Cultural Approaches to Evaluating Indigenous Early Intervention Programs:

A Case Study of Aboriginal Head Start

by

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Abstract

There is a dearth of research on early childhood development (ECD) programs for Canadian Indigenous children and little has been written about their evaluation; many researchers argue that assessments concerning Indigenous children and programs require culturally appropriate approaches. Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), a culturally based program, supports children's cognitive, social, physical, emotional, and cultural development. I use a narrative approach to describe the development process and subsequent methodology for the 2003-2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation, and apply interpretive methods to explore efficacy and cultural relevance in the evaluation design and development phase, its methodology, and the dissemination of its findings. The overarching research question, Is the AHSUNC national impact evaluation approach and methodology an instructive model for impact evaluation studies on Indigenous early childhood programs?, is examined hermeneutically and critically in this study through lenses of (a) cultural responsiveness, (b) concepts of school readiness, (c) relationships between policy, programs and evaluations, and (d) related emerging ECD literature. The study uses an interpretive framework to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues and their complex relationships. I adapt Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model as a conceptual theory, and draw on Indigenous Perspectives to inform cross-cultural methodology and interpretations. The "texts" for the dialectic process include national and international documents related to ECD, social justice, and to Indigenous Peoples, as well as the propositions of Indigenous and ECD scholars, with particular attention to their relationships to the AHS evaluation process. My findings have potential to inform empowering, participatory evaluation designs for cross-cultural ECD programs, and to identify directions for future research. Throughout, I reflect on my position as etic researcher.

Dedication

To Rebecca, and to Leo,

whose unique and creative energies,

surround us with profound beauty.

You weave your vibrant, silky threads into the weft of this text

and into the fabric of my life.

And you are ever gentle on my mind.

community people involved in all stages of the evaluation. They were in my thoughts frequently as I wrote this paper. And we are all grateful to artists Tomson Highway and Leo Yerxa for breathing life into the AHS evaluation story through their rendering of Johnny National.

My family! I thank my three amazing sons (James, George, and Daniel) and their fabulous partners (Sherry, Dana, and Eliana) for their patience and friendship over the past few years. You bring balance and joy to my life, as do my five beautiful and funny grandchildren (Lucas, Sophia, Kellan, Oliver, and Maxwell). And to Bob and Arlie and my many cousins for sharing this time in my life.

Many friends and colleagues have shared ideas, critiques, friendship, and support. I could describe the specifics of your contributions, but that would take another chapter. Alison, Afshan, Brent, my two Carols, Christine, Donna, Gillian, Grace, Irma, the two Janets, Janelle, my two Judys, Karen, Kari, Leo, Linda, Martine and Leland, Meridith, Rebecca, Richard, Suzanna, Vera, and Wes. And to Jessica Ball, Judith Bernhard, Hillel Goelman, Margo Greenwood, Jan Hare, and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw: Your dedication to ECD and Indigenous early childhood programs has been constructive and inspirational for so many of us.

Again, my sincere thanks, and *megwich*.

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Acronyms

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AHS	Aboriginal Head Start
AHSOR	Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve
AHSUNC	Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities
AVAT	Aboriginal Vocabulary Acquisition Test
CEE	Centre of Excellence for Evaluation
CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
CPHI	Canadian Population Health Initiative
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ICIE	Indian Control of Indian Education
INAC	Indian Affairs and Northern Development
IRM	Indigenous Research Methodology
IRS	Indian Residential Schools
NAHO	National Aboriginal Health Organization
NAHSC	National Aboriginal Head Start Committee (1995) or Council (1996)
NIB	National Indian Brotherhood
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAC	Parent Advisory Committee
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
RAC	Regional Advisory Committee

RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SES	Social Economic Status (or Socioeconomic Status)
TBCS	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
TDT	Tool Development Team
TEP	Teacher Education Program(s)
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (originally, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

Glossary of Terms Used in the Study

1. ***Aboriginal People(s)*:** "Aboriginal Peoples" is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. Canada's Constitution (*Constitution Act*, 1982) recognizes three groups of Aboriginal Peoples—Indians, Métis, and Inuit—which are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012). In this study I use ***Aboriginal*** and ***Indigenous*** to refer to Canadian First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. I also use the word ***Indigenous*** to refer to original peoples. ***Native*** is also used, particularly when it is used in the reference literature.

2. ***Culturally appropriate*** or ***culturally sensitive*** are common terms in early childhood development (ECD) literature (Ball, 2009; Ball & Pence, 2006; Ogilvie, 2005; Pence, Rodríguez de France, Greenwood, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). In relation to a program, ***culturally appropriate*** can be defined as "the ability of an organization or program to be effective across cultures, including the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services" (Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, 2001, p. 2). While this is an appropriate working definition for my approach, ***culturally responsive*** is the preferred term in this study because *responsive* emphasizes respect and knowledge of the culture *and* action to engage that knowledge appropriately. I also recognize a more comprehensive pedagogical term, *culturally sustainable,* which connotes activity more deliberate and proactive than *culturally responsive,* impacting the culture itself as well as children, their families, and communities.

3. Kağitçibaşi (2007) suggests the term ***early childhood development*** **(ECD)** to encompass "early childhood development, education and care [programs]" (p. 371). ECD is the preferred

term in this study as well because it reflects the comprehensive, holistic approach associated with contemporary early childhood programs.

4. *Emic:* Merriam-Webster (n. d.) defines *emic* as "of, relating to, or involving analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being studied" (para. 1).

5. *Etic*: "Of, relating to, or involving analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being studied" (Merriam-Webster, n. d., para. 1).

6. *Indian:* A legal term that has commonly been changed in general usage to ***First Nations***. I use this term when it is relevant for the contemporary period.

7. ***Indian Residential School(s) (IRS):*** From 1874 to the 1970s, the Government of Canada removed about 150,000 Indian children from their families and communities to place them in residential schools for educational purposes. Various religious organizations ran the schools; the legacy of family disruption, abuse of students, and cultural genocide has now begun to be recognized and addressed by governments and churches.

8. ***Indigenous Perspective*** (capitalized) refers to a paradigmatic system. I also use ***Indigenous perspectives*** (not capitalized) as a general term that includes perspectives of Indigenous individuals, academics, or communities, and also includes, when applicable, ***Indigenous Research Methodologies***.

9. ***Indigenous Research Methodologies***: A term that refers to a specific methodological approach and structure (See p.64 and Chapter 4).

10. ***Intergenerational survivors***: Family members of survivors—generally children, partners, or grandchildren who are affected by the IRS experiences of their relative(s).

11. ***IRS Survivor:*** A former student of the IRS system.

12. *Local control***:** Administration of AHSUNC project management is provided by ***locally controlled*** community-based organizations (e.g., Friendships Centres) through Contribution Agreements between the organizations and the federal government.

13. *Majority World:* A term that refers to the majority of the world's population outside of the industrialized (Western) countries, or what was formerly called the "Third World."

14. *Métis:* People of mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations, Inuit, or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibwe, and Cree.

15. *Minority World***:** A term that refers to the minority of the world's population living in industrialized (Western) countries.

16. *Off reserve:* First Nations people living in rural and urban communities that are not on Indian Reservations are considered to be living off reserve (the terms on and off reserve are hyphenated when used as adjectives before a noun, such as off-reserve populations). The federal government has specific responsibilities to First Nations people living on reserves, but generally those living off reserve fall under provincial or territiorial jurisdiction, which has implications for social programs targeted for First Nations and other Aboriginal participants. For example, AHSUNC and AHS On Reserve are funded and managed separately.

17. *Progressive approach* refers to programs or ideas advocating social, economic, and/or political reform. They do not necessarily have a critical component or analysis.

18. ***Targeted programs*** are programs that serve a particular purpose or population as opposed to

a universal program that is available to an extended category or general population.

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A STORY IN THREE PARTS, WITH A MOUSE TRINITY AS THE STORYTELLER

I want to share an interesting story,
one that begins as historical narrative,
and progresses as an invocation for reflection, interpretation, and praxis.

Prologue. M̶o̶use = Muse and Researcher

> *When I returned from fasting at Chief Mountain, the Boy asked:*
> *"And when you go on a Vision Quest, is that when an animal*
> *appears to you, and you learn who your animal spirit is?"*
> *"I've heard that," said the Mother.*
> *And the Mother had fasted, and waited, but the Eagle and the Bear*
> *and the Buffalo didn't speak to her directly—only to others.*
> *On the third day, outside of her lodge, as she painted the*
> *willow sticks, a mouse came to her four times, and watched her*
> *work. A humble mouse, she thought—what can this mean? I*
> *wonder, as always, if I have a right to be here; I will try to*
> *embrace Mouse Spirit as my guide.* (Robertson, 1999)

In Haida mythology, Mouse Woman guides and advises those who travel from the human world to the nonhuman realms (Government of Canada, 2009). She is both an advisor and an activist, helping to restore order, balance, and clarity where she perceives chaos. She can appear, without contradiction, in animal form as a mouse, in human form as a grandmother, or without form, as Mouse Spirit—but she always retains her essential mouse nature. She promotes social justice and is a special friend to the young (Harris, 1978/2004). To provide balance, and to show respect for the help she gives, recipients of her assistance present her with gifts, mainly ones crafted from wool, as it is said that her tiny fingers itch to busy themselves unravelling the knitted pieces. To transform these gifts into their essence, Mouse Woman must throw them into a fire. Unable to transcend her mouse nature, however, she cannot resist pulling the scorched woollen pieces from the fire to indulge her mousy urges to unravel them (Harris, 1978/2004).

As a researcher, Mouse Woman speaks to me. Since the day in 1999 when a mouse appeared to me on Chief Mountain, Montana, during a vision quest, I have thought about how I might place myself, as researcher, within the Mouse Woman metaphor—as I understand it—by striving to be humble, straddling multiple realities, seeking social justice, and unravelling the fabric that is given to me in the course of my work.

Several years after my vision quest, I was presented with the fabric of the 2006

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) National Impact

Evaluation. As federal AHSUNC evaluation analyst, I was part of a team that from 2002 to 2006

made an effort to develop a culturally appropriate evaluation methodology. I felt then, and I still

feel strongly, that the details of its development and the evaluation instruments the team selected

or designed have potential to inform other early childhood development program evaluations—

particularly programs for ***Indigenous***[1] families. I began my doctoral studies in 2009 with a clear

idea of my research goal: to describe the AHSUNC evaluation methodology and examine its

claims to cultural appropriateness. As I engaged in my research process, however, the project

became more complex. As a non-Aboriginal woman, I grappled with my own position as

researcher and its significance in qualitative, cross-cultural research in which I was a participant

in my case study (***emic***) and where I, as a "cultural outsider" (***etic***), interacted with Indigenous

cultures and research perspectives.

During my proposal defence, my committee members suggested that I position myself

more openly in my research and adopt a narrative[2] (storytelling) approach to address these

complexities. I resisted this advice at first, because I wanted to talk about the AHSUNC

evaluation, not about myself. However, I spent the summer of 2012 reading about academic

approaches to narratives and ethnoautobiographies, and I modulated my narrative voice and text

accordingly. Over the following year, I read and reread the works of Indigenous scholars,

focusing on how these scholars integrate themselves into their research and how they relate to

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[1] Indigenous and other terms explained in the glossary are bolded and italicized when they first appear in the text.

[2] According to Polkinghorne (1995), "a storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happening, and changing environmental contexts" (p. 8).

Indigenous perspectives, or ***Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM)***. I believe I have found a rhythm that resonates for me through reading their accounts of their struggles and resolutions. I refer often to these Indigenous scholars throughout my dissertation. I can also say that I have been able to find a cadence in the works of several Indigenous academic colleagues and recent graduates.

In a later section of this prologue I use a model drawn primarily from the academic writings of Margaret Kovach (2009) and Renee Linklater (2011) to locate myself as researcher. I am drawn to this model because it acquaints the reader with the researcher's personal background in relation to the research topic. This approach is implicit throughout the study, but it doesn't detract from the dominant storyline of the development and analysis of the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation. Still, in my narrative reflections, I refer to my researcher status throughout. I am aware that one of the greatest challenges I faced in the research and writing process was the persistent need to provide a scholarly justification for the privilege of conducting this research. I approached this issue, in part, by asking myself, "Who do I think are the Indigenous scholars practicing IRM? Who is sufficiently Indigenous to be emic?"

Many of the Indigenous scholars I encountered acknowledge struggles related to their Aboriginal identity and challenges with their suitability to approach IRM. I am reminded of a university class I attended where the majority of Aboriginal students revealed that they felt somehow deficient in their Aboriginal identity because they couldn't speak their own Native language. I recall a visit to northern Saskatchewan where the Cree-speaking residents presented themselves as having "lost" their culture—all fodder for my research questions (see Chapter 1)!

Recent Indigenous graduates are exploring (as am I) exciting new academic territory. I find their scholarly work and the ways they position themselves inspirational. I have included

excerpts from their academic writing to show the significance of a narrative approach and of researcher positioning in qualitative research. I deeply appreciate the insights in their narratives, and their references to IRM have provided me with a deeper appreciation of the relationship between this positioning and the different approaches and perspectives. While my own situation as researcher in an Aboriginal subject area is still somewhat elusive, I see that I am not isolated in my struggle, and that I can continue my study with IRM as a reference guide.

The Indigenous Scholars Who Guided My Narrative Approach

Renee Linklater, a woman of Ojibwe and Scottish ancestry, was adopted as an infant into a White family. As an adult she practices her tribal traditions. She writes in her dissertation prologue:

> Everything about Indigenous research tells us that we have to locate ourselves in our research study. That is, first write our own stories and share our position in the world before we write about the world. This is a big task, because first we have to come to terms with who we are and how we come to do the work that we do. When I began my PhD journey, I was already pondering these questions. I had already been searching. I was searching for myself and for my place in the world. (Linklater, 2011, p. 1)

Similarly, early in her dissertation Trudy Cardinal (2014) places herself in her family and her community:

> This kind of positioning is important because who I am and where I come from has impacted how I engaged in this research. It is also important because these families, the Cardinal and Sinclair families, and all who are part of them, have come alongside of me throughout my educational journey. As an Indigenous researcher, 'knowing my place' is my way of honoring and giving thanks to the ancestors and acknowledging that all that I "know has been given to [me] by all those who came before [me]" (Weenie, 2009, p. 57). (T. Cardinal, pp. 1–2)

> [These stories] are told because they speak to the stories of how even now, I sometimes feel disconnected from Cree/Metis ways of knowing and my identity as an Aboriginal person continues to be filled with tension. I tell these stories also because for the whole of my life I have been told stories of what it means to be an Aboriginal person, yet no story has been able to capture the intricacies and the layers of my experiences. (T. Cardinal, 2014, p. 5)

Tibetha Kemble (2013) was also adopted into a White family; she too straddles two worlds. She relates her struggle with her identity as follows:

> When I started my graduate program some time ago, I entered into it with a somewhat naive understanding of what being Aboriginal really means within the Canadian context. . . . The gradual process throughout these years has brought about fundamental changes within me; not only in the manner in which I see myself within the broader Canadian landscape, but also in relation to how I more fully understand the context, and the means by which, Aboriginal peoples have come to this point in time. (p. 166)

Kemble also refers to the dominant intellectual approach that was bereft of the emotional and spiritual connections inherent to IRM:

> Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) inspires, if not absolutely requires, the researcher to approach the topic under study from an emotional and spiritual place; a place of complete honesty and vulnerability. Prior to undertaking the emotional and spiritual journey required in this regard, I was not able to articulate and situate this work from an Indigenous perspective, nor could I claim that it was adhering to the tenets of IRM, since I was approaching it from an entirely intellectual level; one that was devoid of an apparent connection to my heart, to my being, and to my spirit as an Aboriginal woman and scholar. . . . the principles of IRM however, emanate throughout this work and are ever-present in the language, purpose, and desired outcomes that I speak of herein. The principles of IRM, while not explicitly stated throughout, guided this work and guided me to ensure that I was showing "respect for all forms of life" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195) and that the manner in which I presented data, information, and historical contexts in this regard were premised in the "spirit of kindness, honesty, and compassion" (Wilson, 2007, p. 195). (Kemble, 2013, p. 176)

Janine Akerman is a Coast Salish Cowichan woman who has studied images of the child as perceived by Cree Elders and teachers. Her Aboriginal identity is not a salient feature for discussion in her thesis. She does not convey a sense of angst, but rather recognition of Cree/Cowichan commonalities and differences and the need to learn local community protocols, traditions, and connections in order to conduct respectful and meaningful research. Throughout her thesis, Akerman (2010) respectfully provides methodological details that comprise local and individual protocols and community consultation at each research stage.

