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The Image of the Child from the Perspective of Plains Cree Elders and
Plains Cree Early Childhood Teachers

by

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Abstract

This study articulates Plains Cree Elders' and Plains Cree early childhood teachers' image of the child. The research was carried out in the spirit of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education—an approach dependent on establishing a locally created image of the child within a cultural context. The data was collected using qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies. According to the Plains Cree Elder participants, learning about the Plains Cree image of the child requires a spiritual and holistic understanding of the child from the moment of conception. The teacher participants hold similar beliefs to the Elders, yet often vacillate between Plains Cree and Westernized images of childhood. For many of the participants, the effects of residential school have been noted as an obstacle, as they strive to draw on the strengths of their traditional Plains Cree teachings when relating to children.

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With gratitude to the Creator for guiding my every step.

With gratitude to the Elders who humbly shared their knowledge with me in hopes of benefiting their grandchildren and future generations. *I am merely the pen with which you write.*

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In acknowledgment of the many generations of wise people who came before the participants in this study. *Evidently, your knowledge still lives on in many hearts and minds.*

With gratitude to my grandfather, who taught me the value of oral tradition, gifted me with the ability to patiently listen and instilled in me a pride for my Cowichan roots. *You have kept Tuwahwiye's wisdom alive.*

With thanks to all those, including my supervisor and committee members, who supported my educational journey. *You are many.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preface

The purpose of this research is to articulate Plains Cree understandings of childhood in order to provide a culturally relevant education for Plains Cree children. At present, children from Aboriginal[1] communities are taught in ways that do not necessarily correspond with the values of their family and community (Battiste, 2002; Kağitçibaşi, 2007). As such, teachers' methods of structuring learning may unintentionally detract from the educational experiences of Aboriginal children. My research explores the image of the child from the perspective of Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree early childhood teachers. The term *Elder* is used here to refer to an Aboriginal person who, in the eyes of his/her community, carries knowledge of traditional ways. An Elder, known for his/her humility and wisdom, is given power by the Creator in order to fulfill his/her role (Saskatchewan Education, 2001). The Cree term for Elder is *Kehtaya*.

Conceptual Framework

This research was undertaken in the spirit of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education—an approach dependent on a particular understanding of the image of the child within a cultural context (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Generated from the views of community members in a particular region in Italy, the image of the child in the Reggio Emilia approach is as a competent and capable learner and citizen (Fraser, 2006). Understanding the image of the child from a Plains Cree perspective is vital to this study because, images "determine the institutions [that are] provide[d] for children and the

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[1] The term *Aboriginal* is used here to refer to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada

pedagogical work that adults and children undertake in these institutions"
(Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 43). Thus, in order to escape the dominance
of the Westernized image of the child, it is important to articulate Plains Cree
understandings of childhood. The term *Westernized* is used here to refer to the
dominant North American discourse perpetuated in the everyday happenings of
those countries coloured by influences such as imperialism and colonialism.
Positivistic in nature, this discourse disregards idiographic epistemologies such as
the generational knowledge of Aboriginal peoples (Hall, S., 2006; Kağitçibaşi,
2007; Smith, 2006). It is anticipated that early childhood educators will use the
Plains Cree knowledge system for the benefit of their students whose ways of
knowing are non-Westernized (Merriam, 2007).

Reggio Emilia has gained worldwide popularity among early childhood
educators. In numerous school systems around the globe, there have been
attempts to transplant the Reggio Emilia approach (which was intended for the
children of Reggio, Italy) into other cultural contexts—contexts for which it was
never intended. For instance, in Saskatchewan, Canada, without adequate
resources made available to consult the Elders or cultural leaders of the
community, the Reggio approach has been implemented in schools that have a
high Aboriginal student population. This is problematic in that little or no effort
has been made to invite Elders or cultural leaders to share their images of
childhood with early childhood educators. In such cases, the goal of the Reggio
approach—to provide culturally relevant community-based education—cannot be
achieved.

Current research illustrates the need for early childhood institutions to develop collaborative relationships with both families and communities in a cultural context (Ball & Pence, 2006; Couchenour & Chrisman, 2004; Kağitçibaşi, 2007). Culture brings both meaning and intrinsic motivation to the process of learning. It must, therefore, be the driving force behind any early childhood education initiative. As such, the research questions of this study were as follows:

1. What images of the child do Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree early childhood teachers hold?

2. How do past experiences influence the image of the child that these Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree early childhood teachers hold?

Methodology

This study made use of qualitative research methodologies, with a particular focus on Indigenous practices and protocol (Kovach, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Smith, 2006). My research unfolded as follows: (1) During an Aboriginal talking circle, I received guidance from five Plains Cree Elders on how to carry out my research on the image of the child. (2) I conducted one-to-one open-ended interviews (referred to as *learning sessions*) with two Plains Cree Elders and one-to-one semi-structured interviews with three Plains Cree early childhood teachers (see Appendix for interview questions). (3) Employing constructivist grounded theory I compiled and coded the data and delineated it into categories. I presented these categories to the Elders and teachers in an additional talking circle and gathered the Elders' and teachers' feedback. (4) I engaged in member checks

with the Elders and teachers to ensure that their contribution to the thesis clearly represented their views.

My Positioning in the Research

Engaging in research regarding Aboriginal education required meeting the protocols of the University institution as well as the Aboriginal community. I believe that my Bachelor of Education Degree from the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), my teaching experience in Aboriginal communities, my position as a teacher leader in the implementation of Aboriginal epistemology into the curriculum, my cultural experiences as a Aboriginal person and my extensive experience in relating to my grandfather through oral tradition provided me with the skills necessary to achieve this balance. Most importantly, my relationship with my grandfather, a Coast Salish Cowichan Status Indian, both motivated me and prepared me to engage in this research. As knowledge from an Elder is only gained after one has established a relationship with the Elder, I entered into this research with the understanding that gaining information would be a meticulous and time consuming process which must be carried out in a culturally relevant manner.

The Plains Cree

This research is specific to the Plains Cree people who are a part of Canada's Aboriginal population. In order to understand who the Plains Cree people are, it is helpful to first understand their place within the Aboriginal population. Canada's Aboriginal peoples are categorized into three separate political groupings: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Rather than being classified

genetically, the First Nations people of Canada are most often grouped by their representation in one of "at least ten language families and isolates" (University of Calgary, 2003), which make up more than 65 languages or dialects. Canada's most widely spoken Aboriginal languages, Cree and Ojibwe, belong to the Algonquian family, with Cree being the language of the Plains Cree peoples (University of Calgary, 2003). There are seven dialects within the Cree language: Plains, Swampy, Woods, Moose, At(t)ikamek(w), Montagnais and Naskapi Innu (University of Calgary, 2003). The name *Cree* comes from the word *Kristineaux* (which was shortened to *Kri* and then spelt *Cree* in English) a word which French fur traders used for the First Nations people in the James Bay area (Cardinal, 1997). Cree Elders explain that Wesakechak, a central character in many Cree legends, gave the Cree the name *nehiyaw* which they use for themselves. In the Plains Cree dialect, nehiyaw means "the four directions people" (Cardinal, 1997, p.19).

The Cree people are the most plentiful First Nations group in Canada "with a population stretching from Quebec to British Columbia" (McLeod, 2000, p. 438). With their numerous dialects, as well as the vast area that they inhabit, the cultural, spiritual and linguistic practices of the Cree people vary from area to area. For instance, the Plains Cree—who cover central Saskatchewan and central Alberta—are culturally, spiritually and linguistically distinct from the other Cree groups (D. Thunder, personal communication, January 18, 2010). Yet, despite their distinctiveness, the Plains Cree people cannot be limited to a monolithic group (McLeod, 2000). According to McLeod (2000), because "Cree culture is

ever-changing and has multiple paths of genealogy, there is no catch-all definition that can be used to accurately describe the Plains Cree people" (p.439). Despite their variance in practices, commonalities exist among the Plains Cree people. For instance, in the spiritual realm, Plains Cree people (like most Aboriginal people) share a respect for Mother Earth and a belief in the interconnectedness of all things (D. Thunder, personal communication, January 18, 2010).

The Plains Cree Participants

The participants in this study are Plains Cree people who speak, or whose parents speak, Plains Cree (also commonly referred to as the *Y dialect*). The participants are all from Plains Cree reserves located within a 300 kilometer radius of the Treaty Six Area of central Saskatchewan. These reserves include: Witchekan Lake First Nation, Thunderchild First Nation, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation and Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation. Because this study involves a small number of participants, the results cannot be generalized to the Plains Cree community. Reading this thesis, however, and engaging in learning about the worldviews of the Plains Cree participants in this study—especially the views of the two Elders in this study, whose knowledge is highly respected in the Plains Cree community—will strengthen the reader's ability to understand other groups of Plains Cree people. It is anticipated that once the reader's eyes are opened to a cultural worldview other than their own, i.e. the Plains Cree culture, they may develop an openness to, and interest in, learning about other Aboriginal cultures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Education

History of the Reggio Emilia Approach

The first school, based on the Reggio Emilia philosophy, was built by a community group led by Loris Malaguzzi in 1945. At this time, Reggio Emilia, a small city of 150,000 in Northern Italy, was suffering the devastation of World War II (WWII) (Fraser, 2006). According to Fraser (2006), "since WWII, Reggio Emilia has had a socialist municipal government. The philosophy that is the foundation of the Reggio Emilia system has emerged from this socio-cultural perspective" (p.5). After the war, women needed to go to work in order to rebuild the economy, and they required care for their children in order to do so. Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher, worked with these mothers, and played a central role in the development of the Reggio approach to early childhood education, which encompasses both infant-toddler centers and pre-schools. Further key theorists in the Reggio approach were, and are, Carla Rinaldi and Lella Gandini. Rinaldi was the first pedagogical coordinator to collaborate with Malaguzzi in developing Reggio Emilia preschools and infant-toddler centers and is currently the president of *Reggio Children,* an international organization (Gandini, 2005). Gandini is the leader of the United States of America Reggio network. Rinaldi and Gandini worked closely with Malaguzzi prior to his death in 1994, and are respected authorities of the Reggio approach.

The Image of the Child

The pedagogical practice of Reggio Emilia infant-toddler centers and preschools is based on the image of the child—that is, the view which teachers and family members hold of the child. Malaguzzi (1998) likens the image of the child to the way in which one perceives the child's "identity" (p.116). Based on the Reggio philosophy, every person carries within them an image of the child that is "acquired through the system of representations which every social group develop[s] in the course of its history" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.105). Consequently, conceptions of childhoods vary significantly across cultures (Vinovskis, 1996). For example, when North American society moved from an agrarian society, through the industrial revolution and then on to the information age, the result was drastic societal changes, which lead to changes in the image of the child (Coucnenour & Chrisman, 2008). According to Coucnenour and Chrisman (2008), North American society has:

> moved from seeing children as property of the father to perceiving them as individuals who have responsibility for themselves, from seeing them as miniature adults who have no rights to perceiving them as developing human beings who possess legal rights and need societal safeguards. (p.5)

As a result of such images, expectations are placed on the child by his/her social context (Rinaldi, 2005). According to Rinaldi (2005), "it is through these representations and images that every society and individual relates to children" (p. 105) and provides educational contexts for them.

When relating to children, one must be acutely aware of the image of the child that they hold in their mind, as this image will have a direct impact on the students whom they teach (Malaguzzi, 1998; Vinovskis, 1996). Malaguzzi (1998) contests that what one "believe[s] about children thus becomes a determining factor in defining their social and ethnic identity, their rights and the educational contexts offered to them" (p.116). The Reggio image of the child is "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all, connected to adults and other children" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10). Children are viewed as having "potential, plasticity, the desire to grow, curiosity, the ability to be amazed, and the desire to relate to other people and to communicate" (Edwards, 1993, p.102). Furthermore, children are viewed as capable and resourceful protagonists of their own learning experience (Wien, 2008). This dynamic and multifaceted image from Reggio Emilia directly influences the manner in which teachers, parents and community members relate to children in their care, as they strive to provide intellectually stimulating learning environments.

Images Based on Deficits

In the past, images of children have often been generated based on what a child cannot do—by the child's deficits (Katz, 1995; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2005; Sigel & Kim, 1996; Wein, 2008). For instance, Malaguzzi (1998) points out that some images emphasize "what the child is not and does not have, what he or she cannot be or do," (p.116) thus negating the child's qualities and potential. Many early childhood pedagogical approaches "are inspired and legitimated by the idea of a fragile and weak child" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.105) or by viewing the

child as an "empty vessel awaiting enrichment" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 50).

Moreover, "the younger the child (especially children under three years), the more

legitimate it seems to be to deny the many qualities which identify him/her"

(Rinaldi, 2005, p.105). Other educational discourse outlines what the child *should*

be able to do, thus labeling the child with a deficit if he or she is unable to live up

to such standards. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, most psychologists

viewed infants and children as developing according to a universal "innate

blueprint" (Vinovskis, 1996, p. 105). Based on this image, "no special efforts

were made to provide an intellectually stimulating setting for children because it

was assumed that with normal, adequate physical care children would make

satisfactory progress intellectually" (p. 107). This developmental approach made

no allowance for the unique needs or talents of each individual learner.

Current educational discourse frequently acknowledges the many positive

qualities of young children and has resulted in a distancing from the deficit or

developmental approach. Yet, despite all that "has been said and written about

the competent child . . . very little has been done [in practice] that takes this image

seriously" (Rinaldi, 2005, p. 105). Notwithstanding positive discourse

surrounding the many competencies of the child, the manner in which some

educators currently view and relate to children reveals a complete denial of the

children's abilities and competencies (Rinaldi, 2005).

Generating an Image

The image of the child must be consciously and carefully generated by

teachers, family members and community members, so that children can

experience an education which fosters their many unique capabilities. According to Malaguzzi (1993) one's view of the child is incomplete "without attention to the central importance of teachers and families" (p. 9). Educators at Reggio Emilia schools consider collaboration with family and community members to be "an educational experience that consists of practice and careful reflection that is continuously readjusted" (Gandini, 1993, p.5) to the specific needs of the local community. Developing an image of the child created from cultural understandings of local educators and community members allows children to be educated in an environment that mirrors the important cultural aspects of their own lives.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is not a model to be blindly duplicated by other educators, but rather "an educational experience that consists of reflection, practice, and further reflection" (Gandini, 2004, p.15). The process of creating the image of the child is essential to those wishing to learn from the Reggio philosophy, whereas the actual image of the child that is generated is of secondary importance, as childhoods, and therefore images, differ among cultures and communities (Dahlberg et. al, 1999; Kağitçibaşi, 2007). Therefore, Reggio educators do not purport that their program should be followed as a model to be duplicated in another country (Gandini, 1993). The image of the child is "above all a cultural (and therefore social and political) convention that makes it possible to recognize . . . certain qualities and potentials in children, and to construe expectations and contexts that give value to such qualities and potentials" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.116). The Reggio experience provides a theoretical means to

generate meaningful and culturally specific images of the child through reflective practice and exchange of ideas (Gandini, 1993).

