local epistemology.

Epistemology is essentially a cultural group's intellectual heritage that informs its ways of thinking, how and where it sources knowledge, and its acts of creativity (Fuller, 1988; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Goldman 1986, 1999; Landesman, 1997). Consequently, culturally epistemology is the internally forged ideological anchor and barometer of the historical identity of a cultural community expressed through language, story, art, or protocol. This information contributes to and shapes the collective thinking and identity (collective memory) of its members. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2001) explained that

> epistemology is concerned with who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, and related issues. (p. 57)

Epistemology, although not overtly expressed, is nonetheless communicated between generations of a speech community through its specific Discourse, with the local knowledge and information embedded in language and cultural narratives.

Narratives deliver cultural meaning. They provide a vehicle towards meaning-making from within the frame of a particular lens. The notion of how our personal lives and immediate communities provide a larger story to personal and collective identity also represents a microcosm. This local narrative is consequently embedded within a larger, more encompassing one. "The larger stories in which we often unconsciously dwell have been called 'master narratives' and provide the meaning and values within which people position their identities" (Mehl-Madrona, 2007, p. 123).

In the case of our wider society, the meaning-making of larger narratives is largely premised on the epistemology of empirical science. This larger narrative uses political and mediated authority to control the Discourse. In contrast to minority paradigms and cultural narratives, Mehl-Madrona (2007) added an interesting perspective to master narratives, the hegemonic stories that frame the mainstream and majority cultural narratives:

> To the extent that we absorb the stories of a culture, we absorb the values or morals of those stories. The ways we get caught in pursuing those values mirrors Foucault's description of how people become unwitting constituents of power-knowledge system. . . . We do what we're supposed to. We do what we are expected to do. We perform in the ways that our roles demand from us. (p. 122)

Mehl-Madrona added:

> Most of the master narratives that we enact are inaccessible to conscious recognition of the worldview lived through valid experience, and change. We have to learn how to perceive before we can perceive. These master narrative even include what we should perceive. These master narratives structure our perception and interpretation of the world as intelligible and therefore permeate our everyday language. We generally lack all awareness of our enactment of these narratives and only rarely challenge what they teach us to take for granted. The more people heal, the more able people are to question and challenge the master narrative that make healing external and mechanical. (p. 127)

One of the central factors that orients this local research is the validity of the cultural narrative as a key contributor to Indigenous identity and wellness. For that validity to emerge, it must be accessed, and therefore one of the challenges is arriving at that access point. Thousands of Indigenous language communities have been colonized and are positioned outside the mainstream social discourses. Despite this marginalized

perspective, and as Elders have long known, Indigenous languages carry local narratives that, through a long lineage of lived heritage and practices, facilitate the cultural continuity of its members. This unique narrative informs cultural identity. Once the juxtaposition between minority and majority cultural viewpoints has wedged open space for reflection, locally-lived qualitative validity emerges.

Any particular language, specifically those endemic to a geography, is embedded in a particular epistemology and worldview. Each language is essentially a reflection of a unique cultural paradigm that is communicative through its Discourse (stories, metaphors, analogies, proverbs, etc.), which articulates and expresses local meaning. Indigenous endemic languages, although indeed highly complex and refined communication tools, are singularly unique codes of communication (Everett, 2012). The language might no longer be critical to physical survival in most parts of the world, but these cultural narratives nonetheless represent lineage and inform culturally specific identities that span thousands of years of local presence. Moreover, in regard to the decades-long Chomskian notion of a 'universal grammar,' recent research has revealed little evidence to support the structuralist notions of an innate biological language structure (Levinson & Evans, 2009). Instead, this fallacy more accurately reflects hegemonic strategies that impose theoretical constructs and authorized narratives with which to frame social discourse.

As recent linguistic scholarship has demonstrated (Evans & Levinson, 2009), endemic language is a localized communicative tool with little evidence to support a universally innate biological structure. Tomasello (2009) went as far as to claim that "universal grammar with linguistic content is a myth" (p. 470). Kenneally (2010) called the search for universals a "blind alley" (p. 32). This myth, albeit challenged on numerous fronts, has been in place for almost 40 years, since the early 1970s when Chomsky's theory of universal grammar "muscled onto the scene" (Boroditsky 2011b, p. 63).

The unique context-specific reality that structures each language is therefore a rich informed resource. Related to local access however, colonial practices have also muscled in on the scene and shrunken that cultural resource in rather drastic fashion. Since 1970 the 16 largest world languages have increased their share of the world's speakers from

45% to 55%. By contrast, during that same time the world's Indigenous languages have eroded by 21%. In the Americas, Indigenous linguistic diversity declined over 60% (Harmon & Loh, 2010). New data reveals that, since 1960, 28 language *families* have been extinguished (Campbell et al., 2013). Consequently, hundreds of Indigenous languages are/were located in regions and on parcels of land that became imperial and colonial conquests. These politically driven intrusions supplanted the local knowledge with an imported discourse that included enforced acculturation, educational conditioning, and resource exploitation (Skutnabb, 2000).

The repercussions of fewer languages are fewer cultural narratives. In essence, the fundamental qualitative cost of cultural and linguistic erosion is that endemic languages and their communities of speakers haven been cut off from the history of their own local narratives. Moreover, a more subtle repercussion of colonialism is that the decontextualized nature of imported language is also central to the mandate of schools and political institutions, which frame and condition speech communities according to the authorized axioms of discourse.

Identification of Qualitative Space

Cultural continuity represents a quality of experience in which collective memory and communication unhinge time and, through inter-generational transmission, amalgamate to become identity (Canada, 2005; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; McIvor, 2008). In that very respect, the locally defined value of cultural capital is beyond measure. It is not merely language but can more specifically be understood as the collective memory of a particular community emerging in the natural course of its living-becoming. All members of a particular speech community do this through personal engagement with the heritage and practices of their cultural identity (Battiste, 2000; Brant Castellano, 2000). Pacini-Ketchabaw and Bernhard (2001) argued that "the vitality of a language indicates how well a group is maintaining itself in society" (p. 7). In turn, the local language represents both the cultural capital; the 'what', and carries the cultural economy; its 'how'. Endemic to a particular geography, local languages therefore articulate a unique angle, a qualitative paradigm through which to examine, talk about, and participate with the world (Munchhausen, 1996). In the realm of qualitative research,

investigating access to and practice of that capital and conveying its validity outside its natural context imply the influence of institutional considerations. In the final section I outline some of the factors in the overlap of differing paradigms of cultural and academic representation and consider how this incompatibility can be reconciled for endemic expression to retain local cultural authority.

Representing Knowledge

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified four dominant research paradigms within academia. They considered knowledge a positivist construction. Paradigms are broad frameworks characterized by assumptions about reality. Various paradigms are made up of concepts such as ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Carjuzaa & Fenimore-Smith, 2010). Ontology explains the nature of reality. Depending on the cultural orientation, an example of ontology might be time experienced as a linear teleology, or a cyclical relational orientation (Brown, 1982). Epistemological considerations address how one perceives, frames, and describes the world. Epistemic parameters compare the value of empiricism vs. qualitative and reductionist vs. contextual knowledge. Methodology defines how to go about gaining information about one's own reality. Finally, axiology identifies information that is research worthy and shows how to obtain that information in an ethical manner.

Western science at its roots is a mechanistic reductionist worldview premised on cause and effect, with signposts that mark the behaviors or conditions that constitute measurable validity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Bruner (1986) referred to this construction as a paradigmatic approach characterized by the use of procedures to confer verifiability and test for empirical truth. Consequently, this objective confer approach is a detached rationality, "a hard, calculative, dehumanized, arid form of thought, inhospitable to myth, romance and the body. What is lost or suppressed in this form of thought are the characteristics of Mythic and Romantic understating, as well as of Somatic understanding" (Egan, 1997, p. 135).

As a researcher of an Indigenous qualitative narrative, how did I understand my interpretations of reporting? Was this research project, in and of itself, at risk of being distorted by my attempt at a cross-cultural representation and subsequent interpretation in

a particular way? Through which measures or concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology did I understand the validity of this research: As a construction? As a reflective narrative? Such questions affected this research; 'how' the data and 'how' the method is academically interpreted. Grande (2008) contended that "nations get trans- or (dis)figured when articulated through Western frames of knowing" (p. 234). A contextually laden topic necessitates an appropriate reading to avoid being misled; to seek and privilege the measurable and progressive construction of 'how' misses the broad holism of the exercise.

The Culture of Construction

American Indigenous scholar Deloria (1997) commented on the wide gap between the beliefs and practices of Native Americans and Europeans in three notable domains: science, religion, and government: "Science and religion are inherited ways of believing certain things about the world" (p. 3). Smith (1999) concurred and noted the cultural conceptions of space and time and differing language, philosophy, and values. In addition, the Indigenous worldview also includes spirit (Kawagley, 1998). This qualitative holism is communicated through language and is immeasurably implicated in cultural identity, lineage, and cognitive heritage (Battiste, 2001). Western compartmentalized science tends to ignore these interacting dynamics that contribute to the uniqueness of a particular ecosystem. These epistemic differences represent a value gap between cultural paradigms. The erosion of endemic languages that narrate this qualitative holism has not gone unnoticed: "It seems to me that we are faced today with a pervasive process, on a global scale, of detraditionalization or despiritualization. The world has been experiencing this process in a cumulative manner for many centuries" (Brown, 1982, p. 48). Consequently, Western epistemology and traditional knowledge are often at odds with each other. In turn, institutional research is implicated because it correlates with the power relations that subjectively privilege a particular paradigm as the authorized signpost from which to measure and represents social experience.

The academic act of peering into a qualitative cultural *weltanschaung* is a slippery proposition. Moreover, when the culture in question and its infrastructure and practices have been systematically subverted and marginalized to the point of erosion, a reasonable

question becomes: how valid is an investigation of the qualitative benefits of cultural continuity through the lens of an institutional paradigm that causes the erosion in the first place? This is a solipsism past the point of cross-cultural or relativistic approximation. Consequently, positivist research is at a crossroads: whether to consider the cultural values and conditions that contextualize the phenomenon in question or to validate the phenomenon as a collection of measurable 'facts.' Weedon (2004) suggested that different (cultural) approaches to subjectivity and identity produce different types and forms of knowledge. In Indigenous cultures, that knowledge involves the quality of spirit communicated through narrative representations that are critical to the articulation of identity, values, worldview and which emotionally 'carry' the process. In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In representing Indigeneity through the empiricism of Western research paradigms, the epistemic privilege and its focus on empiricism limits comprehensive meaning. As Bruner (1986) said, "The paradigmatic (empiricist) mode . . . seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction, and in the end disclaims in principle any explanatory value at all where the particular is concerned" (p. 13). In contrast, "without the narrative fabric, it seems difficult to even think of human temporality and historicity at all" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 15). Therefore, for holism to express itself, a shift in rendering meaning is necessary to hinge open the interpretive experience and allow cultural authority to express itself. This leverage becomes possible and is reflected when a speaker, or reader whose sensibilities are awoken—because his or her personal experience has been tapped by the experience— becomes emotionally attuned to the narrative. In turn, emotion binds the speaker/reader to the narrative in a fashion that tilts the lens of interpretation away from paradigms of detached facts and data and towards the broad context that encompasses a multitude of interrelated factors that coordinate to create an environment conducive to making meaning.

However, if that hinge that allows meaning-making to derive from emotional engagement cannot open and the interpretation remains focused on the perceived validity of atomized, reductionist facts, cultural differences represent an epistemic border. As a

result, institutional power is exercised at the cost of meaning. Finally, although the distinction among differing paradigms certainly plays a part in the theoretical framework that positions this research, that distinction also led to the narrative of the research and therefore speaks to the qualitative experience of this ethnography. The recognition that the 'story' of the data has itself constructed the research narrative, along with a qualitative reflection of the personal experience, imbues the ethnography with a qualitative spirit beyond a positivist construction. (I will revisit this aspect in the methodology chapter.) In that respect, this research is itself not a collection of facts or data. Although I investigated a process, it is perhaps more appropriately understood as a narrative of a cultural narrative. In essence, the information implicated loses its validity if it is compartmentalized as a skill set or simple application of strategies unless the larger context of interrelating factors and its cumulative spirit triggered by the narrative is removed from the interpretation.

In this chapter, an overview of the crucial role of literacy and social discourses as influential contributors to personal, collective, and cultural identity, I have framed the theoretical considerations and positioned this qualitative research. The influence of cultural worldview governed by local experience and lineage enables the articulation of local identity to express itself. Cultural identities are driven by narratives that carry unique values. They are expressed through the Discourse of local language. Cultural mentoring, grounded in local history, works as a literacy-driven expression with practical traction precisely by referencing its meaning and content within a lineage of worldview internal to the collective identity of a local speech community.

The acknowledgement and enlisting of local cultural discourses and subsequent affiliation with Indigenous language continuity sit at a balance point between Saussure's (1983) and Voloshinov's (1973) orientations of applied language. Specifically, retention efforts do not sustain momentum expressed as a reaction to political marginalization but, instead, through a focus on practical efforts and the engagement of agency oriented from within the local cultural capital. This local narrative is self-perpetuating, and is nurtured by practices that extend its expression and continuity. At the immediate practical level, the involvement of mentors facilitates this continuity. With the privileged access to this

cultural conduit, apprentices in a mentoring project, by virtue of their participation with the communicative roots of their heritage, are stepping into and embodying a cultural paradigm under the stewardship of those who, so to speak, know the territory.

In the following chapter I review the literature and gradually narrow the focus to this mentoring research project. On the way, I review information pertinent to the erosion of Indigenous languages and the psychological consequences of colonization to reinforce how language and intergenerational mentoring create a sure-footed path towards the expression of identity, the framing of resilience, the enrichment of literacy, and the contribution to cultural continuity.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The preceding theoretical framework was an outline of some pertinent aspects in regard to literacy, orienting meaning-making, and the influence of social discourse. The aim was to create a sociolinguistic landscape orienting the qualitative and communicative space of speech communities.

For marginalized communities, the effects of colonial practices have significantly eroded their active presence and engagement with the language and local Discourse of their heritage. This has left a challenging task in accessing qualitative cultural space. Likewise, it is necessary to outline the process of how that access has become a community challenge. In part, the review of the literature provides historical context to the linguistic ideas in the theoretical framework. The goal of this chapter is therefore to articulate the breadth of information as it narrows from broad historical patterns inwards to the Canadian context, and as well, outlining the role of language in the expression of cultural identity.

I have divided the literature review into a general sequence of six themes from the larger historical context to the current practical considerations. In general order, I move through these themes: The first is hegemony, and I apply the theoretical framework to a context that offers a sense of the broad landscape and narrows into the local demographic of this research. The second theme is the trauma of the colonial process. This leads to the third theme, language erosion. The fourth theme is Indigenous knowledge, and I outline the key aspects therein. The fifth theme involves urban-living considerations and the role of cultural mentors to the mentoring process. The remaining theme is sociolinguistic: the aspects of a cultural worldview that affiliate learners with their heritage. Finally, to conclude the chapter, I briefly discuss second language learning considerations.

A Sketch of Hegemony

Growing progressively since the time and events surrounding the Enlightenment and French Revolution, our world has indisputably become globalized. Through a particular lens and with the application of discourse, we have methodically been conditioned to envision the world articulated through an epistemology of materialist

science grounded in empirical reductionism (McMurtry, 1999; Saul, 1995). This discourse is held in place by economics, authorized by political and educational institutions, and disseminated through technology. These factors impose a top-down discourse wherein nature, history, and conditioned behaviorism are conflated into a teleology of progress (Billington, 1980; Midgley, 2003). Understood more objectively, this global project is a transnational, cross-cultural expression of hegemony. Over the greater part of the last 200 years this ideology has effected a staggering erosion of massive tracts of both the physical environment and local cultural expression (Harmon, 1996; Harmon & Maffi, 2002).

Naturalizing History

Across a multitude of language-driven contexts, globalization, the contemporary metaphor, is an evolving idea that has its own roots. In his historical overview of education-related development, Rist (2009) detailed this path as a process embedded in a larger project. This larger project actualizes hegemony as a rationally constructed metaphor, as a self-referential template that stems from the conflation of an idea grafted onto biology. This analogy between applying observed natural processes and projecting them on to communities and societies is a metaphor of which Rist was aware: "From making it easier to understand the phenomenon (of development), the metaphor obscures it by naturalizing history" (p. 27). The projection of ideology has eventually taken on evolutionary qualities and grown into the construct of Discourse, depending on the occasion and politics involved.

In its early stage the idea of a universal naturalized expression grew from observations of the cyclical notions of living organisms—direction, continuity, cumulativeness, irreversibility—as they progressed through their biological life cycle:

> The key instrument in this permanent project is discourse, a sufficient guarantee of social power. For it is words that are given the responsibility not only to classify, but actually to ground the existence of a representation meant to be generally applied. Words too are asked to justify practices and powers. Biology becomes the unchallengeable reference that ceases to appear socio-political because it is the 'natural' guarantee. (Achard et al., 1977, p. 10)

The fusion of natural processes with intellectual capital validated by Greek philosophy was later leavened with Christian ecclesiastical flavoring in response to, because of, or inspired by a crumbling Roman Empire. These political machinations inspired Augustine to conceive of a positivist paradigm that incorporates the grace of Christian theology into a landscape of humanity that unifies all cultures. The effect of this centralizing inclusiveness of all mankind into one common ontology eventually became articulated as the more linear trajectory expressed through the political vernacular of France and Diderot's post-Gutenburg encyclopedia:

> In the early years of the revolution, Bonneville and other literary journalists in effect invented a new, post-aristocratic form of French that was rich in neologisms and hailed as *la langue universelle de la Republique*. This language was forced on the dialect-rich provinces as a means of destroying local loyalties in a time of national danger. After 1792 the documents of the central government were no longer even translated into provincial dialects; in some ways a "body of language" replaced the body of the king as the symbol of French unity. (Billington, 1980, p. 36)

This new *langue*, through dissemination by academy, print, or politics, became the template from which the construct of development and progress gained wider Western accessibility as it was linguistically dispersed and colonized into common knowledge. This process relates to general literacy and the ingestion of that template as it is delivered. Words, or more specifically, ideas, because of the aforementioned universalizing context under a variety of monikers and memes, psychologically shape mainstream notions about history while steering reality along a prescribed narrative arc. Repeated often enough and accepted as valid because of their association with institutional authority, these ideas become taken for granted as self-evident. However, that same information must be connected to its historical origins, which emerged from an Enlightenment ideology. Framed by parameters of subjective language, the rationalist template referees the public Discourse and churns out the narrative of History. Looking in hindsight at the sequential unfolding of History, Foucault (1969) excavated that notion and articulated how these templates, designed to mirror nature, were sociologically applied:

> It seems to me more likely that the transformations of biological knowledge at the end of the eighteenth century, were demonstrated on one hand by a whole series of new concepts for use in scientific discourse and on the other hand gave rise to a

notion like that of life which has enabled us to designate, to delimit and to situate a certain type of scientific discourse, among other things. I would say that the notion of life is not a scientific concept; it has been an epistemological indicator of which the classifying, delimiting and other functions had an effect on scientific discussions, and not on what they were talking about. (Chomsky.info, 1971, para. 20)

These epistemes, framing a universalized historical narrative, have been disseminated under various guises as analogy, memes, or myths—civilization, modernity, and globalization—that have been embedded in a local geography-transcending Discourse according to the precepts of those controlling the hegemony. According to Midgley (2003):

> Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning. . . . We still often tend to see ourselves, and the living things around us, as pieces of clockwork: items of a kind that we ourselves could make, and might decide to remake if it suits us better. Hence the confident language of 'genetic engineering' and 'the building-blocks of life.' (p. 1)

McMurtry (1999) reflected in his book *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism* on the taken-for-granted modern rhetoric that conflates free-market economics with naturally occurring organisms:

> Pathogenic patterns at the social level of life-organization are analysed in this study as value programme mutations. These regulating sequences are not genetically fixed, but are sets of presupposed principles of preference which mutate beneath notice and which, when diseased, come to select for exchanges within the social body that invade, deplete and strip the society's vital resources and functions. These mutating social value programmes underlie ideologies, which are merely their rationalizing disguises. (p. viii)

Hegemony and Discourse

Building on Marxist theory, Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as a process in which "spontaneous consent [is] given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (p. 12). The population gives this consent for two reasons: first, the dominant group has control of the means of production; and second, the dominant group uses coercion and discipline

(p. 12). Academic institutions are among those on the front lines, backed by corporate and political privilege, which holds hegemony in place.

Lakoff's (2002) recent work *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* explains how metaphors influence political debate. As the esteemed political scientist Edelman (1998) reminded us:

> (Political) language is not simply an instrument for describing events, but is a part of events, strongly shaping their meaning and the (political) roles officials and mass publics see themselves as playing. In this sense, language, events and self-conceptions mutually define each other. (pp. 131-132)

Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2013) substantiated the subtle use of contextualizing discourse: "Metaphorical frames can play a powerful role in reasoning because they implicitly instantiate a representation of the problem in a way that steers us to a particular solution" (p. 7). (In other research, Boroditsky (2011a) demonstrated cultural differences related to the perception of chronological time and spatial recognition.)

As I mentioned, metaphors and public myths hold the structure and frame public Discourse because those who hold the political structure also hold the power to define the validity and assign meaning. Harris (1981) discussed, in part, how language is transferred via patterns and the repetition of the transaction of a particular message through incorporation into methods of dissemination: technology, book, word, politics, emblem, symbol. The dissemination, as a 'photocopy' of an idea, came from a particular context; is authorized with the credibility of a particular economic, political, educational, or cultural credibility; is deemed universal; and is exported.

The Socializing Effect of Hegemony

On a larger scale, the use of economics leveraged into place by a dialectic under the domain of stakeholders, dictates the parameters and limits of meaning. This template trumps local history and meaning and, like precipitation rains down as atomized, quantified data. Leveraged in by the hegemony, the quantified template seeps in to (re)define and/or condition local reality and in turn colonizes the community to conform to the outside definitions. As a result, through importing language which obliges the locality to conform or evolve according to the induced definitions a hegemonic normative message has immense psychological implications.

The act of devaluing, diluting, and supplanting local history is a process of linguistic impoverishment. It privileges an arbitrary history and an artificially constructed collectivized set of universal-isms that rely on economics, psychology, education, and political mechanism to reinforce and validate their inner logic. With regard to contemporary globalized constructs such as the Millennium Goals, which effect change across continents, cultures, languages, and local histories according to predetermined standards through fiscal measures, it is no surprise to read that "the World Bank is the leading global investor in education and is linked through extensive networks to other worldwide organizations" (Spring, 2009, p. 3). This process of diluting local meaning in favor of the global speaks more accurately to a political agenda with an administrative conditioning embedding the local with values, roles, and expectations. In turn, hegemony uses language and technology as the influential and seductive vehicles to effect policy and condition change. Pattanayak (2000) wrote, "By luring people to opt for globalisation without enabling them to communicate with the local and the proximate, globalisation is an agent of cultural destruction" (p. 47).

Regardless of the political macro implications, a chasm emerges, made of cultural differences that generic-sounding language assumes the capacity to bridge. To a large degree, filling the gap requires economics to justify and leverage policies into place. We have the benefit of hindsight to provide a train of thought to follow this thread of teleology. However, on an ongoing basis, for a given populace, Indigenous or global, despite a consideration of the underpinning historical context of the incoming Discourse, the ongoing dialectic that politics and economics enforce subject local citizenry to the values of the imported messages. In the case of South Koreans, as an interesting example of a body of speakers or political community, this neocolonialism is tangentially but inextricably bound to a greater ideology, as evidenced by the presence of tens of thousands of American soldiers who are still stationed in the country, essentially as a preventive measure against various forces of potential dissent.

Cultural Discourses on the Margins

Language imperialism serves as the front for epistemic hegemony. Put simply, language works as a broad homogenizing vehicle that works coercively to redefine and

re-frame the local into a brand of institutional envelopes and files all localities into a homogenized pan-cultural global collective. Very broadly, its historical material expresses teleology of self-ascribed dominion. It requires conformity. It goes without saying that colonized cultures often have values that are in conflict with imperialism. Consequently, stepping outside the cultural paradigm to view these political and philosophy power plays brings unsettling insights. As Canadian colonialism and the legacy of residential schools reflect, this method of conflating arbitrary and artificial definitions of progress with nature, economics, and politics is a mechanism of control beyond merely a cultural intrusion. It also has immense implications for social well-being.

In this sense, the use of the English/French language, applied through schools, science, politics, education, or diversion (sports and entertainment), frames the Discourse of a narrative in a targeted society. In turn, the local populace, regardless of cultural heritage or locale, becomes obliged to adjust not only to the new vocabulary, but also the physical climate of a transformed ecology (Harmon, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In terms of this historical effect on uniformity across cultures, languages, and countries, an enormous qualitative price has been paid and contributes to the anomie and alienation of the politically and socially marginalized.

When the voice of a people has been supplanted, there is both history and a narrative behind the effect. As Steinhauer (1996) explained, "A language . . . is probably irreversibly endangered when the original language is no longer passed on to new generations" (p. 1). To be clear, the reason that these voices are positioned or referred to as minorities is squarely the larger social and political narrative-framing academic and social communication that privileges certain constructs while marginalizing others. Battiste (2000) noted that paradigms of social communication operate at an ideological level through cognitive imperialism, which not only impacts the cultural expression of minority voices, but also socioculturally regulates sanctioned knowledge. A useful perspective on the linguistic repercussions of hegemony comes from Mukherjee's (1990) critique of postcolonial theory that it obliges certain stances of language in that it "insists

that the subjectivity of post-colonial cultures is inextricably tied to their erstwhile occupiers" (p. 5).

Understanding hegemony through a linguistic lens underlines the notion that centralizing the control of language, by defining 'context' (i.e., institutional authority) takes place on such a massive scale that we can be guilty of not being aware of its ubiquity and/or source. This contemporary reality has significance to, but is certainly not limited to, minority speech communities. Nonetheless, with regard to cultural self-expression, this forceful coercion, a kind of psychological blackmail, has served to effectively destabilize endemic Indigenous language presence and has led to immense psychological trauma to local communities.

Cultural Trauma

To gain a sense of the cultural mindset that underpins the psyche of contemporary Canadian Indigenous people with regard to their languages, it is necessary to look at the path that colonialism has taken to bring to light the contemporary challenges of extending Indigenous cultural continuity. Moreover, without wishing to emphasize any particular details, I believe that it is nonetheless incumbent on me to shed light on the sociological impacts of cultural marginalization that have contributed to Indigenous community fractures.

Colonial Disruption

Growing from the work of Herman (1997) across a variety of disciplines, including history, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and political science, recent scholarly work conducted for and by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has resulted in the interpretation of the successive waves of colonization—cultural transition, cultural dispossession, and cultural oppression—through a comprehensive lens referred to as *historical trauma transmission*. From the outset of colonization—some have estimated that 90% to 95% of the Indigenous population have been lost within two generations of contact with Europeans—this massive collective trauma has left a legacy that has enveloped and victimized Indigenous people and their culture and language to this contemporary period (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). In regard to the

internal damage to the structure and fabric of Indigenous society, during the second phase, cultural dispossession, Indigenous people were

> stripped of their social power and cultural authority. . . . Many, by choice, withdrew socially, thereby lessening their social and psychological investment in communal and societal relationships, . . . [which,] in turn, led to disruptive behaviour, social alienation and profound psychological problems. (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2007, p. 67)

As Indigenous society began to feel the intrusion of settler societies, colonizing education gained a presence. Adams (1988) described the foundation of the ideology behind the Native American schooling of a century ago: Government agents and policy makers worked within a paradigm based on the principles of ideology to 'civilize' the Natives from their savage life and pagan rituals. This demeaning oppression has been euphemistically referred to as a benevolent 'rescue' from cultural extinction; the American context has its own particular history and details, but the tactics to assimilate a divide-and-conquer method in both the US and Canada had a common motive and strategy. In settler societies the assimilation process ultimately hinged on the residential school system as the 'socializing' tool (Haig-Brown, 1998). By separating children from their families and forcing children to conform to Western notions of citizenry, religious affiliation, or linguistic communication, the Indigenous inter-generational transmission of language and embedded cultural imperatives was targeted as the link to be corroded to deliver ideology. This ideology was buffeted by social Darwinist ideology:

> We can help you out of these things ("feudalism" and "community living stage") . . . on the way to our level. Give us your children and we will educate them in the Kindergarten and in the schools. . . . With these come the great emancipation, and the schools will give you that. (Lake Mohonk Conference, 1892, pp. 36-37)

Indigenous people were understandably reluctant to accept this ideology. As the embellished ideological rhetoric illustrated the role of power. The politics and psychology of engineering social and cultural change must be seen as a failed experiment (Wright, 2008). In a 2004 Aboriginal Healing Foundation report, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) agreed and suggested that such methods have had enduring consequences:

> Hidden collective memories of this trauma, or a collective non-remembering, is passed from generation to generation. . . . There is no 'single' historic trauma response; rather, . . . historic trauma causes deep breakdowns in social functioning that may last for many years, decades and even generations. (p. iii)

The Language of Power Relations

In regard to the force of linguistic and structural oppression in obliging minorities to convert to those values and the Discourse of the colonizers, Hall (1993) reported that a structural shift in paradigms is at the root of the social upheaval:

> Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, "power/knowledge." It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge,' not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm. . . . This inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If its silences are not resisted, they produce, in Fanon's vivid phrase, "individuals without an anchor, without horizon." (p. 226)

Displacing Indigenous cultural and linguistic traditions is fundamentally an issue that is best understood framed as a conscious intermediation of each culture's language and contextual manner of meaning-making: "What makes sense to one community of people may not make sense to another" (Gee, 1990, p. 103). A contemporary example illustrates the subtle role of language in the framing of political authority and social discourse. The first quotation is from a lawyer in Australia. In debating how best to codify efforts to negotiate Indigenous issues in light of the 1997 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, by linguistically shifting focus away from geography and sense of place, the Declaration (and its representatives) "argues that the concept of Indigeneity is better explained by a right to self-determination, that is, a concept which attaches to groups of people, rather than merely to parcels of land" (Fowler, 2011, p. 35). Counter this rhetoric with the following statement from Taikeke and Corntassel (2005); in clear opposition, he articulates that, akin to Foucault's epistemological reference, the structural, legalistic forces of conformity are markers of discourse, a linguistic Trojan horse. This requires the proper angle of articulation to further serve and define codified frameworks of negotiation. This mediation of language is the fulcrum that leverages space in favor of those who regulate the discussion and exercise power:

> The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call Indigenous peoples are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world. (p. 597)

Taiaiake and Corntassel, reiterating Hall (1993), discuss how this traumatic legacy has psychologically changed the spiritual dimension of Indigeneity, from one expressing being to one expressing politics. The shift in cultural equilibrium and social forces left many Indigenous people feeling that their language has little bearing on their lives and/or is justifiably devalued and not worthy of attention.

Structural Instability

Esteemed linguist Joshua Fishman (1991) characterized the consequences of dominant colonial political and cultural intrusion as follows: "The destruction (of a language) is the destruction of a rooted identity" (p. 4). Crawford (1995) was more straightforward and spoke of historical silencing and devaluation of Indigenous people and the marginalization of their culture and languages to a state of neglect and extinction. He stated in unequivocal terms that language obsolescence "happens to the dispossessed and disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive" (p. 35). In their sociological work, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) investigated the timeless relationship among land, livelihood, and people that the colonial process has incrementally eroded:

> The inevitable loss of personal and cultural dignity and social control will be manifested in self-doubt, self-rejection, anxiety and depression. It is also clear that one of the alarming aspects of the loss of social and cultural self-esteem and a lack of self-recognition is that, in the absence of protective mechanisms, social disintegration may take place. (p. 69)

These fractures to Indigenous social hierarchies came at the expense of displaced emotional bonding and cut off language transmission, leaving cultural identity paled in value and actually becoming a liability in many cases. Through this process of undermining internal social dynamics, Indigenous culture became inverted on itself with a common legacy of parents' choice to 'protect' their children from the pain that could

result from speaking the language of their ancestors that went back thousands of years; it was now a physical liability. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation's research (Mussell, 2005) revealed that the males in Aboriginal society paid the major cost of assimilation. They were marginalized either through physical displacement or the reassignment of their social and cultural roles by the structures of the greater Canadian society, a task for which they had no preparation or reason to subscribe. Mussell commented on the traditional conceptions of the natural organization of Indigenous culture: "The social structures outside the person that promote and sustain practices for maintaining, supporting and restoring balance provide the context for the development of positive self-care practices" (p. 26). Neither did the intrusion leave women unaffected, with their traditional roles impacted by the disempowering practices, which left the social infrastructure of local communities weakened and vulnerable to outside influences (Armstrong, 1996; Fiske et al., 2001; Kenny, 2004).