When I worked at Health Canada with Jeannette Sinclair in the 1990s, her (Métis) family had reclaimed status through Bill C31 (1985). In her doctoral dissertation, Sinclair (2013) described herself as "a landless, bandless, mixed-blood Cree—with Indian Status" (p. 25). In the following passage, Sinclair connects positioning oneself in the research and Aboriginal cultural practice:

> One of the fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is that researchers locate themselves at the outset of their research (Martin, 2003; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2007; Kovach, 2009). Situating oneself during introductions is important in most Indigenous cultures. Introducing yourself, your family name, the names of your parents and sometimes your grandparents, as well as your home community or First Nation is expected. (p. 18)

Sinclair reiterates the importance of positioning and the complexities of culture and identity. In her research methodology she echoes her cultural introduction customs. Both Sinclair and Cardinal convey the Indigenous value of *relatedness* in research which I discuss further in Chapters 3 and 4.

I am indebted to these women for sharing their personal narratives and for undertaking the scholarly work that contributes to their fields of knowledge. They illustrate the importance of positioning and narrative—and I see them individually and collectively as practitioners of, and contributors to, Indigenous research methodology. My own studies have been well timed, as it turns out, in that I have access to their work. Some of these scholars cite Margaret Kovach's (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,* in which she argues the importance of placing *self* in Indigenous inquiry. Kovach, who is of Cree/Saulteaux ancestry, shares in her prologue that she was adopted as an infant into a White family, and that she "honors both influences" (p. 3). Perhaps for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars researching Indigenous topics it is this recognition and its application that are significant.

The quotes from these modern scholars, individually and collectively, underscore some of the questions related to identity and culture that I examine throughout my research. Identity and culture are prominent AHSUNC themes, and are significant to both broader and personal concerns in this study as well. I begin to answer my question "Who is sufficiently Indigenous to be emic?" in this way: Aboriginal community members know who is a traditional teacher or Elder. They don't have a checklist of attributes—they just know!

The requisite self-reflection in conducting qualitative research is heightened for Aboriginal scholars who draw on Indigenous perspectives. In this century of globalization, the demographics, communication systems, and other experiences of Canadian Aboriginal Peoples are changing. Indigenous scholars are going beyond placing themselves in their research and are introducing critical and culturally sensitive methodologies to their work. I can't think that blood quota, residence, Native language proficiency, or personal history—alone or in combination—constitutes "emic" status for researchers. They also need to place themselves in their work. Trudy Cardinal (2011) introduced me to the concept of "I'm not the Indian you had in mind" (from the title of a poem by Thomas King, 2007), which is a reminder that the spectrum of "being Indian" has both length and breadth and is multifaceted, being connected to history, present times, racism, and renewal.

Locating the Researcher

I have had an ongoing relationship with *Indian* children. I was told as a young child that I have paternal American Indian ancestry. This has always been a point of pride for my family, but because our genealogy is unclear, and culturally we come from a British American agricultural background, we identify as non-Aboriginal for most purposes. My father had a particular interest in Native Peoples—their histories, lifestyles, and cultures—and our home reflected this interest

with artwork, books, and a succession of pairs of moccasins. Mr. Jones, our Saskatoon neighbour in the 1950s, was director of Kilburn Hall, the children's receiving home, and we visited there on Sunday drives. There I learned that some children didn't have the advantages that my friends and I had. I was particularly haunted by the Indian children, and I was very curious about people who lived in poverty. Mr. Jones had visited Indian residential schools and talked about the injustice of the concept and its operations.

I decided at an early age that I wanted to be a social worker. I grew up in a home that valued education and social justice, and held a strong work ethic. In 1964, at age 20, with a BA in psychology and English, I became an idealistic child welfare worker with very little knowledge of Aboriginal history or circumstances. As a young social worker, I was given opportunities that reshaped my assumptions and worldview, and my interest in Native children grew as I got to know some of them and their parents. In the early 1970s my husband and I, with our two small children in tow, operated a group home for young teens in a community near several reserves. For close to three years we provided a home for children ranging in age from infancy to 16 years, the majority being *Métis* or *First Nations*. During this experience, I learned a lot more about First Nations cultures and languages and the realities of the children's lives.

I returned to social work in 1978, and in 1979 took a position with the Saskatchewan Social Services Day Care Branch. In this job my interest in Native child care and education grew because at the time there was a heightened interest in culturally based child care and education. Later I enrolled in classes in Native studies and Cree, and I became quite involved in the Aboriginal community. I developed some strong relationships with Native people who included me in ceremonies, and we spent countless hours discussing related matters. I had many powerful

experiences, including my vision quest at Chief Mountain, Montana, that influenced my career direction and worldview. The relationships I have with Aboriginal people have been a gift.

I am a prairie girl. My most meaningful connections in the Aboriginal world have been with Plains and Woodland cultures. And yet one day on a Montana mountain, a mouse approached me and I came to consider a Coastal Indian spirit—Mouse Woman—as my muse! In the realm of myth, "shifting" is not a contradiction. Mouse Woman shifts from animal to human to spirit form and takes on various roles as she guides and advises travellers who are open to what she can teach them. The rich material in the Mouse Woman mythology relates provocatively to my personal history and to the theoretical framework and methodology of my research. I easily imagined plucking the 2006 Aboriginal Head Start impact evaluation from the embers and unravelling it in this milieu. I could feel a sense of satisfaction in being lulled into such a metaphor, perceiving or manoeuvring data to fit an idealistic model. However, a limited and unexamined model can bring its own hazards to the research process and the interpretations of the findings. My research intent was to critically examine and re-examine assumptions separate from the expectations generally associated with them. The "fabric" I unravel is drawn from an ecology that has generated a particular social program and its evaluation. My research process and interpretations—the nest-building from salvaged wool—risk being contaminated by the constrictions of a predetermined model or metaphor. Hence, I see Mouse Woman as Muse, but not as model.

In this research, I am emic only in the sense that I was a participant in the event I am studying. I have many years of involvement with Aboriginal communities, and community members have shared their ceremonies and knowledge generously with me. I have experienced things during these events that I cannot explain to myself, but I have come to accept that just

because they are a mystery to me it does not make them less real. I have a deep respect for the Aboriginal world, and have found peace and answers in that world that I have not connected with in my other experiences. I do know that my life's work with children and with Aboriginal people comes from my heart. I do not have a dramatic life story to relate, but as an elder citizen I can say that my life as a woman, partner, mother, grandmother, and friend has been rich. It has been enhanced by loving relationships, meaningful work and education, and stimulating travel in Canada and abroad. These are the resources that provide me with optimism and resilience, and they nurture me in my daily life and doctoral work.

I appreciate my safe, loving childhood and believe that Canadians need to support basic rights, security, and enrichment for all children. We cannot assume that well-meaning programs to address children's development are either beneficial or as constructive as they could be: parents, communities, and sponsors (e.g., governments) need evidence that they are meeting their goals in the best way. Appropriate program evaluation is important to this assessment, and innovative ways of assessing success are called for to meet changing lives, institutions, and knowledge. Generally, audiences are concerned with quantifiable outcomes and related projections as appraisals of success. In this study I examine the evaluation process/methodology of the 2006 Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities National Impact Evaluation because I believe the context and details of the development phase can make a practical contribution to ECD knowledge and to appropriate program evaluation.

Dissertation Overview

In Haida mythology, Mouse Woman, known also as Grandmother Mouse, shifts her form fittingly to address the challenge at hand and to best convey its message. Of course, her discrete storytelling voices are unified in their underlying themes of order, social justice, and cultural

appropriateness. Accordingly, in this dissertation, Grandmother Mouse presents herself in Part One as Mouse Spirit, imparting ethos and context to augment the substance of Aboriginal Head Start and my research approach. Descriptive and historical narrative provides context for the AHSUNC program and its evaluation, and for my associated research. These accounts generate an optimistic tone, or spirit of affirmation, recognizing progressive social changes at work in Aboriginal communities. Hence, the narrative presents academics, practitioners, policy makers, and participants with a considered appreciation for the program's composition and intended outcomes, and Indigenous early childhood enrichment programs' contributions to social justice goals.

In Part Two, Mouse Woman in human form structures pertinent data for analysis—working to report with order and accuracy. Discrete constituents of my adaptations of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model are explicated to show chronological, distal, and proximal systemic influences and interactions leading to the development of the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation.

In Part Three, Mouse Woman returns to her animal form and, true to her rodent nature, unravels the structured elements of the impact evaluation, examines their intrasystem connections and associated meanings, and envisages their creative potential for social justice and praxis. The ensuing data analysis prioritizes traditional hermeneutic methods. As well, this activity explores and draws on Indigenous perspectives and critical theory to inform methodology and interpretation for the study's fundamental research questions and findings. Indicators of cultural appropriateness and strengths of the impact evaluation methodology and tools are identified, as are associated unresolved and arguable issues and considerations for further research.

I began my doctoral study with a vision of Mouse Woman pulling threads from the fire, examining them, and building a nest to release their essence. In the research process, the dynamic threads glided from their malleable nest structure to align themselves as a tapestry, with the warp threads telling the elements of the story and the weft threads texturing the narrative fabric. Throughout the dissertation I consider my role as qualitative researcher, drawing the weft from my own experiences, insights, and thoughts. Somewhat like the tapestry in *The Lady of Shallot* (Tennyson, 1883), my woven warp portrays the reflected ideas of others, while the weft is more personal and animated. As researcher and author, I value and acknowledge both sources.

Mouse Woman, along with many scholars, friends, family members, colleagues, and community members, is with me on this venture. I say *megwich* (thank you) to all of them.

And now the shape-shifting Mouse Woman generates a narrative entity from the singed threads she has tenderly pulled from the fire.

PART ONE: THE WOOLLY FABRIC AND THE MOUSE

Grandmother Mouse presents herself in Part One as Mouse Spirit, imparting ethos and context to augment the substance of Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) and my research approach. Descriptive and historical narrative provides context for both the AHSUNC program and its evaluation and my associated research.

Chapter 1. Positioning AHSUNC and the Mouse Milieu

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks: Mouse Spirit and Myth

Chapter 3. Methodology: Unravel, Interpret, and Re-vison

Chapter 4. Mouse Woman Fashions a Nest from Key Research Literature

Chapter 1. Positioning AHSUNC and the Mouse Milieu

*The woolly fabric I unravel is drawn from an ecology that has generated a
particular social program and its evaluation. My research process and
interpretations—the nest-building from salvaged wool—are traced here through
their provenance.*

I was privileged to work with the Government of Canada's Aboriginal Head Start (AHS)
programs from 1995 until my retirement in 2009.[3] As evaluation/policy analyst, I managed
national program evaluation projects that included the development of an innovative, culturally
responsive impact evaluation design. I contend that the AHS evaluations and their course of
development are instructive models for evaluating Indigenous and other early intervention
programs. Accordingly, my doctoral study describes and analyzes the development phase of the
2006 Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities national impact evaluation. I
identify what I see as foundational policies and assumptions guiding its design and development,
and analyze their intents, nuances, and implications as I interpret them. I propose that the
research findings will contribute to early childhood development (ECD) discourse and advance
support and application of culturally responsive practice in Indigenous early childhood programs,
and their evaluations.

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) has been judged
to be a highly successful Canadian early intervention program for ***Aboriginal*** preschool children
and their families (Anyana, 2014; Ball, 2008; Budgell & Robertson, 2003; Chalmers, 2006;
Doherty, 2007; Health Canada, 2001, 2002; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012a, 2012b).
The program is ***culturally based*** and ***locally controlled***, serving Métis, Inuit, and First Nations

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[3] Disclaimer: The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada or the
Public Health Agency of Canada.

off-reserve communities. A sister program, Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, serves First

Nations children and families living on reserves, operating separately but with similar objectives

and programming.

AHSUNC was launched by Health Canada in 1995 as a four-year pilot, or demonstration

project.[4] In 2006, AHSUNC moved to the Centre for Health Promotion within the newly created

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). It now has ongoing funding support through PHAC.

AHS On Reserve, started in 1998, is funded by Health Canada.

The federal government requires that their funded programs demonstrate success for

targeted outcomes to qualify for continuing funding. AHSUNC was required by the 1995

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBCS) to conduct periodic formative evaluations

(process and administrative) and a national summative (impact) evaluation. Formative and

summative evaluations have subsequently been conducted at the local, regional, and national

levels. Below I describe the national impact evaluation that took place between 2003 and 2006.

The AHSUNC National Impact Evaluation: 2003–2006

The evaluation took place in ten communities to describe program impact and changes in

participating children, families, and communities in the six program areas: culture and language;

education; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parental involvement. Federal

program administrators and an impact evaluation team affirmed a commitment to the AHS

mandate (Evaluation Consultants, 1997; Health Canada, 1995, 1998) to ensure local Aboriginal

community and parent/guardian involvement in the evaluation of the program. Accordingly, the

evaluation design used a participatory and culturally responsive approach. Accountability to

participating families and communities and the broader Aboriginal community, as well as to

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[4] In the early years Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities was sometimes referred to by the government as the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative; also, just AHS.

federal requirements, was a major consideration for the evaluation design and dissemination of the findings.

Throughout the development phase of the impact evaluation (1999–2003), I worked with a team of seven Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who held collective expertise in early childhood development, program evaluation, and Aboriginal culture to design a culturally responsive impact evaluation.[5] The ensuing design was piloted in five representative sites prior to the two-year impact study. Chapter 7 details the development phase, which is germane to the central questions in my research.

AHSUNC communities and sites are culturally and demographically diverse. The national impact study, in recognizing this diversity, adopted a multisite evaluation approach[6], particularly in the hiring of the evaluators, and in the appraisal of outcomes. Community members drew on Indigenous knowledge and regional conventions to develop or adapt appropriate indicators of program success and guidelines for methodology and interpretation of research findings. As stated by Eisenberg (2002), "evidence is an important part, but not the only part of effective decision-making. The use of evidence is most successful when local differences are factored into the decision-making process, whether at the clinical, system, or policy level" (p. 167). Greer (1988) contends that "in all communities the 'results' which the majority are watching are not in the distant and confusing findings of the literature but those in their local communities" (p. 6).

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[5] The tool development team members were Richard Budgell, Anne Chabot, Carol Rowan, Hillel Goelman, Lynne Robertson, Debra Wright, Jean Woods, and artist Leo Yerxa.

[6] Multisite evaluations recognize local differences with a view that individual uniqueness and particularization contribute to understanding the evaluation issue.

The Importance of Probing Cultural Responsiveness in this Study

       Seeking a common understanding of culture.