Malaguzzi's Image of the Child

Malaguzzi's writing on the image of the child carries with it a lyrical tone. His writing seamlessly flows from one aspect of the child to the next without the use of distinct categories, thus suggesting limitless possibilities. Rather than attempting to come up with a distinct philosophy or formula, Malaguzzi expresses his image of the child in a descriptive yet liberal manner. For instance, in his poem, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Malaguzzi acknowledges that the child has "a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more)" (Edwards et al., 1998, p.3). He does not attempt to list these hundreds of languages, thus emphasizing the child as "unique, complex and individual subject" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.50). In comparison, North American literature on Reggio, attempts to codify and organize Malaguzzi's writing on the image of the child into concise categories and distinct lists.

The Child as a Protagonist

The Reggio approach, as explained by Malaguzzi (1993) is dependent on the involvement of a triad of "three central protagonists" (p. 9): children, teachers and parents. The child is believed to be a protagonist of his/her own learning, a person "fully able to create personal maps for his own social, cognitive, affective, and symbolic orientation" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.116). As such, "what children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught, rather, it is in large part due to the children's own doing, as a consequence of their activities and

[teacher/parent/community] resources" (Malaguzzi, as cited in Wurm, 2005, p.64). With the child as a protagonist, teachers act as facilitators rather than directors of the child's learning. The child, viewed by teachers as competent, capable and powerful, "is a bearer, here and now, of rights, of values, of culture: the culture of childhood" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.171). The child provides teachers, parents and community members with "knowledge about childhood" (p.171). As protagonists in their own learning experience, children are considered to be excellent resources about the nature of childhood and the ways in which children learn.

Perceived as protagonists, children are treated as capable constructors of, and participants in, their learning experiences (Gandini, 2005). Malaguzzi (1998) speaks of "a competent, active, critical child; a child who is therefore 'challenging', because he produces change and dynamic movement in the systems in which he is involved, including the family, the society, and the school" (p.116). Malaguzzi describes the child further as one, who, "very early on, is able to attribute meanings to events and who attempts to share meanings and stories of meaning" (p.116). Rinaldi (2005), speaks of a child who is competent in constructing him/herself while simultaneously constructing his/her world and, in turn, is constructed by the world—a child who is "competent in constructing theories to interpret reality and in formulating hypothesis and metaphors as possibilities for understanding reality" (p.123). Viewing children as protagonists, teachers and parents allow children the opportunity to construct their own learning experiences.

The Child as a Citizen/Collaborator

As the Reggio approach is a "system of education based on relationships" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10), it views the child as a both a citizen and purposeful collaborator who continually relates to others. A contributing citizen of the present, rather than a citizen of the future, the child is viewed as "competent in relating and interacting, with a deep respect for others and accepting of conflict and error" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.123). Malaguzzi's (as cited in Cadwell, 2003) interactive social constructivist views of learning go "beyond Piagetian views of the child as constructing knowledge from within, almost in isolation" (p.10) to view the child as one who forms him/herself through interaction with others and the world around him/her. Emphasizing the importance of such interaction, Malaguzzi (1993) considers small groups to be the most beneficial type of classroom organization for "an education based on relationships" (p. 11). He believes that group settings allow the child to discover the importance of communication and his/her ability to enhance the autonomy of individuals and the group (Malaguzzi, 1993).

The Child as a Communicator

Malaguzzi believes the child to be a communicator right at the moment of birth. According to Malaguzzi (as cited in Lewin-Benham, 2008):

Children are born "speaking" and speaking with someone. The fact that words are lacking for a year does not stop their insuppressible, vital, eager, research to build conversational friendships. The strong desire to communicate is the basic trait of children. (p.72)

Right from birth the child is "so engaged in developing a relationship with the world and intent on experiencing the world that he develops a complex system of abilities, learning strategies, and ways of organizing relationships" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.116). Regardless of age, children are viewed as competent in forming relationships and competent in communicating (Rinaldi, 2005).

Educational Implications of the Reggio Image

The Reggio Emilia image of the child has a direct impact on the role of teacher, as well as on the environment they provide for their students. This is because a teacher's belief about childhood directly influences his/her actions in the classroom (i.e. the manner in which he/she plans and provides learning activities and assesses student learning). In the Reggio approach, "teachers are deeply aware of children's potentials and construct their work and the environment of the children's experience to respond appropriately" (Gandini, 1993, p.5). As such, the teacher's role is to provide psychological and physical conditions for learning. The teacher activates the "meaning-making competencies of children" (Malaguzzi, as cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.76) by psychologically supporting them and interacting with them as they construct their learning, engage in social interactions and address their curiosities. The teacher further activates the "meaning-making competencies" (p.76) of children by providing a physical learning environment that not only allows, but invites, children to construct their own learning.

According to Malaguzzi (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999) "the wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations

and the richer their experiences" (p.76). For instance, open shelves with carefully displayed materials provide students with access to materials of their choosing. Gandini states that patterns in education "proceed from macro philosophical ideas such as the image of the child, down to micro issues such as the organization of materials on shelves" (Gandini, 2005, p. 177). In the Reggio Approach, both the learning and physical environments are carefully planned with the image of the child at the forefront thus acknowledging the child's competencies and rights.

Aboriginal Education

History of Aboriginal Schooling in Canada

The history of Aboriginal schooling by the Canadian government and various churches reveals an image of the Aboriginal child as inadequate and in need of intervention and correction (Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Fraser, 2007). During the era of residential schooling, "educational protocols were designed with the goal of assimilating Aboriginal children and peoples and transforming them from their helpless 'savage' state to one of self-reliant 'civilization' and thus to make Canada but one community—a non-Aboriginal, Christian one" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada as cited in Greenwood et al. 2007). According to Adams (1995), "the goal of the schools was to 'kill the Indian in the child so as to save the man'" (p. 52). As summarized by Cappon (2008), "historical policies removed children from their families and communities for schooling, severed the links between individuals and their spiritual and cultural roots, eroded their languages, undermined their traditional leadership and denied their potential rights and their right to self-determination" (p.60). This resulted in schooling that

marginalized Aboriginal children from the cultural strengths of their families and

communities. Pegged under the eighteenth and nineteen century image of

Aboriginal people as "'nearly human', 'almost human' or 'sub-human'" (Smith,

2006, p. 60), Aboriginal children in residential schools were subjected to

emotional, physical and sexual abuses.

     With over 80 residential schools in operation across Canada for nearly a

century beginning in 1890's, the negative effects continue to be far reaching

(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005). Many Aboriginal children, who are

presently in the Canadian school system, still feel the ripple effects of the horrors

of the residential school experience of their relatives (Aboriginal Healing

Foundation, 2005). According to Greenwood et al. (2007), more than 90,000

current citizens attended residential schools and "their legacy of trauma and abuse

has devastated several generations of Aboriginal people" (p. 5). Some former

students of residential schools describe themselves as victims of residential school

whereas others describe themselves as survivors. Whether victims or survivors,

the outcome for many was a stripping away of their culture—a culture which

provided them with strength and well-being.

Westernized Schooling of Today's Aboriginal Students

     Although today's schools do not have the same blatant goal of assimilation

as residential schools once did, most schools are based on a Western approach to

education—an approach that silently, and sometimes unknowingly, strives to

assimilate all children into Western ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002; Hall, B.L.,

2000). As such, there exists a mismatch between the children's home values and

the values of the school. According to Heath (2008), "the school is not a neutral

objective arena; it is an institution which has the goal of changing people's values,

skills, and knowledge bases" (p. 367). For the majority of Aboriginal children,

"school is a sudden flood of discontinuities in the ways people talk" and "the

values they hold" (p.348). Given that their home experiences often do not match

with those at school, many Aboriginal children struggle to navigate through the

Westernized ways of knowing which are so prominent in many of today's

schools.

The colonial wrongs of residential school still echo in today's schools. As

one example, some educators include only Western perspectives and fail to

recognize and include Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews in daily

instruction and interactions. "One of the defining characteristics of colonial

schooling for Indigenous children was its intentional disregard for the community

'funds of knowledge' children bring to school" (Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd-Tenery,

Rivera, Rendon, Gonzalez, & Amanti, as cited in McCarty, 2002, p.21). Today,

the community funds of knowledge of Aboriginal people are still often

disregarded or simply go unnoticed by educators. In particular, "the perspectives

of aboriginal peoples, expressed in their own voices without the mediation of

Western culture, have been largely absent" (Hall, B.L., 2000, p. 203). Instead,

Western perspectives continue to dominate.

It is important to note that the exclusion of Aboriginal culture and ways of

knowing in today's schools is not always intentional. The term *culture* is used

here to refer to the learned shared behaviour and values, and their attached

meanings, which are passed through generations and "socially transferred in life-activity settings" (Kağitçibaşi, 2007, p. 6). As such, teaching culture in the context of Aboriginal education requires that attention be paid to not only to the behaviour of Aboriginal peoples, but also to the values attached to such behaviour. Some teachers strive to provide a culturally responsive curriculum in order to benefit Aboriginal students (Battiste, 2002). Such teachers, however, "wrongly assume that the Eurocentric idea of 'culture' is the same as the concept of Indigenous knowledge, and they apply cultural corrections to address the problems that will inevitably arise in a system that teaches from within an exclusively western context" (Battiste, 2002, p.16). For instance, teachers may teach about the logistics of Aboriginal cultural customs without addressing the spiritual values attached to these customs, even though spirituality is at the core of Aboriginal ways of knowing. Despite their good intentions, these teachers fail to adequately teach meaningful cultural content and Aboriginal ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002).

Aboriginal Early Childhood Education: Head Start

In the 1960's and 1970's, Canadian early childhood education programs for Aboriginal children were "virtually non-existent" (University of Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 7), whereas in the 1990s, programs began emerging. Today, most Aboriginal early learning programs in Canada are sponsored by the federal government. One such program is Aboriginal Head Start, which addresses the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of young Aboriginal children through half-day preschool experiences in 125 sites across Canada

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004). With a focus on culture, language, parental involvement and Aboriginal practitioners, Aboriginal Head Start has been successful in fostering the cultural knowledge of children (Western Arctic Aboriginal Head Start Council, 2006). Despite its success, Head Start, like many Aboriginal early learning programs, often relies on outside professionals for the foundational planning of its early childhood education services (University of Saskatchewan, 2008). Consequently, Aboriginal Head Start continues to address the challenge of meeting one of its main goals—providing locally designed and controlled services founded on the knowledge and wisdom of the local Aboriginal community (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004; University of Saskatchewan, 2008.)

An Aboriginal View of Learning

Many Aboriginal people believe that raising and educating their children is a communal responsibility (Alberta Education 2005; Cappon, 2008). Despite the communal values of Aboriginal peoples, raising and educating children in "mainstream Canadian society has historically been seen as an individual private family matter" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006, p. 39). Focusing on individualism and the nuclear family, the current education system puts Aboriginal families at a disadvantage, because individualism goes against their value of collectivism. Aboriginal people share a common vision of learning "as much more than an individual pursuit," (Cappon, 2008, p. 61) and believe that learning is a process of "transmitting values and identity" and a "guarantor of cultural continuity." As such, the value placed on learning for the individual and the nuclear family,

cannot be separated from the value placed on learning for the benefit of the collective (Cappon, 2008).

Addressing the Need for Quality Aboriginal Education

The solution to addressing the need for quality Aboriginal education lies in the existing wisdom, knowledge and strength of Aboriginal peoples themselves. "The field of education has long recognized the need for involving parents and the community, but involvement has not routinely been in the area of decision making" (Saskatchewan Education, 2000, p.6). With the current debate of the role of the government in early education, comes long overdue "opportunities for Aboriginal communities to inform and influence the discussion, drawing upon the strength of their traditional and holistic understanding of child-rearing as a shared family and communal responsibility" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006, p. 39). Employing the strengths of family systems and cultural values of Aboriginal people will result in high quality Aboriginal early childhood education, so long as there is meaningful involvement of Elders, parents and the community (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006; Saskatchewan Education, 2000).

The Canadian Aboriginal Population

Developing and providing quality Aboriginal education is not only essential because it is the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples, but is also important because the number of Aboriginal people in Canada is steadily increasing (Statistics Canada, 2008). Culturally relevant and community-based early childhood Aboriginal education is a pressing priority, since almost half of the Aboriginal population of Canada is estimated to be under the age of 24

(Cappon, 2008). Based on the Canadian 2006 census, "about 9% of the Aboriginal population was aged 4 and under, nearly twice the proportion of 5% of the non-Aboriginal population. Similarly, 10% of the Aboriginal population was aged 5 to 9, compared with only 6% of the non-Aboriginal population" (Statistics Canada, 2008). It is anticipated that in approximately eight years from now the number of Aboriginal children in the Saskatchewan school system will increase from the current percentage of 14 to as high as 33 (Cappon, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2008).

Reggio and Aboriginal Education

According to early childhood researchers from the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria, the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education fits well with the desire of Aboriginal communities to shape their local early childhood education systems (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006). "Today First Nation/Aboriginal communities want to return to the traditional concept that caring for young children is a sacred communal responsibility" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006, p. 39). The well-documented fifty year success of Reggio Emilia's community-based approach encourages the use of Aboriginal community knowledge to shape early childhood education programs—knowledge that has been with Aboriginal people long before the Reggio approach came to be (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Focus of the Study

The purpose of my study is to articulate Plains Cree understandings of childhood in order to provide culturally relevant education for Plains Cree children. My research explores the image of the child from the perspective of Plains Cree Elders and Plains Cree early childhood teachers. This is achieved in the spirit of Reggio Emilia—an approach to education dependent on a particular understanding of the image of the child. Understanding locally created images of the child from an Aboriginal perspective is vital, as images directly influence pedagogy. These understandings will support educators in acknowledging the complexity of Aboriginal childhoods.

Indigenous Research Methodology

Indigenous research is concerned with the well-being of Indigenous peoples both during and after their involvement in the research process. The term *Indigenous peoples*, which includes Canada's Aboriginal peoples, internationalizes the experiences and challenges of many of the world's colonized peoples (Smith, 2006). Rather than being a "tool of colonization" (Smith, 2005, p.87), Indigenous research is "a potential tool for self-determination and self-development". My research, therefore, is concerned with collaborating with Plains Cree peoples to put their priorities, knowledge and experience at the forefront of early childhood education (Lester-Irabina Rigney, as cited in Porsanger, 2004).

Employing Indigenous research methodologies allows me to represent the voices of Plains Cree Elders and early childhood educators. According to Smith (2006), Indigenous research:

> is a way of countering the dominant society's image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and their belief systems. It is also about proposing solutions to the real-life dilemmas that indigenous communities confront and trying to capture the complexities of being indigenous. (p. 151)

My research represents the complexities of Plains Cree images of the child thus providing opportunities for Plains Cree children to be educated in a culturally affirming manner.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was chosen as the research approach for this thesis because it complements Indigenous research methodology. Developed by Glasser and Strauss, grounded theory "offers an explanation about a phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.487). The specific type of grounded theory employed was the constructivist design, because its analyses can provide the field of education with Plains Cree understandings and beliefs about childhood—understandings not readily available in most educational settings (Charmaz, 1990). Made popular by Charmaz (2000), the constructivist design "is more interested in the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than in gathering facts and describing acts" (Creswell, 2008, p. 439). This design is a means of "creative writing as a form of expression that has the potential to communicate how participants construct their worlds" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 7).