The Emotional Legacy

Ongoing mainstream cultural practices, entrenched in codification and structural inner relativism of the dominant Discourse, continue to negatively influence Indigenous lifestyles. In no small part this is a result of the imposition of Westernized values and conditioning language. Through schools, politics, or economics, Indigenous cultural continuity has been narrowed, which has reduced the traditional modes of self-expression for Indigenous peoples. Most striking, Hallett et al.'s (2007) report *Aboriginal Language Knowledge and Youth Suicide* stemmed from earlier research findings (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) that connect the rates of early school withdrawal and, most extremely, youth suicide with local band control of a variety of markers, including "health, education, child protection and policing services, . . . [as well as] secure access to traditional lands, and the construction of facilities for preserving cultural artifacts and traditions" (p. 392). This report noted that "youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in those few communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own Native language" (p. 392). Moreover, a significant body of work has argued that counseling Indigenous peoples with therapy and wellness practices delivered through psychological narratives premised on politically

privileged models of mental health behavior is essentially an extension of colonialism (Appo & Haertel, 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Holdstock, 2000; Tapping, 1993).

Incoming cultures supplant local heritage via political or institutional manipulation of existing social structures. In turn, imperialism is, in part, the accompanying structural framework of linguistic privilege, typically ideologically driven and backed by economic or political forces that house and articulate the discourse of hegemony. This in part is why Philippson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) refer to English (or any colonizing language) as a 'killer' language. Not only does the dominant Discourse impose itself, but, through a negative reciprocity, it is also doubly effective by eroding the social function and emotional articulation that language contributes to cultural community. In turn, the incoming language subverts the culture of its collective identity with an imported template.

In conclusion, the legacy of colonialism speaks to a historical project whereby a colonizing narrative was imposed on Indigenous peoples. This narrative has disrupted the cultural framework that holds together Indigenous communities. In turn, politics and education have diminished local identity and gradually supplanted it with an imported version intent on acculturating Indigenous people to Western models. The result has been trauma, with lingering effects on the traditional self-determination of Indigenous identity (Kreuter et al., 2003), as well as present and immediate challenges, as mental health researchers Kirmayer et al. (2000) stated: "Cultural discontinuity and oppression have been linked to high rates of depression, alcoholism, suicide, and violence in many communities, with the most dramatic impact on youth" (p. 607). The clear implication, stated frankly, is that when individuals or entire communities and cultures are subordinated, it affects their well-being and resilience (Wilkinson, 2005).

These data provide compelling insight into the intimate relationships among language, cultural identity, and community self-expression of positive mental health. Tracing the path and strategy of colonial intrusion and the legacy of trauma, we cannot underestimate the degree to which politically driven hegemony has colonized local identity through a structural imposition of locally defined cultural frameworks. These

research examples validate what many Elders and Indigenous activists have consistently repeated: that without language, there is no (cultural) identity (Canada, 2005).

In the next section of the literature I examine the colonial project of overriding Indigenous identity and the language erosion.

Language Erosion

As the previous sections have outlined, and recalling Freire's (1985) reminder to 'read the Word' and 'read the World,' our contemporary reality reflects the role of ideology, political power, and discourse, which all substantially frame the challenges that Indigenous communities currently face. With regard to the literature on framing cultural identity, an examination of the loss of language illustrates a revealing measure of how it has been transformed through political economy.

Language Shift

Indigenous languages are typically transmitted orally. When a speech community shifts a language to an incoming discourse, along with the spoken presence, there is an accompanying loss of traditions, cultural practices, and localized knowledge. Over the past 20 years, Fishman's (1991) Graded Inter-generational Disruption Scale has served as the evaluative framework that underpins the theoretical evaluation of a language shift. In brief, the 8-level scale works top-down: Level 1 is a publicly prominent, ubiquitous everyday language heard, seen, and read across social and legal institutions. This is the state and health of English in Canada. Level 8 is represented by languages that have some remaining speakers, typically the elderly; the languages have little to no economic or political presence. In effect, the closer to level 8 that a language is, because it is not being used in functions beyond cultural domains, it risks extinction within a generation; there are numerous Indigenous examples in the current context. Languages at these stages suggest that an imposition has interrupted the language transmission, and it has few new speakers. In turn, younger generations have likely never had access to the language of their heritage and, in essence, have been embedded in the language of the majority. In Canada, most Indigenous languages fall between levels 5 and 7. It is useful to note that the scale tends to reflect sociopolitical qualifiers in terms of its numerical representation of spoken-language presence.

Political and migratory factors contribute to the ever-shifting dynamics in the area of language minority rights and education, and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) has contributed passionate and compelling arguments to broaden the understanding of the ethical value of linguistic diversity and preservation and the ongoing educational ramifications that challenge marginalized minority and Indigenous language communities.

The Global Picture

Much of the language suppression of the Indigenous people has generally followed a similar path. Over the last 100 years patterns and strategies of language erosion are similar for the contexts of Canadians, Americans, Hawaiians, the Maori, and the northern Laplanders in Europe (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). These minorities and their lineages have been deemed expendable costs of the global-stewardship project rooted in the Enlightenment.

Across the world over the past 200 years the political and economic forces of imperialism and colonialism have overwhelmed Indigenous communities, their languages, and their cultural identities (Bodely, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The repercussions of social and cultural intrusion have induced a language shift away from endemic expression, with half of the world's almost 7,000 languages left endangered. In the last 40 years alone, the politics and discourse of globalization have encroached on local communities, and close to 30 language families—more than 200 languages—have become extinct (Campbell et al., 2013). This legacy of languages with lineages of thousands of years—for example, here in the heart of Cree territory—evidence has shown the Indigenous presence reaching back more than 4,000 years (Stolte, 2012) but being extinguished over a relatively short time. Seen through this lens of political and cultural imperialism, Diamond's (1997) guns, germs, and steel theory becomes a detailed chronicle of how science and economics facilitate the Trojan horse of globalization, which has steadily and dialectically coerced into reality a homogenized citizenry. This pattern, as I discussed earlier with regard to the discourse of hegemony and the frames of politicized ideology, reveals the concerted effort of colonizing forces that has left irreplaceable and uniquely diverse cultures and localized speech communities compromised and weakened, with many currently near extinction.

The Canadian Context

Closer to home, Canadian colonialism has been highly effective in eroding Indigenous languages. The shell of Turtle Island (present-day North America) was once, in part, home to more than 300 languages (McCarthy, 2003). Canada has approximately 50 mostly moribund languages remaining. As of 2001, less than 1 in 4 of the 1,000,000 Indigenous Canadians reported being able to hold a conversation in their Aboriginal language (Norris, 2007). By 2011, although the total Indigenous population climbed to 1.4 million, the number of speakers had dropped to just over 213,000 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Although the three most spoken Canadian languages—Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut—have prospects for sustaining speakers into the next several generations, it should also be noted that both Cree and Ojibway have seen steady downward erosion of first-language-speaker production over the past decades. Inuktitut, which for a long time had the benefit of an isolated geography that traditionally prevented considerable outside-language contact, too has suffered erosion in the daily use of the Inuit language (Canada, 2011). It is interesting to note that one case of a Canadian Indigenous language comes from this example:

> Algonquin, [also] called Atikamekw, has the highest retention rate among all First Nations languages. About 98 per cent of people who claim the dialect as their mother tongue will continue to speak it at home throughout their lives. However, only about 5,900 Canadians speak the 13,000-year-old language. (Curtis, 2012, para. 14)

To put the erosion of Canadian Indigenous language into context, the number of persons in Canada who report speaking Tagalog, a Philippine-based language, increased the most, to 64%, between 2006 and 2011, which brought the total to nearly 279,000, up from 170,000 five years earlier (Canada, 2011, p. 5). These immigrants to Canada can access their language in their home country. Because of the home geography of Tagalog, if the community members want to share or expose their offspring to their heritage, they can access their language and cultural lineage. Ironically, Indigenous Canadians, who live in the territory of their endemic heritage, are limited by their geography and face historical oppression to the cultural structure of their heritage. As a result of that history,

they face other, more immediate and more pressing challenges that have marginalized the central cog of their heritage.

Although a language shift is certainly occurring among immigrating peoples who voluntarily choose to come to Canada, this aspect of language shift occurred at a point in our national history when colonial assimilation practices were evident for at least a century. By the time of much of the Eastern European immigration in the early 20th century and then in the mid to late 1960s, Indigenous Canadians had already experienced the severity of streaming into French- or English-based residential schools, and the government's banning of traditional ceremonies had driven many of these practices underground to survive. At the same time, political maneuvering separated bands and communities.

Equally important is that the Indigenous population in Canada is among the fastest growing demographic in Canada: 20% between 2006 and 2011. Although they are losing speakers at a steady rate, the median Indigenous age is 28, compared to 41 for the rest of Canada. These numbers are further compounded by the fact that close to 30% of the 1.4 million Aboriginal Canadians are under the age of 14 (Regulative, 2013). This statistic is especially striking when we take the role of residential schools into account as a method of cutting off intergenerational language transmission. Motivated by the fear that their children would suffer as they did in government-run schools, over the past several generations thousands of former residential school students decided not to pass on their heritage language. Therefore, in the hope of protecting their children from further abuse and racism, many Indigenous people have inadvertently contributed to the erosion of hundreds of languages across North America. This politically subversive process has severely compromised the potential of language and cultural continuity and, in turn, has prevented many tens of thousands of the current younger generation of Indigenous Canadians from having the personal experience of expressing themselves in the language of their heritage.

Because of their colonial history, Canadian Indigenous people now largely speak only English (Statistics Canada, 2011). In turn, these children become parents and, in many thousands of cases, do not pass on the language. A great deal of qualitative

Indigenous knowledge has been eroded one speaker at a time when the people are unable to pass on what they have been given because of external, social inequities that have marginalized their language and its merits. Language shift and the qualitative loss that has affected subsequent generations are arguably the central challenges to sustaining the spoken presence of Indigeneity. The recent Truth & Reconciliation Hearings brought the human element of language loss and cultural identity into focus. Young people, for the most part, have to rely on an English translation of their heritage to become acquainted with its worldview.

School-Based Language Learning

In First Nation, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) schools the language of instruction is predominantly English, because Indigenous Canadian children are no longer hearing their native languages spoken at home or in the community; thus the languages have been severely compromised (Blair & Fredeen, 1995; Government of Canada, 1996; Saskatchewan Indigenous Languages Committee, 1991).

To understand the reality of Indigenous language education within Canadian schools, it is helpful to interpret this issue and its subsequent challenges of regular contact to nourish Indigenous identity from a wider sociopolitical lens among other minority languages (Park, 2013). Despite Canada's multicultural image, with minorities now the norm, especially among urban populations, and our heritage claims of having a multiculturalism policy Canadian education is still rooted in the orientation of "language as problem" (Ruiz, 1984) whereby the integration and cultural assimilation of linguistic minorities are the goals of education. Danesi and Cummins (1990) affirmed these notions and underscored "racist assumptions among the majority of Canadians" (p. 15), with much of language education amounting to a peripheral form of political correctness. Apart from basic communication skill—300500 base words of vocabulary, simple grammar, polite greetings, and so on—school language education often consists of festival-type stereotypical superficial activities: food, costumes, and crafts. I recall from my own childhood some of these cultural activities. As Grade 4 social studies students in Ms. Pearson's class, we explored the topic of Native Canadians' threading of beads on moccasins. Later, with Monsieur Johnson, we spent junior high class time in the home

economics room making crepes, using only French-language ingredients. As Cummins and Danesi (1990) stated, most ethnic communities are responsible for the heritage language development of their children in spite of the important role of schools and the national multiculturalism policy in Canada. This disconnect is largely attributed to the indifference of the dominant groups in Canada toward minority heritages and languages. The more well-enrolled second language and immersion programs available are the result of the initiatives of the settling groups in Canada (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Italian, Punjabi, Spanish, and Ukrainian) whose immigrant-led speaker base has sufficient numbers to warrant the creation of immersion or partial-immersion programs and language-based curricula to sustain the cultural heritage of their Diaspora (Alberta Education, 2014; Garcia, 2003).

Alberta: Languages and Learning

In Alberta the four most spoken languages, in descending order of number of speakers, are Cree, Dakota (Sioux), Blackfoot, and Dene (Statistics Canada, 2006). Among the speech community and territory where I conducted my research are approximately 15,000 mother-tongue Cree speakers (Statistics Canada, 2011). In schools, though limited, there is a language-program presence. For example, in the Edmonton Public School Board, two schools offer Cree elementary second-language programs, and the Amiskwaciy Academy (junior/senior high school) has a program of Aboriginal language studies. According to the *Alberta Native News* (Copley, 2014) website, five Edmonton Catholic schools offer Nehiyaw Pimatisiwin Cree language and cultural programs that have a quoted enrolment of 1,200 students.

Local Indigenous students are receiving some peripheral exposure to their language and cultural heritage within the Canadian school system, but even schools with Elder involvement are governed by school schedules, access and permission for students, and administrative concerns, which all add layers of institutional protocol beyond the already marginalized state of Indigenous languages. What schools with language programs and/or active Elders do offer their Indigenous students must be acknowledged as better than no access to heritage at all.

The Alberta Education Cree Program of Studies includes the following quotation from eminent Cheyenne scholar Richard E. Littlebear:

> To reverse this influence of English, families must retrieve their rightful position as the first teachers of our languages. They must talk our languages every day, everywhere, with everyone, anywhere. But if they are going to relinquish this teaching responsibility to the schools, then they must be supportive. (Alberta Education, 2007, p. 3)

Freire's colleague, Macedo (1997), expressed what can be applied to the case of residential schooling in Canada and its legacy of failing to

> provide a meaningful education situated in a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform and reproduce meaning—it must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived culture. (p. 274)

In Canada, despite thousands of years of lineage, Indigenous languages are not recognized as official. My initial inquiries about undertaking this research in a school setting were met with administrative reticence to recognize the benefit of providing time and access to students to investigate the topic within school schedules. Consequently, the process of finding an opportunity to access and explore cultural ontology, although certainly a rich and valid source of language-driven cultural continuity, was not a simple task because of other social realities that inform Indigenous identity and access to language and cultural continuity. The reality is that, aside from language immersion programs, most cultural education explorations offered in public school are time constrained. The exposure is akin to little splashes, much like the students' moving from class to class and banking their funds of knowledge from each subject in an account of curricular information. For a cultural mentoring program, the extra time that moving the project outside of that institutional realm required certainly extended the duration of the research. Consequently, though, that extra time brought with it a more nuanced sociocultural literacy to enable an understanding of the complexity of the issues that surround this topic.

The purpose of recapitulating the reality of language erosion is not to bemoan the loss and dwell on information that I shared earlier, but rather to underscore the challenge of accessing a worldview endemic to local geography, especially when it has historically

served such a vital function in the communication, expression and emotional well-being of a community. As Norris (1998) asserted, language is "not only a means of communication, but a link which connects people with their past and grounds their social, emotional and spiritual vitality" (p. 8). It is sad that, regardless of the speech community or heritage, a shift to the dominant language transforms any culture into an exercise in relativism. Without language to anchor cultural identity in lived reference, practices intended to maintain traditions are undertaken in English and become weakened into a pejorative sentiment. According to Eco (2003) this approach results in a subjective approach, process and product. In contrast, language and literacy contribute to a sense of cultural identity and emotional wellness (Williams & Mumtaz, 2007).

Indigenous identity is a cultural dynamic that bonds members to the lineage of their heritage, which is informed by local geography and collective memory. These ingredients express a unique worldview that communicates rich cultural knowledge. Ultimately, the pragmatic implication of this research is that youth mentoring gains value by extending cultural continuity through the intergenerational exchange. And, in taking us to the next section of the literature, that nourishing exchange draws its qualitative content from Indigenous cultural knowledge, teaching, and values.

Indigenous and Cultural Knowledge

When a knowledgeable old person dies, a whole library disappears. (Grenier, 1998, p. 1)

Nature as a Compass

Cross-cultural contact between Indigenous people and the assimilation practices of settling Europeans have revealed three noticeable differences that have emerged since colonization; science, religion, and government. Deloria (1997) explained that "science and religion are inherited ways of believing certain things about the world" (p. 3). The Canada Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005) articulated the role and significance of language in First Nations cultural identity and produced the document *Towards a New Beginning*, which states:

The fundamental relationship reflected by our First Nation, Inuit and Métis languages is our connection to the land. The words for "the land" in our various

languages reflect the fact that the land is more than the mere physical landscape comprising the various material elements known to science. The "land," the "country," the "place"—all these and equivalent terms have an even subtler meaning. (p. 22)

Warren (2001) defined Indigenous knowledge as the "knowledge generated by communities and ethnic groups that usually pass the knowledge from one generation to the next through oral transmission, and it is focused on the micro-environment in which it is generated" (p. 446). Since time immemorial, Indigenous people across the globe have cultivated and nurtured an intimate and respectful relationship with the land and its provisions curated through agriculture, hunting, and general subsistence (Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995).

Framed by the local geography and informed by the subtle rhythms and cycles of nature, local knowledge has been gleaned over countless generations and informs how and why Indigenous people view the world through a holistic paradigm (Harrison, 2007; Mühlhäusler, 1995; Suzuki & Knudston, 1992). This knowledge is communicated in the form of stories, myths, and teachings that inform the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of the community. This body of knowledge is the collective memory of a local community. Through oral language, these cultures extend their heritage by sharing the accumulated, context-specific local knowledge, which reflects the subtle accumulated patterns of nature on which rests their ability to survive (Cajete, 1994; Harrison, 2008; Posey, 2004). Here in Alberta, researchers such as Blood and Heavyhead (2007) discussed Kanai geography and oral recollections of relationship to and through local geography.

The synergy among the land, history, and people cannot be dissected or reduced to decontexutalized skills, behaviors, or universalized languages. Boroditsky (2011b) explained that, indeed, local language and local cultural referents affect perceptions of the world:

> But now, decades later, a solid body of empirical evidence showing how languages shape thinking has finally emerged. The evidence overturns the long-standing dogma about universality and yields fascinating insights into the origins of knowledge and the construction of reality. (The results have important implications for law, politics and education.) (p. 63)

The increasing current linguistic research has demonstrated that language is in fact a cultural code of communication unique to individual speech communities (Boroditsky 2011a, 2001b; Everett, 2012; Levinson & Evans, 2009). Critical theorist Norton (2010) described linguistic code as something that "is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning" (p. 1). Likewise, specifically with regard to culture, it is important to understand how endemic languages are grounded in an Indigenous philosophy with common features across communities the world over. Battiste (2002) suggested that

> values are so deeply embedded within Indigenous knowledges that it is difficult to distinguish the empirical content from the moral message. Stories about animals are sometimes not about animals at all, but about proper human behavior, and the most uproarious tales about the foibles and misdeeds of animals often contain wise insights about community ecology. (p. 19)

More specifically, language therefore represents a kind of communicative echo that contains unique expressions (metaphors about time, space, relationship, nature, morality-ethics-life, etc.) that are specific to and born out of the physical, geographical context from which they emanate (Basso, 1996; Boroditsky, 2011a; De Blij, 2009). For localized endemic communities, as the central communicative product of their geography, language carries Indigenous knowledge.

Ethnobiology

From a scientific perspective, Indigenous people's encoding taxonomies applied to their flora and fauna refer to the discipline known as *ethnobiology* (Maffi, 2001b). In part, ethnobiology explores the concepts, skills, and wisdom that come from living close to the land. Examining such a framework has some important practical implications that correlate linguistic and biological diversity. At the level of ecology, recent scholarship has shown the correlative impact of linguistic diversity on local biodiversity, as evidenced by over 35 'hot spots' around the world where this interdependent symbiosis has been documented (Harrison, 2007). For example, 13 of the top 17 countries of megadiversity in terms of richness of species are also among the top 25 countries home to endemic languages (Harmon, 1996; Maffi & Harmon, 2002). Research has demonstrated the connections between landscape and biodiversity and, in turn, has shown how languages

are essentially etched out of eons of localized living within a particular geography (Everett, 2012). As Mühlhäusler (1995) noted, "Life in a particular human environment is dependent on people's ability to talk about it" (p. 155). This knowledge is the ongoing and refined product of keen observation and intimate ecological knowledge that Dumont (1976) described as "three hundred sixty degree vision" (p. 5), which reminds us of using the circular metaphor of the traditional medicine wheel and the Indigenous worldview, with its emphasis on balance within change:

> What is "traditional" about traditional knowledge is not its antiquity, but the way it is acquired and used. In other words, the social process of learning and sharing knowledge, which is unique to each indigenous culture, lies at the very heart of its "traditionality." Much of this knowledge is actually quite new, but it has a social meaning, and legal character, entirely unlike the knowledge indigenous people acquire from settlers and industrialized societies. (Four Directions Council in Canada, 1996, p. 4)

Many traditional Indigenous people are, geographically speaking, very savvy. Their survival, certainly more in the past, literally depended on localized knowledge of nature. Their communication and language, as Davis (2009) noted, is an "old-growth forest of the mind" (p. 3). Despite this literacy, endemic people were nonetheless considered illiterate in Western modernity's atomized template of literacy such as the decontextualized autonomous skills of reading and writing (Street, 1985). However, deep knowledge of, reliance on and respect for the cycles of nature and the land have forged in these groups a sense of stewardship of nature in gratitude for its centrality to their existence.

Understood as a kind of embedded localized Discourse, Indigenous knowledge is information about and within a particular local ecology that is an articulation of both the worldview and the curriculum and informs relationships, teaching, and models of behavior. When I initially began to investigate Indigenous knowledge in the academic literature, I encountered the very eloquent anthropological writing of Basso (1996). In his portrait he described the process that cultural communities access, visit, or are situated within the realm of local physical geography. As Battiste (2002) also suggested, these natural phenomena (localized cycles of natures, seasonal occurrences, flora, fauna, and wildlife are also examples) become referenced in language, teachings, and expressions of

worldview that are reflective of the communal experience, and they serve as a form of local wisdom that Basso refers to in his book entitled 'Wisdom Sits in Places." Accessed wisdom becomes part of the collective memory of the community. A grounded, bottom-up approach to situating cultural knowledge within the framework of geography, again à la Basso, appears in a recent cultural biodiversity project. Young people visit local sites, discover the scientific method in measuring the subtle rhythms of their local ecology, and, through the process, enrich their holistic literacy to become agents of cultural continuity: "White Mountain Apache culture emphasizes the infusion of the physical world with mental and spiritual dimensions. The Apache language illustrates the inseparability of the two: for example, the root word *ni'* can refer to either the 'mind' or 'land'" (Terralingua, 2010, para. 2). Therefore, specific locations within the physical landscape remind people of history; and, in turn, people's behaviors reflect and inform the symbolic importance of the geography (Terralingua, 2010).

Local Knowledge and Cultural Continuity

In the face of historical trauma, cultural continuity is a critical contributor to individual and collective identity in that it serves a powerful and pragmatic role; if it is available and accessed, it serves a practical and powerful role in engaging agency and building resilience both in terms of healing practices and as a preventative measure. An example of research on colonization and its resultant health repercussions is that of Kirmayer et al. (2000) and Chandler and Hallett (2007), who correlated Indigenous mental health and protective factors, which is referred to as practices of *cultural continuity*.

To underscore the tight synergy among land, identity, and health, researchers have quite recently found that the onset of Indigenous diabetes is correlated to the gradual loss of language and traditional practices that run through the lineage of cultural communities. Oster et al. (2014) stated, "Those First Nations that appeared to have more cultural continuity (measured by traditional Indigenous language knowledge) had significantly lower diabetes prevalence" (Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, & Toth, 2014, Abstract, Results section, para. 1). McIvor (2009) discussed the factors of cultural continuity that contribute to resilience as a grounded strategy of protection to buffer the damaging

potential of negative emotional risks, in part brought on by colonial assimilation. In turn, these factors build individual and collective resilience to mainstream cultural homogenization.

Sharing Knowledge

Reflecting critically on contemporary perspectives and the central role of place in regards to extending Indigenous knowledge, Caduto and Bruchac (1991) wrote:

> In North America today people are realizing that we have not listened well, that we have neglected . . . that Native American stories hold power and wisdom for helping us learn how to live in balance with other forms of life. Through the lessons of ecology—the study of the relationships between living things and their environments—we have reaffirmed the ancient knowledge for the stories, . . . that there is an empirically obvious relationship between people and Earth. . . . The lessons for survival today come from listening to the old stories and from the studying the laws of how natural systems sustain themselves. (p. 4)

As I discussed earlier in the theoretical framework, the epistemology of (cultural) meaning-making is grounded in authority informed by local history and the collective presence of lineage. This interpretive knowledge and holism is equally a form of figurative literacy that is fundamental in composing an embodied, experiential worldview and identity.

Indigenous scholars, including Battiste (2000), Cajete (1995), and Brant Castellano (2000), have expanded the scope and understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems. In turn, language, as the articulated expression of local knowledge, wisdom, and culture, becomes the vehicle for an experiential embodied articulation of the transmission of that lineage (Blue Quills, 2009). The following are some of the essential features of Indigenous knowledge as Canadian Indigenous scholar Brant Castellano outlined them:

> It is a personal knowledge: Information passed on to others is seen as relative rather than absolute. What is said, the circumstances, and what the listeners themselves know are all taken into consideration in a contextual way that reveals the uniqueness of the knowledge passed on at that time.
> It is transmitted orally: In contrast with the contemporary technology-assisted dissemination of information as quickly and as far ranging as possible, Indigenous knowledge favours quality over quantity in the personal nature of transmitting information between two people or groups. This is understood within the context of the relationship, and the affiliation is thus maintained.

It is experiential: Indigenous ways of knowing value the independence of the learner. Through observation, listening, and participation, the individual has a learning experience with minimal interference to personalize and deepen the knowledge.

It is holistic: a consideration of all the senses, the spirit, and trusting intuition are features that describe the comprehensiveness of holistic knowledge.

To conclude, the process of sharing, teaching, and extending cultural lineage requires knowledge of worldview, which, expressed through language metaphors, analogies, stories, and place-based local knowledge references, represents the expression of local lineage. In the transmission of cultural knowledge and language between generations of a speech community, worldview is most naturally mediated and communicated by those with lived experience and literacy in the Discourse of the local narrative.

Urban Centers, Youth Challenges, and Mentoring

One of the central challenges of this research revolved around leveraging open qualitative space to engage agency and extend cultural continuity. However, as I have articulated in portions of the theoretical framework and literature review, ideology, politics, and cultural intrusion have imposed structural and qualitative challenges to the retention of Indigenous practices. The legacy of colonialism reveals that it is not a simple path to travel. Before agency can be enacted, critical literacy, in the words of Freire (1970), is required in becoming 'conscientized' to history and the epistemic effect of cultivating a top-down marginalization of minorities and cultural heritage. Once the structural hurdles of colonialism are identified as products of ideology and hegemony, the holism of Indigenous knowledge can stand on its own merits to become an accessible resource and gain qualitative traction. This section continues along the path of conscientization as the literature transitioned from broad historical and theoretical considerations and narrowed to the urban context that influences Indigeneity, its effects on youth, and, finally, to the vital role of mentors as cultural stewards.

Urban and Youth Displacement

Although it has been established that access and agency with cultural continuity are integral to the emotional well-being of Indigenous communities (Kirmayer et al.,

2009; McIvor, 2008), the effect of colonialism and residential schools has nonetheless played a role in fracturing Indigenous communities. In turn, cultural destabilization has led people off reservations and into cities (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). Subsequently, urban challenges such as housing, schooling, family, and employment place demands on Indigenous people, which, in turn, explains the reality that most urban Indigenous people shift away from their heritage towards dominant languages (Corrado & Cohen, 2011; Norris, 2007; Norris & Jantzen, 2003). These factors have cumulatively contributed to the steady, ongoing erosion of Indigenous language presence (Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

Aside from the severe language loss that Indigenous communities face, one of the most striking legacies of colonial trauma in contemporary society is the disproportionately high number of FNIM youth in the child welfare system. Here in Alberta, as of September 2014, despite the fact that Aboriginal people constitute less than 5% of the total population, 69% of the children and youth who receive services are Aboriginal (Alberta Human Services, 2014). These numbers are in no small part the result of the undermining of Indigenous social and cultural frameworks, and, not surprisingly, the research spoke of the "disproportionate prevalence of at-risk factors for Aboriginal youth" (Corrado & Cohen, 2011, p. 1).

Providing government welfare, protecting children from community strife, and placing them in the care of government-run agencies or, likewise, a mainstream institution such as public education can be understood as two sides of the same coin. Both contexts are institutions and have direct access to students or youth for significant periods of time. Although child welfare/family services would surely claim to be helping, it can be argued that government intervention to address community dysfunction is a solution to social ills that were principally caused by a political dialectic and the cultural subversion facilitated by government-run residential schools. Therefore, although they offer immediate practical support, government practices potentially contribute to long-term dependence, which suggests a continued presence of institutional involvement. As the findings chapter shows, these subtle challenges play a role in limiting youth to regular access to the kin and community of their heritage and, by default, further the cultural erosion. A comment from Nancy, a local school liaison and one of the pilot participants,

underscored this ongoing reality and contended that the colonial legacy is far from healed: "The kids—many—have been traumatized by their Aboriginal family; the structure of the family fell apart; there's more kids in welfare than ever went to residential schools— . . . in some treaties, one of every two." Indigenous educators are aware of issues that compound the challenges. Cree educator Brian MacDonald (as cited in *Cree Beyond Words*, 2010) reminded us that

> we're losing a whole whack of them [Aboriginal students] at the Grade 10 level. And we know why: kids having kids. That's another problem we're facing. A lot of social issues we have to deal with, and in order to give back the pride, we have to teach those kids who they really are. (para. 8)

Ultimately, separation from their families and placement in the child welfare system have left thousands of young Indigenous people, especially in cities, without a network and little to no contact with family, community, or cultural heritage. As a result, beyond the influence of schools, peers, and media, a high number of Indigenous youth face a great challenge in defining who they are (Corrado & Cohen, 2011; McCarty et al., 2006; Weenie, 2000). In this project, six of the eight apprentices were living in group homes.

Cultural Mentors

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) contended that language can play an important and tangible role in urban Aboriginal people's maintenance of a sense of identity. In turn, taking into account that one in five people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue reside within the boundaries of major cities (Norris & Jantzen, 2003, p. 93), efforts to extend Indigenous cultural continuity are well served by working bottom-up from within the Indigenous speech community. With the reality and challenges that Aboriginal people face in urban life, this research rested on the premise of access to available authentic cultural capital and the generation of practical progress. This point is critical, because it is within an Indigenous framework that mentors who serve as cultural stewards are practical and trusted sources in making a positive and lasting contribution.

Brodkin and Coleman (1996) defined *mentor* as

> one who provides one-to-one support and attention, is a friend and a role model, boosts the child's self-esteem, enhances a student's educational experience; . . .

with the goal of enabling a special bond of mutual commitment based on the development of respect, communication and personal growth. (p. 21)

Other aspects of mentoring include the adult role of providing friendship, guidance, direction, and support for children and youth outside their own families (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005; Smith-Mohammed, 1998). This nurturing relationship from community members would certainly carry a positive and reassuring message to the burgeoning self-esteem and independence of adolescents and youth (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Jekielek et al., 2002; Sipe, 1996; Strand & Peacock, 2002).