       In the course of my present research, and in my work with AHS and the AHSUNC evaluation, three recurring questions emerge: (a) *What is meant by culture(s)?* (b) *Whose culture?* and (c) *What do I understand by culturally appropriate/responsive?* A common understanding of *culture* is important to my study. The term refers most often to culture**s** in reference to Indigenous communities' diversities, and its denotation is germane to the key question of cultural appropriateness. References to culture as an AHS program component and evaluation indicator, and illustrations or accounts of diversity throughout this paper augment a comprehensive understanding of culture as an evaluation constituent, coupled with the following working definition for **culture**: "The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought" (Dictionary.com, 2015, "Culture in Science," para. 2). I refer to the following working definition of **culturally appropriate (sensitive, or relevant)**: "the ability of an organization or program to be effective across cultures, including the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services" (Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, 2001, p. 2).

       Within the three groups of Canadian Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), there are many discrete cultures, even within a distinct Aboriginal community, and particularly in urban areas. Hence, *culture* is inherently understood to embody *cultures* in some contexts. In my study, the application of cultural appropriateness extends beyond sensitivity to group differences to an examination of the overall evaluation methodology, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

Cultural appropriateness/responsiveness in program evaluation.

Indigenous early childhood intervention strategies call for culturally responsive design and program evaluation. Traditional evaluation methodologies for assessing early childhood development programs and participant outcomes have been shown to be not suitable for evaluating impacts on AHS children and their families, and more appropriate approaches are required (Ball, 2008; Budgell & Robertson, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2008; Greenwood, 2006; Niles, Byers, & Kreuger, 2007; Niles, Reynolds, & Nagasawa, 2006; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). The AHSUNC evaluation process is remarkable for the continuous and substantive role of Aboriginal guardianship and other culturally responsive design elements. However, a critical exploration of the evaluation could exhume assumptions, knowledge bases, omissions, or intentions that, on further reflection and analysis, appear problematic for an authentic culturally responsive model. Such findings can advance our understanding of culturally responsive ECD.

What Needs Unravelling? Statement of the Problem

Is the AHSUNC national impact evaluation approach and methodology an instructive model for impact evaluation studies on Indigenous early childhood programs? The goal of the impact evaluation was to generate evidence-based outcomes using culturally appropriate tools and methodology. In this study I examine the efficacy of that undertaking and its implications for future research by returning to the development phase and subsequent evaluation process to re-examine their foundational assumptions and influences. Throughout, I pay particular attention to national policies and trends that affect the provision and course of Canadian early childhood intervention programs. My research focuses on two themes, which I identify as foundational and contentious in the research literature on Indigenous early childhood: (a) conceptions of school readiness that inform programming and evaluation methodology; and (b) cultural

appropriateness. The course of the impact evaluation addresses these thematic issues, among other considerations, notwithstanding federal government accountability requirements.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in a number of ways, having potential to contribute to (a) program and child assessments in Indigenous ECD, (b) critical early childhood studies discourses on equity and diversity (Curry & Cannella, 2013), particularly as they relate to early intervention programs and to program evaluation, and (c) ascertaining the relationships among programs, policies, and evaluation. As well, the participatory, multisite, mixed method evaluation approach that is described and analyzed in the study puts forward options for ECD program planners and evaluators.

Contributions to social justice and early childhood development.

Early childhood development, education, and care have gained prominence as matters of social and educational concern in the past 25 years, capturing the interest of economic, educational, health, and social researchers around the world (Friendly, Rothman, & Oloman, 1991; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004; Peters, 1999; UNESCO,1990, 2007). In Canada, research on the significance of early brain development (Hertzman, 2004; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007; Mustard, 2010) and early intervention outcomes (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Centre, 1999; Hertzman, 1994; Peters, 1999; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Schweinhart et al., 2005) has influenced governments, health professionals, parents, social activists, and educators to support additional resources for early childhood programs (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009). The World Health Organization (Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2007) speaks to the importance of early experience as a global concern: "What children experience in their early years sets a *crucial*

foundation for their entire lifecourse. This is because ECD including health, physical, emotional and cognitive/language domains—strongly influences basic learning, school success, economic participation, social citizenry and health" (p. 3, emphasis in original). As increasing numbers of mainstream and Indigenous families make use of these programs (Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009), funders, providers, consumers, and researchers require evidence that they are of high quality and that public trust and investment is generating the anticipated positive outcomes for participating children (Cleveland, Colley, Friendly, & Lero, 2003; MacNaughton, 2004).

Prior to AHS (before 1996) most Aboriginal families in urban or northern communities did not have access to ECD programs that contributed to optimal development for all children. In addressing the inequality of resources in this case, social justice comprises democratization— moving beyond accessibility to include high quality, comprehensive, culturally appropriate programs that attend to community control, in concert with their diversity and distinct community strengths and challenges.

Contributions to evaluations of Indigenous and other ECD programs.

Evaluations of intervention programs targeted for children and families with identified lifecourse risk factors are of foremost importance. Assumptions based on mainstream approaches and interpretations were constantly challenged throughout the AHSUNC impact evaluation development and operational processes—accordingly generating some innovative, constructive resolutions.

This study contributes to discourses on Indigenous early childhood intervention program evaluations and on considerations for school readiness as an outcome for these programs. It provides a reference model for similar studies including Indigenous, immigrant, and mainstream children. As well, it examines the relationship between related policy, program development, and

program evaluation in Canada and other countries. My study supports a cultural and cross-cultural perspective in designing and evaluating ECD programs for all children. Kağitçibaşi (2007) explains the benefits of a cross-cultural perspective:

> The theory-testing potential of cross-cultural research is important; any psychological theory claiming universality must be demonstrated to hold cross-culturally. Cross-cultural research helps disentangle variables highly associated in one culture by going to another society where this is less so. Cross-cultural study also works as a *corrective* for the researcher's ethnocentrism, thus, contributing to a 'sensitization to culture.' (pp. 23–24, emphasis added)

The argument for cross-cultural study has relevance in considerations of evaluation tools and methodology and the interpretations of outcomes. Universal appropriateness of shared approaches, indicators, and interpretations cannot be assumed; accordingly, a cross-cultural corrective suggests two pertinent applications: examining commonalities and differences in artefacts of (a) Canadian Aboriginal Peoples' versus mainstream cultures, and (b) intra-ethnic differences within Aboriginal groups.

Currently, many Indigenous scholars and others conducting cross-cultural research are developing new approaches and methodologies for conducting research and interpreting and disseminating findings. I refer to their work throughout my study and, correspondingly, am moved by their arguments to appreciate their distinctive research approaches and to consider their models in conducting my own study.

Next, I present a background summary of AHSUNC, the program rationale, and the prominence and principle of Aboriginal participation. I introduce concepts of meaningful leadership and participation by Aboriginal people in AHS, and the argument for an Aboriginal-controlled, culturally based early intervention program.

Provenance: The AHSUNC Creation Story

The rationale for AHSUNC grew from community demands and extensive evidence of health, social, economic, and educational disparities in outcomes and status for Canadian Aboriginal people, who are still at higher risk for almost all social determinants of health than the general population (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2004; Greenwood, 2005; Kue Young, 1994; Waldram, Herring, & Kue Young, 1995, 2006). The program began as a Liberal Party election commitment to initiate an AHS program for preschool Aboriginal children and their parents, "to be designed and controlled by Aboriginal peoples at the community level and [incorporating] a culture and language component" (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993, p. 83).[7] The goal of the AHSUNC initiative was "to demonstrate that locally controlled and designed early intervention strategies can provide Aboriginal preschool children . . . with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning and opportunities to develop fully and successfully as young people" (Health Canada, 1998, p. 9).

U.S. Head Start influence.

AHSUNC was inspired by the Head Start program in the United States (Budgell & Robertson, 2003), started in 1965 to tackle the systematic cycle of poverty, in part, by providing comprehensive ECD intervention programs for underpriveleged communities. Extensive research and evaluation of Head Start demonstrated that program participation produced positive outcomes for participants, and the program showed strong cost-benefit results on the financial investment (Schweinhart, 1994). Health Canada consulted with U.S. Head Start principals in the planning stages (E. Zigler, personal communication, June 2006), and the structure of AHSUNC

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[7] The Liberal Aboriginal Caucus developed and authored Red Book sections on Aboriginal Peoples (Chapter 7) and AHS (Chapter 5). Marilyn Buffalo and David Nahwegahbow co-chaired the 1986 Caucus (M. Buffalo, personal communication, 2012).

was strongly influenced by the U.S. model. A significant distinction is Canada's focus on Aboriginal participation and the imperative culture and language component, to be detailed in Chapter 7.

Continuous Aboriginal involvement.

A prominent feature of AHSUNC and its evaluation lies in the significant involvement of Aboriginal people at each stage, as evidenced in its origins, development, management, and operations (see Table 1, pp. 33-34). Genesis and narratives that promoted this approach can be traced in part to concerns voiced, notably, by the National Indian Brotherhood's (1972) *Indian Control of Indian Education* and through Aboriginal child care advocates (Assembly of First Nations,[8] 1989, Native Council of Canada,[9] 1990, both cited in Greenwood & Shawana, 2000) and augmentation of Aboriginal partnership, involvement, and control in other social, business, and political areas (e.g., Blue Quills First Nations College in 1971 [Blue Quills, n.d.], Indian Health Transfer Policy in 1979 [Health Canada, 2014]).

Through the 1970s and 1980s there was increasing awareness, concern, and discussion about cultural genocide and its consequences by social scientists and practitioners, Indigenous Peoples, and social activists (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986; Battiste, 1995; Haig-Brown, 1989/2006). The legacy of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS)[10] is severed Indigenous education and parenting practices, attributable to assimilationist policies, racism, abuse, and dishonour (Goulet, Dressyman-Lavalee, & McCleod, 2001; Haig-Brown, 1989/2006; Highway, 1989, in York, 1990). Advocates for child care services for Aboriginal children (including day

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[8] Formerly the National Indian Brotherhood (1968–1982).

[9] Native Council of Canada is now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.

[10] From the 1870s to the last closure in 1996, about 150,000 Canadian First Nations, Inuit, and some Métis children were removed from their communities and forced to attend IRS (Government of Canada, 2010b).

care and child apprehension / foster care) are conscious of that legacy, and argue for Aboriginal

control and culturally responsive programs to contribute to redressing and healing communities

(Blackstock, Bruyere, & Moreau, 2006; Greenwood, 2011).

The Hawthorn Reports.

In 1963 the government commissioned a study on the social conditions of Aboriginal

Peoples across Canada. The ensuing 1966 and 1967 Hawthorn reports concluded that

> Aboriginal peoples were Canada's most disadvantaged and marginalized
> population. They were 'citizens minus.' Hawthorn attributed this situation to
> years of failed government policy, particularly the residential school system,
> which left students unprepared for participation in the contemporary economy.
> Hawthorn recommended that Aboriginal peoples be considered 'citizens plus' and
> be provided with the opportunities and resources to choose their own lifestyles,
> whether within reserve communities or elsewhere. He also advocated ending all
> forced assimilation programs, especially the residential schools. (First Nations
> Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009)

The government, in response to these findings, issued a policy paper (the 1969 White

Paper) that incensed Aboriginal people, especially First Nations, and led them to organize and

rebut the policy recommendations. For Aboriginal people, this period was the dawn of a new

direction and potency in rights advocacy.

Attributes of *Indian Control of Indian Education* in Aboriginal ECD programs.

In 1969 the government of Canada published its White Paper on Indian policy

(Government of Canada, 2010a), a policy paper recommending that, in the spirit of equality for

all citizens, and a just society, the special status and treaty rights specified in the Indian Act

should be abolished. In response, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), formed in 1968,

lobbied along with its regional counterparts for sustained Indian rights, and promoted Indian

control to Indian communities. Fuelled by the provisions of the White Paper, in 1972 the NIB

generated a policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE), which outlined the

organization's position, and made recommendations to transform Indian education, which was,

and continues to be, the responsibility of the federal department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)[11]. ICIE, composed from submissions from regional organizations and other extensive research, raised awareness in Aboriginal communities and opened dialogue with the government about self-determination / Indian control, particularly regarding social and economic programs (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Government of Canada, 2010; Kirkness, 2013[12]). The model for developing the policy recommendations (regional participation / input and sound research) is germane to AHS program and evaluation activities, as are some of the language and intentions of the ICIE proposals.

Most of the authors and contributors to the 1972 ICIE document were former students[13] or contemporaries of the Canadian IRS system, and consequently had deep-rooted appreciation of its resulting intergenerational effects and devastating squandering of human potential (L. Yerxa, personal communication, 2014). While the NIB document addressed education policies of Status Indians, its messages regarding culture and identity have resonance for other Aboriginal groups. I first read the following powerful quote in the late 1970s; it influenced me to adopt a stance in support of culturally based child care and education in my work with Native communities.

> Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people,
> their language and customs, he will never really know himself or his potential as a
> human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of
> mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The
> lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce &

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[11] As of 2013 INAC was renamed the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

[12] Kirkness (pp. 67–97) provides an informative account of her involvement provincially and nationally in ICIE.

[13] Former students and graduates of IRS are commonly referred to as survivors.

contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 9)

ICIE addresses cultural competency beyond the tribal classroom, recognizing that requisite change must take place at societal and individual levels, as stated in the following proposals:

> 1.6.3. Federal, provincial and territorial governments, school boards/divisions, and learning institutions will ensure that all First Nations learners receive culturally and linguistically appropriate support services.
>
> 1.6.4. Federal, provincial and territorial governments, school boards/divisions and learning institutions shall develop and implement on-going anti-racism programs and cross-cultural education and training to ensure that all people in Canada have a high level of cultural competency regarding Indigenous peoples. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 8)

Further to stating the NIB position on cultural competency and local control, ICIE advocates parental responsibilities in directing education and recommends "eliminating the use of I.Q. and standardized tests for Indian children [because it] has been shown that these tests do not truly reflect the intelligence of children belonging to minority, ethnic or other cultural backgrounds" (p. 10). This view, shared by many but not all contributors to the AHS evaluation methodology, is taken up further in the discussions on tool development in Chapter 7.

The document's momentum has persisted, even though its recommendations were not adopted by the federal government; both its contents and its spirit continued to influence future initiatives and visions, both for Status Indians and for the broader Aboriginal and other activist communities. Here is social constructivism at work on the collective psyche—transformed to praxis!

Aboriginal control and cultural responsiveness as goals for Aboriginal ECD programs.

The 1986 National Task Force on Child Care, headed by Katie Cooke, gave nationwide recognition to the need for Native child care both on and off reserve. The Cooke report stated that high-quality urban child care services for Native families would support parents to pursue employment and education, would facilitate cultural adjustment for those entering non-Native environments, and would help preserve Native language and culture (Status of Women, 1986). In making these recommendations, the task force drew on testimony from over 200 briefs, including submissions from Native Friendship Centres and Inuit and First Nations communities and organizations.

National Aboriginal Organizations were vocal about the need for Aboriginal ECD programs. The Assembly of First Nations' *National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care* (1989, cited in Greenwood & Shawana, 2000) and the Native Council of Canada's *Native Child Care: The Circle of Care* (1990, cited in Greenwood & Shawana, 2000) viewed child day care—on and off reserve respectively—as potential vehicles for social change and cultural transmission. Greenwood and Shawana (2000) provide a detailed examination of "the social, political and historical context of First Nations communities relative to the establishment of child care services" (p. 3), including the following: "First Nations envisage a major role for child care in undoing the damage already done . . . child care centres as foci for family healing and the nuclei for community health in the best sense of the word" (Assembly of First Nations, 1989, in Greenwood & Shawana, 2000, p. 20). The Native Council of Canada's 1990 report states: "A culturally relevant child day care is crucial for the preservation of First Nations children's languages, traditions, and identity. Child day care can be a vehicle through which cultures can be

retained and transmitted from generation to generation" (cited in Greenwood & Shawana, 2000, p. 35).