Flexible in its approach, constructivist grounded theory is explanatory and discursive of the meanings of the participants in the study rather than conclusive (Creswell, 2008).

Grounded theory works well with Indigenous research methodology for three main reasons. First, grounded theory complements the Aboriginal value of holism and interrelatedness of all things because grounded theory is based on a set of well-developed categories that are "interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Second, grounded theory allows me, the researcher, to position myself as one who is giving voice to pre-existing knowledge rather than one who is producing or justifying knowledge by matching it to an existing theory. This is important as "Indigenous ways of thinking, understanding and approaching knowledge have long been dismissed by the academic world because they have been considered not to belong to any existing theory" (Porsanger, 2004, p. 112). Grounded theory therefore allows Indigenous knowledge to stand on its own as a legitimate way of knowing. Third, since concepts are generated from the data and are "systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6) ideas cannot come from outside sources. This sole focus on data derived from Aboriginal knowledge serves as a safeguard against the researcher engaging in colonizing Indigenous knowledge. This safeguard, however, is not infallible; constructivist grounded theory, while attempting to explicate the experiences of the participants, acknowledges the

footprint that the researcher's own background, values and preferences leaves on the research outcome.

The Elder Participants

The criteria for the Elder participants were that they: a) were Plains Cree, b) were referred to as, and revered as, Elders by the wider Aboriginal community in Saskatchewan and c) held a traditional knowledge of Plains Cree childhoods. It was not required that the Elders were female, but given that knowledge of child rearing in Plains Cree communities is often held by females, it is appropriate that the two main Elder participants, Margaret and Helen[2], were both female. Recruitment of the Elders was initiated through gatekeepers. A Westernized research term, a *gatekeeper* is an individual who has an official or unofficial role at a site, grants entrance to the site and assists the researcher in identifying and accessing people (Creswell, 2008). A complex and time-consuming process, the recruitment of Elders is described in subsequent pages.

The Teacher Participants

The criteria for the teachers' participation in the study were that they: a) were Plains Cree, b) were practicing early childhood educators in Saskatchewan and c) held a Bachelor of Education Degree. It was my hope, yet not a requirement, that these teachers had some exposure to traditional Plains Cree culture at some point in their lives. The teacher participants who volunteered were all female. Recruitment of teacher participants was achieved by asking Aboriginal employees in the school division for recommendations of Plains Cree early childhood educators. I then sent a letter of introduction regarding my

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[2] Pseudonyms were used for all participants in this study

research to these teachers. All three teacher participants in my study responded to this letter. The three teacher participants were: Jennifer, Lisa and Michelle.

Preparation

In preparation for beginning my research in the school division, I participated in a sweat lodge ceremony. This ceremony took place in a dome made of saplings and blankets, in the middle of which was a pit with heated rocks (Canadian Plains Cree Research Centre [CPCRC], 2006). A sweat is a purification ceremony symbolizing being in the womb of Mother Earth. It is also a time for prayer (CPCRC, 2006). This attention to the spirit world required me to examine my own state of mind before embarking on my research journey (Ross, 2006). During the ceremony, I prayed that I would let go of my own research agenda and be open to the agendas and research directions of the Elders and their communities.

Approval of Research

In the spring of 2009, my research was approved by the *University of Alberta Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board*. It was also approved by the school division in which I carried out my research. Despite receiving approval from the school division, I felt it was equally important, if not more important, to receive approval from the Elders of the school division. Not only did I seek permission to conduct research in their school division (a division that exists on the traditional territory of the Plains Cree people), I also wanted their input regarding my research topic (a topic pertaining to them and to their people). Believing that "the colonial positioning of Indigenous peoples solely as

subjects of research, rather than as partners and drivers of the research, must come to a stop" (Greenwood et al., 2007, p. 5), I sought input from the Elders. With the help of the Elders' administrative assistant, I arranged a talking circle with five of the school division Elders in order to share with them my intentions and gather their feedback. In the days leading up to the talking circle, I visited each of the Elders individually, to introduce myself and offer them tobacco. The offering of tobacco was a very time-consuming process, but necessary to ensure the integrity of my research, as further explained in the Cultural Protocol section.

The talking circle began with a sacred smudge ceremony by one of the Elders. The smudge served as an opening prayer to the gathering. During the smudge, sweetgrass was "burned to purify the body, mind, heart and spirit of all persons who enter[ed] the ceremonial area" (CPCRC, 2006) thus allowing full participation in the talking circle. I was honored that the Elder was willing to smudge and was comforted by the fact that, by praying, we were enlisting the Creator to guide us in our talking circle. The talking circle then proceeded according to Plains Cree tradition in that a stone was used to signify whose turn it was to speak. Passing the stone to the left, participants took turns speaking while others quietly listened. Comments were made by each Elder regarding my research interest of Plains Cree images of childhood.

During the talking circle, I received information from the Elders on their image of the child, as well as advice regarding my research. I also shared my research intentions and explained why I believed I was capable of carrying out the research in a culturally sensitive manner. The talking circle concluded with eating

lunch together and visiting. Among the Elders, there was a general consensus that

my research was welcome in their school division. This consensus was not

spoken, but rather implied. This was evident in two main ways. First, the Elders

took interest in my topic and invited me to visit them at their schools. Second, the

Elder who led the talking circle invited me to meet with her to learn about her

image of the child. With this invitation in particular, I knew that I could proceed

with my research within the division.

Accessing Elders

Determining who is an Elder is a difficult process, as Elders do not hold an

official designation certified by an institution. In addition, some Elders carry with

them a deeper depth of traditional Plains Cree knowledge than other Elders.

Traditional Plains Cree knowledge can be defined as knowledge passed down

from family members and/or Elders, as well as knowledge which is based on

traditional Plains Cree spirituality rather than on Catholicism or other such

colonial influences. Traditional knowledge cannot be measured quantitatively,

but rather, its authenticity is validated by respected members of the Aboriginal

community. (Margaret and Helen, personal communication, January 22, 2010).

A Plains Cree Métis educational administrator named Ben was helpful in

preparing me to locate and access Elders. A valued member of the Plains Cree

community, Ben had a great respect for Elders and community members

knowledgeable in Plains Cree ways. He encouraged me to take my time in my

search so that I could find Elders who carried with them an extensive depth of

traditional Plains Cree knowledge. Although he believed that I could learn from

Elders who were "early on in their journey," Ben encouraged me to seek out those Elders who were "farther on their journey" and carried with them specific traditional knowledge of Plains Cree childhoods.

Seeking recommendations of Plains Cree Elders appropriate for my study, I visited personal contacts in Plains Cree communities. Margaret and Helen's names came up repeatedly and as a result I was confident that they were respected Elders who represented both the traditional and collective knowledge of their people. I accessed these Elders through Ben. Acting as a gatekeeper, he met with me to ask me specific questions about my research and to learn about my research intentions. He wanted to know who would be the future owner of the knowledge that I intended to gather. I explained that the knowledge that the Elders shared with me would remain under their ownership. Watching out for the best interests of Margaret and Helen, Ben only helped me access these Elders once he was sure that I would treat them, and the knowledge that they had to offer, in a culturally appropriate manner.

Elders along the Way

In my initial search, I met Elders who were unable to participate in a series of learning sessions or visits, but were able to meet with me on one occasion. These meetings were arranged for me by Ian, a Métis gentleman, who acted as a gatekeeper for these Elders. Dorothy was a Cree Elder who graciously welcomed me when I stopped by her workplace to visit. I told her about my research, and she shared with me her image of the child. Dorothy then declined to participate in my research, explaining that she was "slowing down" and needed to have "fewer

commitments." She further explained that she didn't want to commit to helping

me and then make me "feel bad" when she had to cancel. Betty was another Elder

I visited. She welcomed me into her home for a quick visit as she had three

meetings prior to ours, and was participating in a sweat lodge ceremony after our

meeting. Betty shared with me some insights on her image of the child. After our

initial visit, she experienced a death in her family, and I felt it was not an

appropriate time to pursue a relationship with her. Consequently I did not meet

with her again, but am very thankful for the teachings that I did receive from her.

Both Dorothy and Betty held images of the child that were almost identical to that

of Margaret and Helen's. This served as verification that the knowledge I was

gaining from Margaret and Helen belonged to the collective voice of the Plains

Cree people.

Cultural Protocol

In preparation for visiting Elders Margaret and Helen, I visited members

of the Plains Cree community to ask them about protocol. It was important that I

visited people who personally knew Margaret and Helen, as the protocol expected

from Elder to Elder often varies. Defined by Oxford dictionary, protocol is "the

accepted code of procedure or behavior in a particular situation" (Soanes &

Stevenson, 2008, p.1155). Cultural protocol, then, can be defined as the culturally

accepted code of procedure or behaviour in a particular situation. Cultural

protocol is an essential consideration in the context of Indigenous research. Three

main areas arose with regard to cultural protocol when seeking knowledge from

Elders: a) the wearing of a skirt, b) the provision of transportation and nourishment and c) the offering of tobacco.

Wearing a Skirt

Some of the Elders expected me to wear a long skirt when I visited them, while others did not. Wearing a long skirt is a way of honoring a female Elder, honoring myself as a woman and exercising my humility. Elder Betty commended me for wearing a skirt for our visit and mentioned that if I was not wearing a skirt, she likely would have sent me away to change. The other Elders appreciated my gesture of wearing a skirt, but did not hold it as an expectation.

Providing Transportation and Nourishment

Providing transportation and nourishment to Elders are two common ways of showing respect. For instance, when I met with Margaret for her first interview, I took her out for supper at a restaurant near her home as well as provided transportation. I provided Elders with rides and nourishment several times throughout my research.

Offering Tobacco

Following Aboriginal protocol, I offered the Elders tobacco during my initial meeting with each of them. Based on Plains Cree belief, tobacco is a sacred plant that is inter-connected to Mother Earth. In addition to honoring each Elder's wisdom, I offered tobacco as a means of allowing the Elder to comfortably and culturally express, through body language, whether or not she wished to participate in my research. According to both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal protocol, if an Elder accepts the tobacco, then she is

expressing her desire to communicate with me. If the Elder does not accept the tobacco, then she is expressing her desire not to enter into communication with me. The offering of tobacco served as a safeguard to ensure that the Elder's participation was entirely voluntary. For instance, when Elder Dorothy declined participation in my study, she did not accept my tobacco, but encouraged me to offer it to another Elder. When an Elder does accept tobacco, she will eventually offer the tobacco up in prayer and thanksgiving to Mother Earth, while also praying for the person who gave her the tobacco.

Navigating the varying protocols of offering tobacco afforded me valuable learning experiences. Several days prior to the initial talking circle I telephoned each Elder ahead to request a 20 minute visit with them at their school. After arriving on the scheduled day and time, I introduced myself, greeted them with a handshake, and then sat down and offered them tobacco saying "I would like to learn more about the Plains Cree image/understandings of the child, and am wondering if you are willing to share your knowledge with me at the talking circle on Tuesday." All but one of the Elders promptly took the tobacco, and shook my hand in agreement.

When I first offered tobacco to Helen, she did not accept it right away. Instead, she checked her day planner to ensure that she was free to attend the talking circle. Once she was certain she was available that day, she accepted the tobacco. She then told me a story of when, as a child, she would visit her grandmother. Helen explained how a pinch full of tobacco was always graciously accepted by her grandmother, who would carefully add it to her bundle of tobacco

that she kept with her. This story allowed me to learn that Helen preferred to receive a very modest amount of tobacco at each visit, without causing me to feel humiliated for offering her such a large amount. At the beginning of every subsequent visit with Helen, I offered her a modest amount of tobacco. Elder Betty was more upfront about how she expected to receive tobacco. She requested a full, unopened package wrapped in clean cloth for each visit.

Another learning experience regarding the offering of tobacco occurred during my interactions with Margaret. Margaret had her assistant tell me that the tobacco that I offered her during our first visit was sufficient for all subsequent visits; I was not expected to offer her anymore tobacco. During one particular visit, Margaret told me of the importance of children sitting on the ground so that they are close to Mother Earth. I asked her if it was best to offer her tobacco when we were both seated. "Yes" was Margaret's reply:

> When we're sitting on a chair, that's being close to Mother Earth too. And also, the Elder will not stand up. Well, they'll maybe stand up to greet you. But, if you're coming for a purpose, they'll tell you, 'Let's sit down.' And to us, sitting down you're more relaxed and you're more open to welcome, to receive and give that relationship.

From this conversation I learned that I was to be seated when offering tobacco to an Elder.

Learning about the specific protocols preferred by each Elder was a very important component when preparing to carry out my research. Knowing the preferences of each Elder allowed me to arrive somewhat prepared to interact with

the Elder. This built respect as the Elders appreciated my efforts to accommodate them. Unable to completely anticipate the specific protocols that each Elder preferred put me in a position of humility. I had to be open to making errors and, most importantly, I had to be receptive to the new learning opportunities that these experiences provided.

Interviewing

The main method of data collection for my research was interviewing. According to Merriam (1988), the purpose of interviewing "is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 72). Conducting interviews helped me, the researcher, to "find out how people have organized the world and the meanings that they attach to what goes on in the world" (p. 72). The interviews with the Elders were unstructured and open-ended. Consequently, I refer to these interviews as *learning sessions* throughout my paper. The interviews with the teachers were semi-structured.

Learning Sessions with Elders

Elders are experts in their own right. Since I did not possess the traditional knowledge and experiences that the Elders carry, I did not know enough about the traditional image of the Plains Cree child to ask relevant questions of the Elders. With no predetermined set of questions beyond "what is your image of the child?" or "how do you see the child?" the learning sessions were essentially explanatory (Merriam, 1998). As a way of respecting the Elders' wisdom, I simply listened to them and asked for clarification only when necessary. After the first learning session, I was able to learn enough about the

circumstances to formulate questions for later learning sessions (Merriam, 1988).

The unstructured and open-ended learning sessions that I engaged in with the

Elders can be likened to the Westernized *elite interviews* described by Merriam

(1988):

> Elite interviews can be conducted with any person who has "specialized
>
> information"—that is, the interviewer is interested in that particular
>
> person's definition of the situation. The respondent need not have a broad
>
> understanding of the culture. In its purest form, elite interviews are
>
> unstructured. (p.76)

Referring to my learning sessions/interviews with the Elders as elite, however,

would not reflect the Elders value of humility. Thus, I will continue to use the

term learning session.

Relationship Building

Knowledge from an Elder can only be gained once one has established a

relationship with the Elder, and once the Elder has freely volunteered to share

information. In addition to my learning sessions and member checks with them, I

visited Margaret and Helen on five other occasions each. During these casual

visits, the Elders often shared stories from their lives. They covered such topics

as their weekend berry picking with grandchildren, setting up tipis, or sewing

traditional clothing.

Data Collection: Elders Margaret and Helen

For my first learning session with Margaret, I did not use any recording

devices such as a pen, paper or audio recorder. I wanted to focus all of my energy

and attention on simply listening to her. During subsequent visits, with

Margaret's permission, I audio recorded my learning sessions with her. For the

first learning session, the only questions I asked Margaret were "what is your

image of the child?" and "how do you see the child?" After the first learning

session, I asked her to expand on comments from the previous learning session. I

did not introduce any new questions. Margaret provided me with a very

comprehensive view of the child. Because of her wisdom, she inherently knew

what I needed to learn. In addition to her teachings on childhood, Margaret also

shared with me teachings on being a woman. These lessons were not intended for

my research, but rather intended for my personal use. For these teachings I am

grateful.