Although the Western notion of mentoring has a more individualized emphasis, the Indigenous approach traditionally takes a cross-community perspective. Mentoring between generations is time spent together to help youth to integrate the community values of spirituality, reciprocity, and social responsibility for cultural continuity (Weinberger, 1999). In Aboriginal culture, an Elder is a person who has lived an extended life, maintains a healthy lifestyle, and has a wealth of cultural information and knowledge (Ellerby, 2001; Wilson, 1996). Described in a more traditional sense, Elders (and mentors) are understood to be the keepers and transmitters of Indigenous cultural knowledge (Ermine, 1998). Ermine applied the idea of dialogues to the oral teachings of Elders and the passing on of their accumulated wisdom, humor, and experience through narratives stories and modeling through a socially mediated co-construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Research on Aboriginal mentoring has supported the approach that, in part because of its structure, group-based mentoring both offers a nonthreatening atmosphere and fosters mutual learning and capacity building among peers (Alberta, 2007; Delaney et al., 2002; Herrera & Gale, 2002).

Engagement with this discourse is comparable to the polishing of an interpretive lens that oversees the cultural map, or worldview. As a result, under the stewardship of a cultural mentor, stepping onto the terrain and becoming familiar with figurative and symbolic signposts begins to build a nuanced form of cultural literacy Hymes (1971) referred to as *communicative competency* (Canadian Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005; Easley et al., 2004; Hymes, 1971; Strand & Peacock, 2002).

Recognizing the necessity for engagement in the extension of traditions and knowledge, especially for those without regular access to a network, Cree Elder Alfred Bonais (as cited in Lusty, 2000) said, "'It is up to us . . . to reach out and help the youth because they have lost so much of the traditional ways'" (para. 12). A number of examples of community Elder involvement show the willingness of the keepers of the knowledge to pass on what they know to the next generation (Canadian Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005; Easley et al., 2004). Local examples from the Alberta context include the experiences of both the Kainai reserve in southern Alberta and its Youth Council in addressing community health issues, as well as the Paul Band reserve near Edmonton and a local adolescent mentoring program that operates through the Bent Arrow Society (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

The notion of master-apprentice language and cultural mentoring stems from the California Indigenous language work of Leanne Hinton (2003). Her research contributions have been the subject of two pertinent publications: *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning* (Hinton, 2003) and *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, which Hinton and eminent linguist Ken Hale co-edited in 2001. She continues to contribute to the field by navigating a path for those motivated to keep their linguistic heritage alive. The primary focus of the initial MAP was on engaging the apprentice and master speakers in a language-immersion relationship (Hinton, 2002). These extended projects were 8-12 month commitments, with up to 500 hours of one-to-one master-apprentice language time. Research on master-apprentice partnerships in the past (Gardner, 2005; Hinton, 2003) reported the inclusion of master speakers with an inherent desire to pass on their language and cultural experiences. Moreover, it would be short sighted to conceive of a MAP partnership without a mentoring component. In that respect, I conceived of this as chiefly a cultural mentoring project, whereas our participant master speakers were certainly willing, enthusiastic, and motivated to share their language with learners who had little direct personal exposure to their heritage. Therefore, and taking into account the limited number of fluent speakers available, our particular masters served in the role of cultural guides as much as strictly transmitters of language.

Cultural mentoring and introductory language learning, especially marginalized minority languages, will likely not provide the economic benefit to feed or clothe these young people, but the time that they spent with peers and in the presence of an older member of their heritage began the process of seeding cultural continuity. Moreover, this seed is precisely the qualitative value that Elders and fluent language speakers bring to the mentoring process. More philosophically understood, as a cultural, literacy, and emotional investment, this metaphorical seed, the cultural paradigm, can take root, become nourished with time, and in the future be drawn from with a grounded, secure sense of awareness, knowledge, and personal identity. Finally, and despite the rather modest linguistic depth with which any Indigenous language program has initially explored, it cannot be overemphasized that cultural literacy that has grown out of intergenerational time with mentors plays a role in insulating and guarding against even the most extreme risk behavior (Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

The qualitative space at the intersection of Indigenous culture, identity, and self-expression is a necessary dynamic that serves to inform and motivate language learning. Moreover, recognition of the deep cultural connection between land, language, and Indigenous identity as a marker of cultural worldview, expresses a distinguishing quality unique to each language and its speakers (Canada, 2005). Spielmann (1998), who learned Anishinaabemowin as an adult, echoed this notion:

> If a person has his or her language and identity, it can go a long way in preventing assimilation into another culture and in preserving tradition-specific ways of relating to others. . . . The philosophy, world view, spirituality, and culture-specific ways of thinking and doing things of a people are built right into the very structure of their language. It is a route to seeing history and an alternative way of reconstructing a more accurate and representative picture of history.
> (pp. 238-239)

In the final section of the literature review I explore the research, with a focus on aspects of cultural identity, individual agency, and learning. From a cultural perspective, research has underpinned the emotional affiliation between an individual and his or her heritage. Second, second language learning theory applied to the informal small-group mentoring context offers practical insights into aspects of individual and group agency. Ultimately, strengthening cultural identity through a mentoring experience requires

entering and integrating new constructs, ideas, and vocabulary into personal experience, so in the following section I look at pertinent theory with regard to the acquisition of an unfamiliar literacy.

Affiliation: Culture and Language

As I reported earlier, minority identity and expressions of cultural traditions have shifted away from local expression. With each passing generation, presence fades as the structure and discourses of hegemony, framed by epistemology and communicated through politics, education, technology and mass media across all cultures, socialize identity.

Rather than Indigenous communities being orientated within their own worldview, they are communicated through the epistemology and discourse of mainstream social and political realities. Subsequently, Indigenous cultures and traditional worldviews especially have paid a steep price and sit tenuously as their identity continues to be enveloped by mainstream discourses and their local lineage is further eroded. From that perspective, I orientated this research around the immediate goal of building youth awareness of Indigeneity as expressed through language and cultural ideas.

In this final section of the literature review I examine, first, the sociolinguistic research that has drawn on other minority communities involved in cultural retention; and, second, some pertinent second-language learning considerations that offer useful sociocultural insights into mentoring efforts.

Cultural Affiliation Into Agency

In current research Lee (2009) suggested that, in consideration of local and minority identities within the wider sociopolitical framework, bottom-up, internally led approaches can work to create self-defined space for the reaffirmation of personal identity. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1993) emphasized the vital role of reframing perceptions to create conditions for potential agency:

> Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. . . . Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. (p. 226)

To echo the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1971), the political and social conditions of minority cultures must be attended to, achieved through the critical literacy of conscientization, to position local voices toward their local history, which serves as a framework for self-identification and articulation (Freire, 1971).

The inclusion of Elders, mentors, and fluent speakers in a community-based cultural project is a reflection of the Gramscian (Gramsci, 1971) notion of the *organic intellectual*. McLellan (1979) contended that, from within the social class in question, it "creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function" (p. 101).

To these ends, King (2009) looked at the qualitative aspects of the second-language learning of a group of language activists in New Zealand and the particular worldviews that underpin their committed involvement in Maori language revitalization. A crucial function of these second-language speakers across speech communities is their role as intermediate-stage speakers, who are necessary to produce first-language speakers in the future. In Canada this group, the teen to mid-40s people, are largely those who have never themselves had a daily connection with and daily use of their heritage language. The bulk of fluent Maori speakers in New Zealand, as in Canada, are the elder generation, who, for various reasons of historical trauma or negative social stigma, elected not to pass on their language to their children. As if to unintentionally reinforce their trauma, these Elders often lament the lack of speakers required to ensure the survival of languages. Moving forward, it is therefore essential for potential participants in language retention and cultural retention to be aware of the elemental connection between community and language expression in order to foster prospects and guide planning efforts.

Distinguishing between integrative (critical for language revitalization) and instrumental motivation is a key aspect of the desire to learn a language (Gardner, 1985). "It could be described as a decision as to who (or what about the commitment) the learner wants to identify with" (Zuengler, 1989, p. 82). The integrative seeks identification with a group of speakers, whereas the instrumental refers to academic, social, or economic benefit. In Canada the instrumental benefits of speaking English seem obvious, but the

cultural price that the heritage languages of Indigenous peoples pay is ever increasing; thus, integrative motivation, or the lack thereof, needs to be examined and addressed straightaway if change is to be possible (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). King (2009) further explored integrative motivation for adult Maori language learners and broke down the relationship between learners/speakers and the language into three aspects: an initial state of being without the heritage language, an engagement with the language, and a continuing relationship with the language. Orienting oneself towards the language and the sustained commitment to continue learning involves four different motivations in the Maori context, all of which might be applied in contexts with Indigenous languages elsewhere:

1. a quasi-religious worldview, which entails a form of conversion that the individual undergoes;
2. a New Age humanism, which is characterized by "great emphasis upon self-knowledge, inner exploration, and the participation in a continual transformative process" (Melton, 1992, p. 173);
3. a connection with ancestors and Maori culture: That is, the idea of being inspired by parents, grandparents or ancestors allows the informants to link their use of the Maori language with preceding generations. . . . A link with ancestors and culture is obviously a link with identity, thus evoking integrative aspects of SLA theory (King, 2009, p. 102).
4. a connection with Kaupapa Maori philosophy.

The significance of what has occurred for the learners in the Maori context is that they have undergone a paradigm shift. The language and culture of their heritage have fostered a newfound understanding and appreciation by which learning the language has reframed their identity at a personal level. King (2009) pointed out that, although these aspects of integrative motivation are important, there still rests with all individuals their personal agency that explains their motivation in language learning. Comparing the New Zealand and Canadian contexts might offer further insights into individual agency and motivation. The perspective on orienting identity from within the paradigm of local meaning is central to this project. As Mohawk scholar Alfred (2005) noted, there has been enough tribal erosion that, unfortunately, there is both a self-affirming and a political impetus to underpin the cultural continuity:

> Imperialism is inherently a process of homogenization, culturally and politically. It follows then that acting against empire by regenerating culture through the revival of Indigenous languages is inherently anti-empirical. That act of speaking and using Ohkwehonwe languages to reorganize and reframe our existences is perhaps the most radical act we can perform as Ohkwehonwe warriors. (p. 248)

While worded with strong political language, Alfred anchored his position similarly to notions that Fishman (2001) and Kroskrity (2009) called *ideological clarification*. Culture and language retention efforts that communities undertake, as with individuals, as King articulated, are more securely grounded in a sense of not only 'what' the language, means, but also 'why' the language has internal value to a cultural community. Although the history of colonialism might appear beyond the immediate comprehension of youth apprentices, its effects are certainly not beyond them. That legacy lingers with the younger generation, who, despite having little exposure to the riches of their roots, are nonetheless personally familiar with some of the emotional pain. As one of the apprentices, Dana, commented:

> I don't really like to be known as Cree because of all these other people that make Cree people look bad. But knowing the language and knowing there are some respectful Cree people out there, it made me change my outlook. It makes me feel more proud to be a Cree person. . . . In order to speak the language, to me, you have to be proud to learn it.

Echoing notions of ideological clarification, one of the fundamentals goals of enculturating young people into their heritage and informing their cultural experience is in itself an opportunity to fortify integrative motivation and simultaneously clarify cultural ideology. Darrell Kipp (2000) of the Peigan Institute put it this way: "We use the analogy that the language is our grandparents" (p. 67). For young people, cultural mentoring internal to Indigenous communities and between the generations of its members has the potential to play such an instrumental and timely kin-like role. In this regard, those in the community who are able to serve as authentic models of expression and communication of worldview, culture, and language are naturally best able to bring that process to light.

Language-Learning Considerations

For the local cultural retention efforts to retain the tradition and authority of meaning, one of the key factors in a successful learning experience hinges on the language fluency of potential mentors to communicate authentic Indigenous knowledge to apprentices. Although the introductory aspects of cultural mentoring must first open qualitative space by building awareness and integrative motivation, ultimately, it is language learning that fosters sturdy cultural retention. In the final section I explore the research applicable to language learning.

A significant amount of contemporary work on second-language learning, instruction, and program planning is based on the research of Stephen Krashen (1981, 1985, 1987, 1988). One of his main tenets, which I mentioned earlier in my own experience, is that language acquisition differs from language learning. Acquisition is a more holistic processing in a naturalized setting that focuses on communication, whereas learning is a more formalized, conscious practice. Effective second-language instruction emphasizes the act of communicating (in which acquisition is more likely to occur) rather than the formalization of grammar and structure (in learning). This distinction is important in planning for children across a range of ages and throughout elementary and high school. For more mature learners, a balance of both communication and grammar is necessary.

Krashen's (1981) other key elements include the importance of comprehensible input, which means that children must be provided with enough visuals, gestures, background information, and context to make sense of the new language that is being presented. Additionally, the students' emotional affective filters must be kept low, which means that the learning atmosphere must be comfortable and supportive to make the children feel comfortable enough to try out new things and take risks in their language learning. The findings section demonstrates how some of the tenets applied to our mentoring sessions.

Another influential theorist is the Canadian second-language researcher Jim Cummins (1981a, 1984). He articulated the difference between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) for

second-language learners. BICS is the first part of the acquisition process, in which children learn to make themselves understood and exchange basic information. Learners can acquire this content—some scholars have suggested a 500-word base—over several years in a language program with some longitude; it is just as likely that individuals immersed in a language environment in which practical—survival—language becomes the path to immediate meaning and further acculturation can learn the content.

Learners require approximately seven years to develop an academic level of language learning—formal grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and writing proficiency in a language—to foster successful academic achievement. However, without CALP they will not have the foundational literacy that they need to progress. From the cultural perspective of cultural knowledge and linguistic ability, for Indigenous speakers to understand the significance and participate in more nuanced cultural activities such as prayers and ceremonies, an analogy is appropriate between these subtleties and cultural competency, similarly to the principles involved in the more comprehensive literacy of CALP, in that there is a more specific purpose to the communication, and it reflects depth of contextual understanding of the language (Discourse). For an introductory project such as this research, the notion of BICS would have been an appropriate goal for beginner language-learning apprentices with extended exposure. It should be noted that both BICS and CALP involve perspectives and strategies that have emerged from institutional second-language education programs. In this case, Indigeneity reflects a contextual paradigm in which the application of any particular schemata that reflects institutional axiology forgoes its local and qualitative value.

Bilingualism

In addition to some of the theoretical points on second-language teaching, it is relevant to point out that ample research-backed findings support the benefits of bilingualism. In addition, to debunk some of the myths that continue to surround bilingual children and education, there are no contradictory or long-term negative social, cognitive, or academic consequences of dual-language learning, at home or in early education. Jim Cummins (2001), a long-time advocate of bilingual immersion education, stated in no uncertain terms:

> When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality. . . . The research suggests that bilingual children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. (p. 3)

A great deal of research has shown empirical evidence that supports bilingualism and biliteracy and the brain's ability to adapt, benefit, and remain healthy while people communicate and become educated in two or more than two languages (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005; Cummins Bialystok & Martin, 2004, 2000; Davies, 1981; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984). In fact, at the level of societal linguistic diversity, if anything, being bilingual or multilingual expands one's perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities, which for most people around the world is the rule and not the exception:

> To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration supposed by many (particularly, perhaps, by people in Europe and North America who speak a 'big' language); it is rather a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today. (Edwards, 1994, p. 1)

In the words of esteemed renowned Aboriginal scholar Verna Kirkness (1998):

> It must be remembered that language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. Language evolves from those concepts with which a given culture interacts among its members and with the environment. (p. 102)

With language closely intertwined with the expression of cultural identity, not only do young people's participation and beginning to make meaning engage them with their heritage, but the intergenerational process also represents a powerful expression of the collective experience.

Through this theoretical framework and review of the literature I have outlined and oriented the reader to the broad and complex qualitative space that I sought to investigate in this research. The historical realities, the social construction of meaning, the role of discourse, hegemony, and the Canadian contexts all play significant roles in positioning the political and cultural factors that Indigeneity faces. The themes of trauma,

language loss, identity, mentorship, cultural continuity, and learning are among the contributing factors necessary to contextualize a framework of a marginalized linguistic heritage.

In the following chapter I outline the specifics of the research methodology with regard to how this research effort sheds light on the process of practical Indigenous cultural mentoring. The research methodology and the findings that follow show that, as I worked locally, these processes could be and were accessible and able to be engaged. This challenging but manageable qualitative space served as the vehicle to explore with these MAP participants a hopeful space through the lens of a heritage experience. That experience has rich potential to contribute to a refined sense of identity and literacy grounded in meaning as defined in the context of trusted local cultural history.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The Role of the Researcher

This research was premised on a simple idea: to organize access to a qualitative space for urban youth to participate with their Cree cultural heritage. As a participant among the apprentice learners, the language-related goal was oriented around that cultural access through investigating the process, practical considerations, cultural 'content' and participant feedback surrounding the organization of local community-based mentoring. The context of the contemporary reality of Indigeneity in extending cultural continuity has multiple factors, both in content and method, that make an investigation compelling. From an academic perspective, one of the central challenges of qualitative research is to frame the mode and method of portraying the particular cultural narrative. The task becomes challenging in applying a positivist or constructivist epistemology to a qualitative context such as a cultural paradigm (Carjuzaa & Fenimore-Smith, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this cultural narrative covers a breadth of interrelating factors—social history, educational influences, community realities, the legacy of political maneuvering—all of which combine to necessitating an interpretative critical literacy informed by multiple discourses. Conversely, as ontology, Cree worldview is a cultural amalgamation in which the whole of the sum is contextually greater than the individual parts. In turn, as a researcher of these overlapping considerations, I cannot categorize the investigation merely into subsections of skill sets or construe it as a construction of facts. The research challenge is to articulate a qualitative context; it is, after all, the culture that produces the content and therefore positions the meaning-making process within the cultural paradigm and allows that to frame the narrative.

During the early portion of this investigation, I had a conversation that awakened my attention. In turn, that shift, towards the centrality of cultural ontology, would thematically influence to what practical ends this research could suitably be articulated. I spent an afternoon with the pilot-study master speaker, Frank, and the conversation

widened my awareness of Cree beyond language and words to a larger frame of reference. We were brainstorming ideas for the pilot project, and I asked about specific Cree words for various months of the year. It took a moment before he replied; he paused to remember the Cree words for the Western 'idea' as much as the English vocabulary. Frank's comment alerted me to the differing cultural worldviews involved in thinking about time, months, and seasons. He did not remember the exact *month* words, because, in and of themselves, as markers of time, they are not traditionally understood in same way that Western constructs are (Brown, 1982). What is important, he added, are the seasons, which not only very accurately mark cycles of time, but also give context to the situation of an event, ritual, or conversation within a parameter of natural referents.

As the researcher investigating the practical challenge that the continuity of such local practices faces, that example of juxtaposing Cree with Western worldviews struck and stayed with me. Frank's reply gave me pause for reflection. I was not just translating words or planning lessons; I was myself entering into a paradigm of culture: The content cannot be detached from the context. From a cultural vantage point, that is a compelling adventure. As well, it is also somewhat unsettling. Bochner (1984) called such moments *epiphanies*, which reveal and influence the ways that a person can negotiate further incidents "long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (p. 595). For me, this conversation with Frank marked such a demarcation point.

Ethnography

Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that

> in situations where motives, attitudes, beliefs, and values direct much, if not most of human activity, the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer—the human being who can watch, see, listen, question, probe, and finally analyze and organize his direct experience. (p. 13)

In contexts in which community-based cultural and literacy practices are under investigation, Heath and Street (2008) maintained that ethnography is best suited to building a qualitative portrait of a particular people through observational and collected field notes (Denzin, 1997; Harris & Johnson, 2000; Norton, 2010).

Ethnography allows the data to focus on "the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 1).

According to Merriam (1998), an ethnographic study "uncovers and describes belief, values, and attitudes that structure the behaviour of a group" (p. 13). LeCompte and Schensul added that ethnographers seek to generate useful information about the culturally patterned beliefs and behavioral diversity within groups. Heath and Street (2008) described the qualities of a good ethnographer as "visual acuity, keen listening skills, tolerance for detail and capacity to integrate innumerable parts into shifting wholes" (p. 57). Merriam (1998) explained that, in gathering data, whether through meetings or interviews, it is necessary to empathize with the respondents, establish rapport, ask good questions, and listen intently. In part, these underlying principles helped to structure the approach and method of this investigation, and I eventually contextualized a wide arc of sociolinguistic particulars inclusive of culture, pedagogy, identity, and agency (Duff, 2010; Gee, 1986; Hall, 1997; Toohey, 1998, 2000, 2001). In attempting to convey the rich communicative dynamic of this literacy research, Erickson (1984) supported the idea of an internally focused research and noted that "the ethnography portrays events, at least in part, from the points of view of the actors involved in the events" (p. 52). In portraying the events of this community, I used a pair of interpretive lenses (which would be akin to the mechanism of meaning-making that Bruner, 1986, described by *logico-scientific* and *narrative* orientations) that applied to this local context that were both pertinent and personal.

In Between: More Than One Window

My personal experiences as a linguistic 'in-betweener' have attuned my eyes and ears to making meaning at the nexus of what social discourses reflect, within what they themselves are thematically framed, and to what they are subject.

In that regard, central to the interpretive task was/is in the experiencing of this cultural space. As Wilson (2008) commented, modeling "Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing . . . when studying Indigenous peoples requires the holistic use and transmission of information" (p. 32). In research, and in making meaning along the way, the qualitative experience of modeling and reflecting on ways of being and knowing and its articulation as an ethnographic investigation in turn become the content. More specifically, as an investigation within a cultural paradigm, the juxtaposition between the

highly contextualized Cree worldview and mainstream discourses is the epistemic encounter, in the Foucauldian sense, that facilitates the narrative while also feeding into pedagogic implications. As a result, along the way of researching this topic, I continue to be very regularly struck by the challenge of articulating the mechanics of this cross-paradigmatic encounter. Perhaps most simply, and more pertinent to a qualitative narrative, is that understanding and appreciation can only emerge from an embodied cultural experience. Moreover, through that exposure to Indigeneity and its juxtaposition to the majority culture, the ongoing interpretation as the method of making meaning narrates itself.

During this research, and not indirectly, as the narrator I am the barometer of the investigation. Participating positioned me inside and gave an emic perspective, whereas as the researcher I was on the outside of the etic perspective (Agar, 1986). Being a participant was a crucial factor in that it allowed, informed, and produced a number of Discourses, whether they were related to practical considerations, cultural/contextual considerations, sociolinguistic observations, or feedback from the participants. At the same time, although I am inside that cultural space and negotiating meaning, I am an outsider. As a visitor to the culture, I had to attend to narrating this experience within the cultural protocol. As a guest with the privilege of stepping into this cultural space and being afforded an opportunity to draw meaning, I had to be conscientious about my actions, be accountable, show reciprocity, and, along the way, act ethically (Louis, 2007).

Conversely, from the etic perspective as an outsider to this community, other pertinent Discourses also emerged. First, as a researcher, in essence, I moved toward the topic and therefore necessarily had to become informed on its Discourses. Immediate to this topic, these practical and social Discourses have influenced the self-expression of this particular speech community and, by extension, the ongoing presence and future vitality of its cultural paradigm. Second, with regard to cultural continuity, political Discourse plays a role in brokering cultural agency, which must be accounted for. Finally, as cultural outsider, though informed by my own second-language upbringing, I can draw from personal leverage to identify and infer the sociocultural implications of this local

language beyond relegating the data to the realm of constructivist 'language pedagogy' or 'political economy.'

Needless to say, making meaning out of this cultural context has necessarily given my personal critical literacy a substantial heuristic workout. Connolly (2007) concurred that as the researcher positioned between the interplay of multiple vantage points; as observer and participant, as cultural outsider and pedagogic insider, and as intermediary between cultural experience and institutional representation, the role 'involving this level of human interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy!" (p. 453). Nonetheless, informed by such dynamic intertextuality, rich qualitative data emerged. The data informed my ethnographic portrait of this local speech community, rooted in the worldview that provides the referential cultural voice of the narrative.

Portraying a Forest: Narrating the Sum of the Parts

As a narrator, I reflected on my encounter with the content of the topic and the participants, and this ethnography offers an interpretive portrayal of an Indigenous speech community seen through the process of organizing a cultural mentoring project (Ellis, 2011; Tedlock, 1991).

Framed by cultural content and articulated through the lenses of language education and cross-cultural communication, the portrait of this organizational process gets its narrative from the ongoing interplay of multiple lenses—my positioning as emic/etic, the cultural space that the youth entered, the intergenerational communication, and the underlying premise of the cultural 'content'—all working together to produce a rich and varied social linguistic encounter (Olive, 2014).

The narrative tension is generated through the interplay of sociolinguistic, cultural, and empiricist Discourses. Framed by an Indigenous context, which 'hosted' the process, that cultural paradigm underpins the content. Subsequently, the researcher as storyteller pays "analytic attention to how the facts got assembled. . . . For whom was this story constructed, . . . [and] . . . what cultural discourses does it draw on?" (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 428). As a result of the cross-cultural encounter, the emergent data necessitated an interpretation in making meaning in consideration of these various

Discourses. In this interpretive portrait I have attempted to convey a sense of those Discourses and of the distillation of that experience into a synthesized account.

Wilson (2008) and Smith (1999) recognized that decolonizing methodologies are affected by the voices of the storytellers, who infuse the narrative with a qualitative spirit that reflects the context being portrayed. For me, this different cultural paradigm was central to the literacy-inflected meaning-making of this youth-mentoring project. In ethnography, observing the phenomena from within the context of a cultural space is therefore intrinsic to grounding the ontology of the narrative. Managing those discourses, in the role between participation and observer serves as both process and product (Ellis et al., 2010).

Although I am not Indigenous, I strive to recognize the fundamental role of voice in articulating cultural identity, and this research works in the space that honors the centrality of that expression (Battiste, 2002; Canada, 2005; Maffi, 2001). For the reader, this interpretive perspective offers a discerning vantage point. As interpretative ethnography, this research draws attention to the qualitative and sociolinguistic discourses implied by a model of a local demographic to promote further cultural literacy research privileging the holism of the endemic voice. Academically speaking, local speech and cultural community very regularly reflect "forms of representation . . . with people who are different from us" (Ellis et al., 2013, p. 248). In research, the challenge of communicating the validity of those different representations therefore reminds us that, in writing, we are producing "our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9).

This research was an ethnographic investigation into the context and expression of local Cree cultural communication practices. That context produced a powerful encounter that engaged a variety of cross-cultural and literacy-driven discourses.

Situated within the practicalities of organizing and arranging for the expression of cultural continuity, as research, the qualitative experience of temporarily being immersed in that local cultural space and interpreting its cultural constructs awakens awareness of the sociolinguistic realities that influence Indigenous language, identity, and self-expression. The interpretive synthesis of this organizational process gained traction with

overlapping discourses that emerged from within the cultural paradigm and crossed into the constructivist paradigms of qualitative research. For the reader, the narrative that portrays this qualitative cultural project offers the reader insight into that cross-cultural dialogue through the discourses it reveals.

Data Collection

In referring to the chronology of the narrative, the research data was drawn from two sets of mentoring meetings. First, during the pilot sessions held in the summer of 2013. Following that time together, I interviewed each of the participants within a week of our meetings. Natalie and Frank I interviewed at a local restaurant and Nancy at the community library near the residence that held our meetings. The second set of participant data was collected several months later during October and November of 2013 over the course of the youth mentoring visits. Following our farewell gathering, I interviewed the youth, the two master speakers and the house coordinator. I went to the neighborhood house where several of the youth lived and interviewed each of them one Saturday afternoon. The remainder of the youth interviews were completed after school during the following week at the residence that held our meetings. Robert kept at office at that house and the youth came to meet me after school. Following those interviews, which also included Robert, the final two interviews with Allan and Christine were each held at a local coffee shop.

Premised around the process of accessing, and the sociolinguistic experience of the cultural space opened and entered, the data for this ethnographic study were drawn from three primary sources: (a) reflections and journals, (b) meetings and observation field notes, and (c) recorded interviews with the participants. Over the chronology of the ethnography, the data leveraged "insight into an issue" (Cromwell, 2005, p. 439) from which patterns and themes emerged. In turn, while informing the ethnography with supplementary literacy and sociocultural inferences, these themes anchor the "how and why" of the research question and both situate and give voice to the participant feedback (Merriam, 1998, p. 33).

Reflections Journal

Cree language and cultural continuity span a wide landscape that includes sociocultural considerations, second-language pedagogy, and historical influences. At large, by attempting to contextualize Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing through a lens of literacy, appreciative themes and broad proportions inform the discourse of the experience.

Typically, the crux of observations emerged after the fact. In other words, I took notes and later upon further journaling that extra interpretive time was itself informed by a shift in paradigms between the Cree cultural experience and the processing of it. This interpretive process, as Ryle (1949) referred to it, involves 'thick' description between, "understanding and absorbing the context of the situation or behaviour [and] ascribing present and future intentionality to the behaviour" (p. 539). Fundamentally, the shift between paradigms is necessary in the interpretive attempt and speaks to the challenges involved with interpreting cultural considerations and informing the critical literacy of this qualitative research.

Observation Field Notes

The youth meetings were premised on oral communication. During those meetings, along with the apprentices and master, I participated, was essentially immersed, helped to maintain the pace, and asked questions, while I equally attempted to let the youth engage with the content on their own terms.

As a language teacher I am accustomed to expect noise and communication as a barometer of student-topic engagement; however, this context had a cultural component, not to mention a projected expectation and/or the obligation of students to communicate beyond their social, communicative, and emotional comfort level (Krashen, 1985). As I will expand on in another section, stimulating and drawing out participant engagement was a realistic challenge. I therefore took the cultural approach of letting the situation unfold. In turn, when Allan or Christine led the group, they were the teachers. During silent spaces, which is a cultural consideration, it was, in fact, sometimes problematic for me to avoid imposing myself on the class. This was one of the emergent cultural realities of holding the meetings outside of school. In any case, as I mentioned, my participation

influenced the volume of notes. However, triggering incidents that were noteworthy—various, practical, second-language, or cultural considerations—typically led to later reflections that I wrote from a more measured perspective.

As a matter of protocol, and as the master requested, I did not record the meetings. I was allowed to record the three earlier pilot sessions with the adult apprentices. It is not surprising that time and content resulted in substantial data, with a great deal of rich discussion that influenced the approach of the youth meetings. In the youth meetings, my original intention as the researcher was to allow the oral discourse of the investigation to open the qualitative space and stimulate my personal note taking for later reflection.

It should also be noted that, in general, this project involved a distinct lack of technology. I debated the idea of incorporating some form of online technology or social media, a video, or an audio journal as an outlet for the participants to express themselves. In hindsight, while organizing and investigating surrounding readings, those ideas have merits for future applications. In particular, on that note, a longer sustained commitment to a mentoring cultural project could potentially have created a longitudinal landscape for insightful expression through an ongoing participant journal or social media network in terms of sharing learner/apprentice insights about the personal process involved in exploring cultural heritage. This emotional component goes beyond any particular language. Further, although social media and digital equipment now include enormous sophisticated technology to bridge distance and communicative access, "there is no substitute for face-to-face contact" (Corbett & Kulchyski, 2007, p. 58).

Recorded Interviews With Participants

Whether in an individual reflection or a collective speech or a cultural community, the past is the natural grounding point and surest source of a meaning-making point of reference. Even though the researcher's experience is not the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about the participants (Ellis, 2004).

Upon finishing the group meeting sessions—eight communal visits over the course of four weeks—I arranged for personal interviews with each apprentice through Robert. I conducted these interviews over a two-week period after school or on

weekends; on average, they were 45-minute interviews with each participant. In three instances I met with apprentices at their group home in the kitchen or at the meeting site, with Robert in his adjacent office as we spoke. I recorded the interviews were recorded, and the sole copies of the recordings are on my home computer.

Prior to beginning the project, at the time of ethics review I included questions that I foresaw as pertinent interview questions. After my pilot study I had to reword and, in ways, finesse the interview questions for the MAP youth. I therefore had to make this modification twice—once for my ethics applications, and once following the summer pilot to adjust the MAP questions; it involved distilling the interview process from a macro to a micro perspective (Gee & Ullman, 1998).