As the rationale for Aboriginal child care took root in communities and at different levels of government, two logical corollaries were evident which can be seen in the later developed ECD programs such as Aboriginal Head Start. First, a program for Aboriginal young children should be designed and operated by Aboriginal people; second, such programming would be culturally responsive. These same principles guided AHS development and operations and contributed to shaping the *Aboriginal Head Start Principles and Guidelines* (Health Canada, 1998) and *Aboriginal Head Start in Northern and Urban Communities Evaluation Framework* (Evaluation Consultants, Health Canada, 1997).

Canadian ECD programs for Aboriginal children prior to 1995: A cultural focus.

In this section I review some of the early Aboriginal ECD endeavours that predated the AHS program and contributed to a vision of culturally based services for young children. Aboriginal child care advocacy and programs contributed to the foundation for an emerging interest in other culturally based ECD programs by developing principles and philosophies that affirmed their distinctive interests. For example, in 1981 the Saskatchewan Native Women's Association received provincial funding to support a Native Planning Group to study and report on day care issues specific to urban Native communities. The group defined Native day care to include

> Native controlled boards, majority bilingual native staff, Indian used as the
> primary language on a daily basis, ongoing programming drawing from native
> philosophy, values, goals as well as legends, games, songs, art, etc., and the goal
> of the centre being the creation of the child's strong native identity. (Martin &
> Cuthand, 1983, p. 9)

While Aboriginal ECD in the 1980s emphasized the need for culturally based child care, there was also a growing need for comprehensive early learning programs. Some urban,

community-based ECD programs available for low-income families, such as Central Regina

Early Learning Centre (started in 1977), and various provincially funded community school

preschools responded to the cultures and expressed wishes of their participants by including

Aboriginal staff and cultural material in their programs (A. Luke, personal communication,

2010).

An unpublished document[14] describing day care services for Indians on reserves ("Day

Care Services," 1986) references an Ontario study that reiterated the significance of the cultural

focus, and it notes the developmental objective as well: "The main motivation for establishing

day cares seems to be to provide stimulation and development experience for the children and to

offer an opportunity for exposure to the native culture and language" (p. 8)—a practical

expression of community values.

Between 1964 and 1995 I worked in Saskatchewan as a social worker, day care program

consultant, and early childhood curriculum developer and taught in Native ECD and teacher

education programs (TEP). At this time, when urban communities were establishing Native

Survival Schools and universities were offering dedicated TEP for Aboriginal students, culturally

based programs for young children were developed as well. Saskatchewan ECD programs I was

involved in include (a) E-Tahkanawasot Infant Care Centre, located in the Saskatoon Native

Survival School; (b) the Preschool Aboriginal Language Nest project, sponsored by the

Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre; (c) First Nations Child Development Centre, a Native

child care centre; (d) Maggie's Infant Care Centre; (e) The Meadow Lake Tribal Council ECCD

training project (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood-Church, Opekokew, & Mulligan, 1992), an early

childhood curriculum development and training program for First Nations; and (f) the Gabriel

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[14] From the collection of Dr. Judith Martin, founding chair of the Canadian Day Care Advocacy
Association.

Dumont Institute Early Childhood Training Program. All of these programs had strong cultural and parental involvement and Aboriginal leadership/ownership components, signalling movement toward a culturally based ECD model for Aboriginal children and families.

AHSUNC start-up phase.

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative was introduced by the federal government in January 1994. AHSUNC was the third of a trio of Health Canada community-based initiatives for young children. The other two, Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP), also provide programs in some Aboriginal communities. Following Cabinet approval in June 1994, Health Canada consulted with National Aboriginal Organizations[15], provincial and territorial governments, parents, and educators on the design and implementation of the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative. Cabinet approved the design and implementation plans in December 1994 (Health Canada, 1995). The 1994 Speech from the Throne (Marleau, 1994) referred to the Aboriginal community involvement, cultural and linguistic sensitivities, and health and poverty intervention features of the proposed AHSUNC program (see Chapter 6). In Canada, education is a provincial/territorial matter, as are most programs for Aboriginal people living off reserve. Health is a federal concern, and occasionally programs targeting determinants of health (discussed in Chapter 6) include educational, ECD, and cultural components; accordingly, AHS was a responsibility of Health Canada.

AHSUNC addressed these issues through the six program components, which work together in a comprehensive, holistic model that supports the physical, emotional, spiritual, and

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[15] The five national Aboriginal organizations were the Assembly of First Nations, Métis Council of Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Native Women's Association of Canada, and Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.

intellectual growth of preschool children and provides supports to their families. There are no costs to families, and most programs provide meals and transportation.

Although terms such as *partnerships, consultations,* and *participation* are common in business and government phraseology, actual transactions are sometimes neither equitable nor meaningful. AHS program developers worked to ensure meaningful Aboriginal community involvement. With reference to Aboriginal involvement, a subsequent Health Canada publication includes the following directives in the AHS mandate: "[Make] sure parents/caregivers play a key role in the planning, development, operation and evaluation of the program" and "Make sure the local Aboriginal community is involved in the planning, development, operation and evaluation of the program" (Minister of National Health and Welfare, 1995). These principles were adhered to, as illustrated in the following table documenting the range of formal Aboriginal involvement in AHS over the period 1994 to 2006. Table 1.1 shows the breadth and substance of Aboriginal participation at each juncture of program development and operation.

Table 1.1 Aboriginal involvement in AHS, 1994–2006.

Activity	Description
Early Consultations (1994–1995)	- consultation on program design took place in 25 cities and towns - 400 representatives from provincial/territorial governments and Aboriginal organizations took part in the consultations - 300 discussion papers were distributed to organizations; 40 written responses were returned (PHAC, 2010)
1995 National Advisory Committee: National AHS Committee (NAHSC)	Aboriginal representatives with expertise in health, education, and cultural knowledge were nominated by Aboriginal organizations to manage the early development phase in partnership with Health Canada (see Table 1.2 for the names of those involved).
Aboriginal Hire by Health Canada (1995+)	National office staff and regional consultants were primarily Aboriginal, e.g., in the national office, the program manager was of Inuit/ Métis ancestry and other staff members were First Nations and Métis; the large majority of regional staff were Aboriginal.
Regional (Provincial/Territorial) Advisory Committees (RAC) (1995–1996)	The original regional committees, made up of representatives from Aboriginal organizations, took part in regional site selection and distribution of funds. Once projects were established, site representatives formed the RACs.
Regional (Provincial/Territorial) Advisory Committees (1996+)	One representative from each site meets colleagues on a regular basis to discuss matters of regional concern. Members are generally either site

	directors or representatives from the sponsoring organization.
National Aboriginal Head Start Council (NAHSC; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010)	Evolved from 1995 NAHSC once sites were developed. Made up of one representative from each region, nominated by AHS regional committees. Two Health Canada representatives attend the meetings.
Development of AHS Principles and Guidelines (PG; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010)	An Aboriginal consultant (Valerie Galley) developed the PG based on cross-country consultations with AHS sponsors, staff, and parents. AHS sites reviewed draft PG documents.
Elder participation	Regional/territorial Elders open, close, and participate in all national meetings and gatherings; they are also prominent in regional and local meetings and in AHS classrooms and site activities.
Sponsorship	AHS sites are sponsored by local Aboriginal organizations, e.g., Friendship Centres, Métis Nation organizations, tribal councils, Inuit organizations.
Site staff	More than 85% of AHS staff are Aboriginal (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010); PG state: "ensure that preference is given to Aboriginal people for staffing; fill the positions with qualified people in cases where a shortage of qualified Aboriginal staff members exists; place emphasis on training of Aboriginal candidates" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010).
Evaluation Framework	Six Indigenous consultants with related expertise (Maggie Hodgson, Harvey McCue, Gordon Polson, Jeff Reading, Kim Scott, and Paulette Tremblay) developed the framework with community consultation. See Evaluation Framework for details (Evaluation Consultants, 1997).
Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)	Each site has a PAC; involvement varies site to site.
Parental Involvement	Parental involvement is mandated. Parent participation includes parenting and other related classes as well as site-varied classroom participation, etc.
Contractors	Generally, Aboriginal firms and individuals are contracted for AHS activities, e.g., for studies and reports; managing and delivering workshops and training sessions; managing site exchanges; evaluation activities; printing and design.

Table 1.2 Members of national AHS advisory committee, 1995.

Original NAHSC Members	Resource People
Claudette Dumont-Smith (Quebec NAHSC member)	Sophie Tuglavina (Labrador resource person)
Sylvia Maracle (Ontario NAHSC member & Chair)	Doreen Joe (New Brunswick resource person)
Marilyn Miller (Ontario NAHSC person)	Edith Cloutier (Quebec resource person)
Reid Hartry (Manitoba NAHSC member)	Lillian Isbister (Sask resource person)
Dr. Jean Goodwill (Sask NAHSC member)	Margo Greenwood (British Columbia resource person)
Carol Fraser (Alberta NAHSC member)	
Audrey Weasel-Traveller (Alberta NAHSC member)	**Ex-Officio**
Jarvis Gray (BC NAHSC member)	Richard Budgell (AHSUNC Program Manager)
Murline Browning (BC NAHSC & Co-Chair)	Esther Kwavnick (Associate Director, DCA)
Leena Evic-Twerdin (NWT NAHSC member)	Yvette Mongeon (RD, Quebec Region)
Winnifred Peterson (Yukon NAHSC member)	

AHSUNC Demographics

The urban and northern communities referred to by the AHSUNC program includes small

and large off-reserve communities throughout Canada. AHSUNC encompasses all provincial

sites and AHSUNC sites in the Yukon, Northwest, and Nunavut Territories, many being located

in isolated or remote settlements. In 2005–2006 the program served approximately 4500[16]

children in 128 sites (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Participant profiles have remained

consistent over the years. In 2001, five years after the start-up of the program, approximately

51% of the participating children were First Nations, 23% Métis, 22% Inuit, and 2% non-

Aboriginal[17] (Health Canada, 2002). Close to 80% of urban participants were First Nations; 46%

in remote areas were Inuit (Health Canada, 2001). About 85% of AHSUNC children were

between the ages of 3 and 5 (Health Canada, 2002). There were 41,915 3- to 5-year-old

Aboriginal children living in urban and northern communities in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 1998).

Because the program resources can accommodate less than 10% of eligible 3- to 5-year-old

children (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2006), many communities

prioritize enrollment for children considered to have the greatest need for a developmental

program, based on socioeconomic status and other identified risk factors. In some smaller

communities there is a wider range of participant characteristics because there are enough spaces

for all local children to attend.

AHSUNC Programs

A typical program is centre based and enrolls 3- and 4-year old children for three hours a

day, four days a week. Some communities have different service models (Health Canada, 2001,

2002). For example, some sites in smaller communities combine child care and AHSUNC

services. Where there are high numbers of eligible children and limited resources, some elect to

enroll only 4-year-olds, twice a week, to provide school readiness opportunities to all local

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[16] The Statistics Canada Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006: Family, Community and Child Care
(Statistics Canada, 2006) reports 47,000 First Nations children under age six living off-reserve; 35,000
Métis and 7000 Inuit (total 89,000). See additional features in Statistics Canada 2008 reference:
http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080115/dq080115a-eng.htm.

[17] In some small, isolated, or remote areas all community children are considered eligible, for example,
children of non-Aboriginal teachers, nurses, or RCMP members.

children. A few programs enroll younger children and their caregivers, emphasizing building of parenting skills.

One typical program, Regina's Come 'n' Learn AHS (2014), serves about 120 3- to 5-year-old children and their families. The centre is located in north-central Regina, which has close to 40% Aboriginal population (3,590 in 2006; City of Regina, 2006). Come 'n' Learn has four classrooms, a well-equipped kitchen and dining area, and an outdoor play space, as well as offices and meeting space. Participating children are picked up and delivered to and from their homes for their half-day program, which is based on the six AHS components. Culturally, the majority of the children come from Cree, Saulteaux, Lakota, and Métis heritage. Cree is the main Aboriginal teaching language used because the majority of the children have Cree heritage. Pow-wow dancing (e.g., round dance, grass dancing), jigging, and many other cultural activities are part of the regular schedule, as well as a readiness-to-learn focus. Active community partnerships, particularly with health and social agencies, provide additional support to children, families, and program, and regular Elder and parent participation enhances the program.

ECD Intervention Programs for Indigenous Children

AHSUNC is described as an early intervention strategy—a comprehensive early intervention program designed to advance health and social outcomes for Aboriginal participants (Health Canada, 1995). The program components aim to contribute to healthy child development and positive effects for parents and communities. From the outset, program evaluation was required for accountability and program improvement. ECD intervention programs typically have particular responsibilities for accountability to participants and funders due to the vulnerabilities of the participants and the high programming costs.

Delineating intervention.

Niles et al. (2007) refer to early childhood intervention strategies as providing multidisciplinary services to developmentally vulnerable or disabled preschool children and their families, based on the assumption that early educational and social enrichment can compensate for disadvantages attributed to poverty issues. Kağitçibaşi (2007) refers to "early enrichment to promote better child development and competence" (p. 241), and claims that ECD "assumes great value for the low-SES[18] context in counteracting the adverse affects of that context" (p. 242). *Intervention* terminology and its associated assumptions shape program goals, curricula, and evaluations. Kağitçibaşi generally refers to *enrichment*, which suggests to me the possibilities of building on existing strengths, whereas intervention suggests replacing or altering an unacceptable status quo.

Edwards (1999) maintains that recent theoretical "models of resiliency, capacity development, meaningful participation in society, and social cohesion" (p. 10) contribute to a shift away from previous intervention models that focus on the relationship between health determinants and disease (or dysfunction) to causal links between determinants and health, which has correspondence with Kağitçibaşi's argument for enrichment rather than intervention. I see AHS and its evaluation as balanced in transition between the two. In my experience, critics of the often condescending disease/deficit model promote a strength-based approach to the program and its evaluation that is anchored, in part, in a constructive and revisionist view of Aboriginal communities and their capabilities and resources. However, arguments justifying AHS program support by governments rely on evidence-based research and statistics that illustrate (a) the disproportionately low health and social outcomes for Aboriginal populations,

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[18] SES: social economic or socioeconomic status.

and (b) that the said intervention program is effective in reducing these population variances. Influencial American longitudinal evaluations show the economic and social power of intervention through high-quality ECD programs for children at risk (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Centre, 1999; Reynolds et al., 2001; Schweinhart et al., 2005), which has induced U.S. governments to continue funding early intervention programs.

I would argue that *enrichment* is more than a euphemism for *intervention*, and that both concepts are important to early childhood program rationale and design targeting vulnerable populations. The crucial point is that the purpose and desired outcomes, design, and methodology require comprehensive and critical examination, particularly because, in a sense, any mode of schooling in all social, economic, and ethnic groups could be considered a social intervention.

Kağitçibaşi's and Niles's interpretations appear to be consistent with Health Canada's position (Marleau, 1994), also reflected in remarks by Secretary of State Hon. Sheila Finestone and MP Beryl Gaffney (Canada, 1994) identifying Head Start's potential to address poverty, future independence, and economic well-being in Aboriginal communities (See Chapter 6).

Intervention programs for Indigenous children necessitate additional considerations associated with historical, political, and cultural distinctions (Ball, 2008; Greenwood, 2006; Greenwood & Shawana, 2000; Niles el al., 2007). For AHSUNC participants, the intervention means access to a culturally based, comprehensive ECD program, building on various capacities in Aboriginal children, families, and communities toward constructive health, educational, and other social outcomes. In most communities, such resources were previously unavailable or inaccessible.

Population health approach.