Prior to learning from her, Helen made it very clear to me that she did not

want me to use an audio recorder when meeting with her. She explained "tobacco

is your computer." She elucidated that one of the reasons I offered her tobacco

was to help me remember her teachings—the prayers that Helen would later say

while offering the tobacco to Mother Earth would include prayers for my journey

as a learner. Helen also explained that "the really important information will stay

with you." Although I completely respected Helen's choice to teach me through

oral tradition[3] I found this very frustrating at first and was worried about

remembering what she shared. After each learning session, I would write down

all that I could remember of her teachings. From learning session to learning

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[3] When I was listening to, and learning form Helen, I engaged in oral tradition. Once I started documenting Helen's stories in writing, however, I was no longer using oral tradition. Furthermore, some believe that in order for oral tradition to be truly authentic, the ancestral language must be used (V. Okemaw, personal communication, February 12, 2010).

session, I noticed that my listening skills improved, and I was able to recall more information. This use of oral tradition required many learning sessions, as I could only remember so much information after each session. Engaging in this type of data collection can be likened to using a sieve to separate information relevant to my study from information not relevant to my study. Whatever was left in the sieve, that is, whatever I could recall at the end of each learning session with Helen, was the information that I was meant to hold onto; a rich account of Helen's views of the child. This method of learning required a lot of time and patience. It also strengthened my skills as a listener and allowed me to experience some of the benefits of oral tradition.

Data Collection: Teachers

Collecting data from the three teacher participants, as compared to collecting data from the Elders, was a quick and structured process. I met with each of them individually three times—once to tell them about my research, and twice to interview them and conduct member checks. Interviews took place after school in the teacher's classroom. I sent the interview questions to the teachers a week ahead of time, and during the interview they answered the questions in whatever succession they chose. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Emergent Design and Indigenous Methodology

With the Elders and teachers as partners in my research, I was required to be flexible in order to ensure that their opinions were embedded in the research process—a process that was emergent. Explained by Creswell (2008) "an

emerging process indicates that the intent or purpose of a study . . . may change during the process of inquiry based on feedback or responses from participants" (p.141). This occurs because "the qualitative inquirer allows the participants' views rather than imposing his or her view on the research situation" (p.141). For instance, my original research topic focused on the Plains Cree image of the child from age four to seven—the age range that generally encompasses early childhood education (preschool to grade two). When I first met with Helen, however, she was quick to point out that, operating from a Plains Cree paradigm, it was essential to begin at the moment of conception when learning about childhoods. My narrow focus on children age four to seven quickly broadened to include conception, birth and infancy. As a result of Helen's advice, I was left with a much richer and more authentic account of Plains Cree images of childhood than I initially would have gathered.

Another instance of partnering with the community being researched occurred when I was talking with a teacher participant. She suggested that it would be useful for her and the other teacher participants to meet with Margaret and Helen in a talking circle. This required a shift in the carrying out of my research plans. Yet, it strengthened my commitment to Indigenous methodology. Not only did the talking circle allow the teachers to learn from the Elders, it also provided an opportunity for the Elders and teachers to deicide together how, and with whom, the results of my research would be shared. Initially I was going to have only the Elders involved in this decision. The teachers' involvement, however, proved to be useful as well. Although they carry a different depth of

knowledge than the Elders, the teachers are familiar with the realities of

contemporary early childhood education. Consequently, their input

complemented the traditional knowledge of the Elders.

Using the constructivist grounded theory approach allowed my research

direction to emerge from the participants experiences as I began "with general

research questions rather than tightly framed pre-conceived hypothesis"

(Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162). For instance, my main research question was "what is

the Plains Cree image of the child?" In talking to Elders, I soon realized that

residential school experiences of participants or of participants' family members

have a profound effect on the development of their image of the child. Hence, my

research questions for the teacher participants were expanded in order to learn

about the participants' connection to residential school and how these connections

affected their construction of their image of the child.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place throughout the research process, as I continually

reflected on my interactions with the participants, and generated potential themes.

For instance, I frequently reflected on raw data through the use of theoretical

memos. These memos became "more and more complex and analytical" (Mills et

al., 2006) and, true to the purpose of the constructivist grounded theory design,

served as a means of keeping "the participants' voice and meaning present in the

theoretical outcome" (p.7). I often shared such memos with the participants in the

study, and sought their insights and interpretations rather than relying solely on

my own. Following the transcription of my interviews, learning sessions and field

notes, I organized my data into a master file, which is described by Patton (2002) as a "case record" (p.449). An organized and easily accessible "primary resource package," the case record contained all the information needed for subsequent analysis of data (p. 449). Even though analysis had been ongoing, it became more intensive once the case record was completed (Merriam, 1988).

After reading through the case record several times, I began line-by-line analysis to initiate the process of generating initial categories (Patton, 2002). Employing Glaser and Strauss' *Constant Comparative Method*, I used open coding to code each incident in my data "into as many categories of analysis as possible" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.105). This coding occurred as categories emerged, or conversely, as data emerged that fit into an existing category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I also made memos on the field notes, recorded my ideas and noted how these ideas were illustrated in the data. While coding an incident for a category, I compared it to other incidents. This was not achieved through the use of a diagram, but rather by entering into dialogue with the participants and comparing various incidents. The constant comparison of the incidents and ongoing dialogue soon resulted in the generation of "theoretical properties of the category" (p.106). Next, I carefully examined the properties of each category and began to integrate the categories. Using reduction, I looked for "underlying uniformities in the original set of categories of their properties" (p.110) and then, under the guidance of the Elders, searched for a set of higher level concepts. I then reduced the number of categories, which allowed me to become more

focused and continue the constant comparison of categories in a time-efficient manner.

After coding incidents for the same category a number of times, I reached theoretical saturation in which "no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge[ed] during analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 490). I then brought these final categories back to the participants for approval during a talking circle. To best capture the experiences of the participants, I named categories using active code labels (to illustrate change in action) and in vivo codes (to capture the exact word of the participants). For instance, the category "Journeying through Infancy" is 1) active and 2) phrased in the words of an Elder participant (Creswell, 2008). Last, I identified the central phenomenon, specified the relationship of each category to the central phenomenon, and, employing selective coding began writing a theory. This theory, based on the constructivist grounded theory approach, is "evocative of the experiences of the participants" (Mills et al., 2006, p.7) and results in a "readable theoretical interpretation".

Internal Validity

The internal validity of my study, that is, the extent to which my findings matched reality, was strengthened by my use of member checks, triangulation and reflexivity.

Member Checks

I engaged in member checks by soliciting feedback on my emergent findings from the participants in my research (Merriam, 2009). Member checks were done through the use of talking circles, group discussions and individual

meetings. For instance, Margaret, Helen and I met and, as a team, went through the thesis document. I also met individually with each teacher and reviewed their contributions with them. Reviewing the document with the participants allowed me to correct any misinterpretations that I made regarding their comments. It also allowed them the opportunity to "suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). For instance, one of the teachers adjusted her contribution regarding residential school, in order to better explain her perspective, as well as to respect the privacy of her family. Most notably, member checking allowed the participants the chance to safeguard their Indigenous knowledge by withdrawing information that they felt was sacred or private. For instance, I responded to Margaret's request to remove some spiritual teachings that she did not want included, because of her preference to share such teachings with a select audience. No knowledge was withdrawn, however, that related directly to the topic of the image of the child.

Triangulation

I employed triangulation by drawing on multiple sources to ensure the accuracy of the information (Creswell, 2008). I engaged in methodological triangulation by using talking circles, open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation of data was achieved by extensively interviewing/engaging in learning sessions with five participants in total in order to gather a variety of perspectives, as well as by making field notes, reflective notes and transcripts. The use of triangulation, which, at times involved different types of data, yielded different results (Patton, 2002). For instance, despite many

commonalities, the teachers' images of the child varied. According to Patton (2002), "finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study" (p. 248). Varying perspectives of the participants' image of the child strengthened the holistic nature of my study and offered insight into the complexities of Aboriginal childhoods.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is "a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p.65). Reflexivity is something that must be triangulated, thus going beyond the researcher's perspective and voice, to the perspectives and voices of both the participants and the audience to which the research will be reported (Patton, 2002). Throughout my research, I kept a reflexive journal in order to monitor any biases that I held. I also recorded my assumptions regarding the research. Recording my biases and assumptions, held me accountable in achieving a more valid interpretation of the data.

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Ethical Considerations

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My study focuses on Aboriginal peoples, who, in the context of research, are considered vulnerable due to the effects of colonial research. The use of Indigenous research methods addresses this vulnerability in seven key ways. First, while teachers in the study signed consent forms, Elders in the study did not as this was not culturally appropriate. Instead, the Elders' acceptance of tobacco

served as their consent to participate in the research. Second, Elders were accessed through gatekeepers, with the expectation that the gatekeeper was watching out for the Elders' best interests. Third, all participants took part in decision making regarding the research process and the dissemination of findings. Fourth, in group conversations, where total anonymity and confidentiality was sought but could not be guaranteed, confidentiality was achieved by using an Aboriginal talking circle. Prior to participating in talking circles, participants agreed to follow the protocol of an Aboriginal talking circle where "whatever is said in the circle stays in the circle." Fifth, identifying information was removed during transcription and pseudonyms were used. Sixth, all participants were free to withdraw their participation at any time without penalty. Last, research findings are shared under consultation with the Elders.

Limitations/Strengths

Since I am merging two knowledge systems through my research—the traditional Plains Cree epistemology and the English speaking Westernized academic epistemology, limitations exist in my research: 1) I am not Plains Cree, 2) I do not speak Plains Cree and 3) my research strives to merge opposing means of learning; the book-based university learning experience and oral tradition. Throughout my research, however, I strived to take advantage of my emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives. This allowed me to attend to the limitations of my research while maximizing the strengths (Merriam, 1988).

Cultural Background

Although I am Aboriginal, I am not a Plains Cree person, and, as such, I likely interpreted data from my study in a different way than a Plains Cree person would have. Despite my difference, however, I share with many Plains Cree people an Aboriginal worldview of "living in a universe made by the Creator and needing to live in harmony with nature, one another, and oneself" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 1). The reality that I am Aboriginal, but not Plains Cree, gave me an emic/etic advantage. Throughout my research, I often acted as an insider by drawing on the commonalties of all Aboriginal People. For instance, I learned the process of oral tradition from my grandfather and was able to apply this knowledge in order to develop a relationship with the Elders participating in my research. One the other hand, I acted as an outsider throughout my research by looking at a specifically Plains Cree concept or situation with a fresh perspective. This placed me in a position where I could perceive and describe "those relationships, systems and patterns of which an inextricably involved insider is not likely to be consciously aware" (Wax, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 268). For, while the outsider "simply does not know the meanings or patterns, the insider is so immersed that he may be oblivious to the fact that patterns exist" (p. 268). For instance, when compiling the Elders teachings into categories, I was able to offer insights to the Elders on how the central phenomenon related to all of the other categories.

Language

The Elders participating in my research, as well as one teacher, were Plains Cree speakers, yet spoke to me in their second language of English. When Margaret was sharing with me about her Plains Cree people's connectedness to Mother Earth, she said:

> It's really difficult for me to explain it in English. When I hear it in the Cree language I can understand it [in the Cree language]. 'Cause it's really ah . . . explained . . . I would explain this . . . just see a picture of it. Because it is who you are—that is, your culture, your language. You know, one day an Elder tells you, *Kehtaya* tells you something, you know, teaching you, they put it in a way that you just see the picture and you feel it, what they are telling you.

During the same visit, when talking about sitting on the same level as the children and learning from them, Margaret paused and explained, "you know if I talked about this in Cree, and if you understood this in Cree you would just see the picture of what I am talking about. You would just see the children around you." These two situations were powerful reminders to me that language does carry with it a cultural significance, and cultural meaning is lost when people do not speak in their traditional language. Throughout subsequent interviews with Margaret, I invited her to explain a few of her teachings in Cree as well as in English. I have included these in the thesis as a way of acknowledging the importance of her language.

Two Dissimilar Means of Learning

Meeting the protocols of the University of Alberta, while at the same time engaging in Indigenous research methodology proved to be limiting in the areas of: 1) communicating, 2) transcribing, and 3) presenting knowledge. First, the Elders occasionally had a difficult time understanding my academic language. For instance, when speaking with Elder Betty, I asked her about her image of the child, yet failed to adequately explain what I meant by the term "image." She responded by saying, "we almost need an interpreter. When you say 'image' I think of an x-ray." Conversely, on occasion, I had a difficult time understanding the Elders' traditional, intellectual and spiritual language. This limitation in the area of communication diminished as we got to know each other, and as we became more deliberate in explaining unfamiliar terms to each other. Second, when transcribing the oral to the written, there exists potential for meaning to be lost due to the absence of voice intonation, facial expression, and hand gestures. I took this limitation into account when transcribing. For instance, if a participant I was interviewing responded in agreement with a comment of mine by saying "mhmmm," I typed "mhmmm [Affirmative]" in order to preserve the meaning of her statement. Third, Elders usually only share information that they believe is necessary to share with a particular listener or audience. Once the Elders' words are put into writing, however, this audience is lost. Therefore, the Elders in my study were cautious as to what they shared as they knew that it would be available to a wide and diverse audience in the format of a thesis. This is a limitation that I

am pleased exists, as it prevents me from publishing sacred or private

information.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Data Analysis

The Participants

Elder Helen

Helen is a Plains Cree woman from Chitek Lake, Saskatchewan. Having grown up speaking Cree at home, Helen credits much of her learning of traditional Cree ways to her mother. A Plains Cree woman, her mother spoke only Cree and had no formal education. Her mother's knowledge and language was not recognized beyond the Aboriginal community, and Helen felt that her mother had "no voice" outside of the Aboriginal community, despite her vast knowledge as a midwife. Today, however, Helen believes that her mother's voice is "loud and clear—louder than ever as I speak for her." Helen's father was English/Scottish, and Helen's mother was baptized in order to marry, yet she continued to practice Cree spirituality. Helen grew up practicing Cree spirituality and maintains this spirituality today.

Helen's mother did not attend residential school despite the fact that her mother's siblings attended. Helen's mother was raised by her grandparents at Chitek Lake; a community where the church did not gather children for residential school. According to Helen, this was simply a matter of convenience, as there was muskeg blocking access to Chitek Lake First Nation (now known as Pelican) from the main road. Like her mother, Helen did not attend residential school. Helen explains that, because of the absence of residential school in her immediate family, her life is free from alcohol and drugs—two things that she believes people have used to try and heal from the negative effects of residential school.

When talking further about her life without residential school, Helen explains, "that is why I am more comfortable. The church meant well, but the people who worked there [at the residential schools] were not healthy." Helen attended kindergarten to grade twelve at a school in a nearby farming community and then attended the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

Helen has five children, twenty-three grandchildren and five great grandchildren. She is currently an Elder and Cultural Advisor at a high school, and has many talents including beading, hide tanning and tipi making/raising. Helen regularly shares tipi teachings, which she describes as "a woman's teaching," with other Aboriginal women. She likens a tipi to a woman in that a tipi "stands with dignity and is powerful."