The participants' interviews were rich sources of personal anecdotes. The actual interviews were more in the style of conversations than of formal interviews. It became evident that, for these youth participants, the interview process was a new experience. Again, I had to consciously adjust my questions. "Recent methodological work that draws on a 'constructionist' approach to interviewing conceptualizes the interview as a socially situated encounter in which both interviewer and interviewee play active roles" (Roulston, 2010, p. 348). As I read Roulston's article, I thought back to the first interviews and drew on notes that I had written about the interview process:

> We are acquainting ourselves first, and then when the space begins to comfortably open, we begin to construct, but it has to be willingly. . . . There is a sense of modesty I notice about the participants in taking steps into the forest (of reflection) for these young people, . . . but there needs to be emotion involved in order to lower inhibition, à la Krashen's affective filter, for genuine sharing to occur. (personal notes)

Through the interview process I came to realize that I was easily at risk of leading my interviews. It was not lost on me that in that microcosmic example, an overriding irony peeks through the proceedings; namely, the conducting of oral, recorded interviews that provide data for formal written academic research that takes place in the heart of the geography where Cree cultural continuity has had a presence for thousands of years. Moreover, although these speech communities are now literally on the cusp of becoming linguistically silenced forever, to be fair, these young people were likely not thinking

about such things; but that reflection sparked inside me during the interviews. Ultimately, I needed to be aware of injecting the interviews with emotional questioning, though in my mind, the sometimes unsettling irony hung over the proceedings during the research.

Data Analysis

I assembled the data for analysis from my notes, my meeting-time observations, my personal reflections, and the recorded interviews. I digitally recorded, transcribed, and then manually reviewed the information that I gathered in the interviews to derive thematic patterns that would augment the findings discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the model of analysis that Braun and Clark (2006) developed, I analyzed the data as follows:

1. Phase 1: Familiarization with the data: Following the completion of the second session of mentoring meetings; those with the youth and the final gathering, I conducted the interviews, transcribed them, and reread them to become familiar with the data.

2. Phase 2: Generation of the initial codes: This phase entailed arranging the interview data in a general sequence that included the chronology of preparation, the whole-group mentoring meetings, and the interviews. These initial codes were comprised of comments on (a) the social- and organization-related aspects of the project, (b) individual participation and reflections, and (c) comments related to the language and cultural content of the MAP.

3. Phase 3: The search for themes: After the initial chunking of data, I returned to the interviews, and from each of the three main sections in relation to each other, I began to see a pattern emerging. I then highlighted the data from the apprentices and masters with colored codes with respect to comments on their personal participation, reflections from a sociological perspective, and the language and cultural aspect of the meetings.

4. Phase 4: The review of the initial themes and the definition and naming of themes: The last phase involved narrowing and naming the demarcated themes. I revisited, evaluated, and refined the color-coded comments on the

previous themes, which resulted in four final sections that comprised comments that would orient the findings chapter. These final sections include (a) the practical organization of the project and its social, community, and administrative considerations; (b) cultural mentoring and the role of the master speakers; (c) language and lesson-planning considerations; and (d) sociocultural perspectives related to literacy and a cultural worldview lens.

Ethical Considerations: Research Feasibility

This study was possible as a result of scholarly, research, and professional competencies. In organizing the pragmatics of the investigation, I established relationships with members of the speech community and a local youth residential agency. As well, I obtained formal permission and research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Prior to commencing the investigation, as a student in the Department of Elementary Education under the supervision of Dr. Heather Blair, I received comprehensive interdisciplinary training in educational and cross-cultural literacy, Indigenous theory, research methodology, and practical experiences and applications.

I prioritized the maintenance of the confidentiality of my participants and the data that I collected during the interviews. I have stored all of the information that I collected for this project, including the notes and digital files from the interviews, on a secure computer and have not linked these data to any information that would identify the participants. I will archive the digital files and notes in a secure location for an indefinite period of time. I have changed all names to pseudonyms, and I have not revealed any personal information that could identify the individuals involved.

Prior to the interviews the potential participants read, or I read to them, the informed assent form (Appendix A). I gave this letter to the residential administration and management before I approached the potential participants to gain their permission to become involved. The assent form explained the voluntary nature of their participation, the purpose of the project, what would happen during the interviews, the potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and any possible future use of the data. Also, in a letter (Appendix B) I assured both the youth and the adult participants of their right to refuse to

answer a question, to end the interview at any time without penalty, and to refuse participation at any point in the process. The form also included contact information for myself as the researcher and for the primary faculty advisor from the university should the participants have any comments, questions, or concerns that they wanted to discuss following the project and interview.

CHAPTER 5: EARLY FINDINGS

The Anchor of Meaning: Researching a Qualitative Space

Entering the context of this local research involved becoming familiar with a range of discourses, including language, cultural identity, politics, education, history, anthropology, and sociolinguistics. It has been a compelling cultural experience. Along the way, the intersection and tension between and among these various discourses has provided the context to informing a literally unique and figuratively expansive set of findings.

In examining and tracking my understanding of the topic—a local example of cultural practices and language presence—it became evident that at root was more than merely political marginalization. There were also motifs and motivation beyond the historical materialism, beyond an incoming and privileging ideology that targets and conscientiously replaces local expression. Indigenous people have long been aware of the colonial project and its "company of nations" (Akwesasne, 1975, p. 28). This imposed shift has consequently obliged local communities to detach from the practices, traditions, and locally derived meanings of expression and, through institutions, politics, and technology, reengineered local meaning-making away from endemic history, geography, and language. In effect, colonialism has systematically replaced, eroded, and marginalized people from their own history.

This politicized reality projected onto the local leads to a consideration of the causes, effects, and implications of such a forced shift, for it has undoubtedly served to virtually choke off the intergenerational transmission of oral Indigenous expression. It is most pertinent that taking control of public discourse has facilitated this. Under that pretext, colonialism has succeeded in replacing the local epistemology and ushering in an empiricist template accompanied by its administered discourses that govern the social, cultural, political, and intellectual economy. In the case of Cree, or any endemic cultural community, the irony and linguistically critical point is precisely that language, and the cultural paradigm it describes, is in and of itself apolitical; yet that deeply informative ontology, which is the qualitative space of this research, has been systematically targeted

as expendable. The control of language, both literally and administratively, and the erosion over the course of several generations have left local speech communities socioculturally disenfranchised of their own local expression.

Three Themes

As a broad construct, this sociolinguistic topic certainly is a contentious issue. More fundamentally, as I noted in the theoretical framework and literature review, it is practical to remember that language within a particular geography is essentially the accumulated oral expression of a speech community's collective history. In the case of Cree, the language has naturally and literally, by word of mouth, emerged and expresses the accumulated lived lineage of the speech community. My challenge in this research to achieve its most prescient reach in which the investigation was positioned was to foster a qualitative understanding through process and content of the experience as emerging from within the Indigenous cultural paradigm. At root, the deeply contextual fact of leading and informing and framing the cultural content of the youth meetings was ontologically possible because of the qualitative space that the pilot opened.

The findings that emerged from the investigation of and participation in a local community-run youth cultural mentoring project fall into three themes: (a) the considerations that frame the social context of the organization of the project and access to a community of learners; (b) the meetings that served a curriculum of cultural content embedded in Cree worldview; I discuss the role of mentoring as the intergenerational access to that content as an expression of cultural continuity of values; and (c) expansion of the cultural content: the pedagogic avenues of exploration to approach the practical construction of language skills framed within the values of local worldview.

A concurrent motif related to more broad literacy and sociocultural considerations overlaps with these three themes. In turn, the participants' feedback and my insertion of smaller journal entries are not necessarily bound by the chronology of the narrative; rather, I add these where applicable.

Finally, before I move to a description of the findings, a final imperative central to the findings concerns a twofold consideration that I must necessarily articulate. In regard to the interpretation of these findings, especially those that refer to the undertaking and

content of the youth meetings, two factors are critical. They play a significant role in framing the qualitative dimension of the entire project and the quality of its findings.

The first has more practical implications but ultimately served a greater service. According to cultural protocol, and as the master speakers of the youth project requested and which I understood as a valid and more than reasonable request to respect the Indigenous approach and conduct of intergenerational communication and 'teaching,' I did not record the gatherings. As a second-language teacher I expected that time to be the richest source of data for the research. However, underlining the multiple vantage points that positioned and articulated this research and its methodology—my own simultaneously as the researcher, a language participant, and a cultural visitor—the fact that I did not record the youth meeting did not critically diminish the overall interpretation of the ethnography in that, as the investigator, I was afforded multiple lenses. Moreover, in speaking to the epistemic relevance of the findings applied to literacy and the intergenerational expression and practices of cultural continuity, it is imperative to remember that the youth meetings were themselves ontologically informed; that is, the pilot made them qualitatively possible. This leads to the second point.

Orienting the youth gatherings under a more qualitative premise of Indigenous ontology brought its own considerations to the findings: the limited longitudinal exposure of this short project and the participants' previous cultural exposure, second-language learning experience, age, and gender (i.e., I had only one part-time male participant"). Combined, these factors must be considered additionally in making meaning from the experience. Regardless, because of the organization of the youth under rather unique social circumstances, and despite the relatively limited longitudinal exposure, the youth mentoring meetings produced a brief but, relatively speaking, concentrated cultural experience. Ultimately, this concentrated experience, which was underpinned by cultural worldview, premised their participation. In turn—and this is the second critical point— this leveraging cog, which opened the cultural third space, and thus played an instrumental role in driving the qualitative information and participant reflections.

At the root of all of the meaning that I drew from the participation of the youth was that they participated during their social free time. This factor and, pertinently, this

community-run project anchored the literacy meaning-making through the sociocultural experience from within an Indigenous paradigm. Emerging from this context, the these overlapping discourses were leavened by the lived traction of the participants, given their personal, social, cultural, and Indigenous relevance. Ultimately, these participants, both young and old, mentor and apprentice, collectively and willingly stepped into an increasingly uncommon cultural context to engage temporarily with a multitude of sociocultural considerations and reflect on those experiences through their personal Indigenous lens and voice.

Overall, the inescapable reality of the findings comes into high relief because of the social juxtaposition of the project. I touched on some of the ideas that underpin this juxtaposition in the theoretical framework section of this document. The immediate point is that minority cultures and their worldviews are not challenges to the mainstream but, rather, paradigms of being, being themselves. Therefore, before I move into the investigative process and the findings and into the social, demographic, and community considerations of the youth meetings, I will reset and begin this narrative with the findings of this investigation that emerged earlier along the path to the cultural space and spirit into which I leveraged this research.

Getting Underway: A Pilot Study and the Root of Content

Before I could even envision a youth-orientated cultural mentoring project, I thankfully heeded the advice of my supervisory committee and conducted a pilot project. That decision has taken on deeper significance because of the cultural content of the pilot. Put simply, that content leveraged open the third space, the cultural space oriented in Indigenous ontology and reflected in its language and practices. These axioms ultimately articulate literacy as a practical, holistic expression of cultural continuity.

The purpose of the pilot study was to give the research a compass for practical orientation. Over the course of ten days in the summer of 2013, we met as a group of five people for 3 visits of two hours each in a classroom on the university campus. These meetings were an effort to initiate myself and discover what I could attempt and realistically accomplish in this research. In hindsight, those meetings played a far richer role. In terms of becoming organized for the transmission or teaching of Indigenous

language, I had no personal reference. I therefore premised my initial ideas on adapting what I know from my own teaching experiences and second-language methodology, what I learned in working with the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Institute–run language education program at the University of Alberta, and what I read about MAP research in California, where the project began (Hinton, 2002, 2003; Hinton & Hale, 2001), I downsized and tweaked the MAP idea to apply it to a small group of adults.

Pilot Participants

Once it appeared clear that the school-related participation was no longer feasible, I sent out a call for pilot participants through a newsfeed affiliated with local Indigenous organizations. I also received some propositional calls from people who inquired about my needs and offered their services, though some of these conversations unfortunately left me somewhat nonplussed that felt awkward for the localized bottom-up ethic I was hoping to engage. That search brought me together with four adult participants—three women, all local to the city and working in various pursuits: civil, corrections, and educational—and the initial master speaker for the pilot, who had also contacted me. I followed up by meeting him and some local Elders for afternoon tea at a community center.

Nancy is a mature lady who joined the pilot project. She is a grandmother who never spoke the language regularly past a young age. In the pilot sessions she seemed intrigued by many of the little nuances and cultural subtleties of the language. For example, in breaking down words into their smaller etymological parts, she appreciated the contextual makeup of the language and how the words reflect a 'scene' with various components to inform it. Often we discussed things that she had heard before, or they reminded her of personal experiences, like a valve that opened a memory passage and brought a little flush of memory She was nonetheless a beginner like the rest, but, as a grandmother, she is interested in what could be, what could have been if her children and grandchildren had grown up with the language.

Natalie was an interesting part of the pilot project. She is Blackfoot but works in the public system at a local school with a sizable Indigenous population. Her background led her off reserve and into the city, so she has had a wide perspective at her young age,

about 30. Natalie attended university and will teach in an elementary school soon, so she is very much involved day to day with young Cree people. She is troubled by the infrastructural challenges that the young people face. She is old enough to have seen subtle changes in her community, how external forces have disrupted traditional roles, and how change from outside has diluted internal protocols. As an educator she is aware of the socializing power of peer groups, technology, and traditions; and we had some in-depth conversations about her community, her classroom, and the roles of youth and adults, about moving forward to represent Indigenous identity in healthy ways that preserve culture and develop the individual. Her overlapping social, cultural, and professional roles brought rich and interesting perspectives.

The third pilot participant was Shannon. She is a Métis woman who grew up in a Métis home. Her demeanor among us was pleasant but professional. She has some religious background, which informed some of her recollections, and she showed interest in ideas related to creativity and art as expressions of identity.

Our master speaker was Frank. Along with the others, Frank received an email notice from a friend, and we spoke on the phone. Initially, I took Allan with me to a local potluck lunch at a community centre where seniors gather to speak Cree, and there Frank and I initially met and discussed the idea. Frank is a grandfather, still speaks fluently, but as the potluck would evidence, he ventured out into the community to find language and cultural expression by participating along with other seniors. Frank is an easygoing man with a relaxed charm. His explanations in the pilot sessions were personal and, under the circumstances of a pilot with beginner learners, his understanding of the greater context of expression signaled to me a heightened relevance of the importance of place to cultural identity.

In no small part, this research was inspired as an academic attempt to distill and convey a sense of Indigenous epistemic holism, celebrate the ongoing access to this meaning-making space, and practically express its potential to contribute to literacy-driven wellness. This progressive epistemic shift from language to culture throughout this research is in large part in reference to the seeds of Frank's and later Christine's participation and contributions.

Pilot: Scanning a Landscape

In a practical sense, although I was the organizer and arranger of the pragmatics of the project, I felt uneasy about the idea of being the 'teacher' in the meetings. Beginning from that premise, though under the umbrella of a cultural identity mentoring project with a language component, my goal was to begin to investigate and make meaning out of the sociology of this particular cultural and speech community. In hindsight, even that tenuous starting point was unavoidably tinted by the lens of my second-language teaching and learning experiences. Suffice to say, based on how the pilot unfolded, that I quickly became aware of the need to loosen my attachment to those ideas and how they might later influence youth language mentoring.

From the first day, my overarching impressions from the pilot session have been that the boundaries of my perceptions have become stretched culturally, educationally, socially, and ethnographically. I had a considerable number of Aha! moments: the lengths of words, pronunciation, cadence, counting systems. As a language learner I am still conditioned by my linguistic referents. For example, as I listened to Frank I mentally scanned my personal internal language 'files': I cross-referenced, listened for cognates or similar sounds, ran through rules and words that might have been applicable. German, English, French, Spanish, and Chinese all generally follow the same word order. When I encounter a new language, I very logically compare it to those that I know; but that works only if the languages are related, typically by geography. However, Cree has little overlap.

In that sense, once I was sufficiently jarred from accessing my preconceptions of language and culture, by default, I was obliged to let go. This form of open-mindedness begins the process of orienting to a cultural paradigm and its language. A figurative step into a new language and its inner-realities is akin to gaining an insider's (a native speaker's, that is) articulated sense of the cultural space between meaning and expression through the referential motifs and orientations, motifs and references that reflect the ontological value anchors of that speech community. The local tools of oral expressions. For a cross-cultural traveler and multilingual educator, that is an exciting experience. In other words, once Frank explained that that contextualizes the language, the cultural

magnitude of Cree lived experience struck me. He noted that Asians who came over at one point in the railway construction era came to be known as the *Braided Ones*. When we spoke of colors, in his explanation he referred to the etymology of red: The root *mihk* refers to the hue of blood. To be engaged in that qualitative space with the language there 'among' us and for a fluent speaker to have the descriptive facility to articulate those nuances gives the experience a sense of a literacy adventure in cultural meaning-making.

Places and People

Speaking strictly from the perspective of second-language education, although I certainly did not expect to be able to move briskly through any particular topics, as a teacher I admit to having had some preconceived notions about moving through some fundamentals. I recall spending time pouring through elementary Cree-language curriculum guides and sifting through learner objectives to take to the pilot to give us something 'tangible' to work through as a lesson plan. I also thought, according to that lesson plan, that we would be able to move through a few ideas at some pace. That misconception was quashed early in that first meeting.

I distinctly remember that we began with some introductory phrases; loosely speaking, with "My name is." That in and of itself opens a varied conversation that immediately triggered multiple comments from the participants. Frank mentioned that his pronunciation came from a particular position. The Elders who taught him came from the northern Saskatchewan region that overlapped with the Saulteaux language and used subtle nuances that affected pronunciation that he could hear. This triggered a reaction from Natalie, the southern Albertan Blackfoot speaker, who could remember hearing and matching because some words overlapped with her background or had similar references. Another related to geography and the particular dialect that emerged as a distinct French-Cree Creole. The initial discussion took us through the first day. I later reflected on this connection between land/geography and identity in a journal entry.

The language communities who speak the Cree language, "an abstraction that includes many related, but not necessarily mutually comprehensible, dialects spoken from Quebec to northeastern British Columbia" (Westfall, 2001: XV). These are substantial distances that shape and influence dialects and pronunciation and, to a subtle degree,

localize distinctions of meaning among speech communities. Mühlhäusler (1995) noted that as embodied communicators, endemic language speakers in tune with their surroundings, "Life in a particular human environment is dependent on people's ability to talk about it" (p. 155). In varying amounts, for all endemic languages, the cultural capital of all endemic languages drawn from the influence of geography, collective history, and elicited into the hue of local expression, reflects these subtle perceptions (Harrison, 2007). For proponents of cultural assimilation, their position would suggest they choose to ignore the steady accumulating and perceptive acknowledgment that affirms local authority with institutional rigueur in underscoring the inextricable link between place, knowledge, and expression (Boroditsky, 2011a ; Harmon, 1995; Haugen, 1972).

To put the influence of geography on cultural expression into a regional perspective, the Canadian western provinces, with a population of 6 million, cover an area of just under 3 million square kilometers. Contrast this same-sized geographic area with the demographic of Western Europe (not including Russia or Scandinavia), which holds a population of more than 300 million. This area includes approximately 25 languages with more common linguistic overlap than on the Prairies of Canada, and it is unlikely that someone would argue that Dutch, Spanish, or English cultures or language are interchangeable. However, in North America or in the postcolonial territories, this political norm of homogenizing Indigenous or minority identities reveals bias. Assuming that most First Nations communities are more alike than distinct, despite their geographical separation and the variety of cultural practices that differentiate them, this subjugating homogenization becomes represented in academic and institutional discourse. In part because of the lingering mentality, the social and political implications of reality nonetheless oblige those involved to adjust Indigeneity and its self-ascription in terms of how it is positioned as political economy (Dyck, 1991; Pettipas, 1994; Sluman & Goodwin, 1984, Smith, 2001).

The local and Canadian context of this literacy encounter has awoken me to a more proportioned perspective on the relationship between physical space and collective memory. Framing the cultural act of expression and its source of knowledge away from the abstract-laden contemporary world and towards the Indigenous expression premised

around the locality of experiential knowledge. For the participants, some of these examples opened to reveal a mutual space that they could share and personally identify with. A participant asked Frank about a song melody and she hummed a few lines that she recalled. From the melody and a couple of words, Frank recognized it as a type of incantation sometimes heard in sweat lodges and having a ceremonial purpose. As a simple expression of oral traditions, Vansina (1985) remarks that mantras or meditations might be "spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only, and although they are passed down from a generation or more ago, they are not necessarily about the past, nor are they necessarily narratives" (pp. 12-13). Frank concurred with that description, the melody was something he heard within the realm of the community. While my description in the example might sound solemn, Frank pointed out that that setting does not necessarily indicate a conscientious religious expression as much as the practice is part of "a way of life."

These place-specific practices made me briefly reflect about 'other' ways of life and practices that I've noticed along the way which variously express habits of meaning in a speech community. In Taiwan at the high school where I taught, the office secretaries would burn various sticks of incense at various times of the day and school year. It was a practice that personified their way of life. I went to a temple in Malaysia, where Hindus would pierce their skin with long, sharp skewer-like spears in a physical ritual of deference as part of an annual pilgrimage. Less dramatically, but in their cultural traditions, Korean elevators lack a number 4 floor. (Instead, in Korea the letter 'F' is used for 'four' as the numeric etymology and cultural symbolism sound and relate to the word 'death.' Inside an elevator, that superstition seems reasonable to accept.) In each of these practices, just as the singing of a simple melody, the act is specific to a cultural context; the local history has shaped its accepted social meaning, and the result, in turn, expresses a collective value. From the 'etic' perspective, as visitors perhaps we try, or can't help, but notice little differences from our own culture. The process, and its language and symbolic representations, serve as a subtle reminder both of the power of perspective in making meaning, and social forces implicated in that paradigmatic

encounter. In our local example, for Frank, his experiential perspective is emic to this topic and therefore he doesn't require any 'etic' interpretation, but for me.

Ripening Meaning

In my example, and beginning with the first line of my lesson plan, my personal introduction of "My name is Martin," the resultant discussion quickly established that learning contextual information *is* the point. More simply put, our dialogue shifted from Canada and a central discussion of things distinctly from a Cree cultural context.

Frank very patiently explained that in self-introductions, the inclusion of ancestors is a marker of a person's community, and acknowledging ancestors gives the introduction the necessary context; this, in turn, positions that person, based on the community of speakers with which he or she affiliates. Mainstream society does the same thing today, though the tribes are more utilitarian.

Subsequently, what brought the discussion to life was for me the result of learning that the basic phrases of individual self-introductions carry rich meaning and have a cultural protocol that extends a person's individual identity to include a connection to immediate family members and, from there, a kinship to geographical place of origin. Likewise, the lineage that a person recognizes in identifying him- or herself collectively resonates as lived heritage, and as such is always essentially, 'around'/present. That the relations have physically passed away or are visibly gone is not the point. Rather, for those of the lineage here, the act, as a synergistic expression of collective memory acknowledges and communicates respect, sustains the network as a timeless on-going presence (Brown, 1982). This cyclical approach to an ongoing perennial now, time and the representation of memory in the more western linear chronology, is delineated by the material act.

The net result of these rich discussions was critical to turn the attention away from a phonetic exercise of constructing Cree words and towards a wider ontological parameter. To that point, it hinges on the ability of a fluent speaker such as Frank to explain, add to, exemplify, apply, and personify the texture of cultural ideas. One revealing example is the Cree name for *Edmonton*, *amiskwaciwaskahikan*, which, when they first heard reminded the participants that they were familiar with the Indigenous

word for *beaver*. After we broke down the word, Nancy recalled from her work at school that *amisk* is a beaver, which in turn raised a few "Ahs" and "Ohs" from the group. Hence, at an earlier time Fort Edmonton was literally referred to as *beaver mountain house*. In regard to a physical place such as Cold Lake, we duly noted it as a fairly long word; however, the subtleties of pronunciation necessary to add or modify it also change the meaning to imply a cold lake in different contexts: time of season, time of day, accessibility, and so on. This is the lived, communicative local knowledge that is the lineage of that speech community that encompasses information distilled into unique context-specific knowledge.

From the exchanges rooted in the expression of cultural geography, it is apparent that the tone and inflections with regard to regional differences in turn also reflect the vastness of physical geography; someone with fluency can hear it, and the local differences become telling markers of identity. However, it was not that we could not move past these expressions' syntactic difficulty; some new words can be tricky and long, but the flexibility of the premise and discussions that arose took us into multiple directions informing that quality.

Between Two Windows

In light of my recognition of how intrinsically closely identity and place are traditionally interwoven and situate Cree persons relative to their geography and lineage, the pilot project powerfully shifted my gaze from language-based literacy to the wider culturally based form of what I refer to as *figurative literacy*. In our case, the shift to ideas kept us communicative, but at a slow pace and with ample personal detours. Although we slowly moved forward and attempted to learn some basic numbers and the days (which we needed to see written on the board for visual reference; again, because of unfamiliarity), blended with some variations of listening and speaking exercises over the course of the meetings, in hindsight those explorations were as much an attempt to appease some restlessness and create some variety.

Over the course of the three days we established a gentle routine. We began with the pattern of introductions; I will later discuss their pedagogical overlap. We spent considerable time on the introductions as we moved from heightened pronunciation to

conscientiousness about pronunciation. These patterns worked together with tag questions, and we then began to fold in numbers that we identified and communicated through months or telephone numbers. While we spoke, Frank would not interfere, corrected us only when we asked, and then patiently repeated as required. We practiced the vocabulary in a circle, or with a partner, pointed, said it, repeated it in a sense of a constant splashing with the cadence, and took out time getting accustomed to the acoustics of the new sounds to various sets or patterns. From this discourse, interesting cultural subtleties emerged. We would try to finish and review/practice the new words and expressions for a sense of completion, although it was the detours along the way that made the trip worthwhile. For instance, when saying 'maskihki-wapoh,' the second word/part is a gently aspirated phoneme, which sounds like a slow drawn out 'whab-bwoh. This means a steeped hot broth, and with the herbal infusion, it becomes 'medicine water.'

With regard to numbers, counting involves an arbitrary pattern until the number 9. The word loosely translates to "almost 10/20/30." As you continue, the pattern through 19, 29, 39, and so on also continues. At the time I did not ask, but I later wondered whether that pattern, as an expressed 'word,' is rooted in pre- or postcolonial vernacular. For my immediate purposes, it is an example of how, across cultures, ontology influences constructs. It is a sharp reminder that related or in contrast to learners' base-10 thinking, the Cree language, for all intents and purposes, expresses the enumerating act of "getting near to 10." This is a reflection of metaphorical cultural differences:

> The point is that we count things when we do not focus on their individual identity, or when there are too many of them to get to know individually. Hunters and gatherers are not ignorant. They do not need the complex kind of mathematical thinking that is a necessity in our society. (Aveni, 2007, para. 19)

These cross-cultural encounters—an act as mundane as introducing oneself or counting with numbers systems—signaled something qualitative to the participants. Namely, it was emotionally relevant to them. More specifically, that emotion emerged from the cultural space. Equally poignant is the spirit of the fellowship. As we became immersed in the patterns, gained rhythm, and constructed some basic rote-like connections, a student would suddenly ask, "Hey, Martin, what's the word for 29?" After

a pause—because newcomers require some real-time, conscientious, visual and cognitive computation, as well as the unfolding of coordination and consternation before they can produce an answer—someone else would finally 'revert back to English' and reply "almost 30." It worked; the answer was correct, and it was humorous. But, most important, the pretext made it so. As we heard, learned, and 'played' with new sounds and ideas, these tiny 'aha' moments accumulate to leverage open space that allows the cultural visitor or language learner to straddle the border between cultural paradigms and, from the context of our gatherings, and more specifically, through Frank, having a kind of vicarious participation into his lived expression as he would share and explain the ideas embedded in the language of what becomes for the participants their collective heritage.

For urban Indigenous people, accessing this genuine local expression by participation and awareness brings the individual into the qualitative space to begin to engage with the critical cog of that value; the oral intergenerational transmission of culture and language.

What I began to understand through this orienting exposure that the pilot opened space for, is how critical the role, as a living expression of an endemic language, of a fluent speaker is in facilitating the cultural exchanges of worldview and knowledge; the linguistic ability to represent, verify, explain the cultural map for learners to 'step into', draw from and move towards in attaching their personal meaning onto.

(Not ironically, this is the same sociocultural role that foreign language teachers who travel abroad to teach bring as representatives and facilitators of language, worldview and 'authenticity' at a global realm of cross-cultural discourse.) From the perspective of a cultural visitor being able to hear very natural traditional language, the privilege of accessing that body of lived knowledge at the local level within the cultural authority of a fluent speaker, the experience becomes a cultural privilege in itself.

Conclusion: Language as a Map

Because of the cultural and qualitative richness of the expression of worldview, it was not until I had completed the data gathering and moved through the narrative of this local speech community that I began to appreciate the cross-paradigmatic matter at hand.

Digesting these cultural ideas and potentially presenting them as language learning for youth participants led to the question of how much language can measurably be transferred to the Apprentices within a limited time? More important, should that be the point? As a result—which is the qualitative shift into the culture—it became apparent that the language is so interwoven with collective identity that the rich contextual aspect of learning the learning, pedagogically speaking, comes at a slow pace. Ultimately, and very naturally, Indigenous knowledge emerges when meaning is proportionately ripe to be made.

In portraying this cultural space, as an educational researcher I had to be eloquent to pedagogically articulate this juxtaposition between the cultural qualitative and institutional accountability. "Whether qualitative or quantitative, [research is] embedded in institutional structures that tend to promote and maintain the status quo" (Carjuzaa & Fenimore-Smith, 2010, p. 3).

The status quo is an imposing force. Nonetheless, the pilot directed our attention to the cultural and its qualitative dynamic, which confirmed the inspiration for my undertaking this investigation. Natalie validated this holistic purpose and, long after the fact, left me grateful that during our interview she had alluded to the fact that the experience was a noticeable contrast to her professional experiences and the heft of its administrative considerations: "The schools require us to be so accountable." Her reference to accountability was to the ends rather than the means of learning. As someone who grew up in Blackfoot culture and knowing very personally the role and effect of language presence, she was a conscientious participant. She was very aware that Frank represents "a wealth in knowledge" and that, by participating, at a cultural level, he was not just teaching us Cree; rather, he was teaching the culture: "We got to hear everyone's story (and) we came together." While Natalie is from a different community, the mutual sense of a cultural identity in hearing and sharing for her, also as a 'guest,' the lack of pressure made the experience enjoyable. She 'got' it, because she has a qualitative relationship, not with Cree, but with Blackfoot. That affiliation with a cultural value was reflected in her motivation to participate in this endeavor and it brings us closer to home (King, 2009).

Adding depth to her reflections was that Natalie works in the education field with a demographic that has been personally affected by the erosion of intergenerational language transmission. During that same conversation Natalie reported that the students at her school, many in the child welfare system, "don't self-identify" as Cree and distance themselves from it. This kind of coping strategy is a behavior that echoes the legacy of the residential schools and illustrates that destabilization has reframed the episteme and social parameters of Indigenous cultural Discourse. "As a result of the residential school experience, many of today's Aboriginal parents and grandparents lost confidence in their capacity to engage in the kinds of nurturing social interactions with young children that promote attachment and intimate social interaction" (Ball & Moselle, 2013, p. 17; see also Hallett et al., 2007). It is most critical that intimacy directly correlates with cultural space and cultural continuity when, over time, without expression, the internal meaning and collective values that embody the expression of culture are weaned away and reframed through the institutional process. For thousands of young Indigenous people, this status quo is the reality.

In becoming exposed to, recognizing, and affiliating with the qualitative experience, participation in a community of learners premised on the ontology of cultural worldview and its values and language involves stepping into a cultural paradigm of collective self-expression. As a grandmother, Nancy has the political and lived reference to also recognize this space. More fundamental, however, and fully aware of the timeliness of potentially losing finite access to a timeless entity, she also culturally recognizes that paradigm of her heritage. It is not surprising that, as a mature cultural member but a non-speaker, her figurative literacy—that is, her interpretative recognition—exceeds her practical facility. But she made that recognition when she engaged in a space where like-minded community members co-constructed language and, in turn, at a very subtle level, extended their mutual collective cultural continuity. That construction engages the values and protocols and norms of the space with a discourse that expresses and reflects content unique, in this case, to that collective memory.