The Government of Canada addresses the special status and needs of Aboriginal children and their families, in part, using a population health and determinants of health approach (discussed further in Chapter 6). Most ECD intervention programs are framed in poverty reduction, educational support, or culture/native language enrichment (e.g., U.S. Head Start, Hawaiian and Maori language nests[19], special needs programs). The broad considerations of what is called a population health approach encompass all three of these elements. According to PHAC (2001), "the population health approach recognizes that health is a capacity or resource rather than a state, a definition which corresponds more to the notion of being able to pursue one's goals, to acquire skills and education, and to grow" (para. 2). This approach is integral to the AHSUNC program and evaluation design.

Clearly, it is beyond the capacity of a comprehensive ECD program to eliminate poverty or personal and structural racism. The goal for AHS is to support children's development and competence to facilitate positive health and social outcomes. Recognizing that additional community and policy contributions to constructive growth are required, the goal in AHS impact evaluation is to assess and describe positive program contributions and to identify gaps and challenges to meeting these outcomes.

School readiness as an intervention outcome.

One way to consider the participating children's developmental status and progress in early education programs is to assess their readiness for kindergarten or school. Children who begin school significantly behind their peers generally stay behind, and the gap widens through the years (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). Because school readiness is "shown to be predictive

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[19] A language nest is a total immersion-based approach to culture and language revitalization where older language speakers introduce language and culture in early education settings.

of virtually every educational benchmark" (p. 21), preschool intervention programs for vulnerable children aim to redress the readiness gap. However, defining and evaluating school readiness as an indicator of program success is problematic because "evidence" of children's readiness status is generally ascertained in reference to locally developed or standardized testing scores. The program evaluation challenges are shown throughout this paper to be compounded in Aboriginal or cross-culture preschool settings.

Community perspectives.

The ECD and TEP students I taught, most of whom were themselves parents, told their stories of trauma in entering mainstream schools without the knowledge and skills their white schoolmates brought with them. They did not want this experience for their own children, and they saw preschools that focused on "numbers and alphabets" as the bridge between their families or communities and the schools. Some of them envisioned Aboriginal classrooms or schools that reflected their own cultural experiences. As I was teaching in 1992, the 500th anniversary of "The Invasion" by Europeans, I saw a heightened consciousness of the effects of cultural loss, or genocide, which fuelled students' support for education's role in strengthening Aboriginal identity and cultural revitalization. Returning, then, to an Indigenous ECD intervention program, the cultural base, and the education, or school readiness, component have high community value. These two themes were repeated throughout AHSUNC community consultations for program design and impact evaluation indicators of program success (Evaluation Consultants, 1997). As well, Budgell and Robertson reviewed these themes and indicators with participants at the 1999 AHSUNC national training conference who corroborated the 1996–1997 consultation priorities.

As an early childhood educator, I was not comfortable with the community concepts of readiness to learn equated with "alphabets and numbers" rather than the precursory social and early literacy and math skills. Years later I still support a more developmental and holistic readiness assessment, but I decode the parents' and community members' words to be speaking more about social and cultural capital than curriculum details.

A holistic school readiness model.

Zigler, Gilliam, and Jones (2006) address the controversy over the broad ecological perspective of school readiness versus the narrow academically oriented view, and recommend a whole child model. They argue that school readiness is a set of skills and attributes required for optimum kindergarten and school success, in which socioemotional skills make a significant contribution. In Chapter 7, I explore various understandings of school readiness for Aboriginal children, and their influence in designing AHSUNC impact indicators and outcome interpretations. However, the AHSUNC evaluation did not include local or standardized school readiness tests or checklists as program impact tools because they were deemed inappropriate; children's gains were the focus for child outcomes. Demonstrating or providing an evidence base to show that all AHSUNC components are successfully implemented with both positive immediate outcomes and lasting and significant effects is a challenge, particularly in a program where six components operate in concert with a number of site variables.

Indigenous ECD research and program evaluation.

There is a dearth of research on early education programs for Canadian Indigenous children and little has been written about evaluation of those programs. I suggest that, in part, this is because there are few of these programs, and the challenges in researching and evaluating

them are complex. In her examination of Canadian ECD **targeted programs** for vulnerable

families, Gillian Doherty (2007) refers to issues of concern to many Aboriginal families:

> A robust body of Canadian research documents that children living in a low-income family, a family that is Aboriginal, and/or a family whose home language is other than that used in the community at large are less likely to enter school with the skills required to take advantage of what it offers. (p. 6)

However, research demonstrating effective strategies to moderate the effects of early

disadvantage is scant. Local and regional studies and program evaluations on effects of

AHSUNC participation, notably the Western Arctic Aboriginal Head Start Council longitudinal

study (Chalmers, 2006), Alberta AHSUNC pilot study (de la Cruz & McCarthy, 2010), and

Mashford-Pringle's Northern Ontario AHSUNC study (2008), report positive intermediate

outcomes for participants and identify program and methodological challenges. Positive trends

include average or above average median scores for school achievement and early vocabulary

and mathematics, trends toward healthier lifestyle choices, and increased Aboriginal language

and cultural knowledge and pride in heritage. Identified challenges include the limitations due to

small sample size and interprogram diversity, collecting relevant baseline data, and AHSUNC

staff time commitments. It is disconcerting to note that Kemble, in her 2013 master's research

project, when she explores *Through the Lens of Policy Texts and Statistical Representations* the

extent to which Aboriginal Head Start [On Reserve] is successful, finds:

> Following a detailed exploration of the program, this thesis concludes that the AHSOR program is unlikely to meet the program's overarching objectives. Further, this thesis concludes that this program, as a singular approach, will not be sufficient in improving the levels of educational disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. (Kemble, 2013, abstract)

Among Kemble's concerns are the lack of program analysis and program evaluation that

identify standards, and that show what and how children are taught and what the outcomes of

participation are for on-reserve children. These are good points that reaffirm the need for a comprehensive study that goes beyond identifying program contributions.

National AHSUNC administrative and process evaluations provide descriptive and statistical reports of off-reserve data (Health Canada, 2001, 2002, 2012; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002). Consistent with program principles of Aboriginal involvement at all levels, the national administrative/process evaluations were managed by Aboriginal contractors and the design and printing of reports was contracted to an Aboriginal firm. This was in keeping with the federal government's commitment to increase contracting with Aboriginal firms through its Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 1997).

More recently, in 2012, PHAC completed an internal evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of AHSUNC (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012a). Findings conclude there is a continued and growing need for AHSUNC, and that "the program has a positive effect on school readiness, specifically in improving children's language, social, motor and academic skills. Performance results have also demonstrated effectiveness in improving cultural literacy and enhanced exposure to Aboriginal languages and cultures" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012a, "Performance/Effectiveness: Finding 4," para. 1)

Two Canadian scholars who have written extensively about Indigenous ECD programs, Jessica Ball (2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Ball & Janyst 2007) and Margo Greenwood (2005, 2006, 2011; Greenwood, de Leuw, & Frazer; Greenwood & Shawana, 2000; Pence et al., 1992; Pence et al., 2007), argue for the necessity for culturally based ECD programs and discuss some of the difficulties in evaluating them. Problems they identify are broached in Chapter 7 as part of a larger discussion on AHS evaluation challenges; they are also raised by

community informants (see Chapter 8). A comprehensive review of the AHSUNC impact

evaluation approach brings a timely contribution to this discourse.

Mouse Woman Reaches into the Fire: My Research Questions and Purpose

My study is designed to describe and examine the methodology developed for the 2006

AHSUNC national impact evaluation in an effort to determine its efficacy as well as its cultural

appropriateness for evaluating Indigenous early childhood intervention programs. The

description of the development process and methodology itself is as important as the subsequent

analysis as it aims to provide both a history of the project and a model for similar studies.

An overarching research question guides my study: *Is the AHSUNC national impact*

evaluation approach and methodology an instructive model for impact evaluation studies on

Indigenous early childhood programs? Three specific questions delineate my research question:

1. In what ways is and/or is not the design and process of the AHSUNC national impact evaluation culturally appropriate vis-à-vis evaluation issues (Evaluation Consultants, Health Canada, 1997, pp. 10–12) and guidelines for conducting research in Aboriginal communities [20]?

2. How do the AHSUNC program and its evaluation contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of "school readiness" or "readiness to learn" for Indigenous children?

3. What is the relationship between government policy, program development, and program evaluation in this case?

Seeking an appropriate approach to ECD program evaluation.

A major challenge for evaluators and program participants is that mainstream or common

evaluation methods and tools for assessing early childhood programs, and the impacts on their

participants, are considered inappropriate for evaluating program effects on AHS children and

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[20] (Atkinson, 2001; Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2010; Kovach, 2009; National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2011; Smith, 1999/2012; Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2001)

families and for other early intervention programs for Indigenous children (Ball, 2008; Greenwood, 2006; Niles, Byers, & Kreuger, 2007). AHSUNC designed, piloted, and carried out a national impact evaluation that endeavoured to address problems associated with the customary approaches to early childhood program evaluation.

As national evaluation and policy analyst for AHSUNC, I was a member of the team that developed the approach and methodology for a culturally appropriate national impact evaluation. The evaluation story I took part in spans 14 years from 1995 to 2009. The evaluation's findings are publicly accessible, but the story of the development phase has not been told. I see this as a serious omission. There is a benefit for researchers, educators, AHS participants, and others to understand the principles and process guiding the design, and subsequent challenges to the design and operations. My own reflections and analysis, which are informed by the perspectives of ECD scholars and other informants, are key to the study and contribute to an assessment of the efficacy and relevance of the impact evaluation methodology. I am driven by a passion and curiosity—and a sense of responsibility—to share this story and to reconsider its implications.

Cultural relevance and school readiness: Concurrent and connected.

The story-telling process also provides me with an opportunity for critical examination of the evaluation's foundational assumptions and the subsequent rationale and activities for its design. A focus on cultural relevance and school readiness, and their relationship to one another, informs my research questions. New perspectives in ECD literature present fresh possibilities for extending my approach to culture, cross-cultural research, and critical social theory. An examination of "cultural responsiveness/appropriateness/sensitivity" is timely given recent developments for Indigenous research methodologies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010; Kağitçibaşi, 2007; Kovach, 2009; National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2011; Niles et

al., 2007; L. Smith, 1999/2012; Stewart-Harawira; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2001), and an emerging ECD reconceptualist movement (Cannella, Swadener, & Che, 2007; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Soto, 1995; Soto & Swadener, 2002).

In considering my approach, I also recognize that there is a conservative move toward accountability and universality and a focus on school readiness in early childhood education (ECE) in Canada. Nationally, there is a jurisdictional trend for early childhood programming to move from ministries of health and social development to education. This shift has significant implications for programming and assessment in preschool early intervention programs, and has particular repercussions for AHS and early education programs for Aboriginal children. Of interest and significance to this study is the current propensity to infer preschool program success through standardized testing and emphasis on narrowly defined measures of school readiness. Current debates and claims about the significance of preschool education and school readiness are discussed in the literature review (see, for example, Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones [2006]; Ready for School Goal Team [2000]) and in Chapters 7 and 8.

Significance of U.S. and overseas programs and evaluations to my study.

The U.S. Head Start Perry Preschool Study, Carolina Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centre Study are significant for their evaluation methods and findings, demonstrating positive evidence-based outcomes, and for suggesting similar expectations for the AHS impact evaluation. As well, in spite of some differences in design, AHS was initially and is currently influenced by two culturally based Indigenous language nest programs—the Hawaiian Áha Pünana Leo and New Zealand Kōhanga Reo, and their evaluation findings. These studies are summarized in Chapter 6. The more recent encouraging findings of the Turkish Early

Enrichment Project (Kağitçibaşi, 2007) provide an example of how an ECD intervention can affect national policy as a result of thoughtful and comprehensive evidence-based research.

In summary, the foundations and history of AHSUNC, the related studies, policies, literature and documents, programs, and program outcomes provide both data and forestructure for my study, knitting the pattern for the metaphorical mouse fabric.

The Role of the Researcher

> *You, as a case study investigator, need to master the intricacies of the study's substantive issues while also having the patience and dedication to collect data carefully and fairly—potentially hiding (if possible) your own substantive thoughts. (Yin, 2004, p. 4)*

As researcher, I seriously consider Yin's words, but need to re-evaluate hiding my own substantive thoughts. It is my responsibility to identify and acknowledge my thoughts as a starting point in the interpretive process and to step outside of them as required. Many of my thoughts and understandings have been based on the rhetoric of dominant views (or what was deemed politically correct) in academic, government, personal, and Aboriginal settings. To address possible preconceptions, I need to call on my own sense of responsibility, courage, and vision and to recognize and work with external contributors. For example, the metaphorical Mouse Woman becomes a role model for praxis; Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur,* or quilt maker, who uses multiple images and methodologies. These metaphors broaden my vision of the possibilities for both methodology and reporting.

Autoethnography and narrative approach.

As bricoleur, storyteller, and activist, Mouse Woman aims to document an event that has a pertinent context and a potential for praxis, and for reconceptualizing evaluation in Aboriginal ECD programs. As research narrator, and participant in the AHSUNC evaluation process, I have

attempted to clearly position myself and my assumptions and ideas at the onset of this study. In Chapter 3 I refer to my research as an interpretive inquiry. Julia Ellis contends that as interpretive inquirer "the researcher is changed by the research—that is, the researcher discovers inadequacies in his or her own initial pre-understandings" (1998, pp. 28–29). In the final chapter (Chapter 8) I articulate changes and discoveries that I experienced during the four-year research phase of my study—a major finding being the recognition that the study is as much a narrative and autoethnography as it is a record and analysis of an event and its contexts— thus my vision for interpretation and reporting is enriched.

Carolyn Ellis speaks to roles of the personal experience and activism that characterize autoethnography, and that inspire my research:

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). (Carolyn Ellis et al., 2011)

Mouse Woman as researcher and storyteller observes that by including some of her own experiences in her narrative she establishes her long-standing interest in and familiarity with her research topic. Those experiences, together with community and scholarly sources of knowledge, nurture her comprehension of the research questions and of the qualitative research process.

In Chapter 2 I describe the constructivist framework, which explicates and delves further into the qualitative research process that guides my doctoral study.

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks: Mouse Spirit and Myth

Constructivism's central idea is that human learning is constructed, that learners
build new knowledge upon the foundations of previous learning.
(Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1996, p. 1, cited in
MacNaughton, 2008, p. 41)

I situate my research in a constructivist theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner's (2005)

Bioecological Model, which describes interactive influences on human development, provides

the major conceptual framework for my study. It does so in conjunction with considerations for

an ***Indigenous Perspective***, and with critical theory, which draws attention to social justice

issues.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Historical Theory

I view the AHSUNC evaluation as a sociocultural historical construction, fashioned in a

particular time period by concurrent events, and by individuals and groups, based on their

collective knowledge and assumptions. In my study I examine the AHSUNC evaluation, a

multilayered, socially constructed artefact that I believe can be assessed critically and

reconceptualized on further examination. Such an analysis is based on the fundamental

assumptions underpinning constructivist theory.

Constructivism.

Constructivists' ontological position includes multiple realities and is relativist; they

argue that social realities are ongoing and dynamic, subject to change as their constructors

become more sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, they argue that

knowledge is socially constructed and subjective. This has important implications for research

because both the researcher and research participants create knowledge through ongoing

reciprocal interactions, transforming previous constructions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba &

Lincoln, 1994). The dynamic nature of this paradigm is in concert with a comprehensive study of the AHSUNC impact evaluation, which is informed by multiple, interactive sources. Constructivist researchers' understandings progress through interpretation and reflection in the research process. Because social realities sometimes conflict, as a constructivist researcher I employ conventional hermeneutic techniques in my interpretations, using dialectical interchange with my "participants," that is, my literature, documents, and experiences, and keep in mind that the final aim, as asserted by Guba and Lincoln (1994) "is to distil a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions" (p. 111).