Elder Margaret

Margaret is from Thunderchild First Nation in Saskatchewan. Her parents were Plains Cree. Margaret's mother was a midwife and herbalist who spoke only Cree and her father spoke both Cree and English. Margaret's first language was Cree.

Margaret attended St. Anthony Residential School in Onion Lake for grades one to eight. When reflecting on her residential school experience she explains how the Cree parents and Elders at Thunderchild:

> tried to prepare children for their white cousins from the church that were
> going to join them. The Elders and parents tried to prepare their children
> about those Catholic teachings but things were happening too fast . . . too
> fast. The church came in too quickly and too fast.

When asked what she believed the residential school's image of the child was, Margaret replied:

> The culture of the child is not good, it's evil. "I'm going to change the children to the way I believe." Assimilate, I guess. So the people from the residential school were not ready. They didn't even want to listen to our teaching. You know, they didn't want to understand. They were just there to get the land. And change everybody to their way of believing, their way of living. That's how I saw it and I believe I'm not the only one who began to understand that.

Despite her eight years of attendance at residential school, Margaret is firmly grounded in her Cree spirituality. As a school child, she recalls going back home every summer to receive traditional teachings from her mother and other Elders in the community. She compares the teachings of the church to her Cree teachings:

> And I can see the difference in the teaching 'cause of the time I went home from the school July and August, were the times I looked forward to 'cause I connected with the Cree teachings. That's where I had come from, and then there were the Catholic teachings. Well, they weren't all so bad, but I learned a lot from residential school too. That's how today I use the teachings that I got from there and the teachings that I got from my parents back home and together and I try to compromise both the teachings.

Margaret explains that regardless of what she learned in residential school, "the ways of teaching were different. More like, 'I know better and I'm teaching you and you learn what I'm teaching you or else'." It was her summer experiences that fostered Margaret's Cree spiritually as well as her traditional knowledge and skills. Margaret smudges and prays every morning. Her traditional talents include sewing traditional clothing such as ribbon shirts and dresses for ceremonies, quilting, beading moccasins and drying meat such as wild moose, deer and fish that her relations have hunted.

Margaret never attended high school as there was no high school in her community. Moreover, after years of attending residential school, she was not interested in leaving home to attend boarding school. Once married, Margaret worked on high school equivalency courses and then completed the Indian Social Work Program at the University of Saskatchewan. She worked as a community health care worker for twenty years, and is now an Elder at an educational institution. Margaret considered furthering her university education, but was influenced otherwise by her father who encouraged her to spend her time cultivating her traditional Cree knowledge. She remembers her father saying that the knowledge that she had gained from her "aunties, mother and Elders along the way is very important." Her father explained that there would be a lot of university educated people in the future, but his people, the Plains Cree, were going to have very few keepers of traditional knowledge. Margaret remembers this lecture from her father vividly, as it was the last lecture that he gave her before he died.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a Grade 1 Cree Bilingual teacher who is currently in her second year of teaching. She is from Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, Saskatchewan, and has three teenage daughters. Jennifer did not learn English until she began attending kindergarten in Loon Lake, Saskatchewan where she completed her grade twelve. She obtained her Bachelor of Education at the University of Saskatchewan from the Indian Teacher Education program (ITEP). ITEP's mandate is to train First Nations teachers who "will meet the social and cultural needs of the Aboriginal community, as well as contribute to school systems where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children make up the student population" ("ITEP," n.d.). Jennifer's mother and father are Cree. Jennifer's parents and grandparents did not attend residential school but her grandmother's two older siblings went to residential school. Jennifer reflects on the difference between her relatives whose parents/grandparents went to residential school and those whose parents/grandparents did not:

> That was unfortunate for them. 'Cause there's a big difference between the two that went to the residential school and us. The difference, we are very active in our Cree culture. If there's a sun dance or anything, we all participate we all go as a family, but with the other family they don't show up. It's different, it's amazing. We still talk to them and all that, we're still very close to them. Even though we have a different belief system than them, we are still very close.

Jennifer's traditional upbringing, with an absence of residential school in her immediate family history, as well as her current connection to her culture, has certainly influenced the image of the child that she holds.

Lisa

Lisa is a Kindergarten Cree Bilingual teacher in her ninth year of teaching. She has two teenagers and one pre-teen. She grew up speaking English in Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan. She completed kindergarten to grade eight on her home reserve and then completed her high school at a mainstream school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Lisa completed her teacher training at the Saskatchewan Urban Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) at the University of Saskatchewan. SUNTEP's mandate is to ensure that their graduates "are educated to be sensitive to the individual educational needs of all students, and those of Métis and First Nations ancestry in particular" (GDI Programs and Services, 2009). Lisa also holds a Post-Graduate Diploma and a Master's Degree in Education from the Indian and Northern Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan.

Lisa was raised by her grandparents and her parents and grandparents all attended residential school. Although Lisa's grandparents spoke Cree, Lisa grew up speaking English. She explains that her grandparents "naturally or intentionally would hide the language from me because they wanted me to benefit from Western education." Reflecting on her family's experience with residential school Lisa says:

Yeah, lots of residential issues, syndrome, negative effects because of it. It influences everything. And I find that, well just through my experience and through interaction and through my relatives that if they went through the residential system and if they did not further their education, I don't know how to say it, but you can really see the effects of how they were taught and the willingness and the openness is not readily there, if that makes any sense? Willingness and openness to education, to empowerment, to enlightenment and even sweat lodges, sun dances and pow-wows and feasts and round dances. Even those types of gatherings are not readily attended because of the heavy influence of Catholicism.

Lisa has been learning Cree now for seven years, and believes that her own Cree spirituality has grown considerably since she began learning the language.

Michelle

Michelle is a Kindergarten Teacher, who has been teaching in the primary grades for twelve years. She is a member of Beardy's First Nation in Saskatchewan, and has two teenage sons. Michelle went to elementary school in Allan, Duck Lake and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. In her teen years she lived on Beardy's Reserve and was bused to Duck Lake for high school. Her schooling was Westernized with the exception of some Cree language instruction in high school. Today, Michelle can understand the Cree language, but is not a fluent Cree speaker. Michelle completed her university education through ITEP at the University of Saskatchewan.

Michelle's parents both went through residential school, and she explains that, because of the experience that her parents had, she was not taught her language or her culture as a child. She talks of her parents trying to protect her and her siblings from "being punished for doing anything Aboriginal":

My parents went into the residential school, where culture was a bad thing, their culture, their language. My parents knew their Cree language going into residential school, but they were completely forbidden to speak it and were punished if they did speak Cree. So growing up, we were never taught Cree until I was thirteen. Cree was never spoken, only when mom and dad wanted us *not* to know something, then they spoke Cree. Other than that it was English. We were not brought up around our culture in that way . . . 'cause there was a lot of horror stories that my parents had mentioned (stories that my parents only began to tell us once we were adults) and they were scared and they didn't want us to get punished in school for speaking Cree or doing anything 'Aboriginal'. Because, when we were younger, living off the reserve, back then we were the only Aboriginal family in the school and in the community. So anything Native was kinda pushed off to the side.

As a child Michelle recalls observing her father smudge as well as observing both her parents prepare for cultural ceremonies such as a sweat lodge:

When I'd see him getting these flags and tobacco together, I didn't know what they were for. I used to see our mom sewing blankets all the time so I just assumed somebody's going to be sewing something. I knew my dad

was going somewhere with this bag that had a towel . . . and then he had

this pouch of tobacco. "Where are you going?" I would ask. It would be

quick change of subject kind of thing; because of how my parents were

raised in residential schools that subject was a no go.

Despite the fact that her parents "were pretty apprehensive to open up the doors"

to their Aboriginal culture, Michelle recalls moving back to the reserve:

When I was fourteen we moved back to the reserve and that really opened

up the flood gates to the culture. Even though we are Aboriginal, it was

like a culture shock to me. I didn't understand. I would wonder, "I don't

get what they're doing? Like why are they doing this?" It was just

question after question after question after question.

Michelle explains that, once she began dancing pow-wow on reserves, her

questions about her culture began to be answered by the Elders there. Like her

parents, Michele maintains both her Cree and Catholic spirituality, and views God

and the Creator as "one and the same."

Elders Acknowledging Ancestors

When sharing knowledge with me, both Margaret and Helen continually

acknowledged the ancestors or Elders who had originally passed on the

knowledge to them. For instance, before introducing a teaching, Margaret and

Helen would say things such as, "one of the things my mother and the great

aunties taught me about . . ." or, "and in our way, and in our culture, what they

would tell us is that . . . ." After giving a teaching Margaret and Helen would

make comments such as, "so that's what my mother always told me." And,

"that's what my husband's grandmother used to say." When expressing her gratitude for "the teaching from the Elders" that she has received, Margaret remarked:

> They *have* helped me. And even to this day I still believe in that. And, when I pray, I still thank the Creator for allowing me to know about these teachings. It's not that I know about everything, but I kept what I learned, and if I wasn't sure I would ask the older women.

Not once did Margaret and Helen appear to be teaching me for their own gratification.

The Elders' Image of the Child

The Elders' image of the child is presented in six categories: 1) The Child's Awareness in the Womb, 2) The Child as Powerful and Pure at Birth, 3) The Child Journeying through Infancy, 4) The Child's Spirit as Connected to Mother Earth, 5) Listening to the Child's Voice and 6) The Child as a Butterfly.

The Child's Awareness in the Womb

Since Margaret and Helen believe that the child remembers their experiences in the womb for a lifetime, they shared with me many teachings about caring for a child while it is in the womb. Margaret teaches, "it's not only when they're born that they remember things. A child has the power to remember when they're in the womb." Margaret shared the teachings on the child's awareness in the womb that she received from her grandmother-in-law:

> She was a grand old lady, my late husband's grandma . . . She was the one that continued the teaching about how to look after myself when I was

pregnant. She would say, "before you go to bed, sing to your baby, put

your hands on your tummy and sing to your baby or even in the morning

when the sun comes, sing to your baby. And you ask your baby, 'do you

hear the birds singing?'" They listen. You are talking to your baby. And

you nurture your baby through the umbilical cord. You nurture all four

components: mental, spiritual, physical and emotional . . . and this

nurturing transfers to your baby though the umbilical cord. And whatever

you're singing, whatever you're talking, whatever you're feeling goes into

that baby and they'll remember that.

Helen, who insisted that I begin my research at the moment of conception, refuses

to use the European word *fetus* and instead talks of "a child when in the womb."

She believes the child to be "a child at the moment of conception." Helen

explains that "the child's spirit is asked to come down from above at the moment

of conception." "Conception," Helen points out, "is the English word that is

used." Helen talks about pregnancy as a nine-month ceremony where the mother

is *with child* or *carrying a child* which in Cree is called *kikiskahawasot*. When

carrying a child, everything that the mother says, does, and thinks will affect the

child she is carrying. For example, Helen says that if a mother belittles her

husband or others, or swears, the child she is carrying will hear this. Helen

believes that a child can remember experiences while in the womb. For instance,

Helen's granddaughter remembers going berry picking with her mother while in

the womb. Helen also talks of the importance of a mother abstaining from alcohol

while with child. According to Helen, all of the care required while carrying a

child "has been know by the Elders for a long time," but their knowledge has not been acknowledged because of their lack of formal education. Helen believes that a child's experience in the womb should be "pleasant and beautiful" rather than "threatening" because a child's experience in the womb has direct implications for the child's journey to adulthood.

The Child as Powerful and Pure at Birth

Both Margaret and Helen referred to the child as "powerful and pure" at birth. Margaret illustrated this power by sharing that, at the moment a child is born, they are crying while holding their fist in the air:

> You know what my grandma told me a long time ago when I was a young lady about fourteen? "Someday you'll have babies and whey they are born you'll notice that they have their little fists like this all the time, hanging onto something." And they are hanging onto something and they tell you what they're hanging onto on their first cry they tell you that. In Cree they say "*esônikeyimiyan*, (the future is in my hands), and I have to protect it. I have to protect this future, but you have to help me. Mom and dad you have to help me." That is what every child is saying. "The future is in my hands and I need you to help me protect it."

Margaret explains how her "mother and all the older women" used to teach her to use herbal oil to wash the child's hands right after birth to protect the future that rests in the child's hands. Also, Margaret talks of the child blessing those around him/her:

When they have their hands open they are blessing you cause they're

powerful, they're really pure. With their hands they're blessing the people

around them in the house and their surroundings. (That's what she used to

tell us, that old lady.) They're born pure, they're very powerful, so they're

blessing you, talking to you and telling you you're receiving their

blessings.

Helen believes that, in addition to blessing those around them, the child has

his/her fist in the air saying, "I come with a gift." This gift is a talent to be shared

with others and is unique to each child. Helen talks of the spiritual power that the

oskawâsis or newborn baby has. She explains that when one hears the cry of an

oskawâsis, they are instantly drawn to the spiritual purity and power of that child.

Margaret tells the story of when she was born, and how she was

acknowledged as both "powerful and pure":

When I was being born my mother went through a lot of child-birth, you

know it weakened her because of giving a lot of child-birth and she was

having problems with me. They asked this Kehtaya, (this Elder) in the

community to come and do a ceremony to help my mom . . . and then what

he did was he put the pipe on my mother's tummy and *invited* me to come

into the world. And he called me by my name. That was when I was

named and called *opipiwakeskwun*. And that means when you see a bird

flying in one spot, that's a thunder bird. When there's a light drizzle of

rain sending down the powers, healing waters that was why the thunder

bird was flying in one spot. That's what I am named after . . .

opipiwakeskwun comes from the word *Iskwew*. Iskwew is a woman. See,

already that old man knew I was a woman, a little girl. He invited me in

the ceremony of birth. He invited me to come and then shortly after that I

was born. He said, "in the future this baby will grow into a woman who is

going to have this lodge, going to have to do this lodge." That's what he

told my mother. And my mother told me that to help me . . . those are the

things that our culture did for babies, child-birth, those are the things that

they did to help, with child-birth. They give you to help in the natural

way, and we call these the Creator's natural laws.

Margaret's story about her own birth can only be fully understood, and is only

intended to be fully understood, by those Plains Cree people who have an

extensive understanding of Cree spirituality. What all people can learn from

Margaret's story, however, is that she was acknowledged as pure and powerful at

birth.

The Child Journeying Through Infancy

Both Margaret and Helen emphasized the importance of caring for a child

when they are an infant, as infancy is a time where the child learns many new

skills. Helen refers to infancy as "a sacred journey," where the child learns to talk

and walk. Margaret shares about the infant engaging in learning:

Children, from the time they are born, start studying. They start learning

about their mother, that's the closest person that they have. He or she is

being nourished by their mother . . . for food and also, you know, being

warm and fed and clothed and all this and loved and cared for. But at the

same time they're already learning. They're watching, you know, and

feeling their mother and they want to do that. Even as little and young as

they are, their eyes will wander. They'll test what they've seen. They do

that and they even talk in their own little language and they think in their

little minds. They even do that. And then they want to play and they love

playing, especially if they get their mom laughing. You know they want

that forever and we have to let that with the children because that's their

time and we have to respect and honor that. That's what I said, we have to

learn patience . . . and when they are about a year, two years old they want

to do things. They want to help you. They want to please you.