The pilot was critical to this research in that it demonstrated the magnitude of cultural expression. Nancy's comments supported Natalie's perception that attention to

context heightens the juxtaposition between institutional accountability and cultural expression. In terms of our second-language context, Nancy remarked that, in her experience with this format, when people participate in something such as language learning, in most cases they have certain expectations. She was referring to institutionally framed expectations: how a class will be delivered/perceived/presented, and so on. As a community-based literacy project, in this pilot the group gathered and communicated under a different representation of learning. Even by a simple message of physical orientation, communing as a circle which for Nancy facilitated the paradigm away from the pedantic and towards the experiential oriented around a communal sense of participation. Moreover, the nature of that space and the free-flowing path of content revealed in those telling moments was not pedantically predetermined. With that shift into a more holistic context, she said that expectations "go out the window, . . . and I become more open" (see Brant Castellano, 2000; Krashen, 1985). Her remark carried no sense that the cultural experience had any political reference. It was simply her recognition that in participating and affiliating with a cultural expression, our cultural encounters "weren't bound by structure," and that flexibility opened the space to allow meaning to emerge.

Following our final interviews, the data that I gathered showed me that, for these mature pilot project participants, the idea of the research was authentic and that, in turn, as Indigenous people, their supportive recognition of that qualitative space and, equally prescient, their feedback brought a sense of sturdiness to its purpose. Understandably, through that open-ended, non–task-based approach, we did not achieve a measurable amount of language learning. As ethnographer and language educator, I took the route that the qualitative experience would exceed the quantity. This resulted from participation in a relatively condensed qualitative exposure to Cree language and worldview with members of the cultural community. In turn, stepping into that cultural paradigm afforded me access to a bounty of insightful discourses to learn what Indigenous culture and mentoring entails.

To conclude, the insight that I gained from the pilot was twofold. First, the real-time exposure to the Discourse in its cultural context helped me to recognize the

centrality of a place-specific lived experience to the ontology of a cultural community. In turn, oriented by cultural ontology, the Discourse facilitated the cultural dynamic and engagement in the holistic paradigm when, appropriately accessed and contextually engaged with, naturally serves as a rich source of meaning-making and an embodied expression of collective identity. As a result of a glimpse of that qualitative space, the focus of the youth experience, rightly so, shifted away from rote language to cultural ontology. The goal of the youth gathering became to open this kind of Cree space where the culture and its ways become the content and, in turn, frame the meaning-making parameters.

Consequently, as a researcher, I appreciate the practical influence of the ontological modification. Most important, it inspired me to create a specific kind of context in terms of organizing the demographics, the meetings, the participants, and the ideas that we discussed. As a result, finding and then briefly inhabiting that context ascribed a very specific cultural texture to the data. In that respect, the pilot sessions served the vital functions of tilting the ethnographic lens of interpretation towards a holistic perspective and, with regard to language and literacy practices, identifying the role of mentoring in the expression of cultural continuity.

CHAPTER 6: ORGANIZING COMMUNITY-BASED

YOUTH CULTURAL MENTORING

In the pilot project I gained a rudimentary exposure to the breadth of Cree expression. In several useful ways that time together provided a social climate that opened cultural space and was the beginnings of my perceiving the fundamental connections that ground Indigenous identity. These rich, natural avenues and arenas of holistic consideration informed my orientations towards how to communicate cultural content within that social context. And foremost, the path began with how to go about finding youth. (In terms of sequence of this narrative, the search for a community placement unfolded following the pilot. However, in terms of the larger narrative and narrowing towards community mentoring, I will refer to some pertinent school-related details that I originally encountered during my school-based research application process.)

Locating the Demographic: Social Realities

In no small part, and under the control of the government, institutions have to facilitate the process of minority cultural marginalization and language erosion. As much as Canada claims to be a multicultural society, the endemic cultures and languages have been greatly eroded, from more than 300 prior to European contact to approximately 50 remaining, with the vast majority each having less than several thousand speakers (Canada, 2011). Over the course of successive generations, the legacy of that reality has filtered down to urban reality, and the dearth of Cree language and culture being practiced in the community especially among young people. This reality made the process of finding participants outside of school a demographic challenge.

Beginning with questions that began during my time teaching junior-high in northern Manitoba, I became curious to explore the role of (Indigenous) language in relation to cultural identity. And preferably, I wanted to explore that relationship outside the influence of schools. Therefore, to conduct this cultural mentoring research with youth, I needed access to that demographic.

Initially I applied through the school-based placements that the university offered and requested a local junior high and high school. However, in fairness, I was initially ambiguous about how best to proceed in general in terms of the immediate dynamic involved with mentoring. That uncharted territory, combined with what feels like an imposition with the need to find schools to participate and/or to ask or assign young people to play a research role. Within an already constrained time challenge of schools, this combination vetoes the qualitative point of the exercise. It was for that reason, and certainly coupled with some early practical apprehension about how to appropriately conduct a MAP-type idea within a school-based schedule, that I turned away from that layer and instead looked into the community. While my naive miscalculation of the practicalities may have induced some administrative reticence, the end result, which was that one school did choose to decline citing the lack of practical value, the effect provided a sobering reminder of the challenges of accessing cultural space within an institutional context.

Therefore, though by practicality but ultimately, considering the topic, leading to a more appropriate context, I was obliged to shift my attention away from schools. In hindsight, although that has certainly added time to the overall length of this project, it has also been fruitful time in that it has provided a sustained exposure to a wide breadth of literacy-related issues weaving together literacy, language and Indigenous knowledge. As I mentioned, I had limited personal references with regard to how this urban project would unfold. However, by default, I came to learn some fundamental realities related to school placement. In terms of the time factor, I was reminded of the fact that schools operate under a schedule and have only so much time to deliver, first and foremost, a mandated curriculum. The regulated delivery of public education compartmentalized into pockets of time and skill sets mandated by the curriculum is a massive topic in and of itself; however, in light of Indigenous culture and worldview, which is holistic in nature, a school-based project would feel perfunctory in its limited capacity to allot time and contextual flexibility to the participants.

Making Contact, Building Acquaintances

Finding research space outside of schools was a challenge. I began this process in a variety of directions: phone book, educational angles, and, of course, online, and the search produced a handful of numbers, addresses, and contacts to any and all local organizations I though applicable to this demographic. I gathered close to two dozen related contacts and sequentially began to contact them. They included civic agencies, residential homes, religious affiliations, clientele in detention through legal attempts, and language and literacy, local mentoring, and mental health organizations.

I regularly use the local public library close to my home, which gave me the practical idea of running a literacy project at that location because a number of youth frequently use the computers for communication, and social media. The library administration did allow me to use the facilities, but as I recounted the reality of the youth was too tenuous to expect a commitment beyond the next 24 hours. Taking that into consideration, I approached the local youth shelter nearby, thinking that I would find a pool of more permanent, or at least extended temporary, residents with whom I could possibly work. My visit with the shelter's program director taught me the realities with which some of these young people are dealing. The shelter cannot comply with the provision of housing if the youth are under the influence of drugs or alcohol and/or fail to keep curfews. As it turns out, many of the young people (approximately 15-30 years of age) who use computer services at the library are struggling with substance abuse, lack of housing, and unemployment. For many, their addictions are in control and keep their attention on the immediate. This is likely a factor that prevents their reaching out for help. It should be noted that those who do comply and are finishing school or gaining work experience can stay as residents at the youth shelter for up to six months.

As we spoke it certainly occurred that a number of these youth are the demographic I refer to in this cultural context and to be able to organize some literacy work in and around their lives would be a fascinating experience at multiple levels. In the meantime, the tenuous day-to-day life of these youth does not open much space for commitment to a project even over the course of a month, so the director gave me a list of potential agencies that I scanned until I gained some traction. Shortly thereafter I found

what I was looking for. I located a group home here in Edmonton dedicated to providing culturally based programming, support, and accommodations to Aboriginal youth. It seemed to be appropriate for my purposes.

Access to Community: Robert as a Key Link

I phoned the agency and was put into contact with Robert, the youth coordinator and cultural resource person. Subsequently, I have spent some time with Robert; in our initial interviews, phone calls, and language sessions, he has been my primary conduit to the youth, and his work was essential in making this project possible. His coordinating role in representing the youth and his cultural position as communicator, mentor, and facilitator between mainstream and Indigenous culture became evident soon after I met him. During one of our first conversations he described some of his work as a community liaison within and around nearby schools that several of the agency's youth attended:

> A hockey player on a mostly White team was called racist names in the dressing room. The team manager approached the school to talk about it. The school called [me] to work with the 250 Native kids; 102 showed up [after school]. I asked them, "What should we do?" [The students replied] "We deal with it every day." [Robert asked] "What do you want to do? We can create something constructive. We'll start a project. I will return, we can create a positive image for the community, and then turn it into a positive. Next week I come back, 4 kids showed up [out of 250]. It's a challenge, but they're afraid. They communicate among themselves, but [the challenge of our community and our residential support is] instilling a sense of who am I/identity."

The daily realities that these youth face gave me pause for thought. In regard to agency, the fact that the Aboriginal students from the community (in Robert's example), despite being the victims of racism, were involved in tackling a solution initially left me with a positive impression of their willingness. However, in hindsight, it could equally be interpreted that the school administration did not offer much recourse to offer solutions so they invited Robert to get involved. Viewed from the other side of the equation, it appears curious that the marginalized population has been left in the position of helping to create or even address the possibility of a solution to a problem that they did not cause. Facing these kinds of social challenges, Robert spoke of his professional, and cultural responsibilities:

The reality is treating them with value. Get(ting) them to understand their values, how they see themselves in a school system where they don't seem to fit. How do I feel of value in a school system when there's a thousand other students? How do I feel like I'm going to be important? This is my mandate, with the language; this [cultural mentoring] is a building block. We tried it [language-learning] before; it didn't work. The choice was made for them.

These comments of Robert and Natalie in framing the social context of the youth gave me a sense of the emotional challenge that I was facing in recruiting participants. I presented the idea to him, and we waited for a couple of weeks for him to canvass. His efforts to recruit participants initially met limited success; it resulted in one person. Evidently, free time, at any age, is a precious commodity. Meanwhile, it also occurred to me that within that context Robert represented my best opportunity to bring this cultural project into action. As an outsider to this community, I did not have much influence, and I needed his cultural influence.

As an expression of bottom-up local language and cultural literacy, entry into this sociolinguistic community was to a large degree unvarnished by institution. That would not be possible but for the role and supervision of a cultural steward and his or her understanding of its intended purpose. In this research that steward was the local residential facilitator. In terms of facilitating this Discourse, Robert was essential; he helped to co-ordinate the youth, but he played a more subtle role than that. Between the formality of the institution and the third space of the Cree worldview, Robert was part of the facilitating link that leveraged open space.

Although technically Robert was not part of the pilot project, he overlapped with the participants that because of his personal experiences with the language as an adult, he has a qualitative appreciation for what Indigeneity personally represents. Due to his background, he appreciated the holism of the idea that I proposed. When I contacted the residential administration he fortunately recognized and identified with the anchor of my meaning: mentoring as a premise for the communicative socio-cultural exploration of cultural, lineage, identity, and expression. His life experience and age give him a perspective on the intended purpose:

I know all the ceremonies, shaking tent, sweat lodges, pipe. I'm missing the most important thing: I want those children kids to have the same feeling, values, of what life gives; They don't know what they're missing."

I later asked Kaylie, "What did you learn about Russell from this?" She replied:

He knows about the culture and stuff, but no one taught [the language] to him. . . . [But] I didn't know that about him. He knows a lot. When I asked him when [someone] passed away, he told me where her spirit goes.

Although she has known Robert for at least a year, she admitted that she did not know that at one point Robert had known Cree, but he too was separated from it. It is a simple example, but it gave Kaylie a personal perspective on the effect of the socializing process of residential schools. Just as much, while that perspective is very context specific, under the circumstance, it provided a poignant example of a young person having a mature caring person they know and trust, and can ask pertinent questions to.

"Cultural security is the outcome of a process which involves a youth mentoring program, recruiting staff and mentors with cultural awareness; . . . [and] how the service is conducted and whether the program delivers outcomes for Aboriginal people" (Australia, 2014, p. 5). Robert's appreciation for his cultural heritage and, in his professional capacity, his stewardship of his abilities to make this exposure possible for the youth to experience, provided this cultural security. It is no understatement to say that Robert was the cultural hub; his personal cultural capital leveraged open the qualitative space for examples such as Kaylie's reflection to emerge. Quite specifically, his participation opened the cultural space into which we could step. I will return to Robert in a later vignette to underscore his own mentoring role but first give backdrop to the challenges of accessing the qualitative space so central to engaging cultural continuity.

Youth Demographics

Locally in Alberta, Indigenous youth, including several of these apprentices, make up 9% of the youth population but more than two thirds of those in care (Alberta, 2013; Kozlowski, Sinha, & McHugh, 2011). This statistic is alarming and reflects the effects of deep qualitative issues that have frayed the social fabric of many Indigenous communities. Beyond the daily price of families and communities struggling, a future toll is equally being prepaid as the collective and finite expression of cultural identity

continues to erode, with limited new speakers replacing them. In that reality, children

and youth removed from their communities and relocated by government family services

remain unwitting victims of a short-term solution to a long-term problem that is not

designed to have a positive result. Those children removed in one or two previous

generations and disconnected from their roots have now become parents in communities

that collectively face the legacy of these disruptions to the local cultural climate. The

dialectic process that destabilized communities in the first place is replayed through child

intervention services. Now the children are removed, not to be civilized through

education, but because of dysfunction in the nuclear family unit or as a safety precaution

against the unpredictability of an already resocialized community. Natalie commented on

the youth at her middle school:

> The kids—many—have been traumatized by their Aboriginal family; the structure
> of the family fell apart. There's more kids in welfare than ever went to residential
> schools. In some treaties, one of every two kids are in the welfare system. . . .
> When they go back to their communities, they're ostracized and rejected. This is
> where bullying, rejection, and gangs take over. The feds give a block of money to
> the leadership and then chunked off much of social assistance. The leftover money
> [is] very little.

The result is that the child welfare system furthers the rupture in the intergenerational

transmission. This process is into its second and third generation. Robert relayed his

own experience of growing up with the displacing effects that were shifted among

community, family, residential school, and homes:

> In group homes I had no sense of self; couldn't visit my family. I know these kids
> will go back to their people. They won't live in White culture; they're going to go
> to their people. Our community is grateful to have us there. My experience tells
> me this will be the process.

In 2000 the Alberta child welfare standards, based on the Child, Youth and Family

Enhancement Act, included the consideration that youth guardianship or adoption

agencies include a "cultural connection plan outlining the ways in which that child's

culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions will be fostered" (Kozlowski et al., 2011,

para. 2). The heritage connection plan does not mention language. An extension of these

practices came during my interviews when I visited two separate group homes. Despite

being a caring employee, this worker did not have much in common with a young Cree teenager from central Alberta because she is a relative newcomer to Canada from Ghana. It begs the question—and Robert`s role is likely the reply—for young Indigenous people such as Allison, who lived in the city during her teenage years without regular contact with her immediate family, where and under what circumstances do they get the attention, affirmation, and sense of who they are and/or learn about their culture and heritage? Numerous immigrant communities have more mother-tongue Native speakers than in the Cree community, though Cree is an endemic language with more than 4,000 years of spoken presence. This is a difficult notion to fathom. Perhaps this is the legacy of globalization—or its price. For its part, the agency, as a publicly employed contractor in the field of residential care, advertises this position and considers all who apply.

This climate of cultural homogenization is also a form of political correctness that extends beyond a single context, which Christine, one of the mentors who along with the other participants, I will shortly introduce, echoed. In her profession and experience working with the holism of cultural teachings Christine regularly encounters mainstream social workers who are frustrated with unresponsive Indigenous clients and "can't see why they're not making progress…based on theory learned." At the root of these cross cultural processes are separate discourses, each serving a paradigm that frames meaning in a distinct way. One Discourse is embedded in the communication and lived expression of a collective identity, "inclusive of spirit, blood memory, respect, interconnectedness, storytelling, feelings, experiences and guidance" (Baskin, 2006, Towards an Understanding of Aboriginal World Views section, para. 1). The other Discourse is based on theoretical constructs. In social work practice, ignorance of cultural ontology, and instead applying constructed attempts to condition behavior into predetermined parameters of meaning simply reflects the power of the greater cultural episteme. Christine, stated rather plainly that attempting to re-program, and thus override, the local with the synthetic is not only a failure, but also an imposition: "Get off your soapbox. You will never change an Aboriginal to think like you."

Amid these deep conflicts is the ongoing toll paid in a political economy: the erosion of self-determined cultural and collective self-expression. In that light, as Robert

pointed out, does it come as a surprise—nonetheless, underscoring the rooted power of community and collectivity—that upon reaching legal age, many urban youth return to their communities? He added that that scenario is typically embroiled in other considerations of making a return home amid stressful conditions a bittersweet experience. Robert recalled that, following his years in residential school and into young adulthood,

> when I went home when I was 18, I went looking for them. My auntie held me and told me about my mother and how important it was for me to be home [and] speaking Cree because she couldn't speak English, and how my being there connected me to the family. I had to move on, but I will not forget that feeling.

Natalie relayed the ongoing challenge of involving community members who may not have personal exposure, access or experience with the critical validity expressed through cultural continuity: "We [pilot participants] participated willingly, but not everyone is like that. They're distracted by life [and] they have immediate concerns" that override their interest. Moving forward, this area of identifying and communicating Indigenous dialogue 'within' cultural worldview is critical for entrenching the role of literacy and its centrality to the validity of endemic self-expression (Kroskrity, 2009).

Surrounding this local context, as I have become more informed on Indigeneity, language, and culture, I have come to understand that under the colonial reality rests a profound cultural treasure. Experiencing this treasure is possible only within the context of the cultural community and with the community members' participation. Robert commented that "one of the most important things we've been trying to develop with these kids is getting them to value who they are as traditionally young Cree. They come from so much destruction, their background, where there is nothing."

Returning to the task at hand, after a couple of weeks of preparing for the project, Robert called to inform me that only one person was interested. It was another splash of cold water to hear his message, but as we spoke, his voice and words told me that he was prepared to continue looking and he needed another round of canvassing. Ten days later he called again to relay that his persistence had worked! His efforts led to a group of six female cultural apprentices who were in Grades 8 to 12.

From the first day the most fundamental consideration for this research revolved around opening and keeping open a particular qualitative space. Consequently, in seeking the participants' reflections on the experience of integrating at the intersection of language, culture, and identity that space, which therefore shaped the meaning-making of the content, feedback and in turn, grounds this research, can only be opened one way. As a qualitative investigation, the validity of the research is premised on accessing an affective domain which, in this case, results in cultural expression. Very specifically then, opening that affective domain leading into expression means that participation must be willingly undertaken. And for this project, it means the youths' participation was on their own time.

So, despite the looming feeling of no participants, the project would progress, but the experience throughout the planning has felt like a test of perseverance and has resonated with me. It is no understatement to say that meeting Cree youth in the city and outside of schools for the purpose of exploring language and heritage is a fairly rare space. Consequently, facing challenges to get to that space has also left me feeling rather self-conscientious. The idea of holding these meetings should not be a defiant declaration of its possibility—that is the other end of the continuum than I sought. But, massaging the reality in order to shift that balance point to a more favorable context, I have to work within the reality and sweeten the pot, in order to hook their participation but ultimately the strategy helped frame a landscape where the young people could refer meaning to (King, 2009). As it turned out, a practical way to gain and solidify their attention and participation was to offer food. That tilt inched open enough space to keep their attention over the course of these meetings.

As I mentioned in the Methodology section, the qualitative cultural and language experience between cultural paradigms is central to this encounter. In that regard, I will briefly change gears to introduce the participants and give their further anecdotes and references some narrative reference.

Participants

The Youth

Allison is about 14 years old, in Grade 8. I visited her at her residence and during our conversation she mainly listened, and possibly out of shyness, tended to agree with me when I asked her questions. She was away from her home reserve but occasionally spoke to her family from the youth home. Kaylie and Charlene were Allison's best friends. The three of them spent time together at school and lived close to one another so they always came to the meetings together. Charlene was the same age as Kaylie and lived together at another home. They were all close. Charlene was more animated than the others, and her personality had an artsy flair. Thus she gravitated most to Allan's active personality rather than to the more reserved Christine. Charlene enjoyed dancing and had been to several powwows over the past summers. It is interesting that she also had a boyfriend of Dene background who visited a couple of times though he chose not participate for his own reasons.

Kaylie was also part of that trio of close friends who lived in the same neighborhood and arrived at the meetings together by bus. Kaylie was rather soft spoken, but displayed an attentive awareness. From her own family background she was familiar with such things as protocol and the appropriate behavior amongst Elders. She seemed to know the Cree 'cultural neighborhood.' However, as at school, where the Cree class had no fluent teacher, she did not have regular opportunities to explore the neighborhood for an extended period of time.

The two other girls, Amanda and Dana, are sisters who came together. Their mother, who worked for an agency that had received the email about my initial call for participants, dropped them off. Dana, a high school student, was the oldest participant; she was two years older than the others. In some ways, at that age, she was a stranger to the others, but that was acceptable to her. She liked to wear hats, and her music headphones hung around her neck at all times, not because she wished to ignore others, but because she appeared to enjoy keeping her own company. She was more independent than alone. The fact that she went to a learning centre rather than a public high school reflected her self-awareness. Her mother recognized her daughter's individuality and

allowed her to follow her education on terms that were acceptable to her. Her mother speaks Cree, but I typically did not ask the adults or the students if they spoke or heard Cree at home, and if not, why not. I consider that a personal question, and some background knowledge of the topic suggested that I not press the point.

Dana's younger sister, Amanda, was in Grade 8, like the other girls, but at a different school. She and Charlene saw one another at local cultural events from time to time but did not spend time together. Amanda had an interesting way about her. She was observant in a quiet, inquisitive way, as though she knew that something that connected language and culture was occurring. Her quietness gave me the impression that she was trying to work out that relationship; I had a sense that here attention to that context had awoken. However, in the Cree context, the language and ideas of this new encounter made the content perhaps feel like a small mountain of new of data: long words, numbers, opposites, pictures, and so on. These symbols and information come as ideas through forms of representation. Literacy can be helpful, but if speakers are limited to fundamentals, it can also leave many unable to move past the sound and visuals to the abstract. I am not implying that this applies to Amanda at all; in fact, the opposite is true. She talked about her friends at school who spoke French, and she heard and wondered what they are saying. Her attention was definitely tilted towards the fact that different language and words and sounds make her friends communicate in a way that she did not know. Her awareness implied that she recognized that connection. It also makes more sense that, in terms of capturing her attention, she said that some 'stuff' was boring and some was interesting. It was the tone of her comments that implied she gave attention to how that 'stuff' was or could be presented. She had friends who spoke a second language about which she was curious and was curious enough to participate with us, and her quietness nonetheless kindled meaning. Her encounter with this content reminds me of both cross-cultural and individual-difference approaches to language and learning (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Darren, Allison's boyfriend, was a playful person with a charming nature. He spoke with an easygoing nature and was noticeably more outgoing than the girls. Initially he did not sign up to participate, but he wanted to spend time with Allison after school, so

he decided to join the sessions when he was not playing basketball; he attended the majority of the gatherings. He is of mixed descent and lived at an adjacent residence. In meeting Darren, his multicultural background and friendly nature during our interviews led our conversation beyond just mentoring into social roles and cultural differences. He was in Grade 10 and at that time was also taking a Cree cultural class with an artistic theme. My impression was that Darren was generally fairly open-minded, which I believe stemmed from his multicultural background. He enjoyed art and was making a chicken suit at school. He appeared to be comfortable across several cultural fronts. His cross-cultural awareness—besides the fact that he was the only male youth—added dynamism to the meetings. From Darren, following our interviews, I had a better perspective on how a longer exposure could open natural avenues to bridging cultural artifacts and ceremony with language construction.

Cultural Mentors

Two of the master speakers spoke fluently, and they were both older than I. They were strangers to the youth but, coincidentally, were related to each other through extended kin. Essentially, these Cree speakers, along with Frank from the pilot, served as the cultural conduits who guest-hosted our meetings. Less dramatically, they were the 'feature,' but in a supportive role to provide presence, talk about words, and help with pronunciations and cultural ideas connected to the topic and discussions. During the planning portion I had sent a missive through a list-serve that I circulated through a local Aboriginal agency, and I found two potential participants who were fluent speakers. I met with them separately and discussed the details.

Allan was retired but still working part time at a local restaurant. As a Métis, he grew up with the language, went to residential school, and recently took part in the local Truth & Reconciliation Hearings. Over our initial conversation when I visited his place of work, we spoke about the topic, and he expressed his interest in participating. Meeting him and learning his perspectives resulted in some interesting drives to and from the sessions. Prior to the meetings I was able to observe Allan's communication skills; at this same occasion I also met Frank for the first time.

Allan and I went to a local community-run Tea and Cree and shared some potluck food with a gathering of seniors who met regularly to practice their spoken Cree. As Allan moved around the room and introduced himself to the others, he demonstrated his language and people skills. He is a charismatic person, and his communication skills reflect he has been a cultural 'in-betweener.' That awareness of his heritage contextualized his contribution to the spirit and the literacy of the youth meetings.

The second youth cultural mentor was a local woman who also contacted me. Her involvement was good fortune. Prior to the pilot project, during my search for participants, I had received a call from a healing agency in the city who informed me that two women wanted to participate. At that time I had gained ethics approval but found no school or participants, and I was feeling dejected. Thus, hearing from and meeting Christine was good fortune. They met me at a nearby restaurant, but only Christine eventually participated. It is interesting though that accompanying her was her *oskapew*, Karla. This term loosely refers to a kind of apprentice who personally participates in cultural continuity by learning about protocol, ceremonial practices, and traditions and gains experience by assisting an Elder, often as a form of cultural mentoring over an extended period of time.

This cultural relationship in which the participants became involved made me reflect on the word *mentoring* and the very personal nature of real-time learning that is transferred through observation and listening. Indigenous paradigms of knowledge speak of highly contextual meanings, orally transmitted in an experiential way that learners integrate as they observe, model, and begin to internalize their own personal meaning. This is, admittedly, a slow process, though no different from raising a child.

Christine is a Cree woman from northern Alberta/Saskatchewan. She was in her mid 40s and had a quiet strength. Although her disposition seemed stern and serious, we laughed often and without reservation. In hindsight, Christine's work with traditions and ceremony, along with the cultural mood of the pilot, influenced the climate of our sessions as a cultural space rather than a series of language-learning driven periods of cultural observations. Ultimately, this qualitative essence served as the fabric to develop the content into a 'Cree map.' Christine's local work and language fluency brought

genuine, credible authenticity to this project and the time. Coupled with the engaging, lively personality of Allan (they were the pair who know each other through extended family), they made a good team and alternated the days of their visits with the participants. These mentors played a critical role. By communicating the ontology of the culture in a way that allowed me observation in the hope of translating the intergenerational process as an expression of literacy and cultural identity. I was fortunate to have their participation as it permitted me the sociocultural opportunity to observe and learn from their contributions (Council on Aboriginal Initiatives, 2012; Klinck et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 7: ACCESS TO LINEAGE

Following the pilot, its cultural perspectives left me both refreshed and, in a practical sense, somewhat muted. In initially planning this investigation around the broad construct of language learning, I was moving along the appropriate path by brainstorming how to build learning. However, at first, by separating myself from the language, perhaps à la Saussure, I was guilty of approaching the *langue* of Cree as an entity and interpreting pedagogy and speech production in terms of constructing a communicative taxonomy. At a simple level, although, on the surface, reducing language to facts and data might lend itself to the representation of useful markers of communication, in the Indigenous context, language is imbued with references to and reflects a collectively lived expression (Battiste, 2002). Whether by syntax (Levinson, 2009), metaphor (Boroditsky, 2011b), time (Beck et al., 1977; Epes, 1981), geography (Harrison, 2007), or as the source or nourishment of cultural, linguistic, and physical paradigms (Harmon, 1996), the holism of communication and collective identity as a merging of communication and embodied experience emerges as self-evident. As Dumont (1976) noted, an Indigenous worldview and cultural paradigm elicit communication from within a 360-degree environment.

In my understanding, the expression of cultural literacy can begin to emerge when retaining the qualitative space. While I was engaged in this cross-cultural encounter, my own personal background was not specifically applicable; however, as a second-language educator that background was very much applicable. That applied literacy, between the practicalities involved in opening this qualitative space, the time spent with the mentors and learners, and the literacy and articulation of what it means helps navigate these subsequent findings.

As a language educator, encountering and being with the language among the youth was a tricky proposition. My role notwithstanding, as language beginners, none of us speak enough Cree to talk about it in Cree, so, to give those ideas some shape from which to make meaning, we spoke mostly English. Moreover, for some of these young people this cultural experience was a new frame of reference. As a result of that gap in their personal experience, the often quiet space of our meetings spoke loudest, only later,

after I had time to reflect, that I could begin to discern the meaning. As a research space, by their participation or articulation, this local community of learners and their qualitative encounter frame the findings speaks of served to inform of a quiet and profound cultural reality.

I have merged the findings of this chapter: the climate of the meetings, the language content and the role and presence of the cultural mentors, from 'within' this sociocultural space. And while these language-related topics were certainly influenced by the parameters and sociocultural realities of our time together, the rich sociolinguistic space in which we engaged in them brings insights into language and meaning beyond this local community. In that light and oriented broadly throughout this investigation, the meetings opened into the sociolinguistic discourse elicited from a quiet cultural space to better understand some of the social dynamics underpinning the expression of holism towards future sustained language construction.

Gathering in a Space

During our time together during the winter months, we met in the late afternoon when the youth arrived from their various schools, either by foot or by bus. On the way to the house I stopped by the grocery store each day and purchased various ingredients or condiments such as flour, lard, butter, jam, and juice to prepare bannock, as well as tea. One day in the store I started thinking about how multicultural Canada is. There I was in an Asian supermarket, and I was the visible, cultural, linguistic minority. Because I did not speak the multitude of languages—Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Vietnamese—as far as speech and cultural communities are concerned, I was on their 'turf.' In some ways, possibly even because of it, I thought it somewhat poetic that I was there buying staples to prepare homemade traditional food with some local youth.

Cooking homemade food is always effective to lower people's defenses, and for us it was also always a good way to set the mood. Amid swirls of sounds and the comforting smells of frying bannock browning in the pan, all eight of us would gather in the kitchen. It was communal, we took our time, and we ate with pleasure. During this time Christine or Allan would speak Cree, offering us food, modeling the frying, and preparing bite-sized portions, while along the way telling us the names of the bites that

we ate; and we shared, helped around the frying pan, poured tea, and smeared jam. Some of the vocabulary we used included *pahkwesikanis* (cookie), *siwanos* (sweet), *maskihkiwapoy* (tea), *pihkatewapoy* (coffee), *siwiminihkwewin* (juice), *siwinikan* (sugar), *ehmihkwanis* (spoon), *minihkwacikanis* (cup), *micisowinahtik* (table), *minisapohkan* (jam), and *tehtapownihk* (chair). (I will return to this list shortly, but my point including them here is that in their own simple way they serve as tiny reminders, as a specific type of reference to the associations of this mentoring experience; and more qualitatively, as a subtle expression of cultural literacy.

The mentors repeated words when we asked them to do so and offer little tips and meanings that inform the words. *Maskihkiwapoy* (tea) and *pihkatewapoy* (coffee) have a similar ending that signifies a liquid for drinking, with a *wabwoy*-sounding pronunciation that has a soft aspirated sound that is not common in the English language. However, as we began to understand it, it had had a warm, comforting sound, both hearing and saying it. Extending that mood explains the savory appeal of dark roast to some drinkers, and coffee translates to a loose meaning of 'burnt water.' To a degree, thinking about coffee as burnt water makes sense. To mitigate that strong taste, *wihki-pahkwesikanis* (cookie) chunks into an etymology of 'sweet little bread.' These markers might seem innocuous and they are certainly common to every culture; however, in learning about the etymology of any language and from a fluent speaker who still uses these local cultural markers as frames of reference, enriches the moment. I recall a conversation with Nancy during the pilot when she said that Frank's reference to local knowledge evoked a memory that spoke to her cultural sensibilities and these little references gave her a "sharper picture of the language." For these young people, the fellowship of food gave voice to our vehicle of expression of a sentiment similar to the one that Nancy had observed. With the mentors cooking and modeling the words, the opportunity to hear Cree anchored the rich simplicity of our gathering in a satisfied, unhurried spirit.