Because I understand constructivist knowledge to be subjective, I am conscious of inherent individual and cultural values and their significant role in both selecting and framing my research questions, approach, and methodology, and assessing and interpreting my findings. The prominence of culture and context in construction and interpretation characterizes social constructivism and my research practice. Furthermore, a critical component is invoked in the process because knowledge is recognized as value dependent.

Vygotsky.

Dominant concepts informing my study address *ecology*—understood as the interrelationships between humans and social, economic, and political spheres—and *context.* Vygotsky's (1978) view of human development elucidates sociocultural theory: "as human beings we actively realize and change ourselves in the varied contexts of culture and history" (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978, p. 131). Through social interaction, thought, language, and reasoning processes are shaped by culturally embedded customs, engendering what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. Culture evolves in a context of historical ideas and events. Vygotsky's ideas about the role of cultural mediation in human development (Kağitçibaşi, 2007;

MacNaughton, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) are important to my study in three ways. First, they

support my research approach: Inherent in a constructivist view is the idea that social

construction inevitably implies ethics, values, and politics, calling for some critical examination

of the constituted structures. Second, they inform an understanding of culture vis-à-vis the

meaning and significance of the terms ***culturally appropriate/responsive/sustainable*** practices**.**

Third, they illustrate how diverse groups construct and comprehend knowledge differently. This

point has implications respecting the disparities in the Eurocentric scientific and Indigenous

approaches to research. According to Vygotsy (1978), cognitive and linguistic development take

place through dialogical exchange between individuals and their social environments. Extending

this concept to my constructivist view of the research, I see my own understanding developing in

my interaction with the extensive research materials.

Conceptual Framework: Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological/Bioecological Systems Model

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 2005) model provides a conceptual framework for my

research. His original model incorporates four concentric, permeable, interactive circles

representing distal to proximal impacts on human development. Variances within a distinct

representation correspond to other systemic attributes. In a later evolution of the model, he adds

a fifth, three-dimensional ring (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). I adapt Bronfenbrenner's model (Figure

2.1) as the major conceptual framework for my study, applying the AHSUNC impact evaluation

as the central concept, embedded in both mainstream and Indigenous influences.
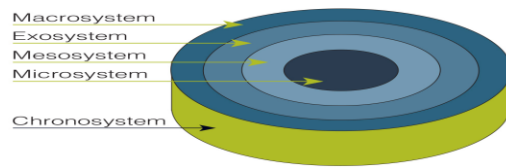
Figure 2.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Model

Bronfenbrenner's model, delineated below, incorporates the following original four components and his later additional fifth component:

1. The innermost *microsystem* is "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing the person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

2. The *mesosystem* is a set of interrelated microsystems that have a major influence on the individual's development.

3. The *exosystem* is made up of contexts that affect the individual indirectly; it is "an extention of the mesosystem embracing . . . specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which the person is found, and therby delimit, influence, or even determine what goes on there" (1977, p. 515).

4. The distal, superordinate *macrosystem* involves culture, macroinstitutions (such as the federal government), and public policy.
"The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystem characteristic of a given culture, substructure or extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems." (2005, p. 101)

5. The *chronosystem* (2005). Bronfenbrenner added the fifth system in 1990. It augments the structure by accounting for time and historical events in shaping development.

My adaptation of the model.

In my study, Bronfenbrenner's concepts of *person* and *human development* are replaced with *impact evaluation* and *impact evaluation development.* The adapted ecological system presents a framework for this study and for the AHSUNC national impact evaluation and its

development. In the adapted model, the macrosystem includes relevant global issues. The

exosystem focuses on Canada's response to global issues and on related research and evaluation

literature. The mesosystem introduces the AHS program and Aboriginal approaches to research

and evaluation. The microsystem provides an overview and details of the AHS impact

evaluation, and the chronosystem recognizes historical and local influences. Chapters 5 and 6

expand on the specifications of my adapted ecological systems model and identify their systemic

connectivity in policies, themes, or artefacts.

Table 2.1 below lists major documents, policies, and activities sited in the adapted model.

Table 2.1 Particulars of my adapted model.

System	Documents, Policies and Activities
Macrosystem *See Chapter 6*	ECD Intervention: Global • UN Convention on the Rights of the Child • UN Special Session on Children • 2000 Dakar "Framework for Action on Education for All" • UNESCO Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report Determinants of Health • WHO Overarching Beliefs • Minority rights • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

Exosystem *See Chapter 6*	ECD Intervention: Canada
	• "A Canada Fit for Children"
	• WHO response
	• Determinants of health—Canada
	Evaluation
	• Definitions
	• Government of Canada requirements
	• TBCS requirements for AHS
	• Aboriginal research guidelines and principles
	• Other significant EC programs and outcomes:
	  - U.S. Head Start FACES and Perry Preschool studies
	  - Abecedarian
	  - The Chicago Child-Parent Centre Study
	  - The Turkish Early Enrichment Program
	  - Language nests:
	     Áha Pünana Leo
	     Kōhanga reo
	The Literature (as cited in the Literature Review) and Related Studies.
	  - Indigenous ECD research
	  - Indigenous language and cultural revitalization literature
	  - Early childhood intervention programs, school readiness, and assessment

Mesosystem See Chapter 7	AHSUNC Evaluation Framework, and Stairs & Bernhard (2002) AHSUNC Program and Program Oversight AHSUNC Tool Development Team School Readiness Literature Literature on Indigenous Culture and Language
Microsystem See Chapter 7	AHSUNC Impact Evaluation Methodology • Site selection • Training • Data collection • The *Perceptions of Change* questionnaires (key informant interviews) • The Work Sampling System • The Enviroview • The Aboriginal Vocabulary Acquisition Test • Dissemination and reporting
Chronosystem See Chapter 5	Government Priorities Concurrent Children's Programs Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization Many Hands One Dream U.S. Head Start Outcomes Local Events

Kağitçibaşi's contextual approach.

Cross-cultural psychologist Çiğdem Kağitçibaşi (2007) references Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original ecological model for contextual cross-cultural psychology and other cultural/contextual studies. Her approach to early development and intervention programs has significance for my study and implications for the original and adapted models. Both are fundamental, and they sometimes overlap. Kağitçibaşi uses a contextual approach that corresponds with Bronfenbenner's model. She places individual and human development within the context of the family and its sociocultural environment. She includes developmental, *functional,* and cultural/cross-cultural approaches. Her presentation of cultures characterized by relatedness and separateness is significant for discussions of ECD intervention and for the AHSUNC impact evaluation.

Indigenous Perspectives

As Mouse Woman in human form conceptualizes Bronfenbrenner, Mouse Spirit, a being of Indigenous mythology, contributes another dimension (multiple realities). I refer to this latter dimension as ***Indigenous perspectives,*** which I understand as the considered or formalized ideas of Indigenous individuals or groups, as well as a particular research approach comprising Indigenous Research Methodologies (Atkinson, 2001; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010; Kovach, 2009; National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2011; L. Smith, 1999/2012; Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2001), discussed in Chapter 3. Because I propose to examine the cultural appropriateness of an Aboriginal program, I draw on both my own relationships and experiences in Aboriginal communities and on related literature to consider alternative worldviews in my research. Aboriginal scholar Shawn Wilson (2001) clarifies that while Indigenous research shares some similarities with qualitative approaches, it must be recognized as a separate paradigm rather than simply as an Indigenous perspective within a mainstream paradigm. Wilson imparts his Native perspective, showing how knowledge is built on relationships with people and objects, and also with the cosmos, ideas, concepts, and everything around us; from this perspective, knowledge cannot be owned or discovered because it is mutually shared. Wilson sees relationship accountability as an integral moral part of the research relationship.

As an evaluator and researcher, I too respect the inherence of sharing, ownership, and accountability of an Indigenous perspective; they are my study's raison d'être. I have been told by Elders that knowledge is earned, and that one realizes their own unique understandings in the undertaking. Sacred stories in particular are bound by a process and protocols that are similar to copyright. For example, one has to earn or be given the right to repeat a story, and must include

its provenance as part of the story (Wes Fine Day, Cree storyteller and traditional teacher, personal communications, 1989–2012). Indigenous Perspectives, considered as a worldview, is significant for its role in methodology, particularly for interpretation, and I discuss it further in the methodology section. As well, it is linked to critical theory, in part through its uncertain status/power in research theory, which Stewart-Harawira express in part as "ongoing subjugation of indigenous ontologies" (2005, p. 24).

Critical theory.

> *Only when we collaboratively envision an early childhood education that is built on a theory of cultural democracy and acknowledges the issues of power and the political nature of the field can we begin to reconfigure policy and practice in a discourse of 'hope'. (Soto & Swadener, 2002, p. 58)*

AHS aims to reduce health and social inequities for children, families, and their communities within a context of cultural democracy, which includes a respect for the cultural knowledge, research methodologies, and priorities of Aboriginal peoples. Because Euro-American theories and methods generally dominate the ECD field, aspects of critical theory are central to this study in assessment and analysis of the program goals, its evaluation, and the evaluation methodology. Soto and Swadener (2002) contend that an expanding ECD critical theory movement is examining power and equity issues and reconceptualizing Native American, multicultural, and bilingual research. I call on reconceptualist ECD literature to inform my research.

Critical theorists.

Critical theory emerged from the social critique of members the Frankfurt School, who reacted against the pervasive dominance of positivism in Western rationality. According to Peter McLaren, "critical theorists are united in their objectives: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustice" (1989, p. 160). In his discussion of critical

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pedagogy, McLaren emphasizes the relationship between politics and culture and education (schooling), which has significant application in a critique of AHSUNC impacts.

Jürgen Habermas, another major critical theorist, provides insights important to epistemological considerations, and to the spirit of praxis in education, evaluation, and research. This contribution is in concert with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) recommendation that scholars play a role in ameliorating social issues through "sharing their knowledge with policy makers and citizens by conducting research that guides and assesses new policies and practices" (p. 199).

Both theorists informed my understanding and methodology for my 1994 master's thesis *Early Childhood Education in Saskatchewan: Can It Be Emancipatory?* (Robertson, 1994), which examined the extent of the emancipatory interest (as delineated by Habermas) in Saskatchewan ECD programs. According to Habermas (1968/1971), knowledge is culturally constructed and is comprised of three knowledge-constitutive interests representing knowledge and action in interaction: technical (empirical-analytic); practical (historical-hermeneutic); and emancipatory (critical). His model is compatible with an Indigenous approach, and introduces power and control elements germane to Indigenous Perspectives and impact evaluation discussions. Habermas' theory of communicative action has shaped my perception of dialectics and social coordination of understanding, where validity holds merit based on a social truth that is authentic in relation to dialogical accuracy and context (Habermas, 1987).

Critical theory and AHS.

The scope of my responsibility as researcher is extended to consider broader societal implications and questions by including critical theory as a framework constituent. For example, if AHSUNC is reaching less than 10% of the eligible children—and for the most part is targeting the most vulnerable children—and is showing positive gains attributed to program participation,

what would be a judicious statement about the impact of the program on the general Aboriginal population? Does the population benefit? Is it empowered? Furthermore, applying a critical framework, to what extent do the AHS actions or outcomes influence policy change? What are the underlying properties of intervention, historically and in our present understanding?

Together with narrative and autoethnographic approaches, I incorporate critical theory in my examination of these questions and my overarching and guiding questions.

A Reflection

Canadian Haida sculptor Bill Reid created *The Spirit of Haida Guaii* (1991), a bronze canoe carrying 13 disparate West Coast mythological figures, including Mouse Woman, "traditional guide and advisor of those who travel from the human world to the nonhuman realms of Haida myth" (Government of Canada, 2009). The canoe is crowded, and its passengers not always harmonious, but they do paddle together in the same direction. Correspondingly, my research draws on different traditions to inform a framework for my study: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, Indigenous perspectives, and critical theory, individually and in collaboration, contribute to my understanding of aspects of my research project, and to social justice. The metamorphic Mouse Woman triumvirate guides me through the multiple realities I encounter in my research journey as I prepare to unravel and reconstruct them. I begin this process in Chapter 3, where I outline my qualitative research methodology.

Chapter 3. Methodology: Unravel, Interpret, Re-vison

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to
*arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. (*T. S. Eliot)

I have conducted a qualitative interpretive case study of the 2006 AHSUNC National

Impact Evaluation, a study situated in a sociocultural constructivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln

(1994) describe a paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator,

not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (p.

105). In keeping with constructivist epistemology, I examine national and international

documents related to ECD and to Indigenous Peoples, and propositions of critical theorists and

other early childhood scholars, to describe the "construction" or development of the AHSUNC

impact evaluation. Second, I review relevant literature to garner, interpret, and critique new ideas

and their contributions to Indigenous ECD intervention program evaluation.

Qualitative Research

I have a proclivity for life's puzzles and mysteries, particularly those that allow for

divergent or multiple responses. As well, my curiosity for sources of ideas and causes of actions

leads me to a qualitative, interpretive approach to the complexities of my research questions.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an

interpretive, naturalistic approach . . . attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in

terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). Correspondingly, Merriam (1998) describes

the philosophical view of qualitative research as reality being "constructed by individuals

interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6). Merriam provides five essential characteristics of

qualitative research: "the focus is on interpretation and meaning; the researcher is the primary

instrument in data collection and analysis; research activities include fieldwork; the process is

primarily inductive; and rich description characterizes the end product" (p. 25). Description and interpretation are both process and product. The work of these scholars augments understanding and a structure for the basic approach to my study and my life.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) list characteristics similar to those provided by Merriam; in their discussion on the descriptive characteristic of qualitative research they state that "the written word is very important in the qualitative approach, both in recording data and disseminating the findings. . . . Nothing is taken as a given, and no statement escapes scrutiny" (pp. 30–31). They contend that the process of qualitative research enables informants' perspectives and reflects a dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects. The goal is to better understand human behaviour and experience, to grasp the processes for constructing meaning, and to describe those meanings. Understanding and description are key elements of my research process. My role as researcher is both emic and etic as my interpretations include my own perspectives and observations over ten years as AHS national policy/evaluation analyst.

My interpretive case study situates the AHSUNC 2006 national impact evaluation in a historical and political context and examines the evaluation's development phase and its foundations. As a researcher supporting the social construction of reality, I aim to reconsider the evaluation's original premises and to reinterpret and reconceptualize findings hermeneutically.

The case study.

According to Yin (2003),

a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident . . . you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions. (p. 13).

Stake (1995) recommends a case study approach when the case itself is of special interest, adding that it can capture both particularity and complexity. The case study

methodology calls for accurate descriptions, given that observations are never value free. Emphasis is on interpretation, and prior to this ongoing process, the selection of case, criteria for evaluation or significance of findings, and nature of advocacy is overtly subjective.

A case study can include multiple cases and levels of analysis (Yin, 1984), and is generally used to address descriptive and explanatory (how and why) questions (Yin, 2004). Then again, psychologist W. M. Runyan (1983) supports *ideographic interpretations* in case study application for individuals, noting the opportunities for insights and context-specific predictions rather than explanations.

The case study is a most suitable approach for investigation, interpretation, and reporting in my research, particularly because my intent is both to describe and gain insights and to make a contribution to an Indigenous ECD issue drawn from one edifying, complex experience. My study has both a descriptive and an exploratory feature, as the introductory section provides a historical context to support an interpretive enterprise. McDonough and McDonough (1997) refer to *interpretive* case studies as developing conceptual strategies to support or challenge given assumptions; in *evaluative* case studies, the researchers add their own judgments. Here again are aspects of ethnoautobiography. I aim to use features of both approaches.