Margaret views the infant's interactions with his/her mother as a significant

learning phase.

Carrying a child or placing a baby in a moss bag[4] was an important part of

child rearing for both Margaret and Helen. Margaret talks of her oldest son and

his memories of being in a moss bag:

My oldest son, he said "I wonder how old I was," he said "I remember my

grandmother putting me in a moss bag, taking my hand and putting it here

and wrapping my hand so softly. And I remember taking my other one

and putting it over, you know, after that and then I started getting really

warm cause she was wrapping me that much." He said "I remember that."

And I said, "well did you see her"? He said "Nope, but I know it was

grandma." [Margaret laughs]. I said it could have been me [Margaret

---

[4] A moss bag is traditionally made from hide and filled with dry soft moss. In modern times, moss
bags are often made with cloth. Moss bags have lacing all the way up the middle, allowing the
parent to tie the laces so the baby is snug and secure. Moss bags are often decorated with beading.

laughs]. I wrapped all of my babies in moss. Moss, it grows in muskegs, and it's nice and soft.

Helen believes that when in a moss bag, infants learn how to be patient and how to observe. Because they are not squirming around and looking at their hands they are able to see what is going on around them. Also, being in a moss bag, infants develop their senses of smell, sight and hearing as well as sleep better at night. According to Helen, infants can be kept in moss bags until they are about one year old. Helen showed me a beautiful moss bag that she was sewing. She also showed me a picture of herself as an infant in a moss bag, as well as a picture of her granddaughter in a moss bag.

Helen shared with me the importance of properly holding an infant, or as she puts it, "a sacred child." Helen's mother taught Helen to hold an infant by cradling him or her. Helen explained "don't carry an infant under your arm like it is a thing—that is not respectful." Instead, Helen says "cradle the infant." Helen explained further, "Don't prop a bottle and let the infant feed—rather breast feed to allow a physical bond." Helen's teachings on holding the sacred child reveal her high level of respect for the infant.

According to Helen, the infant has a very important place in Aboriginal gatherings and ceremonies. Referring to ceremonies where people are sitting in a circle, Helen says that "the circle is not complete without the very young." When at ceremonies, Helen encourages all mothers to bring the very young into the circle. She is not concerned when infants crawl around and touch ceremonial objects because infants are pure and, as such, "they purify the circle." Helen

explains that "once children begin walking on Mother Earth, they can begin learning about how to act in a ceremony."

The Child's Spirit as Connected to Mother Earth

Margaret and Helen talk of the importance of "teaching to the child's spirit"—a spirit that must be acknowledged as being connected to Mother Earth. The term *Mother Earth* is not something that I myself can define, but rather is something that one can only begin to understand by listening to the teachings of Elders. Margaret teaches about Mother Earth:

Mother Earth has teachings from what's on and in her body, you know, the plants, the medicines, the food, even our clothing come from Her and from the animals as the white people call them, but us, we call them the grandfathers, the grandmothers. Even the sky life, She connects with the sky life because the birds that fly come on her breast to feed from her breast. We call Her waters the seas, the lakes, the rivers, those are Her breasts to us. Because if we didn't have that water we wouldn't live. We have to have that water. And we also have to have the sun 'cause the sun . . . sends down the energy to every living spirit on earth and the sky life to help them live. So that is one of the reasons why the woman is connected to Mother Earth . . . And our men, they sit down too when they do the ceremonies. Yeah, they sit down when they do the pipe ceremony and even in our lodges the men sit down. They connect with Mother Earth too.

It is significant that Margaret makes note of the men sitting down. Generally it is considered most important for the women to sit close to Mother Earth, as they are recognized by the Creator as very powerful because, like Mother Earth, women can bear life and give birth.

  According to Margaret, women can "identify with Mother Earth cause only Mother Earth can bear and give birth to life." Margaret explains further:

> Grandmother the moon blessed us women and we can identify with her every 28 eight days. She's full moon, every 28 days, and she gave us that gift, that we will become spiritual every 28 days. Because life is so sacred, so sacred.

In both English and Cree, Margaret expands on the women's bond with Mother Earth. The English translations of the Cree language are in brackets:

> osâm ohci tâpiskoc kiya iskwew ehahâwasoyan ekwa enihtâwikihat ana awâsis [Because, just like you being a woman, you bear life, and you give birth to that child]. peyakwan kikâwînaw ehahâwasot pimâtisiwin ekanaweyihtahk enihtâwikîtât kahkiyaw kîkway nipiy mîciwin [Just like our Mother bears life, she takes care of it/preserves it, gave life to everything, water, food]. That's how you are as a woman. You bear that life and give birth to that life. You give food to your child, nourish your child. That's how you're connected with Mother Earth.

  Children, like adults, also have a special connection to Mother Earth as she provides many necessities for them such as food and water. In the following

passage, Margaret talks in both Cree and English about the benefits of children

and adults alike sitting on Mother Earth:

> Sitting down on the ground you will feel the energy of Mother Earth, the
>
> coolness of Mother Earth. You can feel the grass, you can just feel.
>
> kimôsihâw kikâwînaw kâhayapiyan waskanihk [You feel Mother Earth
>
> when you are sitting on Her breast/chest]. You know, when you're sitting
>
> on Her breast, you just feel Mother Earth. You feel Her energy.
>
> sôhkisiwin kimôsihtân [You feel the strength]. It just goes in you 'cause
>
> you're connected to Her.

When children sit on the floor of a classroom, rather than sitting on the ground

outdoors, Margaret believes that they are still connected to Mother Earth and can

feel Her energy. Margaret believes that the teachers should sit on the ground with

children when teaching, in order to acknowledge their connection to Mother

Earth.

> Sitting on the ground with children not only allows the child to connect to

Mother Earth, it allows the child to be acknowledged as equal. Margaret explains

that when sitting at eye level with children, "you're more relaxed and you're more

open to welcome, to receive and give that relationship." According to Margaret,

children can:

> feel the energy of the care that you have for them because you're getting
>
> to their level. You're not standing up, like teachers do . . . teachers mostly
>
> stand and they walk around and you have to follow them, you're moving
>
> your eyes. But the closeness and the caring that we were taught about

teaching is sitting down with the children, being on the same level with

them.

Margaret considers that, of all the teachings she has received from her

grandmother, one of the best teachings "is to be on the level with the children":

My grandmother said, "do not scare their spirits away by being so high as

if you know more and you silence their spirit, they're not willing to learn.

They feel so small. And they're scared to speak up. But when you get to

their level they will share."

Helen also believes that children are equal to the teacher, and as such

teachers should sit down with the children and be at eye level with the children.

She cautions against speaking loudly to children as this is often associated with

trouble (e.g., trouble at home). Helen believes that children cannot hear or

process what the teacher is saying when the teacher is yelling. She believes that

children should be talked to with a gentle voice. This gentle voice will allow the

teacher to speak and teach to the spirit, rather than the mind. Helen believes that

teachers need to focus on the child's spirit rather than, for example, on their

clothes, or the fact that the child's parents may be living an unhealthy lifestyle.

"When you touch the spirit," Helen gently explains "the child, the *awâsis*, will

learn." Helen defines the spirit of the child as "the whole child"—which includes

the "emotional, mental, physical and spiritual" dimensions of the child.

Listening to the Child's Voice

Margaret and Helen both speak of the importance of "listening to the

child's voice" since a child has much knowledge to share with others. Margaret's

preference of sitting with children is a way of acknowledging the child's ability to teach the adult. Margaret explains that when sitting at the same level with children:

> You're welcoming them . . . you're being open to them and you're welcoming their sense of level, that you're not above them, that you do not know more than they do, but you're willing to share and willing to teach and willing to learn from them. That's what you're giving them. They can teach as well.

Margaret tells of what her grandchildren and children have taught her:

> My grandchildren and my children have taught me how to care for them, and how to listen to them. They also taught me patience. Patience that in time they will want to learn what I want to share. But in the mean time all I have to do is watch them, to look after them, to protect them and see that they don't get hurt. Those are the kinds of things they taught me. They taught me responsibility. They made it stronger. They made my caring stronger and they taught me how to listen to them . . . And one of the things that I was told too, is that when your children don't listen to you, you tend to start speaking louder and more sternly or even yelling at them and that's when you drive their spirits away. Because you don't have patience. You're not showing them that we need to take time together.

Margaret believes that when adults and children take time together, the child teaches the adult both patience and responsibility. It is the adult's role to diligently and openly accept these teachings.

According to Helen, from the moment a child is conceived, they have a voice that must be listened to. Helen knows pregnant mothers who often ask, "what about me?" when overwhelmed by pregnancy. Helen reminds these mothers that there are now two lives, and the mother must do what is best for the child. After all, the child is also asking "what about me?" and mothers must hear and respond to that voice by caring for the child who they are carrying. Helen acknowledges that it is a difficult time for some mothers, but they must sit with Elders/grandmothers and receive knowledge, encouragement, and strength from them.

Helen believes that a parent must allow their child to have a voice and to be heard. She cautions that when a child asks his/her parent questions, the parent must take notice and respond to the child's question. If the parent is not able to answer the question, he/she may send the child to an Elder who can better address the question. Helen pointed out that a child "gets used to the rhythm of a parent's voice," and it becomes harder for them to always internalize what his/her parent is telling them. Therefore, the parent, even if he/she is able to answer the child's question, or give the child a teaching, may still go to an Elder and ask the Elder to teach the child. Because the teaching is coming from "a less familiar voice" the child will be more likely to listen to, and accept, the teaching. For example, Helen talked about a time when her daughter needed advice in a particular area. Helen had given advice to her daughter several times, but her daughter did not appear to use it or internalize it. So, Helen asked another Elder to give the same teaching to her daughter. Months later, at a gathering, Helen noticed that this

Elder had quietly sought out her daughter and was speaking to her. Helen kept

her distance, knowing that if her daughter saw her observing this, she may stop

listening to the Elder. Later, Helen's daughter came to Helen and excitedly

shared the seemingly new teaching that the Elder had given her.

Margaret believes that listening to the child's voice involves responding to

children when they express areas in which they want to receive teachings. For

example, Margaret talks of children who touch ceremonial objects which are not

meant to be touched:

> In ceremonies, I hear mothers say, "get away from that" before their
>
> children experience it and fulfil their curiosity. Let the children do that,
>
> touch the ceremonial object. And they'll ask, "what is this for?" And
>
> that's when your teaching comes in. They're asking for your teaching.
>
> They're asking for you to exercise your teachings. "What is this for?"
>
> Okay, you'll tell them that. "And why can't we touch them or play with
>
> them?" That's when you need to explain, "they're for ceremonies and
>
> that's the only time we use them. We'll do it together. I'll teach you
>
> how."

For Margaret, a child's curiosity is welcome in a ceremony. Holding the belief

that children and adults can learn from one another, she recognizes the importance

of responding to a child's curiosity.

The Child as a Butterfly

Margaret likens the child to a butterfly who is free in spirit. Margaret

explains:

You look at a butterfly. They are so delicate. They're so soft and there's such beauty in them. You can see the purity in them and the beauty. And that's the way a child is, a child is free in spirit. Like their mind will go, you know, a child has the power to leave spiritually and still have life in their body, but they're flying around observing. That's how they know where they're gonna be and then they'll even think that "hey I was here before cause my mother talking to me while I was in her womb" . . . They have the ability to think and they'll store that. They're not forgetting it . . . but they're storing it, in their little minds and in their hearts and in their senses.

The child as a butterfly analogy has direct implications for early childhood educators because it illustrates a child's need for flexible and free use of learning time in the classroom:

Well you look at a butterfly. Just watch a butterfly. It'll go to one leaf or maybe go to another flower. They'll have the taste of it and they'll have the experience of touching that plant and then flying away and learning again and then they'll come back to where they were before.

Like a butterfly, children's spirits will flutter from one learning opportunity or thought to another. Margaret advises teachers that children will only pay attention for the amount of time they choose to:

Well I always tell teachers when I go and talk to them, that I'm not gonna force the children to stay two hours with me or an hour with me. 'Cause they have their own space, like we do. Sometimes we're sitting there and

we're listening and then finally, you know, we're not listening at all 'cause already your spirit had enough and needed to go elsewhere to digest what we learn. And that's the same thing with children. But theirs is a shorter span because the spirit they're given is to learn and to pick up in different parts and different areas. And that spirit will go, it will wander off. You'll be talking there and the child will be there, but they're not really listening. So we have to respect and honor that.

Margaret warns against reprimanding a child for not listening during class. Instead, she suggests that the teacher ask the child:

What is it that you had to experience? I'd like to learn about that. Are you willing to share or can you talk about it sometime? It must be very interesting. I'd like to learn and I'd like to know about it.

After the teacher asks the child such questions, Margaret explains that "sometimes they'll come back and tell you more about it, sometimes they won't."

Margaret shares that teachers must listen to the voice of the child in order to determine the amount of time that the child requires to complete a learning task:

Our children, we're always told they're slow or behind coming from another school. But I always think they're not slow, they're not behind. It's the teachings that we had, we are given to be free, to be flexible with that child to allow them their time. Even ask them, "how long do you want to spend time with me?" Respect and honor that and they'll tell you.

"Will you be able to get what I am gonna be teaching you in that time?"

And they'll tell you.

This respecting and honoring of the child and the amount of time that they wish to spend with a teacher, further illustrates Margaret and Helen's belief that the child's voice needs to be heard and responded to.

In addition to illustrating the child's need for flexibility, the analogy of a butterfly is a powerful illustration of the child's connection to Mother Earth. This connection is eloquently made by Margaret in the passage below:

> awâsis awa tâpiskoc akamâmak kiwâpamâw akamâmak epapâmihât nipiy
>
> nete enitawipakitinak water enitawikotistahk ekanawâpahtahk pewayinîw
>
> kiya ekwa kitohtâk ewako anima emiyosit enatôkinâkosit eyâkitisit
>
> pikwihte kâkîhayispihâw awâsis ewako ana akamâmak tâpiskoc [A child
>
> is like a butterfly, you see a butterfly flying, over there in the water, goes
>
> and puts/releases something, goes and tastes the water, looks at it and then
>
> returns, comes to you and like that it is nice, it is colourful, it is light, it
>
> can fly anywhere. The child is like a butterfly].

The Teachers' Image of the Child

The teacher's image of the child is presented in three themes: 1) The Child as a Gift, 2) The Child as a Teacher and 3) The Child as a Whole.

The Child as a Gift

When asked about their image of the child, Michelle and Jennifer both referred to the child as a gift from God, as well as a gift from the Creator. Michelle says, "truly, children are gifts from God. And I'm here to make a

difference while they're here with me." In reference to her students, and to her own sons, Michelle says:

> These little ones were given to me, like . . . my own children, they're on loan. They're not mine. They don't belong to me. I don't own them. They are given to me as a gift from God, from Creator up above. I was raised that if you don't take care of what's on loan to you, in a snap of a finger, it can be taken away.

Michelle goes on to talk exclusively about her two sons:

> They're gifts from up above and I need to take care of that gift, I need to nurture that gift because someday there might come a time in my life, where I'm going to need the nurturing. So what goes around comes around so to speak.