Protocol

Following more food, we cleaned up and moved to the adjacent eating area. At this location, a modest house that served some older clientele and was Robert's working office, we had room in the kitchen space, so we moved the table and arranged a circle of

chairs. At one side we gathered around a stand with paper for writing and vocabulary.
Before we began the sessions, Robert led us through a smudge.

As the youth coordinator, Robert is very aware of the centrality of culture to his
role as a model for these young people. His interview underscored his knowledge of that
awareness of the protocols connection. At another time when I arrived at the house, he
was making a leather sheath for a pipe and had various supplies lying on the kitchen
table. I watched him with the leather laid out and a simple but elegant carved wooden
pipe to fit into it, and as I soaked it in, he quietly and, reminded me not to touch the pipe.
His tone was not threatening, just earnest. The cultural protocol and ceremony involved
with pipe-making and carrying is part of sacred practices, so he being courteous to tell me
there is a line about seeing and not touching that a newcomer could unintentionally step
on.

Providing the youth with models of behaviour and sharing his knowledge of
cultural practices has a quiet honor to it that Robert reflects in a conscientious and
humble manner. What made him such an integral part of this research aside from driving
it to fruition was also part of his own reward in kindling some of his own language
memories during our time together.

Robert's cultural knowledge, and his practicing appreciation for its continuity,
certainly gives him a unique form of figurative literacy. For us, it helped him to
recognize that our gathering together for learning and an opportunity to be with carriers of
the language who came to share their knowledge was meaningful and his efforts reflect
that it needed to be recognized. With all of us standing in a circle, Robert would light the
braided sweetgrass and begin to fan it with an eagle feather as he explained that the
Elders would be proud of our gathering for these reasons and we should try to share and
enjoy this experience with good intention. At the same time, the smudge had another
purpose in preparing for that time together.

As Robert went along the inside of the circle and stopped at each person, they
drew the smoke up and over their shoulders. He explained that smudging has a specific
meaning: While it does clear the air around our minds, eyes, and ears; the process is
important as it gives us a chance to stop and remember. For Indigenous people who

practice smudging, the act is a ritual or ceremony that connects man with nature by melding the ingredients (Beck et al., 1977, Manitoba, 2011). These roots are fire, air, water, and earth. To cleanse mind, body, spirit, and emotion, particular herbs, typically sweetgrass, cedar, or braided sage, are chosen for their pungent aromas and stimulating effects, which are both the process and product serving attention as awakening reminders to the expression that connects all of us with the greater spirit that runs through all living things (Bopp, 1984; Regnier, 1995).

During the smudge Robert's voice would become even more soft-spoken, but a steady calm reassuring tone (Krashen, 1981). The youth, most of whom attended a school with a sizable Cree population, were familiar with the practice. At first only Dana and I were relatively new to the process, but quietly watched the others who modeled how they drew the smoke up and over themselves. Robert initially modeled the way though over the course of the meetings, each participant took turns 'hosting' the smudge bowl.

After the smudge, Robert asked Allan or Christine to say a prayer. As a guest participant in this context, and also as protocol, I was not permitted to record, but learned afterward that these prayers thank the Creator and those who had offered us a place of gathering for their kindness. As we watched and listened, it became a challenge to focus on the present. The connection through willingness and kindness helped us to become part of the culture and wisdom of those who came before us. Like a smudge, these simple ceremonies, in and of themselves, physically engaged our senses and opened a space to create a memory:

> Implicit in this is the understanding that all of life is a ceremony; that the sacred and the secular are parts of the whole; that people are whole beings (body, mind, spirit, emotion); and that "*mino-pimatisiwin*" is achieved by taking care of all aspects of one's self. (Manitoba, 2014, p. 3)

Planting seeds is essential to the nourishment of roots, so following the lively atmosphere in the kitchen and sharing food, the smudge and prayer are quiet gestures which represent an expression of Cree values, but modestly also associate personal identity with the practice of a collective point of reference. That is a cultural seed for the individual to attach meaning. Along with the modest gesture of holding hands in the circle, these humble protocols work as reminders, and their embodied practice nourishes their value.

Planting a Flag

From a language-learning perspective, following the pilot, what Frank had taught us constituted a solid starting block of content that could anchor a simple but identifiable sense of connection to Cree worldview. Perhaps more important, and especially because these young people attended on their own time, I wanted that connection to be present but uncomplicated. Therefore, beginning with the first meeting, I wanted to focus on only a few ideas. I will address these particular sentences here, but I will revisit them in the following chapter as they apply to literacy and second-language learning. From the first meeting onwards, the self-introductions consisted of four sentences:

> *n't'siyiihkaason* ____ [My name is . . .]
> *nikaawiy* ____ [My mother is . . .]
> *n'caapaan* ____ [My great-grandfather is . . .]
> _____ *ohci niiya*is [. . . is the place/area that I am from]

These self-introductions from the pilot have struck me particularly as a strong connotation at a nexus to a qualitative paradigm. Very specifically, in that cultural context, the nature of these introductions are the expression of a mode of meaning-making and come from a qualitative space outside the lens of science. this leads to some points in regards to the value and pretext of communication.

The Power of Place

In the Indigenous worldview, the act of self-identification is deeply contextual (English: I am Martin Paul Zeidler; Cree: My name is . . . ; my mother is . . . ; my great-grandfather is . . . ; . . . is the place/area that I am from). On first impression, the Cree version seems formal and perhaps even a little pejorative and old-fashioned because it includes place, lineage, and maternal or paternal relationships. However, more accurately, as a form of protocol, the declaration socioculturally anchors the speaker within the references of an Indigenous paradigm. Understood more holistically, self-identification represents more than just a statement; it is an embodied act that merges the cultural with the psychological within a relational (Simpson, 2000). "The protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. xv). (For the sake of a cultural

comparison, Korea has a version of this relational collective that orients its vertical social hierarchy. Who the oldest is quickly emerges and in the proper honorific is identified. In Korean culture, where 20 million people are named Kim, Park, or Lee—and likely in most homogenous cultural communities—the process is so socially embedded in everyday conversation that the practice goes undetected; but, very fundamentally, it ethically frames the nature of the communication. In my own Asian foreign language teaching, and depending on the formality of the learning environment, watching my English students positioned their pecking order the and within a few short moments of meeting, everyone knows who is the *de facto* senior member.)

In the localized Indigenous context, a self-introduction that accounts for lineage, community, and blood memory is anything but basic. However, as a result of the colonized physical space, and defining the political economy of that space, what is in essence an act of local epistemic expression and instrumentalized into an 'outcome' or 'skill' as a communicative marker of particular content. For our purposes, these simple self-introductory sentences certainly fall under the BICS parameter of communication competency. And while I use the example not to attack Cummins, I understand that, in our society, pragmatically speaking, *I am Martin* serves as an identifying tag; however— and with no irony—what we say and what it means cannot be taken at face value. That is the critical cultural point of distinction.

The socialized relativity of communication does not change the essence of the information as a cultural value. However that same relativity does reflect power. Therefore interpreting "My name is . . ." without considering what it means under the given circumstances and cultural differences underserves the local authority and transforms communication to an instrumental value. While Cummins' model describes the exchange in a school-based setting and he is certainly aware of the 'levels' of literacy towards a given discourse.) Re-iterating both the challenge, and the payoff of what cultural expression entails, the example is to demonstrate how in regards to some as simple, or significant, as a cultural act of self-identification and institution standardize measures of performance through reducing language to utility. This political homogenizing and glossing over cross-cultural differences in the service of measurable

markers usurps the same meaning that this research space examines where culture and identity engage, meet, build and extend meaning out of a quality of being. That qualitative space also communicates a very specific kind of literacy. Cultural mentoring represents a most timely communicative key to retaining Indigenous cultural continuity.

So, while these introductory markers may appear politically insignificant, they are noteworthy when understood as emerging out of a distinct cultural framework. In turn, they are most potent when their value is internally self-defined. That self-defined context, and its access and engagement, is any culture's source of strength.

The symbolism of these expressions of self-identification also highlights the role of culture in framing a natural network among collective expression, meaning, and wellness. When individuals position themselves in such a context—within family, geographical place, and social/emotional community—they inclusively draw on the holism of those referents as part of their identity (Baskin, 2006). In the Maori context, the qualitative value of this literacy-based affiliation emerges as individuals engage with the cultural capital of their heritage and begin to integrate it into their personal identity (King, 2001). However, at the same time—and this is the challenge with all minority languages—foreign- and second-language classrooms, because of their curricular choices, cannot accommodate the dynamism of this view of language (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). It speaks to the social authority of rendering meaning that the simple expression of communication of "I am Martin," represented instrumentally, is reduced to an economy of words.

Therefore, the context of the encounter with the language must be the facilitating factor to engage motivation. The context of the locally defined space and the quality of the communication it elicits underscore the logic of retaining locality as a trusted source of meaning-making. "Key within a relational worldview is the emphasis on spirit and spirituality and, in turn, a sense of communitism and respectful individualism" (Hart, 2010, p. 3). These simple markers usefully reflect a similar dynamic, as King (2009) discusses, in the motivational terms in which second-language learners engage. Further, this underscores the point that cultural expression becomes diminished within the context

of institutions; therefore, both retain local authority but, through language and cultural practices, extend their holistic expression.

The Circle of Words

The cultural underpinnings of language learning are certainly significant. Admittedly, for the immediate and practical purposes of this research, to a degree I was also guilty of distilling cultural ontology. This reality and the limited duration of the project, the youths' available free time, the fact that the youth were beginning speakers, the number of mentors, and the limitation of being indoors, cumulatively, also affected the language-related dynamics of the meetings. Nonetheless, from the inner dynamics of our Cree meaning-making process on those afternoons, when we would wrestle with vocabulary, syllables, and pronunciation in an attempt to construct language, some pertinent language-related considerations emerged that I will discuss shortly.

Along with the introductory set of statements, we created a Circle of Life that was our reference point; it anchored a kind of compass that oriented our attention and to which we could add as new words arose in the meetings. I had a large circle on the board that represented a map of sorts that pointed out the four cardinal directions and was divided into the four seasons and the four colors. The words included the following:

Earth: *kihc-okawimaw*
Sun: *kisikawi pisim*
Moon: *tipiskawi pisim*
Feather: *mikwan*

East: *sakastenohk*
Spring: *miyoskamin*
Yellow: *osawisi*

South: *apihta kisikahk*
Summer: *nipin*
Red: *mihkwa*

West: *pahkisimohk*
Autumn: *takwakin*
Green: *askihtakwaw*

North: *kiwetinohk*
White: *wapiska*
Winter: *pipon* (Ahenakew Wolfart Dictionary, 1998)

one: *peyak*, two: *niso*, three: *nisto*, four: *newo*, five: *niyanan* (mnemonic: Rhiannon), six: *nikotwasik*, seven: *tepakohp*, eight: *ayinanew*, nine: *kekaymitaht*, zero: *namahkiway*

Over the course of the meetings we maintained a routine to foster the association between the culture and the content. As well, for all of us newcomers, the words were on the board, always available for easy reference. It was one more thing to lighten the emotional load for the participants during our time together; anyone who felt 'on the spot' could easily check the board, so the lag time was not dramatic. These words comprised our content for various group and pair activities along the way. As I mentioned, it was a conscientious strategy not to use a great deal of content in that short window of time. As I watched, I began to think more about why, how, or whether they would retain that content. This leads to the second point about the depth of meaning, and the construction of language skills. In turn, these considerations highlight the role of engaging the learner

Regarding Rote Learning and Memorization

At a simple communicative level, up through to the age of 7, around the time that they start school, adolescents model and physically reproduce sounds, and largely unconsciously, figure out how to identify, stimulate and express messages through language. Related to oral language learning, in the institutional context, teaching and language-learning practices generally attempt to mimic this process along the lines of building phonetic awareness and then starting to construct words. In this section, I discuss similar language learning considerations emerging out of our sociocultural context

In our after-school context with older beginners, our Cree encounters with the new sounds and words—that is, learning vocabulary—we were, ironically, bound by similar time limits, and due to that certain aspects of our construction and language-building somewhat defaulted to an similar approach to a school setting, but for the social context and the presence and role of mentors. However innocuous it may seem, that sociocultural fact did indeed inform the context, the content and combined to pretext and elicit pertinent pedagogic feedback. Though partially these observations are related to the particular parameters of our meetings, at the same time, they address literacy and meaning

from a qualitative space between the individual and the culture. Along with pertinent vocabulary building, engaging that relationship becomes the unfolding cultural map and as literacy, is an unbound space of cultural expression.

Working with post-adolescent learners, building meaning means considerations beyond the literal in order to gain emotional traction with the vocabulary (King, 2009). Drawn from the course of our meetings these language-specific observations are interpreted in consideration of an extended exposure with language word-building. As we relayed words, took turns around the circle sequentially, or pointing to the next speaker—with alternative turns and little tiny 'on-the-spot' unexpected moments-whatever the variety of the social group-oral activity- led to some observations about how language as a process and product, is socially presented and personally internalized. For example, if I could not think of a word during my turn, the group members gave me some phonetic cues or hints to help me. Triggering memory by cuing once there is some connection is acceptable. But it gets more subtle. Let's say I already knew even the first syllable, which, though a very simple demonstration, does show memory. By that token, it was evidence of a hook already in my mind, not very deep, but it was there, as traction. However, if I could not remember even the first syllable, it implied that the hook/?memory/?learning had not reached the point of expression.

In terms of language construction, and what under-girds its motivation, this tenuous memorization revealed interesting considerations about the depth of retention and the nature of the learning. In the next chapter, I will explore in more detail some of pedagogic considerations of learning and teaching a language laden with rather long polysynthetic words. Suffice it to say, when time is constrained, "Memorization and rote learning can play a substantial role in learning isolating languages, but may be less helpful for poly-synthetic languages, due to their vast numbers of roots and affixes which can combine in multiple ways" (Fortescue & Lennert Olsen, 1992, p. 24; as cited in Kell, 2014).

In the same regard, using overt strategies to associate or trigger rote-memory, such as total physical response ([TPR] Asher, 1977) might help to stimulate physiology; as an approach to making meaning 'stick,' it applies well to short-term task-based or evaluative

applications. However, unless there is sustained exposure to the language, the immediate traction of TPR has little opportunity to seed into long-term memory. Therefore, even at the level of basic language construction, the *act* of memory has to be triggered. TPR helps by engaging the physical body in creating some associative traction, though my observations told me that the language strategies and approach to building long-term memory are the product of a different process. I will look closer at making meaning out of 'new' words and ideas more in the next chapter in the discussion of the pedagogically related findings.

What emerges is that a limited context such as our short time together requires that meaning-making shift away from immediate 'performance' of production, and instead towards making meaning prioritized out of a larger, cultural meaning rather. These limitations are the result. If the cultural context is not privileged and the exposure given the sustenance of time, any attempts at construction by rote or conditioning methods pay the price of decontextual information, especially for older learners. In turn, the topic speaks to the centrality of the (cultural) frame of reference and premises the literacy-related encounter, and meaning emerges when the connection/memory has been emotionally engaged. More pragmatically, the process of constructing knowledge or allowing it to emerge by opening the space and engaging the natural referents of its expression is one of the cultural approaches. We must remember, we were all beginners, and the phonemes of Cree, even as simple as "one, two, three, four, five" sound new and a simple activity of working through those numbers and sounds, building some memorization and then incorporating the words into an activity such as a phone-number quiz can take a fair bit of brain power, especially when the building blocks; the phonemes of the language are new and foreign. Many words are long and, ultimately, in all fairness, vocabulary should emerge in spite of the length of the words.

Especially in an Indigenous language context, the shortcomings of various approaches and their roles in meaning-making must be understood to foster a climate of further learning. However, our time together was condensed, and it was especially a challenge to open that space. Nevertheless, culturally, Cree worldview and its expression are precisely a qualitative experience with a richness of meaning that unfolds over time.

It cannot be quantified. Therefore, the strategies and approaches to instrumental language learning are limited, which underscores the need for an affective qualitative dynamic to embed the linguistic experience.

Nonetheless, despite our poor phonetic skills, in the youth sessions the repetition and phrase building were always useful to generate good energy among us and keep us 'loose,' comfortable, and giggling. For monolinguals and new second-language learners, the sounds and correct pronunciation can be slippery. As in any language, physical speech positions (tongue, lip, throat) affecting pronunciation. Cree has its own distinct sounds with some aspirated and others extended or bent to a certain tone or pitch. Until the phonetics of the syllabics are understood, these sounds can be a challenge to say properly. For now, as a journal entry provides, suffice it to say that even those exercises were not without their humor.

We used some of the directional words with which we had finished on the previous day and then moved to self-introduction. The apprentices had had little experience with language learning, and their pronunciation of some of the long words was a challenge (as a side note, with its layered, stacking polysynthesis, Chinese written characters also have this very subtle contextualizing quality). Allan, our master speaker, inadvertently reduced the tension by interjecting during the proceedings when it was my turn to recite vocabulary in Cree. I had mispronounced words by using the wrong tone/accent of voice, which convinced Allan that I was a French Catholic missionary priest. *Mon Dieu*!

One of the overriding observations with regard to non-adolescent learners is that when the learner's pre-existing ability and exposure to the language is limited, building meaning from the encounters must be framed by the forest of culture and not reduced to the sometimes intimidating individual words. Based on the time in the pilot, this appears to be especially so with more mature learners. Through the affective experience the contextual meaning of the words, has a better opportunity to foster integrative motivation. This is achieved by accessing the cultural knowledge, and in a social, interpersonal way. The interaction is embedded in culture, which shifts the social dynamic from an exchange of information into a more broad positioning of mutually being, which ultimately has an

effect on the quality of the meaning made. My impression was that, once these communicative parameters have been reframed, cultural meaning, as opposed to rote memory, can attach itself to the learners memory because it is made from within an emotional qualitative landscape.

These repetitions were, in a manner of speaking, slower than expected reminding me of my personal preconceptions about language education. Our time was rather useful in addition to providing feedback on what doesn't work so well, that context helped confirm that the qualitative experience of the cultural mentoring is a secure source of meaning-making. The medium does influence the message. Frank and I noted that some learners learn to learn in a certain way. He commented that the fellowship and sharing are paramount to the point of the language, which governs the spirit of the matter: "There is a certain protocol. You will find the atmosphere [lighter] where [there is] less overt structure. You will find humor. When it's lighter, the information tends to stick." In terms of pedagogy, Christine and Frank each said in a slightly different way, perhaps unknowing of the psychology but certainly each is aware that emotional warmth and connection must be present in the cultural encounter in order for the individual to "let the language out."

A Teaching (Part 1)

Having access to fluent speakers as map guides who are able not only to explain how and what, but also communicate a sense of the connection between the two—that is, the why—is a crucial aspect of making meaning of culture and values. According to scholars Hulan and Eigenbrod (2008), oral traditions are "the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation. Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory" (p. 7).

After we reviewed the vocabulary, the youth worked in pairs or in a circle as a group, moved orally around the circle, and alternated the phrases, we followed up with a matching quiz. I would then typically defer to Christine. When she came back on alternate Wednesdays—during Allan's visits he reinforced what she had taught and worked with pronunciation and vocabulary—Christine led us through a number of

cultural teachings. As I mentioned earlier, her knowledge and community contributions as a cultural educator centered on the Circle of Life, the path of maturing, and the role of nature in coordinating the circle and its various stages. On one particular day she taught us about an eagle feather, and I reflected on it later that evening:

> October 22:
>
> Today we had Christine bring in an eagle feather and she used it as a teaching tool to share a story with us. The eagle feather is a sacred and honoured gift given to an individual. The eagle is our relative, and together we are of the same family. We must care for and respect that the eagle has given up its life so that a person can carry its feathers. The eagle carries our prayers to the Creator, so that when we carry or wear a feather, it sends a signal that we are honoring the Creator.

Christine explained that because the feather has such rich meaning, as a symbol of hope and memory it is also used as a teaching tool. Sometimes the feather is used in ceremonies such as a smudge or during other rituals or rites of passage. For example, referring to the length of the feather, Christine explained that the center stem symbolizes our path as a lifeline. If and when we lose our way, if we become disrespectful to our family, betray ourselves, lose our identity or language, or experiment with or abuse alcohol, the feather begins to lose its shape as we too lose our center stem and go off course in our lives. However, the feather, like life, can be brushed back into alignment, and we too can return to our center by remembering to care for ourselves.

Christine completed the teaching by emphasizing that if we remember who we are and what our connections are, we can access the lesson of being whole within ourselves by using that memory as a feather. To demonstrate, she smoothed over and methodically realigned the ruffled feathers that had become displaced and brought them again into a smooth, aligned, and elegant symmetrical wholeness that reflected us when we honor the sources of our being—the Creator, our families, and our inside spirits—and are mindful of our behavior.

As I listened to Christine, the assuring tone of her voice reinforced the trust that I had felt upon meeting her a few months earlier. That first meeting with her and her *oskapew* (cultural apprentice) left me with a strong impression that her sincerity is genuine, and as her work as a counselor and teacher indicate, the natural paradigm, our

origins, is spirit, which she tries in her work to share with people through Indigenous teachings and social work. We must access the realm of spirit for meaning to have a reference, and its meanings come from the natural world. Indigenous holism offers that paradigm of expression:

> The program is based on geographical teachings. Sure, you can deal with the emotional stuff, and put it in a box, and leave it there. But as Natives we will deal with it (as a whole) and integrate it into our life.

As Christine spoke, she moved her arm to indicate a flowing motion and pointed out that as people we too are flowing energy and that the use of boxes interferes with the expression of energy, which has to flow somewhere.

Christine was a good speaker. Dana described her as mellow but said that she was a good "explainer" compared to the more free-spirited Allan. In hindsight, at some level at the time, the teaching seemed to be an abstract notion. However, in the context of Indigenous culture and local expression, it is quite practical in its access. The use of a feather as reference point, and the value of that content/information emerges from within the community and its collective heritage does not require artificial jargon. The idea of balance in life, embedded within the seed of the words, as a natural metaphor, has a lifetime to sink in. When it is ripe for the learner to internalize, it will offer proportionate meaning. Metaphorically-speaking, apart from any particular language, this kind of holistic knowledge is a modality of meaning-making that anyone can explore. This is itself a powerful lesson. The question emerges: Which and how do holistic metaphors articulate the cycles of nature and the patterns of life? Moreover, as a kind of figurative literacy, how can we further explore these cultural metaphors and the meaning they give to those who enter them?

My sense of the teaching is that, with time and life adding layers of experience, the significance of the feather metaphor will find its way into the participants' personal stories. The context of the exercise made me think about the many other young people who have never heard this teaching and how they might respond to being presented with it. Would they reject it? Would they be amused? Would they gravitate toward it?

The Gatekeeper: What the Mentor Brings

Christine joined us for several of the talks, including on the feather, the Circle of Life, and the role of women. Then we usually took a break. At that point it was apparent that the youth were tired and restless. For this reason I would often go to the public library before the meetings, make some photocopies, and ask the youths to pair up and spread them out on the floor; or I would ask them to use some of the vocabulary of the day in a variety of memory or writing exercises, opposite-word searches, concentration games, or crossword puzzles; or I would encourage them to use the dictionary.

After a number of meetings and exposure to vocabulary revolving around the Circle of Cree worldview, our community had settled into an Indigenous backdrop beginning to represent an outline of a forest made of particular trees of ideas and words and practices. For me, that emerging metaphor was to put a perspective on cultural literacy. I will revisit this idea in the following chapter. Tying into this idea, is a journal entry that opens some cultural considerations regarding the communicative dynamic of our meetings:

October 29:

As it was most of the time during these meetings, I'm beginning to feel more aware of myself as being a guest rather than a facilitator. While I am central to the organization of the proceedings, this is a different learning context than I'm used to or educated in. Mentally, I'm habituated and am constantly bouncing between my classroom management habits and realizing, ethically, that I am a guest within these proceedings. It's always in the back of my mind that those habits have me 'pacing' the time, either watching the clock or mentally brainstorming to come up with a question or activity to reinforce the data, etc. Am I overstepping my boundaries? Is this idea of trying to manufacture a Cree 'situation' plausible, or even culturally ethical?

From a pedagogic perspective, part of my angst arose from being immersed in the cultural moment and not the pedagogy, and that was psychologically jarring. Not knowing any of the language is no small thing. Being linguistically naked revealed a feeling of vulnerability, especially in the pedagogic sense that, although the words and ideas were introduced to the youth (and me), my conscientious didactic process needed to be turned off—at least to the extent that the pace and timing of the meetings were not for

me to referee and it is important to remember none of the participants were expected to reproduce the information beyond the immediate experience.

In that regard it was a cultural context in which rules about school, learning, and expectations for achievement were not a part of our circle. As the observer, being loosened by the lack of institutions brought a rawness that is a cultural experience. Between being vulnerable as a learner while myself sitting among these young people, and as a language teacher, encountering new words all the while listening to cultural teachings; and realizing as a researcher that this context is premised and embedded within a wider socializing history of the speech community, and the overlapping discourses had a cumulative effect that was disquieting.

Over the course of the meetings I watched and participated. With regard to sharing knowledge, Brant (1990) described the fine line that I encountered. He referred to the mental health field and outsiders working with Indigenous populations, and the concept of noninterference struck me as appropriate: "A high degree of respect for every human being's independence leads the Indian to view giving instructions, coercing, or even persuading another person to do something as undesirable behaviour. Groups goals are achieved by reliance on voluntary co-operation" (Non-interference section, para. 1).

Dana, one of the apprentices, was a young lady with a quiet spirit whom I could see maturing into a strong woman. She was old enough to know about space and crowds and choice. This is one of the reasons that Dana attends an independent learning center, where she engages with the content in a manner that suits her. Part of the purpose of the meetings was to offer young people such as her an outlet to choose to discover, explore with this social and cultural context in a way that would not impose itself, but would instead allow her personal experience to unfold on its own.

As a guest to her culture, I attempted to allow the participants to walk through the experience on their own terms. Aside from my professional agency, primarily in terms of opening a cultural space, the protocol of the context suggests that ultimately I didn't really 'conduct' the meetings in a strict sense largely in the understanding, especially pertinent under the circumstances, that the spirit of the experience is born when the

student takes away meaning, and begins the process of becoming the teacher to their own experience.

Related to this point and how cultural context with and among cultural mentors also influences the communicative dynamic, one of the learners intimated during some of the exercises and memory games we played that she found the information exasperating and that our free-form discussion of ideas lacked structure. First, in reference to what and how the content was presented, we had no expectations in this Cree cultural language pilot project. Second, and for all of the participants except the fluent speaker, the new language was essentially an exploratory context. In this cultural learning context, her expectation emerged from her experiences with language classes, where time and achievement are correlated with measuring and achievement parameters through subjects, grades, schedules, tests, and so on. In institutionalized settings these factors are all centrally implicated. They contextualize the location, determine the method of inculcation, and direct the interpretations of achievement.

Outside the institutional framework, language retains its cultural vitality. Moreover, when learners are new to the culture as much as the language, under such circumstances, when a fluently bilingual speaker among the group is able to move off task and add particular meaning or explanations with personal anecdotes, a less formal structure allows the flexibility to follow the group's curiosity. A comment from Kaylie supported this cultural community approach and its emotional effect:

> At school you're supposed to learn it, like a subject; but when you're a family, it's them actually teaching you. When you're at school they grade it and stuff, but with family, they just correct and tell you did a good job. It's like hanging out: Instead of feeling like it's a job, math, science, social, English, religion, we were pretty relaxed. We didn't write down scores or anything; it was open, more fun than a job. Schools always tell you "You'd better."

The Space to Be

In attempting to distill the meaning of crossing cultures, one of the obvious considerations is language. Crossing a cultural and language barrier and being immersed in another culture, on its linguistic and cultural terms, is the closest analogy that I can make to frame this experience with the prescriptivism of approach, product, or

expectation of classroom learning. I do not speak Cree, but I do speak a number of other languages. I say this because, in this local qualitative context—Indigenous, intergenerational, informal, and participatory—the factors combine to give the experience a broad palette of flexibility for a 'product'—whether an idea, a word, a skill, or even an attitude—to emerge, without the filter of expectation.

Allison noted that "with the right group" she was willing to participate; she added that, after school, "You have more time. At school you only get an hour." The looseness of the roles was noticeable to the mentors also. Allan replied that this context left him "more happily connected than I anticipated. I am a high school teacher dropout because of that attitude, that these kids were participating and learning their culture, that made it so worthwhile."

At a practical level, from the standpoint of the small-group setting, it might sound simple or magnanimous but the larger more informative point I take away from this cultural experience rests in the articulation of a delicate space between 'what' and 'how.' Often, that space is separated by culture, and often it is what separates experience from expectation. For myself, coming to that realization also emerged from experience. Recognition can come from simply listening. A poignant anecdote will illuminate the point. Amanda, who was quiet most of the time, relaxed during our interview and we talked about life and school and some of the ideas that she could remember. While I was gleaning through the interviews and chunking down the themes of the findings, I got an opportunity to listen more carefully to each person, and the nature of what they shared with me. While I was interviewing Amanda, because she was generally quiet, and even during our time together as a group she didn't say much. During the interview it was a 'chance,' not to put her on the spot, but an attempt to pin-point answers. That expectant attitude, that I brought as a researcher, also speaks volumes about the process of externally investigating culture 'looking for something.' When I interviewed her in my search for understanding her point or, as I may have thought at the time, helping. Instead, I pried, and cut off her full thought with another question. Later, I went back to the interview and listened to the conversation again. As it turns out, by my searching, looking, expecting her to say something, I had not listened very well at all. At another

level, I had blurred the boundary between her personal experience and my expectation rather than allowing what she had to say to emerge on its own.

The same powerful feedback that emerges from listening can come from those who have fluency and the communication to express culture. As an authentic, grounded presence, this is what a fluent Indigenous language speaker contributes to the context. In our interviews I asked mentor Allan about our context, and he relayed it in this way: "This was arranged as 'unschooled' as possible. Language was a by-product of the fellowship" (laughter, food, smudge, activities). Although Allan is not a mother-tongue speaker, he is literate across language and social contexts to offer discerning observations:

> It was an introduction. They're third and fourth generation of residential schools. We wanted to give the kids that which we didn't have. Often without parental skills, [they] have never had an intro. This is about boundaries.

Allan used the word *boundaries*. The meetings began to build a context, a frame of reference for a cultural place that contains within it certain values. It is also a place from which Cree language and worldview emerge and can become expressed as intergenerational transmission and cultural continuity. It also became evident from this localized approach, when a space of comfort was emotionally opened and engagement shifted from expectation to being, that the time together unfolded in a less linear way. Kaylie's thoughtful comments reflect her awareness of connection to the presence of the Cree chain of cultural continuity and her being part of that collective identity:

> Elders have been on earth for a long time, and they're wise, so they're the teachers. I would feel responsible to the Elders that they're passing on their knowledge and language to younger people. They have a lot of knowledge; sometimes they're strict. Like at pipe ceremony she scolds you if you're not sitting properly. She's making sure the next group is keeping something alive. Sometimes she'll use a bit of Cree: "Sit right." So in Cree culture you don't write things down; like when your *kukum* tells you something, she doesn't put it on paper.

A Teaching (Part 2)

November 7:

We had a session yesterday, and the topic dealt with being women/female in the Cree culture and it used the Circle of Life as a reference. An interesting, and sobering idea was, the traditional conception of the cycle is considered 100 years divided into four as Child, Youth, Adult, and Elder.

Christine said that young ladies might come to think about themselves as young Cree people and also as part of the Circle of Life. Divided into four quadrants of 25-year spans, these apprentices are still considered children. The model, in contrast to the Western 'adult' stage, uses the age of 25, when the body and mind reaches its physical peak, as an Indigenous measure of entering adult hood. At that point, in the Indigenous model, the person—man or woman—is then mature enough to earn a mate and begin a family. How very different the reality is! I asked the apprentices about it, and they all had personal friends (between 15 and 18 years of age) who were already mothers and fathers with children of their own. Seeing and listening to Christine explain the process and protocol of traditionally and responsibly finding and responding to affection, having intimate relations, and becoming mature enough to parent offspring was, needless to say, a stark reminder of how many young parents in all cultures who are still in their own childhoods take on a parenting role.