In the course of my case study, I use qualitative research methods to collect, review, and analyze data (i.e., historical and current documents and literature) to address my research questions. I am guided by principles of interpretive inquiry and hermeneutics. Packer and Addison identify three possible outcomes from an interpretive inquiry: "(1) Ideas for helpful action are identified. (2) New questions or concerns come to the researcher's attention. (3) The researcher is changed by the research—that is, the researcher discovers inadequacies in his or her

own initial pre-understandings" (1989, cited in J. L. Ellis, 1998, pp. 28–29). All three of these outcomes are realized in my case study of the AHSUNC evaluation methodology.

Interpretive Framework

Hermeneutic approach to data analysis.

Heidegger (1962) describes human experience of the world as taking place within horizons of past, present, and future. New understanding is made possible through the forestructure of past experience. Gadamer (1979) argues that prejudgment is fundamental to all understanding, working in a dialogical relationship with the present entity. We bring our own prejudices and values to meaning making, and collective understanding requires a fusion of individual horizons into a new common understanding (D. Smith, 1991). In my inquiry process, I realize my own preunderstandings and review the collective or common understandings of the AHSUNC evaluation development team, as I perceive them. Ferraris (1996, p. 1, cited in Kinsella, 2006, p. 1) defines hermeneutics as "the art of interpretation as transformation." As bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I have a responsibility to contribute my creative and artistic skills within a consciousness of my goals for transformation.

The hermeneutic approach is visualized as a circle made up of two arcs that together inform interpretation. The forward or projection arc of the circle employs the researcher's forestructure and preunderstandings, which include the researcher's own history and beliefs and concerns about the research questions. J. L. Ellis (1998) describes an interpretive inquiry process as a series of loops in a spiral, each loop representing a separate research activity, or consecutive efforts to reinterpret one "text" or "set of data" (p. 19). After the initial interpretation, the backward (evaluation) arc is used to evaluate and re-examine the data "for confirmation, contradictions, gaps or inconsistencies" (p. 26) and to identify what is absent as well as what is

present. Determining what is absent may be the most creative and informative step in the process because it may require divergent thinking skills and thinking outside of the box, and even in the late research stages, it may require the progressive focusing that Stake (1995) refers to in relation to "improving the research questions as the study continues" (p. 172). Reviewing the questions, and refining them as the research evolves advances hermeneutic understanding, and enhances the researcher's potential to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time (Eliot, 1943).

The AHSUNC evaluation was anchored in the developers' beliefs and understandings. In my research I aim to recover the original collective understandings, and through a hermeneutic study of the various texts, to reconsider some of those understandings. J. L. Ellis (1998) describes three themes of hermeneutics. First is the inherent creativity of interpretation; the interpreter examines intent or meaning holistically. The second theme involves interplay of whole/part movement from specific to general, micro to macro—the "hermeneutic circle," which augments understanding rather than arriving at an absolute truth. The third theme is the role of language, which both enables and limits the researcher's understanding, "since language arises from a community, reflects the influence of tradition, and marks a moment in history, history is linked with language in being understood as a condition of understanding" (p. 16).

My theoretical and methodological frameworks have relevance for the AHSUNC impact evaluation as well as for the present research. Similar principles of a qualitative approach apply to both. The impact evaluation does not have explicit connections to a qualitative framework or to interpretive inquiry; however, the guiding premises correspond.

Indigenous Perspectives and Methodologies

When I place myself axiologically, I genuinely value the teachings of the Indigenous scholars and community members who have shaped my understanding of life, and of Indigenous and culturally responsive approaches to research, which are integral to my study.

According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), a contemporary agenda for Indigenous research moves toward an ideal of self-determination and "a set of approaches that are situated within the decolonization politics of the Indigenous peoples' movement" (p. 115). It is beyond my own capacity and the scope of this paper to do justice to a full exploration of Indigenous perspectives or Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM). Essentially, traditional, spiritual, and collective values guide beliefs, thinking, and action in IRM (see Chapter 4 for IRM principles). The principles imply emic research, but they raise consciousness for the reflective etic researcher as well. The holistic model for research and evaluation is culturally and community based, participatory, formative, and transformative. The cultural, spiritual, and axiological directions differentiate the paradigmatic approach.

Another Maori scholar, Makere Stewart-Harawira, describes her ontological approach and her reformulation of the "hermeneutic circle of understanding" into a "spiral of understanding" (2005, p. 24). The spiral metaphor locates "indigenous cosmologies and ways of being at the centre of an expanding spiral of being" (p. 24):

> Here the metaphor of the spiral signifies the turning back 'on a wheel of strength', to 'the place it came from': in other words, to the sacred teachings of the ancestors, to the source of 'the primal energy of potential being', and the returning of these to the forefront in a dynamic process of re-creation and transformation. (p. 24)

Here, Stewart-Harawira shows the relationship between a researcher and her axiological position in an Indigenous perspective.

In the course of my interpretive process I will periodically shift paradigms and include Indigenous perspectives. My work and relationships in the Aboriginal community provide me with a dynamic horizon that operates in tandem, rather than in fusion, with a mainstream paradigm. I aim to respect the distinctiveness of the Indigenous influences, keeping in mind that the boundaries are permeable and that assignment of system attributes relies on my educated guess. For the impact evaluation attributes (exosystem and microsystem), the hermeneutic and Indigenous approaches unite and overlap (i.e., the culturally responsive impact evaluation methodology). The chronosystem is most relevant for the Indigenous model; for example, cultural disruption, relocation, and the legacy of Indian Residential Schools are chronosystem components, as well as pertinent contemporary events and issues. Throughout this discussion, linkages between the systems are inherent. A major challenge in the evaluation project was to respect and incorporate both perspectives throughout the process, including the dissemination of findings.

My Research Process

I conducted my research in three phases. First, I explicated the ecological components of the AHSUNC national impact evaluation: (a) global and Canadian and documents and reports (*macro- and exosystems*); (b) documents and reports related to the AHSUNC national impact evaluation (*mesosystem*); and (c) review/analysis of AHSUNC impact evaluation methodology and tools (*microsystem*). As well, I identified and connected chronosystem events related to the other systems' elements. Each document is vetted for the presence of selected concepts; findings are charted individually and in extended aggregate form for data analysis, which first includes presence/absence notation, and second, analysis based on hermeneutic examination. Table 3.1 is a worksheet example showing the key assumptions and concepts used in the process.

Table 3.1 Condensed blank example of an aggregated worksheet.

(x 2: review [1] and analysis [2])

Key Assumptions and Concepts	Documents and Literature				
	Global	**Canadian**	**AHSUNC documents**	**Methodology and Tools**	**Chrono-system**
ECD/ECE/ECCE as important					
Holistic/comprehensive ECD program					
Intervention					
Education					
School readiness					
Intervention					
Indigenous position					
Indigenous culture					
Indigenous language					
Indigenous methodology					
Evaluation approach					
Indicators of success					
Governance/policy					
Social justice					
Praxis/change/ reconceptualize					
Other concepts related to AHS					
Child					
Diversity/minority					
Other					

In the second phase I included relevant, current, post–2006 ECD literature and considered the thematic implications for Indigenous program impact evaluation. Finally, I analyzed, triangulated, and interpreted findings from the first two phases and reconsidered their applications. Interpretive, Indigenous, and critical approaches applied at every phase.

Denzin (1984) refers to *investigator triangulation* as a triangulation protocol, that is, multiple peers or researchers review the data and interpretations for error or bias. Although this study reflects my own understanding of the AHSUNC evaluation process, to ensure accuracy, I

shared relevant research sections with current and former PHAC personnel to be vetted for accuracy.

Relevance of the study for research.

Findings generated by my study will contribute to the literature and discourse for similar research and evaluation inquiries related to Indigenous, immigrant, and mainstream children and families. Researchers, program managers and designers, and educators will be able to draw on, challenge, and extend my reporting and intepretations, further contributing to our comprehension of an ECD system that supports social justice.

In the process of the research I have examined relationships among government policy, program development, and program evaluation. I considered, for example, in what ways, if any, this comprehensive impact evaluation is significant for relevant policy or research. As we further our understanding of these connections, policy makers, program developers and practitioners, and researchers can create and augment effective services for children and families.

Delimitations

The study describes and examines the development stage of a national impact evaluation of one Indigenous early childhood intervention initiative. I am interested in questions related to cultural appropriateness and school readiness and have selected materials to inform those questions.

As a former federal government employee, I am committed to rules of confidentiality; thus, to avoid controversy, I have selected only documents and literature that are in the public domain. I chose not to pursue related key informant input (e.g., from federal employees or contractors) in my methodology to avoid conflict of interest or confidentiality issues for them and for myself.

I do not address outcomes of the AHSUNC impact evaluation because my study focuses on the evaluation's design and methodology.

My research and interpretations are guided by the intuition and insight gained through a lifetime of relationships with Indigenous people as much as by academic or scientific protocols.

Limitations

Generalizability is limited. The findings are intended to provoke further discussion and provide ideas for particular applications.

I am a guest and learner in Indigenous cultures and communities, which partially defines my relationship to Indigenous Perspective and Indigenous Research Methodology. My respect is great; my personal history and comprehension could constrict my research approach and interpretations. With deference, I include an Indigenous paradigm in my methodology in spite of those personal limitations.

Ethics

This research has been conducted in accordance with the University of Alberta and Tri-council guidelines for ethical research. I did not engage human subjects. Throughout the study I communicated with PHAC to ensure that I was adhering to my ethical obligations as a former employee.

Next, in Chapter 4, I present four personal assumptions and refer to them to frame and explore literature that informs early intervention, ECD program evaluation, Indigenous ECD programs and their evaluations, and Indigenous research methodologies.

Chapter 4. Mouse Woman Fashions a Nest from Key Research Literature

Reconceptualist perspectives and methodologies are oriented to and argue for 'hope and possibility as we move toward a newly evolving, liberating "third space", an early childhood dreamscape of social justice and equity' (Soto, 2000, p. 198). Many of us believe that to ensure an equal and emancipatory early childhood education for both children and adults, all educators who are concerned about children and the future of humanity and our work—practitioners and theorists, teachers and parents, reconceptualists and developmentalists— must join together and take action in solidarity. (Cannella, Swadener & Che, 2007)

My Assumptions

I enter the dreamscape of social justice and equity Soto (2000, cited in 17th International Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Conference, 2009) talks about with four major assumptions: (a) early childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes for participating children, families, and communities, and to social justice; (b) early intervention program evaluation is complex, hence it requires a range of innovative approaches; (c) Indigenous early intervention programs and their evaluations have unique characteristics and requirements; and (d) research in Indigenous communities requires significant methodological considerations. According to Robinson and Reed (1998), a literature review is "a systematic search of published work to find out what is already known about the intended research topic" (p. 58). I have selected the literature in this chapter to address my assumptions related to my research topic, and to social justice and equity in particular.

Assumption #1: Early childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes for participating children, families, and communities, and to social justice.

Historical introduction.

Minority World concepts of early education and education as intervention can be traced to the 16th century (Cleaverly & Phillips, 1986; Morrison, 1991). For example, the initiatives of religious leaders and reformers Martin Luther in Germany and John Comenius in Moravia (in the modern-day Czech Republic) promoted universal education and literacy as agents for transmitting social and religious values. John Locke (1632–1704) saw the child as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, on which experience writes, which introduced the idea that an environment determines people's moral and practical traits. Following Locke, Claude Helvétius (1715–1771) studied variables that would account for differences in human equality, and subsequently blamed inequality on the government and the church-run education system. These four pioneering thinkers recognized the power of education and the broader environment in shaping the child and society.

They also established, perhaps for the first time, that education is a sociocultural conduit, and that if a society questions and values the equity or particular developmental outcomes of its members, or identified categories within its membership, it should look to the environment and carefully consider reform or intervention. Extending this idea into the next century, Robert Owen (1771–1858), an English political, social, and educational visionary, believed in the importance of the environment in shaping children's character. He provided an infant school for the children of his mill workers, who were mainly uneducated. His utopian ideas were not always successful,

but he provides an early example of an early childhood intervention program; in this case the intent was to counteract and compensate for parental deficiencies (Cleaverly & Phillips, 1986).

The works of Rousseau (1712–1778), Pestalozzi (1746–1827), and Froebel, the "father of kindergarten" (1782–1852), drew attention to the importance of early education. These three environmentalists believed in children's innate goodness and stressed natural unfolding in development, which was a controversial notion at the time because the Church's perspective was that children were born in sin and therefore needed constant correction. There was also a strong belief among some Protestants in God's power of predetermination, which precluded incentive for social change through education or other means. These early educators developed pedagogical models, including Froebel's influential "gifts" to guide young children's knowledge and skills.

Consequent to the initiatives of the Enlightenment thinkers, Dr. Maria Montessori (1870–1952) worked constructively with underprivileged and institutionalized Italian children thought to be uneducable. Inspired by her study of Pestalozzi and Froebel and her contemporaries, Jean-Marc Gespard Itard and Edouard Seguin, she developed methods and tools through child observation (Kramer, 1976). Her successful methods and their outcomes for at-risk children demonstrated the positive powers of early intervention and became established as curriculum resources for mainstream children as well.

Not all historical interventions, however, have been successful. Canadian, American, and Australian residential schools for Indigenous children, operating from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century, are an example of systematic cultural intervention through education with drastic consequences. These federally sponsored, church-run institutions intended to assimilate children through severing parental influence and annihilating Indigenous languages and cultures,

replacing them with European languages and values. The result was cultural genocide, loss of identity, and personal pain and dysfunction for survivors (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012) —the antithesis of positive outcomes and social justice (Haig-Brown, 1989/2006; Stairs, Bernhard, & Colleagues, 2002).

As is evident in the foregoing examples of intervention programs, generating and examining assumptions, expectations, and data and forecasting possible short- and long-term outcomes of the intervention are essential as groundwork for program planning and evaluation. The Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are a case in point. They targeted school-aged children, and their legacy sends up a red flag to planners and educators working with the very vulnerable younger children. AHSUNC participants and designers are survivors of the IRS legacy. They have turned the intervention on its head by ensuring an integral cultural base, Aboriginal management, and parental involvement for the AHSUNC program. Education is enrichment supporting competence and equity, not annihilation and replacement of children's language, culture, and values.

ECD, human development, and social justice.

The IRS example raises questions about the ethics of ECD intervention. The late Dr. Fraser Mustard and his colleagues (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007), mindful of the connotations of intervention, provide rationale, goals, and direction for ECD researchers in relation to social justice:

> We now understand how early child and brain development sets trajectories in the health, learning and behaviour for life. *How we apply this knowledge in our various societies will determine whether we will be successful in the 21st century.* To establish stable, prosperous, equitable societies, we have to make equality of opportunity for all young children a key policy of our societies. (p. 11, emphasis added)

They go on to explain how social environments and economic resources influence human development (p. 32). It is noted as well in earlier discussions of Canada's population health approach that family education and social and economic status generally influence health and social outcomes for children. I contend, accordingly, that social change must interact and progress within and through all ECD ecological systems, that is, government priorities and policies, ECD research agendas, ECD program goals and operations, and family support systems. ECD intervention programs affect each level within these systems. As an illustration, Edward Zigler (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006) maintains that researchers in applied developmental psychology are supporting decision makers in constructing effective social policies, and building "evidence-based social action programs that improve the lives of children and their families" (p. xiii); that is, they collaborate in translating research/knowledge into practice by engaging interacting systems.

In *A Vision for Universal Preschool Education* (Zigler et al., 2006), Zigler and other experts discuss the benefits of high-quality ECD programs and their social, educational, and economic value to society. Prominent longitudinal studies of U.S. early childhood intervention programs for economically disadvantaged families generate evidence in support of ECD programs. The authors report significant high cost-benefit ratios related to higher academic achievement, fewer special education placements, lower crime and unemployment rates, and higher incomes, when compared to control group outcomes. However, Malakoff (2006) argues that the most at-risk American children have the least access to preschools, despite evidence that high-quality preschool experiences help prepare them for school. (See Chapter 7 for U.S. longitudinal study details and references.)