Viewing the child as a gift, Michelle sees her role as a teacher and parent as one of nurturing and caring for the child.

> Talking about her image of children, Jennifer reflects on teaching from her grandma:

> My grandma used to say that they're God's child. The Creator lends you the child. You look after the child. They're precious or . . . they're just very, very special, especially when they're this young. You are responsible for all of them in the classroom. I'm responsible for my children.

Jennifer talks of the Creator "giving you a child to look after and your responsibility is teach them what the Creator wants you to do: respect the land,

respect yourself, respect the people around you." Jennifer certainly sees her students as well as her own children as a privilege, gift and responsibility.

The Child as a Teacher

Michelle, Lisa and Jennifer all hold an image of the child as a teacher. They see the child as capable of teaching both peers and adults. To this end, they provide opportunities in their classrooms for the students to share their knowledge and ideas. This exchange of knowledge is based on Michelle, Lisa and Jennifer's belief that they are on the same level as, rather than above, their students. Michelle explains how she sees herself as equal to the students:

> I always try to place myself on an even keel with the students. I don't make myself better than they are. I am not their boss. I'm here to learn just like they're here to learn and I put myself in their shoes. If there's something that comes up I ask them, "if you were me, what would you want to do? What would you decide? If you were in my shoes what would you do?" And I try and place myself where we are equals.

As a learner alongside her students, Michelle provides a learning environment that supports the children's role as teacher.

Viewing the child as a teacher, Michelle allows her students to deviate from the topic she is teaching and introduce their own topic of interest. Michelle explains:

> Years ago I would have said flat no to going off topic, but now if my students need to tell me a story, I realize now that you know what? I might be the only person that listens to them. If somebody starts telling

me that they had a ladybug in their hand, depending on the weather . . .

the season. Sometimes we'll drop what we're doing, we'll go outside,

we'll go looking for ladybugs. So if I can give them that little window of

an opportunity, let them see there are different experiences out there, you

just need to open your mind to it . . . And if we really need to finish what

we're doing then I will just let them know, "I really love that you're telling

me about ladybugs and I'm so glad that you can tell me that, but right now

we need to talk about this and I promise I will let you talk about that after,

is that okay?" And at some point I will go back to it.

By allowing her students to initiate teaching moments, Michelle reveals the value

that she places on her students' ability to teach.

Michelle talks of how she views the children in her classroom, "I'm here

to teach them, but they're also here to teach me." She talks of an experience last

year where she was given a child named Anne who was non-verbal. Anne was in

a wheelchair and was tube fed. Michelle recalls:

I was scared and I probably would have transferred out years ago, but I

needed to learn how to start taking little baby steps with these students

with special needs. I learned how to tube feed . . . I think I helped this

child grow socially. Slowly, over time, with reminders, she was able to

hobble towards kids and she would play without grabbing, and play

without throwing herself onto somebody.

Reflecting on this experience with Anne, Michelle comments:

Yeah, so I was here to teach her, but she was also here to teach me, that I can do this. These special needs are not so scary after all. She gave me courage, she gave me strength. She taught me empathy. I thought I was empathetic, but every time I would not want to do something, I need to step out of my comfort box and do a little bit more.

Michelle believes that her experience with Anne has helped her care for other students who have special needs. For instance, she had a student with severe diabetes for who she was required to check his blood glucose levels when the medical facilitator was unavailable. When referring to her decision to agree to check the blood of her student with diabetes, Michelle exclaims "had I not tube fed Anne and learned how to do that, then I probably would have said, 'definitely no' to checking the blood glucose levels of a student. But Anne helped me learn that it's not scary. I can do this."

When reflecting on other children with intensive needs in her classroom, Michelle says:

I would have been terrified of these kids had it not been for my learning experience with Anne. So I believe that these kids are here to help me as much as I'm here to help them . . . so I take me helping them, as them helping me because I'm a firm believer that everyone comes into your life for a reason. That may mean that I'm meant to touch you in some way or you're meant to touch me in some way. There's a reason why each child is with me.

By frequently positioning herself as a learner, and by viewing her students as teachers, Michelle has gained valuable skills in relating to her students.

Holding the belief that a child is a teacher, Lisa talks of the interconnectedness between teachers and students. She explains how they can learn from each other:

> In Cree ways of knowing and doing we are all connected. There are pieces of me in you, and you, and you, and you. And that's how we find our connection and relation to each other. And so we have to look for those things and be willing to learn from each other—not to hold grudges and learn to forgive. And that's one of those prominent teachings again that was taught from my grandfather, that we're all family. Being together is what family's all about. Let's learn from each other. Let's grow from one another.

Lisa goes on to explain how this *learning from each other* occurs among people of all ages. "I don't think there should be any restrictions. It's learning from each other regardless of age. I grew up with three of my cousins and so that's where my grandfather would say, 'learn and grow from one another.'" Lisa says that a lot of this learning and growing occurred when her cousins would help each other learn from their mistakes.

Lisa believes that the role of a teacher goes beyond that of a teacher to that of a learner:

> I believe that we are not only teachers, but we are also learners with the child. They're also teaching us something. Like I said they taught me

how to live in the moment. They taught me my present awareness. And

they also taught me this idea about not holding anything back, 'cause they

may get mad and act out for like a minute or so, but then they forget it the

next minute and they're ready to carry on. They don't hold onto anything.

Yeah, and that's what they taught me. If only we could carry that on as

adults.

It is through being open to the teachings of the children that Lisa is able to learn

valuable life lessons such as living in the moment.

In order to provide opportunities for children to share their knowledge

with others Jennifer uses talking circles in her classroom. Jennifer explains how,

in a sharing circle, "no one is higher, no one is lower." As the talking stone is

passed, each child has an opportunity to share whatever they wish while everyone

else listens. When reflecting on learning from the children, Jennifer says, "I take

a lot from the sharing circle." Jennifer also believes that the sharing circle can be

an opportunity to allow the students to utilize their leadership skills.

Jennifer, however, has not always held an understanding of the child as a

teacher. She describes her own experience as a child below:

When I was a child I remember my grandma, my mom and all them used

to say we had roles as a child. Our roles were we had to listen to our

family, our grandparents, our relatives. And we had to learn to respect our

family, especially not talk back to them. A lot of times we just cannot ask

questions . . . When I was growing up that's what I was supposed to be

doing is just learning from the Elders, learning from my family.

Jennifer illustrates her role as a child with the story below:

> When we were little kids, every summer we used to go blueberry
>
> picking—or berry picking—before winter, before fall. There was a certain
>
> way we had to pick berries and they had to be clean and we weren't told
>
> how to do it, like we weren't told, "if you do this, you're going to ruin the
>
> blueberries." We were just told, "you have to do it clean, that's it. You
>
> cannot pick the roots." All they used to say is, "if you do that there won't
>
> be no more blueberries."

Jennifer explains that she has now "combined the two ways of learning—the
Western and [her] culture" in that she encourages children to learn by asking
questions as well as by observing the teacher.

The Child as a Whole

Michelle, Lisa and Jennifer all hold an image of the child as a spiritual,
emotional, physical and mental being. This relates to their belief in the medicine
wheel, "an ancient symbol that reflects values, world views, and practices"
(Manitoba Education and Training, 2003, p.9) of many Aboriginal people. With
the teaching of the medicine wheel being unique from person to person, "the
medicine wheel is used to represent the interconnected relationships among
aspects of life" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p.10). In this case,
Michelle, Lisa and Jennifer refer to the medicine wheel as it represents the
spiritual, emotional, physical and mental aspects of the individual.

Michelle talks about tending to the emotional part of each student's
medicine wheel:

I acknowledge what they say, I acknowledge their feelings. Their feelings are a huge part for me. You know, like even when they do something wrong, I let them know, "I really love having you in my classroom, because I would be so sad if you were not here, however, when do you do this, it makes me feel like this. If I did this to you, how would that make you feel?" You know, to really make them valued as a little person. Because growing up I was validated by my parents.

Michelle goes on to talk about the medicine wheel:

With your medicine wheel you have your four different sections, and if their emotional part is off kilter then how can I expect that child to come here and do their work academically if emotionally they are suffering and if they feel that I don't care?

Michele gives an example of a child whose parent is picked up in front of her by the police and taken to jail:

How can I possibly expect this little one do anything if I can't help her emotionally and spiritually and nurture that part, because she's never going to be able to do anything academic unless I get that wheel in balance. Yeah, so for me that's a big part. I need to nurture the whole child, not just the social, not just the academic. I need to nurture every part of the child.

Michelle reflects further, "they feel and learn with their hearts, so if I am not nurturing that part, then how could I possibly expect them to learn?"

When asked if there is a conflict between the curriculum and her image of the child, Michelle responds saying that "too much [of the curriculum] is based on strictly academics." She explains "going back to the medicine wheel, their emotional side, their spiritual side, is totally ignored." Michelle talks of the importance of keeping herself balanced so that she can come to school prepared to teach:

> I might have had something upsetting happen to me like had an argument with my son at home that morning, you know, to where I don't want to be here. But, you know what? I can't let them know that because my job here is nurturing them. And if I can get them spiritually, emotionally, academically and physically, balanced then I'm doing my job.

Michelle talks of nurturing the physical aspects of each student and gives an example of a student named Tom who was not able to walk for more than a few minutes at a time because he was out of shape. Consequently, she implemented the practice of going for a daily *In-Motion Walk*. Michelle explains the far reaching effects of Tom's positive response to the walk:

> Tom helped me take a look at the way I was not helping the other kids, physically. Did I teach them gym? Yes. Did we run in the gym? Yes. But I wasn't helping him in the other parts of his life because when we went outside for recess he couldn't play. And just doing this small little thing, a daily in-motion walk, made me realize that nurturing the physical is a part of my teaching that I didn't even think about working on with my other students before.

Intent on tending to the whole child, including the physical aspect, Michelle continues to take her students for an in-motion walk every day.

Lisa also believes that her role as a teacher includes addressing the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions of each student. She explains:

I see them as this whole being with all these dimensions that need to be taught. You know, spiritual, physical, emotional and mental. That's so important. All those teachings need to be taught. And I do that as a teacher and I do that as a parent. I try to show them all these different things. Like with my little five year olds, I taught them how to meditate for five minutes. I thought that was amazing. They knew the routine of smudge and prayer and learned how to recite a prayer in Cree. And I was just tickled. They knew their little roles that they were supposed to do, like sitting. They knew they were supposed to behave and they were supposed to just sit there. And they got this idea that being silent was your way of communicating to God or talking to God.

When explaining why she uses mediation with young children, (a practice most commonly used by adults) Lisa explains:

I think children are very capable. We don't need to baby talk them. I think they know a lot more than we think that they do. Maybe not quite abstract thoughts, but they do know a lot. And I also believe that we are spiritual beings . . . which is a Cree teaching, a Cree philosophy kind of

concept and that life is a learning experience and so I bring those teachings
to the classroom.

When asked to expand on her belief in the Cree teaching of "people as spiritual
beings" Lisa responded:

That we're spiritual beings? Well the way I see it, we meditate, we pray,
we rely a lot on our dreams. So there's this connection to another place
that we call the spirit world or heaven, but it doesn't necessarily have to be
like way up there high in the sky out of our reach. It's like just another
level. So I was taught by an uncle in Sturgeon that we were great
meditators and prayers and had great visions and we knew that the world
was round. And we knew that other nations existed on different continents
because we could use our minds to see things and to travel. We didn't
have to go out and explore. We already knew they existed. And we have
a lot our people that were prophets. They prophesized what was going to
happen . . . because of that connection to the spirit world, because of that
connection to that inner peace. And a lot of those other teachings would
include humility, tranquility, this idea of always giving, being selfish was
always unheard of or frowned upon. Our great leaders were also the most
humblest of the tribe, which meant that they were more than willing to
give. And they were also chosen because of their character, because of
their compassion, because they cared for the rest of the people other than
themselves. So that's what I mean by being a spiritual being. You had all
these connections to something bigger than what you are as a person.

Acknowledging her students as spiritual beings is of great importance to Lisa, as is apparent by her use of meditation in the classroom.

Jennifer believes in the importance of acknowledging the child's feelings in the classroom, thus building on the emotional component of the medicine wheel. She expresses how she struggles to find the "feeling" in Westernized ways of teaching. Jennifer, however, explains that she likes some of the Western ways of teaching and utilizes them in the classroom: "I definitely don't want my side to go away. I wanna keep a lot of that and take something from the Western ways that I really like that would make sense with mine." She explains that in her Cree ways of knowing, "it takes 100 miles for them to come and tell one story, to give that one point. As with the other ones [the Western], they're more blunt." Left to decipher which ways of communicating best balance the medicine wheel of each student, Jennifer leans towards the Cree practice of storytelling.

Jennifer says that she always strives to nurture the emotional part of each child in her classroom by addressing their feelings:

> I'm always looking at myself thinking, "am I being too hard or am I being too soft?" For example, if a child keeps coming to me and starts acting like, "I want this, I want that." That's when I think, 'Okay, maybe I'm giving too much attention to this person," or something like that. I don't know. But I do mix it up a bit. I try to anyways and if I don't know what I'm doing, a lot of times I ask the Elder, "what should I do?" A lot of times I do that if I get too overwhelmed about one individual student or all of them. I go to the Elder sometimes and ask, "what would you do?"

Seeking the advice of an Elder provides Jennifer with wisdom as she nurtures the emotional components of each student's medicine wheel.

Chapter 5: Journeying Forward

The Elders' Image of the Child

For Margaret and Helen, two Plains Cree Elders, the image of the child is understood holistically from the moment of conception onward. Organized into six categories, the Elders' image of the child is deeply-rooted in their Plains Cree spirituality. In this chapter, the Elders' categories are paramount, because in their role as Elders, their voices are more collective of the Plain Cree people's beliefs than the voices of the teachers. The Elders' categories are: 1) The Child's Awareness in the Womb, 2) The Child as Powerful and Pure at Birth, 3) The Child Journeying through Infancy, 4) The Child's Spirit as Connected to Mother Earth, 5) Listening to the Child's Voice and 6) The Child as a Butterfly.

The first category, "The Child's Awareness in the Womb," reflects the Elders' belief that a child's experience in the womb has an effect upon the child's journey to adulthood. The Elders believe a child to be "a child at the moment of conception" and refer to conception as a time when "the child's spirit is asked to come down from above." When "with child" a mother nurtures her child mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally by way of her pleasant words, thoughts and actions.

The second category, "The Child as Powerful and Pure at Birth," acknowledges the newborn as capable of contributing to the world into which he/she has entered. The Elders describe birth as "a ceremony" in which the child is "invited to come into the world." Because of the spiritual purity and power of a newborn child, one is instantly drawn to his/her cry. When born, the child raises a

fist in the air declaring "the future is in my hands." The child then asks the parents to help him/her protect this future, while at the same time blessing those around him/her.

The third category, "The Child Journeying through Infancy," characterizes infancy as a sacred journey. Along this journey, children learn by observing their surroundings as well as through interacting with others by "talk[ing] in their own little language." When holding an infant, caregivers should cradle the infant to show respect to the sacred child. Infants play an important role in Aboriginal gatherings and ceremonies because they both purify and complete the circle.