Understood in one way, this curtailed trajectory of interrupted individual as well as emotional and physical maturation leads to poor choices influenced by pressure, both economic and emotional. Understood in another way, our world offers so many immediate material and emotional temptations that long-term happiness becomes marginalized. This curtailed trajectory carries the long-term expense of curtailed culture, identity, expression, and the individual experience of becoming.

Christine's teaching, which underscores a lesson about rushing through life, also had a packed meaning as a microcosm of colonialism, settler society, and imposed acculturation. The metaphor is rich. I am in my fourth decade, and in the holistic Indigenous interpretation, in my life history I am somewhere between an old youth and young adult. That is a pleasant thought. At the same time, taking into account the

lessons that I have learned, and how I went about it, I am not so sure that this model does not offer a humbling perspective.

In our local province, the language erosion is on-going. Alberta has approximately 15,000 ageing mother-tongue Cree speakers. The Blackfoot community has less than 5,000 in total, and another language, Michif, has an estimated 50 fluent speakers (Canada, 2011; Ma, 2013). Many of us have the experience of living and communicating a heritage or linguistic identity. This awareness across languages and cultures, to and from 'forests,' brings the realization that language and various forms of literacy are intrinsic to the expression of identity. In this case, cultural mentors introducing and stewarding their lived experience is a gentle process that leaves signposts expressing collective value. Ultimately, those values, communicated most powerfully, are expressed through the vocabulary of the language.

Conclusion: Continuity

In the interim, how does bottom-up cultural continuity (McIvor, 2003) become extended? What can cultural mentoring meetings—the participation, the role of the mentors who bring words and lessons and are the literal access to a timeless depth of local knowledge—express as a qualitative space, and how can it remain active? It was my impression that the communal mood is the fundamental and primary seed that the young people would take away from these meetings. As Robert said, "We tried it before [language], but the teacher, a Cree speaker, had no way to teach. I sat in, and then kids were there because they had to be; not by choice. . . . It was a wonderful opportunity to feel that joy."

The result of participating and observing, and chiefly reflecting on these meetings, the approach of inviting youth to come together, with the language there among us, does have the effect of gently opening up a cultural space. However, under the practical circumstances and within the social reality, it is important to understand that cultural space from a broad perspective. At one level I was undertaking the process of presenting a cultural context in the guise of a social climate. In no small part that was to defuse the expectation away from learning and the presence of something uncommon: fluent

speakers. Moreover, very relative to the cultural context, we took our time and in that circle we were equals.

In that world each portion of the whole contributed to a 'place' where we gathered and learned some simple but deep ideas about life and nature. We learned about the connection between the circle and the seasons and when a group shared those ideas through their collective memory and cultural heritage, the larger community becomes connected by its ideas. In that world we learned teachings that have been passed down in this local area for thousands of years. We shared food. We smudged and gave thanks to show our respect for these traditions and to honor the culture of the people who were here a long time ago. Our small community together tapped into the connection to the people through the ideas and words that they had left for us when they lived here.

Within a particular context premised on communal fellowship, cultural mentoring attempts a literacy-based recreation of inter-generational cultural transmission. I do not want to oversell the idea, but at an early stage, before language learning, the affective task is to build a cultural reference, onto which then the language can hang meaning. Towards those ends, being together underpins language learning.

The mentoring process, as culture, hinges on spirit. In this case it is intracultural fellowship, sharing the idea, communicated through language and the metaphors of traditional teachings, of a collective identity. In a contemporary setting, this authenticity, as a genuine Indigenous expression, comes from the presence of the 'trail guide.'

The reality is that that context, between generations of youth and a bilingual fluent speaker on free time, Our limited time caught merely a glimpse of an altogether too infrequent occurrence. In the city, culturally speaking, small group mentoring is very much a practical challenge to facilitate.

In light of the wider reality of language erosion, and what makes this topic so timely, is that to be with a fluent speaker of any Indigenous language is very much a privilege. These youth were aware of the connection between them and culture and language, and their understanding of that connection had a natural feel. Darren made a good attempt to put that local knowledge into words when I asked him about these fluent speakers and whether what Elders have is different from the kind of information in books.

He replied that Christine learned her local knowledge "from her grandma and grandpa, and Elders. They have power [that] comes from living." These young people are aware of such subtleties. Kaylie and I discussed how different languages, though they may be related through families of languages, are still different: "It's part of being in different places. Our [Cree] culture is different from Blackfoot or Ojibway, so we have a different language."

In this interpretive approach to cultural meaning-making, through their participation and engagement with the topic the participants have lowered their affective filter. Put another way, what meaning they took away elicited itself. It rests in the cultural space, the participants entered into it. Moreover, what they took away first arrived by their listening. Applied to the influence of cultural communication, for young people and new language learners, the degree to which their emotion has been affected influences further engagement.

Although she was not outwardly demonstrative, Dana was a receptive participant. The language for her was a challenge, but she was reflective and gave the impression that she understood what the cultural worldview represents as a metaphor to make meaning. When I asked her about the role of a mentor, she used her own metaphor, of a music box and gave a poetic response: "If you have something precious, you want to show [it] and pass it on." The language and the culture represent that precious commodity, and to borrow Dana's metaphor, to have access to its discourse and depth of ideas is to wind up the music box and enter into its medley of song. Cultural mentoring offers a practical step retaining that cultural affect.

Although this investigation is premised on the continuity of Indigenous worldview, the experience has nonetheless left me curious how Indigenous holism becomes represented as expression. In the final chapter of findings, I draw on the content of our meetings and look into the holism of Indigenous worldview as a meaning-making discourse applied to and engaging cultural literacy.

CHAPTER 8: LITERACY AND BUILDING MEANING

While the previous chapters took a more descriptive perspective of the social considerations of this context, this chapter attempts to juxtapose the nature of Cree ontology with majority worldviews and discuss perspectives incorporating cultural ontology in the direction and expression of literacy (Egan, 1997).

Encountering Content

Like many people, I am intrigued by traditions and the worldview of cultures outside of my background. While I lived in Asia I was in regular contact with Korean practices in the Confucian tradition and encountered cultural norms within a relatively homogenous society. During that time, even at a rudimentary level, it was socioculturally necessary to learn some of these honorifics and use them respectfully. Elsewhere, in Taiwan, funerals include a practice of ornately decorated trucks (*hua che*: flower vehicle) that drive through the neighborhood, blaring loud, loud noise by which to honor the spirit of the recently deceased. It was their way. Hindu reverence blends with Balinese nature in that morning merchants would place a small morning pallet of brightly colored fragrant flowers outside their shop as an offering to their gods.

Upon returning to Canada, in Manitoba, that geography and its long winters, dancing northern lights, and through my acquaintances I became aware of local knowledge the type and number of saplings and the kinds of natural ingredients used to make a sweat lodge. It was their way. During this research I was reminded that walking near someone who is sitting down or engaged in a conversation, it is a show of respect to stay on the outside perimeter of their space of communing. Of course, I have heard of this social etiquette but hearing it from the local perspective, and an oral culture, this protocol makes perfect sense. What each example shares is something important. In each of these examples the value of the idea is retained through its observance or practice. In turn, observing the practices is a form of ritual that expresses membership. Applied to Cree culture, local practices, and their observation express and serve as reminders of spirit, nature, and place. To be mindful of cultural traditions—and each culture has its own—they are often accompanied with lessons left behind (Brant

Castellano, 1990). These examples and stewards such as Frank, Christine, and Allan inclusively widen the breadth of meaning and thus what cultural identity and literacy entail beyond the immediacy of words.

Working with the young people, who were culturally removed from and perhaps unfamiliar with their heritage, I found that awareness between personal and collective identity has an emotional gateway. It is a sensitive sociolinguistic location. Alison identified it when I asked her what part of our experience had made her proud as a Cree person. She replied, "Learning some of my culture and speaking some my words." She then quickly corrected herself by saying *'the words.'* I found that modest self-correction to be a natural intimation of other cultural information. As a newcomer talking about these ideas, she was likely being self-conscious and had caught herself. At the same time, from the perspective of a young Cree person, it might equally reflect that, with time and regular exposure, the line between *the* and *my* words will melt (King, 2003).

The emotional connection between individual and collective identity appears to be a natural progression. During the same conversation with Allison, I tried to gauge how she interpreted some of the content that we covered. When I asked about her interest in the Circle of Life teachings and how that overlaps with the cycle of the seasons, she was not able to find the words to express it, so, instead, I used my arm as a level to indicate her interest in those topics. Communicating her meaning that way, she was able to express her interest and that she realized that there is something to it. Ironically, when she did not have the words, she was expressing a form of affective literacy, with the lever moving from 'colder' to 'warmer.' The feeling was elicited from the qualitative space. Understanding her comment about communication within the naturalized premise of holism from a broader perspective as something with which she engaged intergenerationally alongside other members of her culture, the process that involves the role of language and culture signals a relationship among cultural expression, identity, and wellness (Kirmayer, 2000; 2009). Negotiating the cultural dynamic of meaning-making offers rich linguistic exploration and underscores the ontological security that is necessary to give meaning traction.

Encountering the ontology of their heritage for these young Cree people involved to which they might not have been exposed, but, as they communicated, they were aware there is a qualitative connection. Locust (1988) wrote, "As Native people, we cannot separate our spiritual teachings from our learning, nor can we separate our beliefs about who, and what we are from our values and our behaviours" (p. 328). From this orientation, whereby "all of the senses, coupled with openness to intuitive or spiritual insights, are required" (Brant Castellano, 2000, p. 29) as a means to make meaning, the cultural space is also the end. This frame of reference, in which nature, holism and expression make up the blueprints for meaning, is not only an inviting space to enter but as a profound expression of cultural literacy, a rich opportunity for making meaning.

Between Science and Culture

> It appears that the top paradigms are weightier than that, which partly justifies calling them "myths." But not all myths are alike—no more than the men who embrace them. I contend in fact that the stature and dignity of a person depend largely upon the myth he has made his own; in a way we become what we believe. (Smith, 2001, p. 227)

Part of my path to making meaning leading to and through this research is getting a perspective on how Indigenous worldview, expressed through its language and practices, represents a cultural territory. As a form of applied literacy, I wanted to explore that territory to gain a sense of its framework of expression. This second-language exploration, in encountering Cree, has led to ontological tension in me attempting to position the meaning gathered somewhere on the line of interpretation between culture and science. The ongoing negotiation, and psychological tension, of a new culture frame of meaning and returning to my own digesting Indigenous ideas and lessons still lingers with me. Ellis and Bochner (2000) described the process similarly: "First through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 739).

The drives home after the meetings were memorable for an unsettling mixture of reasons. On a few occasions I recall that it was snowy and wet. There was always a little sobering moment-in-reverse, when the meeting was over and I stepped out of the house

and into the urban world, when reality swallowed me into the night, our little community was dissolved, its spirit evaporated. We held the meetings in late October, early November, which in Edmonton is already the 'dark season,' and travelling along the streets in my motorized vehicle, through the traffic with lights and reflections and life going on, caused an existential feeling. After those meetings, and being humbled by the rich simplicity of the ideas—the grandeur of the eagle, the perfect rhythm of the seasons, even basic color—I increasingly came to the realization, at least culturally, that the things in 'life going on' that we do are mostly according to someone else's timetable, which, in relation to the informality of cultural self-expression gives off a feeling of much of our inter-personal engagement and public time being more evidently contrived. Shifting between the two is essentially culture shock. Following one of our meetings and Christine's speaking, I went home and rambled.

> November 5:
>
> What a strange journey. All this back and forth. This cultural, and cognitive, journey and what I've encountered by the cross-cultural jolt has left me profoundly unsettled. And in some ways it's not like a vacation where you can go back home. With each new reading, article, another example of how language and paradigms work to condition the minds of a community, citizenry, etc., I have deeper misgivings. Namely, those misgiving center around the over-proportionate role of Science. It appears that technological advances which initially allowed for greater measurement of the natural world have now, as the authorized epistemic lever, applied Science to such a degree that the empiricism has blended with technology to become a digital marination. While empiricism was certainly a big historical breakthrough, this cold technical approach has gathered much steam and inspired more blind faith in reason that [it] has led to full-scale scientific privilege normalizing the human experience across all cultural landscapes. The irony is that as long as everyone has their convenient 'walkie-talkie' things can never feel too foreign because the seduction of the novelty has overridden critical faculties of its limitations.

Over the course of this cross-cultural encounter, the interpretation of the qualitative space under discussion elicited the tension between worldviews. In ethnographic research, trying to distill the meaning between different worldviews is one thing; but, more tellingly, through the eyes of literacy and the expression of the qualitative space that this research opened, its cognitive expression; its ontology has also been colonized. Although that subject might appear peripheral to this topic, the empirical legacy of five generations

of negating local expression and obliging countless communities to assimilate their psycho-social infrastructure and orientation away from their endemic heritage and its daily acknowledgement and expression of practices is pertinent.

During those drives back home from one little community space back to my little private space, and thinking about Cree and what is feels like to be in that qualitative space, it began to hit me that, most ironically, what these young people are potentially losing goes well beyond the Cree culture. As a member of greater society, I too am being conditioned by science. "The basic ontological and epistemological assumptions of reductionism are based on homogeneity, . . . made up of the same basic constituents, discrete, unrelated and atomistic, and it assumes that all basic processes are mechanical" (Shiva, 1989, p. 22). This template approach is the same conditioning strategy to which Christine referred: the social workers' application of psychological constructs into compartmentalized arbitrary boxes, and those same professionals become frustrated by the lack of traction applying their specialized capacity. The point is not that the clientele is Indigenous. Instead, it is as Shiva explained, "experts and specialists are thus projected as the only legitimate knowledge seekers and justifiers" (p. 22). These cross-cultural homogenizing discourses have played a large role in psychologically leading Indigenous expression away from its own roots. The intrinsic strength of cultural mentoring is its local authority, self-defined expression and inter-generational communication of such collective roots. For Indigenous people, knowledge is their local inheritance.

Metaphor and Meaning

Metaphors not only reflect our ideas, but also shape the way we think. "Security is very likely the primal political symbol. It appeals to what engages people most intensely in news of public affairs and defines developments as threatening or reassuring" (Edelman, 1998, pp. 132-133). In turn, metaphors can "create a reality rather than simply . . . give us a way of conceptualizing a preexisting reality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 144). Applying this form of meaning-making, metaphors can play a significant role in shaping our epistemological framework:

> We found that metaphors influenced people's reasoning but also which solution people think is best. . . . Research shows us that the languages we speak not only

reflect or express our thoughts, but also shape the very thoughts we wish to express. (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2013, p. 1)

In relation to physical geography, a cultural and speech community is influenced by the local referents from which it draws its analogies. About a third of the world's languages rely on absolute directions for space (Boroditsky, 2011). As a pragmatic tool of cognitive mediation, endemic language is therefore highly contextual, and unique to its specific environment with those local factors instrumental in the construction of meaning and the communication that follows. In fact, "Linguistic diversity [then] becomes the crucial datum for cognitive science: we are the only species with a communication system that is fundamentally variable at all levels" (Levinson & Evans, 2009, p. 429). Culturally speaking, the local code is laden with meaning (Everett, 2012; Harmon, 1996; Harris, 1981; Harrison, 2008; Maffi, 2000). Cognitively, these local elicitations are beyond the projections of science: "Language and its container are far too complex to give up their secrets in one fell swoop by one fell linguist, however hawk-eyed" (Harris, 1993, p. 260). In reference to the universalisms of Chomsky that 'muscled' (Boroditsky, 2011b, p. 63) onto the scene, instead what emerges is that the field of structural linguistics could more transparently be defined as post hoc projection of codified patterns onto useful examples.

While it remains to be seen whether fundamental linguistic universals will be found and result in a more refined, nuanced version of uniformity across history and geography, the current reality does not inspire that. What adds to the unsettling tension of the erosion of local expression is that in the 40 years since the imposition of structural linguistics, globalized homogeneity has paved over the cognitive legacy of 28 language *families*. Thirty years ago, Sachs (1992) stated, "If current erosion continues unabated, of 5,100 languages still spoken on earth today, not many more than 100 are likely to survive the next generation" (pp. 23-24).

Building Meaning: The Local

Since Kuhn (1970), linguists have accepted that metaphors penetrate all forms of knowledge and facilitate frames of perspectives called *paradigms*. The symbols that trigger metaphors are therefore powerful psychological markers. These symbols and metaphors are associated with culture and practices through words, stories, or rituals that

have been negotiated between the self and the collective past and present experiences of others (Habermas, 1976). The epistemology of meaning in relation to context, whether social, cultural, or political, speaks to the authority of the speech community. In that Indigenous space, where expression is interwoven with worldview, collective memory, practice, and identity, local meaning-making still rests under the stewardship of the local community.

One of the grounding strengths of Indigenous wisdom is that its symbols such as the feather and the circle are so eternal and steadfast; that is, they have existed for a long time, and the lore surrounding them can be trusted. This cultural form of cognitive *bricolage* "refers to the means by which man responds to the world around him. The process involves a 'science of the concrete' (as opposed to our 'civilized' science of the 'abstract')" (Hawkes, 1977, p. 51). Nancy gave an example of the intrinsic relationship between meaning and collective memory. During our interview we discussed cultural motifs and themes, and a trigger for her was "the colors of the sky. At night it's not black; it's a dark blue." The simple effect of color gives off a strong association, with the hue creating a planetarium kind of experience naturally associated with a relational worldview. For Nancy that memory was an anchored and embodied reference. My perspective was similarly moved during the pilot and our discussion of the role of lineage in identifying oneself to others.

Making It Local

In my interpretation, the Indigenous approach to making-meaning, as a cultural expression, emerged through mutually communicating the journey of life. Within that collective experience, the metaphor of the Circle of Life came out of the Cree experience engaging with the 'concrete.' Over time interpreting that local area with its cyclical patterns and particular phases or repetitions that seemed to particular lessons associated with which everyone in the community could relate to, a collective understanding or interpretation of the patterns of life emerged unique to that area.

It was during those same meetings as I listened to Frank I found myself in the mental re-representing my own network of lineage orientated around its geographic and spatial representation; the lineage of my blood memory. That affective dialogue, elicited

under a particular context, and removed from theoretical constructs that serve to obfuscate simple profound realities, within a cultural and speech community generates the emotional traction nourishing the local meaning and help bind the individual to a mutual cultural experience.

As potential expression, from inside worldview and during the qualitative encounter, the culture and the individual meet at the point where meaning emerges when it is received. For the individual, engagement, that is, 'receptiveness', is elicited through a shift into a relational space. As a result of that shift, the meta-physical orientation, coupled by its juxtaposition to the western worldview, serves to inform how, as Kaylie observed, "You can see the world in two different ways."

Taking her comment outside the cultural conceptions indicates that the cultural worldview seems quaint or pejorative. After all, we live in a globalized society. However, the perspective on how to approach life and its stages ultimately comes down to personal choice, and just as often those choices come from our social structures and their conditioning. For these young Cree people, in opening an angle of perceiving and making meaning of the world and life, drawn from their heritage, the angle reveals its own answers. Their reality leads to interesting reflection. In one conversation Allison reflected on valuing Indigenous language. At her group home, "when Doris [the care-worker from Ghana] speaks to her family, it's cool.It makes me feel like I'm more of an Aboriginal person." In terms of applying local perspectives to a sensitive topic, one of the younger girls, Charlene, when I asked her about the notion of getting approval from the Elders in her lineage/community before she dated, she replied in a giggle of rebellion, "I don't like it!" I asked, "Why not? Is it important?" She reflected and acknowledged that "it's respectful." Yes, she knew the difference, but that acknowledgement was encouraging to hear.

Listening to young people work out their thoughts and reflect on who they are and how and if that might overlap with being part of a cultural lineage is a subtle experience. Charlene's giggle was connected to an experience of cultural exposure, which, in turn, premised on fellowship and trusted communication, becomes a context and source of emotional and psychological wellness.

The construction of cultural meaning is the process that engages the individual with the ideas of the collective consciousness. Whether through the metaphor, symbol, analogy, word, or idea, the context of the praxis produces the affirmation of the collective meaning. The smudge and prayer are both simple expressions that engage the cultural capital. More important, they demonstrate an action that either in and of itself or leading into a cultural discussion opens qualitative space. Applied to cultural literacy, through intergenerational communication, the content, entering the cultural space, is accessible; it is ripe with symbols and metaphors for members to communicate or potentially scaffold meaning from within the terrain of the map. Symbols, and for that matter ideas, words, practices, and rituals, are all expressions of culture. Although they variously refer to physical place or express ideas and identify a community, they are nonetheless essential semiotic tools.

In turn, applying this cultural dynamic to intergenerational communication, practices such as mentoring socioculturally scaffold meaning through the expression of collective practices and language, which in turn extends continuity. This exchange of local cultural capital within the community fuels the sustenance. Following our meetings, mentor Allan left our apprentices with a going-away gift and thoughtfully made photocopies of a beginner Cree book from his local church. It listed a variety of basic words that were in the same spirit as our basic vocabulary; but, most important, the thought was the point.

Dana recognized that about Allan when we spoke. I asked about the mentors, and she remembered Christine's demeanor and Allan's animation, as though to say that he made "it funner, made it feel like it wasn't so serious, and he was taking it serious, . . . but in his own way." "In his own way" in this context is significant. The little book and those words represent the qualitative space in which Cree is expressed. The spirit of the expression within our little speech community spoke to his sensibilities, enough to inspire him to take the time to prepare the gift. That book allowed access to the cultural space.

Robert, too, as a youth coordinator understood the experience of this cultural space. While he and I met and discussed our time together, he spoke about being around the words and with the youth and our little cultural community gave his memory a

workout. Christine's teachings reminded him of "that powerful connection" to worldview, nature, and identity "of what life gives. They [the youth] don't know what they're missing." Allan acknowledged this very same qualitative space with regard to the notion of enlivening it through intergenerational transmission:

"I think it would be so interesting if we pursued what we're doing and introduce[d] them to aspects of our life, introduce[d] them to the language, introduce[d] them to spirituality. At this point in time they don't know; they know it's out there, but they don't know".

When I asked what he thought of that quality to which Robert had referred, our apprentice Darren identified it as a quality of being emerging from a process and what it gives the individual is "power." Basso (1996), writing about the Apache in Arizona, might reply to all of this that, like the title of his book, local knowledge reflects local natural referents. Over time those local metaphors have come to represent wisdom that "Sits in places." Christine referred to a similar quality that emerges naturally when attention slows down enough to receive rather than project.

As someone with a refined sense of local knowledge, her literacy comes from within making meaning out of holism. She is also aware of the subtle mechanism of cultural space influencing learning and the perspectives that follow. Like a flower or fruit, learning occurs when meaning is ripe. Applying that cultural approach to the process of 'encountering,' as a qualitative experience and from within a collective, and blood, memory of ideas or language in connecting the individual to the greater expression in terms of engaging the individual and the cultural expression of where that leads, as an extended personal relationship, she replied in a straightforward manner that the language is, rather very locally, "in you."

Standing on Solid Ground

Following one afternoon when Christine visited, I thought about her talk on the cycles of nature and, specifically, how cultural information is a reference point for meaning. On the other hand, as I reflect on the symbolism of the teaching, I realize that the metaphor clearly has a poetic sense. When the message is embedded in local content, the seed of teaching has a trusted presence that leaves an impression. My understanding from learning about the Circle of Life and lineage is that language offers a paradigm of

thought constructed by its inner logic, metaphors, analogies, and so on. Ultimately, around the world, fewer languages mean fewer paradigms outside of the quantifiable empiricism that represents the authorized validity. Grande (2008) pointed out the problem of "nations [that] get trans- or (dis)figured when articulated through Western frames of knowing" (p. 234). As literacy, and making meaning out of the world, fewer paradigms also mean more homogeneity in thinking. Through its history, this has been the mandate of public education: to form citizens, and prepare them with skills to enter the workforce, where almost all of us will use our skills largely to maintain the infrastructure of our global paradigm.

In extending culture and building language and literacy from within the context and worldview of local narratives, Hampton (1995) wrote perceptively in a similar reference to the idea that communicating lived meanings brings the individual into the circle of the collective saying that "memory comes before knowledge" (p. 21). This frame of reference, the collective memory, expresses the rich breadth that even introductory communication such as those that we encountered— *n't'siyiihkaason* _____ [My name is . . .], *nikaawiy* _____ [My mother is . . .], *n'caapaan* _____ [My great-grandfather is . . .], and _____ *ohci niiyai*s [. . . is the place/area that I am from]—when we understand them in a relational sense of situating identity beyond conditioning constructs about both place and time, and they become re-framed as potent expressions of blood memory and lived lineage. Whether self-identifying within the network of a (collective) memory or metaphorically expressed through symbols, language, and stories, these expressions and practices emerged on their own and in that light represent a way of looking at things.

Although at times Amanda seemed aloof, she expressed her understanding of the Cree way of looking at things: "The circle shows how seasons go in a circle; every year it begins again to go around." She presented an idea in a particular order, with certain colors associated with certain seasons; and all combine within the endless cycle of the circle. For the realism of that ontology to have effect, no finite limit or mark of measurement can encapsulate the task. The affective quality is in the individual experience and the on-going presence of ontology. These young people recognized it, as Kaylie remarked about

Christine's role as a teacher and mentor, being a personal journey: ''She knows [a lot] for her age. She's almost an Elder, and she did a lot of learning up to this stage." When I asked Kaylie about life and what is different between Cree and Western ways in regard to age and maturation, she replied that as Cree, according to the stages of life analogy and cultural conceptions of maturation, "We take longer to learn and mature. [We] take most of our time learning. [It] takes us longer to mature." Kaylie explained her point: "Western culture rushes."

"Frequently, when sincere attempts are made by Native Americans to adjust to or acculturate within the dominant society, they become involved in a process of diminishing return or reach dead ends with regard to acquiring meaningful quality of life" (Brown, 1981, p. 49). The association of ideas, values, and language from within their situated context—the collective memory of the speech community—is akin to tapping into a well of cultural identity hundreds of generations deep. Mehl-Medrona (2007) discussed the psychological aspects of wellness from that perspective in what he termed "narrative medicine" (p. 122). This metaphor can simply also refers to the emotional lineage of a community with which its members affiliate and from which they draw meaning. The cultural narrative is its medicine, expressed through its communicative discourse—'medicine,' the lived wisdom embedded in language, symbols, teachings, and stories. Meaning, rather than being imported or segregated, is derived from the heritage of the speech community. In our case, what might seem like a simple linguistic marker of introduction more existentially, or qualitatively embodied by conscientious action, establishes a relational parameter. in that three-dimension realm of timelessness, meaning-making is not only unique unto itself, but clearly qualitatively different from the instrumentalist approach of empirical reductionism. Language and cultural expression therefore are "not only a means of communication, but a [n expressive metaphorical] link which connects people with their past and grounds their social, emotional and spiritual vitality" (Norris, 1998, p. 8). Ultimately, the live history of physical place and markers of collective memory feed a cultural story or narrative or a word or teaching. Each can serve as an ontological expression and carry great emotional power.

With regard to Kaylie's statement about taking time to "become adults," Christine's introduction to the ideas about the Circle of Life reveal the proportions of that perspective. Cultural conceptions, such as the difference between *skills* and *ways of knowing*, have emerged, from different mechanisms of engaging with the material world. The Indigenous approach is a manner of allowing observation to grow into meaning from within the learner's memory. In a modest but self-assured sense, and as Christine herself encapsulated, becoming aware of the Circle of Life and what its broad holism entails is central to the Indigenous approach to learning and teaching: "I'm only here to remind you, it's already in you."

Speaking of Cultural Maps

As a newcomer to her heritage language, Amanda was challenged by the length of the words and their sometimes tricky pronunciations. Before the meetings, part of what encouraged her to participate was that "I have some friends, and they speak French together. It makes me want to learn." Amanda's comments offer useful insight into the ontology of the space into which this research delved.

The participants, both adult and youth, although culturally aware, were language beginners. From a literacy perspective, the space where self and content meet and meaning is elicited is part of the process that extends cultural continuity. As her comment on her French friends demonstrates, Amanda's participation in our meetings was motivated by an interest in and curiosity about language. It was premised on an emotional engagement with the topic. As in her paraphrasing of the Circle of Life and the cycles of nature, the personal meaning Amanda took away was therefore relevant to that cultural context, and free of expectation (my interview faux-pas notwithstanding). With these young people, if and when an emotional climate becomes established, what emerges proportionately becomes evident on its own accord.

At the same time, I must take into consideration that my overreach in bringing language and cultural ideas under the projection of learning might have also contributed to Amanda`s feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the volume of syllables and length of words. It is understandable, and it was acknowledged, that hearing new-sounding words, having two different speakers, and matching and writing fairly long words is an

intellectual 'shift.' With the combination of language learning and time considerations in a condensed fashion, and the big-picture reality that these ideas actually require some 'life' time to digest, then, yes, the refined holism of the content was limited. Moreover, with the encounter of new content, as was the case with at least one apprentice, a room with words and chairs might itself not be a climate conducive to various learning styles.

Underneath these considerations was a community-run context, youth participation, intergenerational communication, and a subtle sociocultural encounter. The elicitation of those ingredients was a cultural re-creation and at times the pace was slow. In hindsight I now better understand how the encounter could be more discernibly navigated. Very frankly, one youth replied, "Probably not" when I asked if it made any difference what these sessions included for her participation. Informed by the quality of our communication and what I gathered from the experiences and therefore depending on the cultural lens, that comment can be very revealing. To that same degree, another person, well aware of the trickiness in some of the pronunciation, wasn't put off by it, because there was no expectation beyond the experience was being measured. Sure, she responded as would any beginner when I asked what was difficult about the language learning sessions, "the words: I never learned this language; remembering the words and what they mean." But a moment later, she would reply in true spirit when I asked about the tricky pronunciation and her attitude explains her giggle and said, "I'd just try it again."

As a starting point to a self-led local expression these encounters gave these young people an accessible opportunity to associate with the "precious" thing Dana earlier referred to. Allison too is mature enough to recognize that life is a long journey and framing it through a model like the Circle of Life can bring refinement to the stages and meaning of that journey; "You can have a spiritual life and not a lot of money, or have a lot of money and be less spiritual." In terms of mentoring, through emotional openness, from inside that frame of space, leads to language building that can incorporate awareness of cultural worldview and its holistic parameters. For too many young people, having that cultural choice is not a part of their life.

Perhaps in part it is because Indigenous expression cannot be quantified that explains why it is on the margins of mainstream culture. Spending time with a Cree Elder reminded me of how much less conditioned by time they are, or how much more we are. Why do they navigate differently? In my experience, entering a state of mind (through conversations) governed by constructs other than those of one's own culture creates this feeling, and it tweaks one's sociocultural awareness. The experience out of and into a shifted paradigm affects certain proportions. Just as concepts such as kinship, place, spirit, god, family, nature, and time are interpreted by the local culture and members' practices, so too through travel or a conversation or a worldview do these 'proportions' have a newness that feels different until they are better understood.

Qualitative space opens, with as little as a conversation with an Elder, and with exposure and familiarity it naturally deepens. The natural strength of mentoring allows the individual to familiarize with cultural encounters towards grounding and articulating that cultural experience into a representation or expression, such as through language (Battiste, 2000, 2002; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Warford, 2011).

For cultural continuity to become extended, it must have the space to be expressed. While I have limited ability to influence that process by my cultural influence, my contribution comes in the form of sharing how the cultural space I encountered can be further explored by building on its blocks of meaning towards language learning. To that effect, during our interviews I was certainly curious to get 'insider' feedback in that direction, so I asked the master speakers how we could expand on this mentoring approach and build cultural knowledge along with language skills. Christine offered a wealth of information in sharing her impression:

It's about experiential knowledge; you can't have wisdom without experience. [Therefore' the implication is to go out and participate in a ceremony that would validate in their being [north, sky, earth, etc.], to be out [in a natural context] there and have all your senses [engaged]; to ground that knowledge in them. For complete beginners, as kids [youth] and staff, before doing that [going outside], you would have to prep them— prepping them as in having those foundational teachings (then) reinforce that and then add a little bit more.

I asked Allan about his impression of how our idea might translate to language learning: "I would continue how we operated the first section and then learn all about animate objects. Next session we will teach about genders, (and) build lessons." These comments are very practical because they connect cultural ontology with language and literacy.