The fourth category, "The Child's Spirit as Connected to Mother Earth," reveals the special connection that children have to Mother Earth (who provides necessities such as food and water). When children and teachers sit together on Mother Earth they feel her energy. Sitting on the ground also acknowledges the equality between teachers and children. This equality suggests an atmosphere that welcomes, rather than scares away, the children's spirits. It also enables children to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

The fifth category, "Listening to the Child's Voice," acknowledges that children are capable of teaching adults as well as capable of expressing their desire to receive teachings in a particular area. This desire is often expressed through curiosity. Children's curiosity is welcomed in ceremonies, as children often inquisitively touch objects as a way of asking to receive teachings about them. Children teach adults patience, in that adults must patiently wait until a child is ready before sharing teachings with him/her.

The sixth category, "The Child as a Spiritual Butterfly," symbolizes the child's purity, beauty and freeness of spirit. The Elders explain that "a child has the power to leave spiritually and still have life in their body" while their spirit is flying around observing. Like a butterfly, children move from one learning opportunity to another and teachers must respect and honor the child's inclination to pay attention to a task for a limited amount of time. If a child is not listening during class, a teacher is encouraged to, at an appropriate time, invite the child to share what they were thinking and learning about.

Central Phenomenon

Margaret's teaching on the child as a butterfly serves as the central phenomenon to the Elders' teachings. Through the analogy of a butterfly, Margaret acknowledges children as spiritual beings who learn best in an environment where they can explore learning opportunities at their leisure. The category of "The Child as a Butterfly" incorporates the five categories of: 1) The Child's Awareness in the Womb, 2) The Child as Powerful and Pure at Birth, 3) The Child Journeying through Infancy, 4) The Child's Spirit as Connected to Mother Earth and 5) Listening to the Child's Voice. First, likened to a spiritual butterfly, the child has the ability to leave his/her body spiritually and observe a situation or place that they remember from when they were in their mother's womb. Second, by referring to the child's "power to leave spiritually," and by likening the child's purity to that of a butterfly, Margaret acknowledges the child as powerful and pure. Third, Margaret's description of the child as a butterfly also relates to the child journeying through infancy. Before an infant can crawl,

"even as little and as young as they are, their eyes will wander," much like a butterfly will wander from plant to plant. The infant's wandering eyes are confirmation that the infant is constantly learning. Fourth, Margaret talks of children and teachers sitting on Mother Earth and feeling Her energy. They use this energy to learn from each other as equals. Mother Earth nurtures a child as they learn in the same way that it nurtures a butterfly. As Margaret explains, Mother Earth sends the sun's energy "to every living spirit on earth and the sky life to help them live." Fifth, through her analogy of a butterfly, Margaret explains how a child may listen to a teacher present a lesson at one moment, and in the next moment the child's attention will shift. This is because the child's spirit has "had enough" and needs "to go elsewhere to digest" what he/she has learned. When the child returns their attention to the lesson, the teacher may then invite the child to share what they were experiencing. Giving the child the option to share or not share is a means of listening to a child's voice, in that it allows children to freely choose when to, or when not to, express themselves.

The Elders' Past Experiences

For Margaret, the effects of her eight years attendance at residential school are an obstacle that she has overcome due to the support and teachings that she has received from Elders. Today, she draws on the strengths of her Plains Cree spirituality and traditional child rearing teachings when sharing about her image of the child. Margaret attributes this knowledge to summers spent at home receiving traditional teachings. Helen, whose immediate family did not attend

residential school, has drawn on her mother's traditional teachings in forming her image of the child.

Reggio and Plains Cree Images: A Comparison

The Reggio Emilia image of the child and the Plains Cree Elders' image of the child are similar. First, both acknowledge the child's ability to communicate and learn from the moment of birth. Malaguzzi (as cited in Lewin-Benham, 2008), states that "children are born 'speaking' and speaking with someone" (p.72) despite their lack of words. He describes the child further as one who, "very early on, is able to attribute meanings to events and who attempts to share meanings and stories of meaning" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.116). Similarly, Margaret explains that "children, from the time they are born start studying . . . they even talk in their own little language and they think in their little minds." Second, both Malaguzzi and the Elders believe that the child is an important and contributing member of the community. Malaguzzi illustrates this community membership by referring to the child as a citizen whereas Helen illustrates this membership by stating that "the circle is not complete without the very young." Last, both Malaguzzi and the Elders believe that children are excellent resources regarding the nature of childhood. Malaguzzi believes that the child provides adults with "knowledge about childhood" (Rinaldi, 2005, p.171) and Margaret talks of how her "grandchildren and [her] children have taught [her] how to care for them, and how to listen to them." In addition to commonalities surrounding their image of the child, Malaguzzi and the Elders describe their image of the child in a similar fashion: lyrically, vividly and non-systematically.

The Reggio image of the child and the image of the child offered by the Plains Cree Elders in this study are indeed similar. This, at first glance, offers support to the continued implementation of the Reggio approach into Saskatchewan schools. For instance, there are numerous Reggio Emilia pedagogical resources which teachers of Plains Cree students may benefit from using. Educators must be cautioned, however, that, unlike the Reggio approach, the Plains Cree image of the child is centered on a spiritual orientation, which can only be fully actualized when accompanied by Plains Cree culture and language. Ultimately, teachers must seek to fully understand the image of the child by learning from Plains Cree Elders, community members and parents. It is this multi-generational knowledge that will best serve Plains Cree students.

Spirituality Discussed

When I asked Helen to describe spirituality in the context of early childhood education she replied, "it is the holistic well being of the child as a person and includes all four dimensions: the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental." In other words, as expressed by Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris (2006) "spiritual life involves the whole of life" (p. 293) and the spiritual cannot be separated from the physical, emotional and mental. Helen explained further that a spirit is "the first thing that a person is gifted with when they come into being." Within a traditional Plains Cree paradigm, one's spirituality is entrenched in, and inextricable from, relationships with others and relationships with the land around him/her. As Bone (2008) explains, "to be indigenous is to have a spiritual tie to the land" (p.266). For Plains Cree people, spirituality is a

means of maintaining the interconnectedness of all life on Mother Earth while giving thanks to the Creator. Complex and worthy of a lifetime of learning, the spirituality of the Plains Cree people is something that can only be accurately and explicitly defined by listening to the teachings of Elders.

The Teachers' Image of the Child

The teachers' images of the child fall into three categories, all of which, like the Elders' categories, are rooted in Plains Cree spirituality. The teachers' categories are: 1) The Child as a Gift, 2) The Child as a Teacher and 3) The Child as a Whole. In the first category, "The Child as a Gift," the teachers hold an image of the child as a gift from God/the Creator, for whom they are responsible to provide care. In the second category, "The Child as a Teacher," the teachers view the child as equal to everyone regardless of age, and therefore, capable of teaching others. For instance, Michelle shares how one of her students taught her the importance of providing opportunities for daily physical activity for her class. By viewing the child as a teacher, the teacher participants acknowledge the child's equality in the circle; the circle being a core belief and teaching in Plains Cree spirituality. In the third category, "The Child as a Whole," the teachers view the child as a spiritual, emotional, physical and mental being. They believe that in order for a child to learn, all four areas must be nurtured. By nurturing the whole child, the teachers follow the traditional teachings conceptualized in the medicine wheel, which symbolizes foundational Plains Cree spiritual beliefs.

The Teachers' Past Experiences

The teacher participants in the study often vacillate between Plains Cree and Westernized images of childhood, despite their tendency to favor the Plains Cree image. This vacillation appears to be a result of their upbringing, their own schooling as a child/teenager, as well as their university education. For instance, Lisa and Michelle's childhoods were largely absent of Plains Cree culture, spirituality and language. This absence appears to be a result of the residential school experiences of Lisa and Michelle's parents. Michelle explains that her parents "didn't want [her] to get punished in school for speaking Cree or doing anything 'Aboriginal'" and Lisa shares that her grandparents "naturally or intentionally would hide the language from [her] because they wanted [her] to benefit from Western education." With both teachers only beginning to learn about their culture as teenagers, it is evident that the effects of residential school are generational. With no residential school experience in her immediate family, Jennifer grew up speaking Cree and attending cultural celebrations such as sun dances. For all three teachers, (Jennifer, Lisa and Michelle), their elementary and secondary schooling experience was predominantly westernized. Although none of them view their school experience as particularly negative, they seem to view it as a missed opportunity to learn about, and benefit from, their Plains Cree culture. As Lisa puts it "I was hungry and thirsty for my ways of knowing and doing and I did not see it being taught to me." All three teachers completed their university education through either SUNTEP or ITEP which are teacher education programs that focus on Métis or First Nations epistemology. These programs have helped

to shape the teacher participants' image of the child and have contributed to their knowledge of their culture and spirituality.

The past experiences of the teacher participants in this study have direct implications for the education system today, particularly in the area of cultural knowledge of teachers. Educational administrators must be aware that teachers, whose university education was culturally rich, may nevertheless be in the early stages of learning about their Aboriginal spirituality and culture. One cannot assume that because a teacher is a member of a cultural group (i.e. Plains Cree) that he/she is equipped with the cultural beliefs and language that reflects that cultures image of the child. School systems must provide opportunities for teachers to learn their Cree language and Plains Cree spirituality from Elders and community members. This, in turn, will benefit Plains Cree students. It should never be expected, of course, that Plains Cree teachers ought to be versed in their culture. Yet, in situations where Plains Cree teachers willingly enter a teaching position that has a specific mandate to teach from a Plains Cree worldview, they, as well as their students, would certainly benefit from being offered opportunities to grow in their knowledge of their culture and spirituality.

Absence of Spirituality in Teacher Education Programs

In many teacher education programs spiritually is rarely addressed. For instance, in *The whole child*, a textbook which the authors describe as "a practical methods book for foundational or introductory courses in early childhood education" (Hendrick & Weissman, 2006, p. v), the spiritual dimension of the child is not addressed. Instead the authors focus on "the physical self," "the

emotional self," "the social self," "the creative self," and "the cognitive self" (p. v). The absence of spirituality in teacher education programs can be attributed to the reality that Western philosophical systems "assume a division between sacred and secular domains of life" (Mattis, et al., 2006, p. 284). Teacher education programs that adhere to this division and do not address spirituality, are likely to ill prepare future teachers who will be educating Plains Cree children—children whose spirituality likely permeates all facets of their lives.

Language

The Elders in the study cited language revitalization as a means of cultural renewal for the Plains Cree people. According to Lessow-Hurley (2009), "language and culture are inseparable" (p.114) and learning language invariably entails learning culture. This idea is evidenced by Lisa, a teacher in the study, who believes that her Plains Cree spirituality has grown considerably since she began learning the Cree language. Both Margaret and Helen believe language revitalization must begin in the home. It can then be reinforced at school. According to the Elders, this learning of language at home requires "expanding kinship" since young children best learn language by relating to parents, siblings, relatives and community members.

Indigenous Early Childhood Education in New Zealand

When seeking linguistically and culturally appropriate educational programs for Plains Cree children, much can be learned from the Māori people of New Zealand (Aotearoa) who, like the Plains Cree, are seeking to address the negative effects of colonization. With the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in

1840 "the British colonised New Zealand in a way that almost eliminated the indigenous people's language and culture" (Nicholls, 2003, p. 26). Over the last few decades, however, culturally and linguistically based early childhood education programs have been established in New Zealand, contributing to the wider revitalization of Māori culture and language.

Te Whāriki, the National Early Childhood Education Curriculum of New Zealand, acknowledges "the important place of spirituality in the development of the whole child" particularly for Māori families (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2010). Within the Te Whāriki curriculum, "intellectual, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual learning" of children "is interwoven across all their experiences" (2010). The Te Kohanga Reo approach, a holistic early childhood Māori language immersion program, operates under the umbrella of the Te Whāriki curriculum. (Te Kohanga Reo literally translates as *language nest*). A study by Clay on language use in Te Kohanga Reo "provides evidence for how language use and processes of acquisition express and construct cultural meanings" (Hohepa, & Smith, 1992, para. 1). Clay discovered that the program was effective in "the reversal in trends of young children's Maori language" even though the children in the study were "highly likely to have parents who [were] *not* native speakers of Maori" (para. 5, emphasis added). The success of Te Kohanga Reo is of interest to the Plains Cree community as they seek ways to revitalize the Cree language through early childhood education, despite the fact that many of the parents of Plains Cree children do not speak Cree.

Elders in the Classroom

Through conversations with Margaret and Helen, it became apparent that teachings on Plains Cree culture are best provided by Elders. Margaret explains how she learned from Elders as she was growing up:

My parents back home always had a grandma there, a moshom there, to be our teachers. And the same thing with my late husband. That's how they were raised. They always had a moshom or a grandma there living with them, giving the teachings.

The presence of Elders in early childhood classrooms benefits both the students and the teachers. For instance, Jennifer shared how, in addition to receiving teachings on Plains Cree spirituality, she would seek guidance from the Elders on how to best interact with her students. Most notably, having Elders in the classroom is a way of acknowledging the cultural richness found in each community, and, therefore, a means of refuting the false notion of a single and prescriptive best practice for Aboriginal education (U of S, AERC, & FNAHEC, 2008).

Learning: A Lifelong Journey

When I asked Margaret and Helen what they wanted written in this last chapter of my thesis, they were quick to offer suggestions regarding spirituality, language and Elders. They then emphasized that learning is a lifelong journey, and as such, my research should not be conclusive in nature. This importance placed on learning as a lifelong journey was summed up by Helen, who, with a

nod of agreement from Margaret said, "we are thankful for the words that our ancestors have left behind and believe that these words will continue to teach."

Recommendations for Future Research

Establishing an image of the child is only a preliminary step in providing quality early childhood education. As such, there is a need for further research on the education of Plains Cree children. First, research on how Plains Cree images of the child can be actualized in the context of the early childhood classroom would be useful in providing culturally relevant education for Plains Cree children. Second, the participants in this research were all parents but were interviewed in an educational context. Consequently, research on Plains Cree parents' images of the child (with the family as the context) would be helpful in offering educators further insights into Plains Cree childhoods. Third, further research on how Aboriginal ways of knowing can coincide with other spiritual orientations or religions would be helpful to those Plains Cree families who adhere to a practice other than Plains Cree spirituality. Last, research on the commonalities among the Plains Cree image of the child and the image of the child held by other Aboriginal groups would be useful in providing teachers with a basic framework prior to learning about the complexities of Aboriginal childhoods.

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Appendix

<u>One-to-One Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Teachers</u>

1.   What is your image of the child? (i.e. How do you see the child? What do you think are the strengths of the child)?

2.   How have the teachings that you have received from Elders or your parents/relations influenced this image?

3.   Do you see a conflict between the Plains Cree image of the child and the dominant (Westernized) image of the child?

4.   Have you experienced conflict between the expectations placed on you as a teacher (i.e. curriculum, learning outcomes, and expectations from university teacher education programs) and your image of the child?

5.   Do you rely more on your university teacher education (or even your own experience as a student in elementary school) when you teach *or* on your traditional family teachings (i.e. knowledge passed down from grandparents, Elders, relations)?

Note: These interview questions were used for the purpose of generating conversation with the teacher being interviewed. If she wished, the teacher deviated from the interview questions.