Thoughts on Word Construction and Polysynthesis

In second-language learning a reasonable base of survival language is about 300-500 words (Bilash, 2009). Building a cultural map, as a holistic 'entity' gives attention to the role of language to distinguish relevant features of the Indigenous qualitative fabric and, to paraphrase Allan, to work through its various features: one day animate objects, another day gender, and so on. His comment on the path of building language learning speaks to the hinge of polysynthesis.

Following the pilot, I asked Nancy, as a grandmother, "How would you approach your children with this content and try to make meaning?" She replied that the simplest approach would be involving taking "the big word chunks and breaking [them] down." As oral language, this is a similar bottom-up strategy that all young learners use, phonemically mimicking sounds, building awareness and adding pronunciation refinement to their communication. Applying this to second-language learning and understanding the construction of Cree words as made up of a 'stack' of phonemes, the root of the word or a prefix or suffix that serve as phonemic Lego pieces chunking together to make meaning (Kell, 2014) In essence, a single word contains the same meaning as would require a number of conjoined syntactic contributions to represent in a nonpolysynthetic language. (At one time in the lore of any language, this embodied communicative process of eliciting and bestowing 'name' would have been the local informal fieldwork equivalent to what Hawkes (1977) termed the *science of concrete*.) For example, the word *south* in English uses a single morpheme to identify the concept. In Cree, through word stacking, *apihta-kisikahk* is understood and variously translated to 'when the sun is situated in that region of the sky' or 'the location in the sky where the sun is.' These translations carry a relational connotation. And, if nothing else, endow the

word with an esthetic. As second-language learners, attending to their power as little shapes of interlocking sounds we can use these informative tags to deepen meaning. Within the paradigm of Cree worldview, at the word level, each morpheme extends into a word, each word extends into an idea. Each idea extends into a story. Collectively they contribute to a relational forest of expression. It is very much a web and morphemic knowledge offers a lens onto language building by bringing little meaning into high relief, and practically useful for referencing and written recall (Kell, 2014).

By this token, learning a useful bundle of 500 Cree words certainly serves as a powerful leveraging tool, and if the relationship between morphemes is incorporated those same words become packed with more meaning. Dana mentioned that to remember the word *kihc-okawimaw* (Earth), she used an English mnemonic, 'we know,' to help her to associate ideas into a memorable chunk, although I discussed the shortcoming of memory-based learning, unless longer-term learning can come of the exposure. In this case though, once a student remembers a word, the webbing and construction of wording becomes relevant. *Meegwin* (feather) leads to *meegwa* (red color), which leads to *askitakwa* (blue), which leads to a blue object and then to a red object. Within these words, the relationships become a self-informing process.

This webbing progression of mapping meaning through word stacking or themes overlaps with a holistic, worldview-driven understanding of language. The communicative tapestry, as in any endemic culture, ultimately serves as both the product of the collective lineage and, rightfully, the soul of a culture. Now in hindsight, some of that quiet time when the apprentices were completing a worksheet or matching a set or opposites, with more time, the classroom habits of the teaching-to-achieve side of me rears its head and asks, "How much"? Had I been able to have more time to navigate this and fine tune the specific cultural seeds I could offer as 'planned traction'; knowing spring is the word for 'health,' the summer etymology is related to 'growth' and the word for autumn references 'beauty.' This bottom-up research opened that kind of meaning-making, As a language educator, the pedagogic encounter of that informal 'science of the concrete' in turn helps navigate questions how such grounded cultural literacy may be further investigated moving forward.

On the topic of spelling, as an interpersonal topic based on oral communication, the idea of learning any language is largely an interpretive application of strategies to re-create a cultural quality or state of being. Beyond the brevity of this rudimentary exposure, focus on the qualities of the cultural map as a priority before narrowing in on the formality of spelling or grammar that can derail interest. At some point however, working with etymology and root words implies inevitable referencing of a dictionary to assist in building meaning. Until that point emerges however, cultural engagement is well served with a focus on an emotional connection to holism before the semantics of grammar intrude on the experience. In the interim, throughout this work I have variously used Romanized spellings of these words from the Plains Cree dictionary (Wolvengrey, 2011), as well as the *Online Cree Dictionary* (Canadian Heritage, n.d.).

Words come to life when meaning is known. From a pedagogic perspective, knowledge of both cultural content and communicative practices offers vital traction when cultural worldview merges with manageable and contextually relevant language learning. Engaging in and fostering this awareness engenders a person's relationship with the language, premised less on its instrumental value than on the affective. In our case, and again returning to Christine's earlier suggestion, cultural mentoring gave these young people an opportunity to come into subtle contact with their heritage. Though it was rudimentary and an experiment of sorts, it was an invitation to participate in language and literacy. The holism of Cree ontology is the lens of meaning-making, which in of itself frames and expresses a worldview. Through an affiliation that grows personal familiarity with cultural collective identity where personal connection can be nourished melding the individual with the collective.

Summary

When you came here, they sat, laughing; it was a constructive atmosphere, wonderful to watch. Made me feel that excitement about feeling good about who they are; that's real. They need to feel that regularly: energy, pride, 'I was part of it; I watched it.' (Robert)

Our meeting circle and, to a wider degree, my cultural visit combined to give me a relatively close proximity to a broad spectrum of Cree language and literacy considerations. That was possible only through the participants. In turn, their simple,

honest, and informative feedback validated the qualitative space that opened. Allison's remark that the linguistic challenge for her was "the [length of the] words" put the newness of the language into a humbling perspective. She wanted "to learn more about my language. I didn't [learn it growing up]. my parents speak the language, but I don't live with them." This reality was enhanced by Kaylie's hopeful honesty: "I don't want to only speak English because I wouldn't want to lose my language. It's still within our culture, and I want to keep it going."

This connection between identity and expression emerged from the qualitative cultural space. Kaylie recognized it in remarking that cultural ideas and speaking the language have meaning beyond just learning words: "You get to say it in your own way, your own culture, (be) closer to the language." When I asked Charlene, who had attended and participated in round dances and tea dances and had attended powwows, why she participated in the project, she replied, "So I can sing in Cree, old traditional songs." Beginning to look, reflect on, step, or dance into a cultural space reveals that these young apprentices were aware of the difference between being and speaking.

In this research I opened and looked for confirmation of the connection by conscientiously setting up a context that allowed the participants to enter through an affective gateway. In a cultural space, appealing to emotion and providing context naturally leads further expression of mentoring communication in the direction of language learning. Pertaining to instruction, the compounded power of polysynthesis extends knowledge toward contextually and sharpens the perspectives embedded in words. Understanding word-stacking adds nuances to Cree literacy through which to build referential meaning where "everything is related (and) all relationships have a natural history" (Cajete, 2000, p. 76). With cultural mentoring, access to communication with a fluent language speaker brings young people into immediacy with a cultural map its ways of making meaning through inter-generational communication that equally serves as a source of cultural wellness.

The central significance, including worldview, of a cultural mentoring project is twofold. First, from the perspective of future language learning, cultural worldview provides a natural reference and context. From that starting point pedagogy can be

suitably addressed across multiple modes of expression: from building language skills such as pronunciation or singing to understanding syntactic mechanisms such as etymology and the polysynthesis, to more kinesthetic expressions including art, performance protocol, and participation in ceremonies.

Second, for this cultural content to be engaged with and elicit expression, participation must be voluntary. That boundary was exceeded by these community meetings. Having 'linguistics' access Especially to this demographic of young Cree people, is squarely due to the cultural capital of a person like Robert whom the youth know, like and trust, It was he who invited them to join him, myself and some local fluent speakers. And strung together, these local meetings, between the pilot and the youth, represent two condensed pockets of cultural space where I was able to enter into and glean meaning.

Narrowing down from the broad social and historical context and emerging in a local speech community of participants voluntarily sharing cultural fellowship provides a powerful space for qualitative interpretation. The meeting point at which language, identity, and culture intersect is a specific cultural location. These young participants engaged at the meeting point of these cultural signposts. By their brief emotional investment engagement, they validated the intention of how and what entails local cultural continuity. At this point, their feedback confirms the premise that voluntary affiliation within the history, narrative, and language of cultural community is an estimable anchor to the expression of cultural identity.

Last, and leading into the final chapter encapsulating this local effort within more broad literacy-related reflections, for young people, as with all 'new' to learning a language, communication is embedded in a contextual, or cultural realm. The bulk of this interpretive research emerged out of the realm of this cultural community. In turn, learning about and from the ideas in the local Cree cultural space can serve these young people towards expressing what I refer to as *figurative literacy*.

As a qualitative experience outside the pre-text of epistemology or the expectations of institutions, Indigeneity is simply an expression of being. More intuitively, cultural expression elicits an emotional effect. As a qualitative paradigm,

Indigenous expression gives off such an effect if the cultural ways/means are engaged in. As culture, expression is timeless and further, as a state, quality has no destination point. Indigenous holism, through action or language, expresses that quality, merging the individual into the collective space. Chiefly, this is achieved through the mechanism of receiving. Indigenous cultures are sustained on circulating this timeless quality from those earlier in the cycle and forward to the next. In expressing the precious gift of self-authorized validity, cultural mentoring is an act that, in product and process, the community pays to retain.

CHAPTER 9: LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Literacy is the multimodal ability to engage with a variety of symbols that convey meaning (Gee, 1989; 2008). Understood in a particular way, through literacy, an individual builds a familiarity, a kind of cognitive relationship with a particular expression or Discourse. The Discourse can be a skill, a language, or information about a culture. In that light, as a particular discourse, Indigeneity, which represents a qualitative space of expression, elicits meaning relevant to the members of its speech community. Methods such as mentoring help to retain the ideas of a speech community as the intellectual and cultural capital. Through inter-generational transmission among members, the communication and mutual expression extends cultural continuity.

Canadian colonial history has rerouted the majority expression of local Indigenous people. Over the course of several generations this has led to many young people in the current generation politically by-passed in their opportunity to have cultural heritage a part of their lives (Norris and Clatworthy, 2011). Along with spoken erosion, the living access to the expression of language unfortunately grows narrower. This constricted reality leaves potential learners with fewer opportunities to engage with the culture, worldview, Elders, mentoring, and trust of their very local heritage. These are the essential contributors to cultural continuity. When Indigenous identity transfers experience, philosophy, and folklore to the next generation, the process involves these contributors and the information is leavened through language and literacy.

This literacy research focused on the practical matter of accessing space to furthering cultural continuity. More importantly perhaps, while cultural mentoring works to maintain continuity; this method of qualitative engagement produces a powerful interpretive frame of cultural meaning-making that speaks to the valid authority of expression. In some critically insightful ways I was afforded a unique vantage point from which to observe this speech community and its local considerations within a broad landscape of social discourses and the expression of literacy.

Retaining Identity

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (Fanon, 1968, p. 210)

Of the more than 300 North American languages prior to European contact, current census figures in Canada state that less than 50 languages/dialects remain (Canada, 2011). At the individual level, less than one fifth of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples speak the language of their cultural heritages; and 80% of the Indigenous languages that remain have no new speakers (Krauss, 1998). However, what is hopeful is that between 2006 and 2011 the Canadian Indigenous population grew 20.1% to 1,400,000 (Statistics Canada, 2013).

This cultural mentoring project was orientated from the position that language is a precious resource (Ruiz, 1984). Applied to mentoring, that central fact means that access and connection between culture and identity by default should have few to no institutional layers for the experience to be interpreted. This is why I undertook this research outside of schools and why it took a long time to find a suitable pocket of participants. Frank, the master speaker of the pilot project, made an insightful comment when I asked him about the attitudes toward language retention in the community:

> The mentality of the system, they've got to be shown if they want to understand who they are as Aboriginals. They need to learn the language. There's always a big difference between those who speak and [those] that don't. Those that don't speak have something missing, but they're [unaware of] the connection. [Many parents] don't want their kids to go through—or the kids see what their parents went through and don't want to repeat it.

Part of the focus on cultural worldview in this research is the holistic precepts that serve as powerful markers of cultural identity. The affect of engaging with culture helps the individual to recognize the language as an expression of identity. One of the central features of mentoring is that it can genuinely contextualize intergenerational communication. Their personally drawing on the cultural symbols, words, and meanings

and communicating their meaning is the central reason that Elders and language mentors are so integral to the continuity of Indigenous identity.

If we look at Canadian colonial history and the effect of the subversion and replacement of cultural traditions and linguistic expressions with another structure, it is not difficult to understand that Indigenous Canadians are in peril of losing their heritage completely and forever. As Allan recalled in our interview, these children are already a generation removed from the emotion of the residential schools, and since that time their educational and social realities have been a product of a climate in which "we place English literacy as a part of the continuing drive to colonize and assimilate Indigenous peoples. . . . Further, the literacy efforts . . . demonstrate a high potential for social disruption through individualization of learners and alienation of local authority" (Hermes & Uran, 2006, p. 393). Whether the trickle is down or up, as far as cultural identity is concerned, social Discourse requires that Indigenous expression trade its own meaning to the lingua franca of the political economy:

> The shift . . . reflects the mainstreaming of a dialectic that requires Indigenous people to identify with profoundly asymmetrical forms of recognition granted to them by the colonial state and society. . . . [This] serves to reinforce the dominance of colonial power, and as such is not a viable way to transform the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada. (Hunt, 2013, p. 2)

The real legacy of Canadian colonialism, and all forms of imperialism, for that matter, is ultimately that its subversive effect undermines identity. This is the realm of the social dynamic; in turn, the shape of its meanings influences discourse and psychology and leads to the definition of identity and socialization of the individual. Colonialism and cultural assimilation, largely through public education, work in two directions: to blanch the past of endemic roots and to steer the discourse through the vernacular of the dominant hegemony. Those local roots, sapped of language mainly through abandonment, also slowly become sapped of cultural meaning, because a different framework of references becomes the language of communication, and the local becomes culturally habituated in the direction of homogeneity. Along with the bathwater of the past, the baby is now critically at risk. The staggering facts of language erosion offer a

stark reminder: Indigenous language is the primary avenue of local expression under the cultural authority of the community and its collective practices.

The Value of Local Meaning

It is upon the Trunk that a gentleman works. (Analects of Confucius, I.2)

Local space, the source of Indigenous worldview, is beyond the codification of political or linguistic precepts. This location is a place of quality. Likewise, the lived, experiential body of collective knowledge of a particular space reveals a deep well of quality that anchors the worldview, collective memory, and communication of the community. It is a valid source of quality its is congruent with local history.

The practical implication of the experiences of conducting this research and holding the meetings is that bottom-up, internally led cultural mentoring is a sure-footed step onto a cultural map; with exposure, it leads naturally into the expression of an Indigenous worldview. What emerged from this context speaks to an important aspect of Indigenous culture and its process of passing on tradition and cultural identity. Specifically, cultural identity is nourished through informal, trusted, and emotionally comfortable communication without expectation. Quality is an expression of love. It is not surprising that the holistic connection among expression, cultural heritage, and personal identity has implications not only for learning language, but more fundamentally, as a stable grounding of self-expression. There is no more direct path between identity and expression than one beginning with awareness, so to underscore what anchors the validity of that that path, it was humbling to hear Kaylie encapsulate that same awareness saying "I want to learn my language because I'm not anything else."

From the socio-cultural approach of identification with cultural worldview through the local roots—the language, ceremonies, Elders, teachings, traditions, and so on—personal engagement with the culture can be understood as a form of cultural tilling. Reynolds et al. (2006) showed that engagement with traditional cultural beliefs and practices has considerable influence on Aboriginal well-being. Walters and Simoni (2002) reported that Aboriginal women use enculturating methods and draw on resources from within the traditions of their culture to build emotional wellness. Ultimately, language serves as the 'purest' vehicle with which to enter a holistic qualitative space.

However, under the circumstances that young Indigenous people face, and framing the piratical goals of this research, building exposure to ontology while simultaneously improving literacy, strengthening resilience, and cultivating a refined sense of cultural identity offers a useful and manageable context to bring young people into contact with their cultural heritage and its values. Kirmayer et al. (2009) explained that "such work is consistent with other work on ethnic identity which indicates a strong cultural and ethnic identity is good for health and subjective well-being" (p. 97). Hallett et al. (2007) corroborated, to a profound degree, the inextricable weave that binds local identity with cultural continuity and demonstrated that Indigenous communities that actively maintain their traditions and heritage literally practice life-affirming behaviors.

Humans are attached to narratives that connect the individual to a larger sense of identity. Indigenous cultures use these narrative accounts and dialogue circles to extend the continuity of local identity through the expression of orally narrated accounts, wisdom, stories, myths, and local knowledge or wisdom (Government of Canada, 1996). "Some people will say that historical memory has the power to allow us to remember events that we have not directly experienced. We indirectly experience those historical events through the oral tradition. We maintain Indigenous history through storytelling" (Wolf, 2011, p. 134). Kenny (1999) supported this idea: "Collectivities may not have minds, but an individual also does not transmit his experience without being part of one or other kind of collectivity" (p. 421).

Accessing heritage through cultural mentoring is a safe, trusted process, as it should be. In turn, it holds the worldview of an expansive qualitative dynamic that furnishes a storehouse of lived cultural knowledge collectively experienced and transmitted over timeless generations. Like any Indigenous culture, four thousand years of continuous expression is a good indication that Cree is self-sustaining in drawing sustenance and wisdom from its own history, values, and teachings. Davis (2009) describes these unique spaces of localized expression as an "old growth forest of the mind" (p. 3). It is precisely these collective memories, protocols, and traditions of practice that identify unique cultures and, within each, the functioning (and as cultural

visitor, observing of those practices work as cognitive levers that orient, and leverage meaning accordingly,

> Within traditional Native cultures . . . that rhythm of the world in its mode of operation is believed to be circular, as is the life of a human. . . . Most Indigenous languages do not have past or future tenses; they reflect rather a perennial reality of the now. . . . The same eternal processes are recurring now and are to recur in other future cycles' (Brown, 1982, p. 50)

Related to these lived cultural conceptions and the role of ontology is King's (2003) Maori research that showed that not only does affiliation with language represent an entry point into culture, but also, through the affect of cultural experience, the step into a cultural paradigm engages metaphorical tools as those Brown (1998) deftly described by Brown.

As Vygotsky (1962) pointed out, knowledge of verbal language is a determinant of thought. At the same time, thought might also determine verbal and nonverbal languages. Bialystok (2001) explained that "words can . . . determine our ideas, because they focus our attention on certain concepts at the expense of others and invoke assumptions that may never be made explicit" (p. 121). "Language becomes part of thought as well as a tool to thought" (p. 191). This is an important point. Before becoming words, at a cognitive level psychological processes hold our thoughts in place; they are conditioned structures that frame how we come to interpret the world. Put another way, words are the product of the culturally subjective psychology in which they are embedded. This is our epistemic forest. From within this forest, individuals, cultures, or societies become habituated and either reject or conform to the psychology and language; we become conditioned by the discourse of the narrative.

Cultural narratives and local discourses work as forms of applied literacy to affirm and express collective meaning. Indigenous language and cultural knowledge, as a kind of meta-window, look into the space of a worldview, draw on it as a source of meaning, and engaged with it to express collective memory (Brant Castellano, 2000). The positioning of the individual in the collective by means of its holism gives open systems their leverage. Holism also suggests the reason that such expressions as sun dances have been suppressed. As a cultural combination of memory, place, nature, and local lineage,

holism expresses a wide vista of qualitative space to which the individual can attach meaning.

Cultural narratives give the members of a community a sense of who they are and help them to access and affiliate with collective memory. This process extends cultural continuity, and such practices contribute to wellness. In this local research I have given examples of the undermining and marginalization of the local Indigenous narrative away from local expression. With regard to the importance of undertaking, teaching, or guiding ritual or ceremony, it was therefore no surprise to hear Christine as a cultural steward say, "If I can't facilitate it, I won't participate. I have to be able to maintain the integrity of the experience, those senses, those feelings." In her words, it comes down to the authenticity of the experience. In turn, local endemic expressions of language and identity are not governed by a materialist, rationalized positivism. Nor are they the product of ideology. Instead, to create an ongoing embodied experience, Indigenous cultural space rests in the perennial now. Left to its own devices, this qualitative source produced unique and highly contextual tools of meaning and communication that are rather different in nature and orientation from a template guided by the ideology of numbers. It has emerged naturally from the collective history of a particular geography of people.

Figurative Literacy

In spending time within this local Cree community and becoming exposed to some of the holistic ideas and metaphors that express Indigenous worldview, I have been triggered by the juxtaposition of a cultural worldview beyond my own. Even at this rudimentary level, as I stepped outside the framework of my cultural conditioning and explored some of the cultural ontology, this literacy research brought together a unique combination of factors to elicit a powerful lens through which to compare Indigenous worldview with my own cultural background, but as well, the structure and political discourses.

With regard to Cree worldview, cultural concepts such as the Circle of Life, place-based meaning or networks of lineage, by grafting meaning onto and through engagement with physical place, self-evident holism reveals in idea and word, a highly contextual

worldview. Not only are these aspects applicable to language learning, but, as social constructs, these qualitative approaches to life and kin—that is, the local narrative that is the cultural expression of holism—represent profound modalities to make specific nuanced meaning.

The sociolinguistic context of exploring Indigenous worldview offers and opens an intriguing fulcrum from which to orient meaning-making. Related to figurative literacy, when Indigeneity is understood as an experience, because of the sociological position of Cree worldview in relation to the larger paradigm of the hegemony, the experience of Indigeneity cracks open an angle of critical literacy from which to observe and interpret the larger paradigm bringing the social role of discourse into stark relief.

Speaking to the seeding power of words and their lingering impact, Chinese sage Lao Tzu once reminded to "Watch your thoughts; they become your words. Watch your words; they become your actions. Watch your actions; they become your habits. Watch your habits; they become your character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny" (QuoteCorner.com, 2015, quotation 3). In a subtle but distinguishable manner, this advice is also a applicable as a perceptive form of critical literacy. If we are unaware of the source of our Discourses and are influenced by these Discourses, we are at the mercy of the language. For this reason, I repeatedly draw on the analogy or a forest or that Indigenous ontology and worldview provide such insightful As Mehl-Medrona (2007b) pointed out with regard to narratives, "we have to learn how to perceive before we can perceive. [These] master narratives even include what we should perceive" (p. 127). By extension, if we unaware of who authorizes or defines the meanings of the words that we use, we are equally at the mercy of conditioning according to a particular narrative.

"Hegemony," as Brzezinski (1997) said, "is as old as mankind" (p. 3). Investigating language and literacy as discourses from outside the paradigms of power, where political economy tenders meaning, is powerfully informative. In hindsight, I realize that this is also because paradigms leave echoes. For example, between 1940 and 1990 almost every one of the almost 50 former British colonies in Africa had retained English as an official language or recognized its utility in academics, politics, or business (Fishman, 1998). Hegemony works in that location, silently framing and governing

epistemological space as Marx said, "If you can cut the people off from their history, then they can be easily persuaded" (FreeRepublic.com, 2005, quotation 1).

A Glimpse of a Map

Finally, returning to language as a unique highly specific local tool, utilizing that tool as a lens informing *figurative literacy* remains paramount. We know that Indigenous cultural expression directly correlates with wellness. As a result, the meaning-making process is the difference. This difference is a result of holism, in which, rather than projecting theory onto it, local cultural habits are premised on receiving the patterns of nature that bring experience. Empiricist theory, in the sociolinguistic sense of applied discourse, has been the Trojan horse used to politically usurp in order to epistemologically usurp the cognitive expression and authenticity of local experience. Economics and technology are similar tools. For an individual person or an Indigenous community, colonizing forces, by any name, require a literacy that elicits an expression of emancipation somewhere between the perceived validity of authority and the qualitative authenticity of experience. Cultural mentoring expresses the latter.

When interpretive attention is framed internally to the narrative and its referents, voice and agency also converge in the process, and a subtle literacy is engaged. The natural connection between identity, culture and expression might be one of the most holistic frameworks a person can affiliate with. And the authentic quality emitted from that space is local, unique, and immeasurably grounded in Natural Law:

> There has never been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) 'ideologies,' all consist of fragments from the Tao itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the Tao and to it alone such validity as they possess. . . . The rebellion of new ideologies against the Tao is a rebellion of the branches against the tree: if the rebels could succeed they would find that they had destroyed themselves. The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in. (Lewis, n.d., para. 16)

This local literacy attempt is part of the practical process of relocating a qualitative space under the cultural authority of its local expression of Natural Law. With

regard to extending continuity, and despite the timely circumstances threatening future expression, the most appropriate term defining this cultural dynamic is *stewardship.*

      *C*ultural mentoring brings young people, and all new language speakers, into contact with a unique local toolkit. Mentors are those who have linguistically travelled the cultural path, and are masters of those communicative and meaning-making local tools. As a result, the cumulative collection of this local knowledge; this word, this idea, these values that link one generation to the next, each remembered and extended by word of mouth. This collective local experience, defined from within the parameters of its own history, still has the potential to be tapped and accessed for its profound richness. A cultural map situates that local meaning, and the ontological holism of local knowledge guides a holistic path way to an embodied journey under the authority of the local speech community. For Indigenous Canadians to access and engage with their heritage and its more than 4,000 years of cultural capital is an act of protocol.

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APPENDIX A: ASSENT FORM

October 15, 2013

Martin Zeidler
University of Alberta
zeidler@ualberta.ca
780-235-7301

Supervisor:
Dr. Heather Blair
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
hblair@ualberta.ca

Re: Assent Form for Apprentice (Master-Apprentice Partnership)

Hello to you,

My name is Martin Zeidler. I'm a language teacher and also a student at the University of Alberta. I study how people learn second languages and the different ways to teach them. This letter is tell you about a research study using a special way to learn Cree. A research study is a way to find out about new information about something. I'm writing to you to tell about this study and to invite you to participate, but first I will give you some more information before you have to decide. You can talk this over with your family or guardian them before you decide.

This is a cultural mentoring project. In this project we will have a Master Cree speaker and 4 or 5 Apprentices (if you choose to participate you will be one of the Apprentices). I will also be participating and learning Cree with while I take notes and observe. There are no classrooms, homework or assignments. Part of the study is to see how this method works as a way of learning language so we will use English but we are focusing on the meanings of words and how they relate/connect to Cree culture. Like I said, one of the main things I want to find out is how much an Apprentice can learn using this method.. I have some teaching ideas and learning tools and those will help us. So, by trying the MAP in this informal way no lessons or tests, I hope you will learn some new Cree, have an interesting experience being with the Master and maybe it will make you think about learning more Cree in the future.

The one thing you will need to remember though is that you will feel some frustration. It might be you haven't heard much spoken Cree in your life, so this will be a bit difficult because you really need to listen very closely. However, at the same time, if you remember it is a new learning experience and you stay curious but patient, it will take

away some of the frustration that everyone feels when we learn a new language. This happens because we're not used to the new sounds and our ears and brains are working really hard to try and make sense. You might expect that this will happen and if it does you can definitely mention it to me, there's no problem with telling me. That's going to be the hardest part of this project and if that happens, you can talk to me and we will find a solution that works for you, but it's better for me to tell you now so that you have the information before you have to choose.

The time commitment would be eight 90-minute visits to our meeting location. I will bring something for us to snack on as we sit down and gather, then the Master will lead us through the topic for that day which will be a demo/activity/discussion for us to try and watch, listen and do together. And then we will review the new words and practice them and say goodbye until the next visit. the eight visits will take about 90 each over four weeks. This will take about 14 total hours of your time.

Also, I am asking you if I can interview you once at the end, for about an hour. I will meet you on a different day, and I will record these interviews. I will ask you things like, "what you have learned from this experience?, "how learning from the Master makes you think about being Cree?" and "what part of this worked well or not?" (I have a list of something of the questions I will ask you attached to this letter). After our interviews you can listen to the recordings and if there is something you don't want to include, I will delete from my report. The information collected about your learning and your comments during this study will be kept safe so nobody will be able to read or find out what you said. Only my supervisor at the University and I will listen to the audio-recording. I will ask the others in the group to keep private anything that is said in the group sessions, but I can't promise this since I don't have control over what is shared outside the group. Your name will not be used in any writing I do about the study. The information will be used for my final report for my University program and maybe for presentations and publications. After the study is done and my final report is written, I will give you a copy if you want.

If you want to know more, you can ask any questions that you have before you have to choose. Either you can call or have your parents call me (780 235 7301). Your parents//guardians have given the choice to be in this study up to you, you do not have to be. If you don't want to, you just have to tell us. No one will be upset. It's up to you. If you decide to participate and change your mind you can stop being in the group at any time. In the interview you can choose to answer or not answer any questions. If, after the study is finished, you decide you don't want anything you shared in the interview to be included you can tell me up to one month after our final interview and I will take it out. I will not be able to take anything out from the sessions we had with the Master.

The information that you share with me during this study will go to helping other partnerships that other schools and language communities can also try. What we will do together will help give others a better idea on how to make this idea happen and what things are important that need to be thought about. Your participation will help give

these ideas to the final report so you are actually the main point of the whole project and what you learn and share will be very useful information.

You can also take more time to think about being in the study. If you decide to be in the study, please write your name below. You will be given a copy of this paper to keep.

Thanks for reading and I hope we will get to meet sometime.

Thank you.

Martin
zeidler@ualberta.ca

I have read and understood the information above about the study: Master-Apprentice Partnership.
Yes, I will be in this research study   _____
No, I don't want to do this.   _____

_____
Child's Name, Signature of the Child, Date

_____   _____
Person Obtaining Assent, Signature, Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

AND INFORMATION LETTER

March 1, 2013

Martin Zeidler
780-235-7301
zeidler@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Heather Blair
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
hblair@ualberta.ca

Re: Information about Cultural Mentoring

Hello to you,

My name is Martin Zeidler. I'm a language teacher and a PhD student at the University of Alberta. My background is in the area of teaching second languages. I'm writing to invite you to participate in a language project helping young Cree people learn about their language and culture. This project is based on a language learning method called the Master-Apprentice Partnership, or MAP. The MAP method does not use regular classroom teaching, or even needs a classroom, and there are no tests or assignments. This version of the MAP involves a fluent Master speaker like yourself using English and Cree to explain and demonstrate some cultural ideas to beginner youth 'Apprentice' learners. Through this time together, and all of us together watching and listening the Apprentices slowly begin to get comfortable and perhaps begin to model some of the language that you demonstrate. With the help of the other Apprentices and some language teaching and learning tools that I will provide the Apprentices can use this experience with a fluent speaker can build their cultural awareness between their heritage and its language and traditions. This is the research area I am curious to explore; learning about if and how the youth feel about learning about their heritage in this informal way.

Therefore, just as important as learning the language is the opportunity of spending personal time with a Master speaker. Part of my final report will be based on interviews with the Apprentices asking them how using this method makes them feel about their Cree culture. My hope is this method can then be used with other youth both in and out of schools.

I am inviting you to participate to be a Master speaker. The time commitment would be four 90-minute visits to our meeting location. In addition, I will need to meet you before

your visits to plan which will require one hour, and we can meet somewhere convenient for you. Finally, at the end of your visits, I will ask that I may interview you and get your opinions about the experience and this interview will be transcribed. You are free to listen to your interviews before I submit my final report and if there is anything you want me to delete from your comments, I will honour your request. In total time, this project would require approximately 9 hours of your time.

In this regard, as you are coming and willing to share your language and cultural experience with these young people, I have made some arrangements to provide you with an honorarium provided by a local sponsor supportive of this language project. It is their generosity that allows this topic to be explored outside of schools and for me to ask community members such as yourself to participate along with the youth. I hope you will accept this modest gift for your contribution.

There is one condition you must agree to follow if you choose to participate and that deals with the safety of the students. You will be required to provide a current criminal record check and a child welfare check. If you agree and cannot pay for it, I will help with the payment of these costs to you. As well, I will arrange for transportation for your visits in the form of a bus pass or tickets for your three visits to the school. Before your school visits, I will need to meet with you once to make plans for your visits however this meeting doesn't have to be at school and we can meet somewhere convenient for you.

If you are interested in sharing your Cree language and culture with these youth Apprentice learners, and have any specific questions, I have included my telephone number and email address. Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Martin Zeidler
780 235 7301
zeidler@ualberta.ca

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.