What is intervention, and what would constitute advantageous outcomes? I found a pertinent response in Kağitçibaşi's research and application. She claims that early enrichment interventions are most effective in promoting healthy childhood development and competence when both environmental improvements and individual resources are strengthened. Kağitçibaşi supports a "whole child" approach to evaluation research, and shows how these comprehensive interventions confront the inequality of children's choices and freedoms related to their social disadvantage. She argues that implementation quality may be more influential than the intervention mode. Kağitçibaşi's Turkish research project focuses on enriching preschool children's cognitive and socioemotional development in relation to their social adjustment, school performance, and overall well-being. In her 2007 book *Family, Self, and Human Development Across Cultures: Theory and Applications*, Kağitçibaşi discusses intermediate positive outcomes from evaluations of early interventions in Majority World programs which show improved school performance, but long-term effects are not available. However, the most compelling improvements are noted in the most disadvantaged children, which is significant for local and global policy and evaluation considerations. This is remarkable given Malakoff's comments (above) concerning at-risk American children.

The literature clearly supports the supposition that ECD intervention programs can contribute to social justice for targeted children and their families and to social and economic advantage for the broader society. Further reconceptualization, reflection, and diverse research and evaluation are needed in order to generate and describe evidence-based data, successes, and challenges and potential new directions for program, evaluation, and policy design.

Assumption # 2: Early intervention program evaluation is complex; hence, it requires a range of innovative approaches.

Hauser-Cram, Warfield, Upshur, and Weisner (2000) suggest an access point to penetrate the problem of complexity. They call for an expanded view of evaluation for early childhood intervention programs to "provide meaningful information to the necessary audiences" (p. 487). In this case, principal audiences, or stakeholders, include funders (i.e., federal governments), sponsoring organizations, community members and participants, practitioners, and the general public. Hauser-Cram et al.'s approach acknowledges a key fact: Demonstrating that intervention programs ultimately save public money is only part of the success story, though it is sometimes considered the most salient evidence in ECD evaluation. For program participants and community members, however, the more important goal is more personal: Does (or how does) the program or intervention affect and/or improve our lives? I once asked a Cree Elder and educator what, in her opinion, would constitute evidence that AHS is meeting its goals. She responded, "When we see positive changes in our communities."

In addressing these issues, funders, policy makers, and academics require reliable evidence-based evaluation reporting. I speculate that, because quantitative data are generally straightforward and qualitative data more problematic for those seeking conventional rigour, quantitative data have higher currency for evaluation of ECD intervention programs. A predicament for researchers and evaluators is that, most frequently, ECD program evaluation is time sensitive, and evaluators cannot afford to wait for longitudinal results to describe, justify, or negate program effectiveness. The AHSUNC evaluation methodology includes an assessment of participating children's progress, using both quantitative and qualitative data. In my experience, for some audiences—community members in particular—qualitative research methods and

evidence can be most meaningful. I argue that both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary for comprehensive understanding of findings and issues, for judicious program enhancement or modification, and for meaningful reporting to the diverse audiences.

ECD program evaluation generally involves program quality assessments, formative or administrative reporting, and/or program impact / summative outcomes. In this section I introduce literature pertaining to program quality, evaluation methodologies and assessment tools, and examples of relevant alternative approaches to program evaluation. As well, I continue the discussion on school readiness, which is widely considered a vital expectation for early intervention programs (e.g., *The Impact of the AHSUNC Program on School Readiness Skills*, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012b).

Reconceptualizing program quality and its implications for innovative approaches.

ECD program evaluations generally consider either program quality or participant outcomes, or both. Contemporary discourses on "quality" inform progressive directions for many other ECD program evaluation issues as well. Two leading research teams, Dahlberg and Moss and Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw, discussed below, provide insights applicable to broad ECD program evaluation questions in their critiques of quality issues.

According to Dahlberg and Moss (2008), the notion of quality in current research and policy in early childhood is understood as "an attribute of services for young children that ensures the efficient production of predefined, normative outcomes, typically developmental or simple learning goals" (p. 21). The authors argue for a treatment of evaluation as primarily political rather than technical, noting that quality [I would add some intervention goals], as a socially constructed concept, is built on mainstream values and assumptions, and assumes universal, objective norms based on restricted expert knowledge and discourse. Risks associated

with this approach include missing opportunities for more democratic and ethical practice, and to generate diverse strategies for developmental or program improvement.

While I am inspired by Dahlberg and Moss's message of a critical approach to quality, I would argue that customary expert knowledge should not be undervalued because it provides a common language and understanding for practitioners and parents/caregivers. As I noted earlier, Kağıtçıbaşi points out the influence of quality in relation to outcomes; however, the underlying premise of quality as a social construction has particular credence for cross-cultural evaluation and critical analyses.

Canadian scholars Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2008) address quality and cross-cultural evaluation in their British Columbia-based study, *Investigating 'Quality' in Early Childhood Education* (IQ Project):

> Given such commitments to, and realities of culture and diversity, it was important that the IQ Project examine closely the degree to which various early childhood discourses 'open up' to diversity, social equity, and local voices in ways that are supportive of the multicultural realities of the province and the country. (p. 241)

Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw argue for Canada to broaden its conceptual orientations to quality, and "join other parts of the world that are actively engaged in post-structural, decolonizing, and critical explorations" (p. 241). Other authors, including Greenwood and Shawana (2000), Niles and Byers (2008), and Niles, Byers, and Krueger (2007), question applications of mainstream concepts of ECD quality to Indigenous programs because they overlook Indigenous worldviews and community values, such as a culture and language component.

Although the AHSUNC impact evaluation does not include a program quality assessment, all 10 participating sites were considered to meet basic quality standards according to basic impact evaluation site selection criteria (i.e., all sites were operating within regional

ECD program regulations). In my experience as an ECD consultant in Aboriginal communities, standardized ECD program quality assessments presented a number of cross-cultural challenges when they were used in some sites, and they were not considered germane to the impact evaluation. However, the critical approaches to quality in the preceding discussion have application for ECD evaluation goals, methodology, and interpretation of findings.

Progressive approaches to program evaluation methodology and child assessment.

Recent initiatives that have a progressive but not necessarily critical approach have relevance for my study as well. I have previously referred to literature which argues that mainstream methods and tools are not always appropriate for evaluation of Indigenous ECD programs. Below I describe a progressive approach to program evaluation methodology and child assessment: the CHILD Project.

The CHILD Project. Goelman, Pivik, and Guhn (2011) provide an instructive methodological model and rationale for new approaches to ECD research and program evaluation in their account of the Consortium of Health, Intervention, Learning, and Development (CHILD) Project. They write that the project's purpose was "to study children and childhood within the multiple embedded and interactive contexts that frame and influence early childhood development" (p. 1). The collaborative project examines 10 different studies in one overall disciplinary framework. Goelman et al. refer to the research as contributing to community-based organizations' access to the research process, making deliberate attempts to inform child and family public policy, and using a "numbers and narrative strategy" for reporting "to weave together the epistemologies, methodologies, and findings . . . into a meaningful understanding of the many different and complex factors that contribute to [ECD]" (p. 2).

The CHILD Project research approach responds to the realities of an ECD community of programs, and is in accord with the AHSUNC evaluation, which describes impact in diverse communities as part of a single case study. Both use a multisite, mixed methods approach. The *Kellogg Evaluation Handbook* (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 1998), with reference to cluster evaluation, explains that the study of a group of projects can "identify common threads and themes that, having cross-confirmation, take on greater significance" (p. 17). Both the CHILD Project and Kellogg references respect both the individual character of the participating entities and the strength of the aggregated findings—a feature realized in the AHSUNC design and data analysis. The CHILD Project methodology is relevant for my study as well:

> The research illustrates the utility of "mixed methods" in which empirical, statistical and qualitative/ethnographic research together better illustrate how knowledge can be constructed in different ways, illuminating different aspects of childhood. This again forces us to deconstruct the hyperindividualism and the emphasis on only positivist and a certain narrow view of empirical research that is at the core of most American research on children, and the ways in which we come to think about their child development and learning. (Goelman et al., 2011, pp. xi–xii)

CHILD is situated in Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, emphasizing the importance of the broader diverse contexts and their interactions with the interpretation of proximal processes. Throughout the project, it was requisite that researchers "confront their own beliefs about and lenses on critical aspects of [ECD], and to reconcile [their] findings with different theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary lenses" (Bronfenbrenner et al, p. 27)—an approach in concert with Bronfenbrenner's "developmentally instigative belief systems" (2005, p. 101) and with hermeneutics and interpretive inquiry.

Furthermore, in many urban and northern communities, families have access to additional ECD programs, and it is not unusual for an AHSUNC family to have participated previously in, for example, the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and/or Community Action Program for

Children. This possibility both confounds attribution in evaluation and underlines the significance of contexts, as described by Goelman et al. and by Bronfenbrenner.

Child assessment as a contributor to ECD impact studies.

Moving within an ecological framework toward proximal considerations, literature addressing child assessment and school readiness is critical to program evaluation and to my study. In an evaluation of program impacts, assessment is generally understood as pre- and post-participation assessment, whereas school readiness appraisals would commonly be administered only post-participation. Intervention program success, then, especially in vulnerable populations, could not be based solely on readiness scores; their value to program assessment would be identifying areas of low performance to inform preschool program and curriculum design.

According to Meisels and Atkins-Burnett (2000), "the goal of early childhood assessment is to acquire information and understanding that will facilitate the child's development and functional abilities within the family and community" (p. 232). Assessment can be formal or informal. Meisels and Atkins-Burnett explain that to be productive, assessment and intervention are linked, and continuous assessment must be incorporated into intervention. I would add that a consciousness of praxis must also be part of this equation, as understood by Freire's (1970) concept of praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 126). In this case, thoughtful proaction in relation to assessment findings could impact the broader ecological systems.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) comments on experimental procedures with children, referring to "the science of strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest period of time" (p. 19). Given this and Meisels and Atkins-Burnett's views, it is doubtful that researchers/assessors could expect meaningful results from testing children in "strange"

settings. Meisels and Atkins-Burnett (2000) advocate that assessment be conducted in context, drawing on multiple information sources which include the primary caregivers.

Evaluation and assessment: Observation and pedagogical documentation.

Child observation and pedagogical documentation are alternatives to placing children in controlled testing situations for individual assessment or for program evaluation. In the first approach, children are observed in their natural (classroom or other) settings and observations and artefacts are recorded and assembled. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999/2007) critique observation and argue for the primacy of pedagogical documentation:

> Adopting a modernist perspective, child observation assumes an objective, external truth that can be recorded and accurately represented. It is located in a traditional objectivist and rationalist view of enquiry and observation, in which the world is understood as an independently existing universe and knowledge is understood as reflecting or corresponding to the world. . . . Adopting a postmodern perspective, pedagogical documentation does not claim that what is documented is a direct representation of what children say and do; it is not a true account of what has happened. . . . Meaning does not come from seeing or observation alone. . . . It is produced in acts of interpretation. (pp. 146–147)

Documentation, understood in this way, is a co-constructed and interpretive process, and also a force for transformational change, not only for teachers but for children and for the political and social contexts (Dahlberg et al., 1999/2007). It is, however, possible to apply a co-constructed and interpretive process to child observation as well, as was noted in some of the AHSUNC impact sites, where participants and evaluators clarified and reworked indicators, observations, and interpretations in accordance with a cross-cultural context.

A standardized child observation tool, the Work Sampling System (WSS; Meisels, 1993), is one cornerstone of the AHSUNC impact evaluation; hence the cited argument put forward by Dahlberg et al. suggests a critique of the AHSUNC methodology. However, when observation is framed as naturalistic observation and includes documentation, as is intended in the AHSUNC

evaluation, these concerns can be moderated. In this case, assessment outcomes are considered in the context of additional supplementary data derived from multiple sources.

Meisels and the Work Sampling System. The work and ideas of Samuel Meisels (1993; Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000) inform both this study and the selection of the child observation tool used in the AHSUNC impact evaluation. Meisels supports naturalistic child assessment and notes the importance of assessment context and social validity, defined as the "ecological characteristics of assessment information, the acceptability of the methods employed, and the importance of the data derived" (Bagnato & Neisworth, 1994, p. 82, cited in Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000).

Meisels and Atkins-Burnett (2000) advise using tests administered from within the culture: "Our task is to ask for suitable, appropriate or culturally meaningful questions and to interpret the answers that we get within a meaningful cultural framework" (p. 399). Their WSS, which includes child portfolios as a documenting component, is used in the AHSUNC impact evaluation; it is described in more detail in Chapter 7.

Child observation and documentation in two ECD programs.

Correspondingly, two prominent ECD programs, High/Scope and Reggio Emilia, use child observation or documentation for assessment and evaluation. I discuss these programs' use of the practices below.

The High/Scope Preschool Child Observation Record (COR) uses authentic assessment and records of observations (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2012) for assessment and program evaluation. This tool is aligned with a pedagogical system that has systematic educator training programs and record-keeping practices. COR is used in many U.S. Head Start sites and has been used in several AHS sites in Canada as well (Health Canada, 2002).

Methodical documentation and child observation can have formative value in child assessment and curriculum development, and the Italian Reggio Emilia early childhood system uses documentation as a formative process. Rinaldi (2006) underscores one aspect of pedagogical documentation:

> The materials are collected during the experience, but they are read and interpreted at the end. Herein lies the substantial difference [between Reggio Emilia's approach to pedagogical documentation and other documentation practices]. In Reggio Emilia, where we have explored this methodology for many years, we place the emphasis on documentation as an integral part of the procedures aimed at fostering learning and for modifying the learning-teaching relationship . . . documentation is a substantial part of the goal that has always characterised our experience: the search for meaning—to find the meaning of school, or rather, to construct the meaning of school, as a place that plays an active role in the children's search for meaning and our own search for meaning (and shared meanings). (p. 63)

The relationship between several commonly used assessment tools and program evaluation is conditional, as many mainstream preschool assessment tools are screening instruments designed to identify developmental delays or other special needs. Systematic child assessment can provide valuable information on specifics of children's developmental delays as well their areas of success. However, many tools have disadvantages associated with placing children in testing situations, or are deemed culturally inappropriate. An evaluation of an intervention program like AHS requires clear goals and assessment criteria that may be at variance with standard measures because the gauge is change and progress rather than mainstream norms. That is to say, outcomes showing that the program contributes to children's positive development are the anticipated result for a vulnerable population, not a predetermined, normative score.

School readiness considerations.

This focus on gains leads to issues associated with (kindergarten or grade one) school readiness as a measure for program effectiveness. "Ready" children are generally characterized

as physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively healthy and as having approaches to learning that support their success (Ready for School Goal Team, 2000). Readiness status is most frequently assigned using local or regional checklist scores at kindergarten or grade one entrance. Findings generated from this style of testing are helpful for teachers, but they do not provide appropriate measures for the impact of an intervention program, although contributing to children's readiness is a recognized goal in most preschool programs. There is a vast amount of literature related to my research which informs this important topic. For example, see Dockett and Perry (2002), or Zigler et al. (2006) for constructive discussions of school readiness.

The assumption: Researchers and evaluators recognize the complexities in evaluating ECD intervention programs and have developed some innovative approaches. Researchers, educators, and activists understand that ECD programs can contribute to individual development and to social justice, but that other political/ecological changes are required as well to realize social equity. Accordingly, for some researchers, program evaluation includes critical analysis. From this stance, the complexities of program evaluation are taken to another level.

Assumption #3: Indigenous early intervention programs and their evaluations have unique characteristics and requirements.

The significance of the culture/language component in Aboriginal ECD programs.

A culturally based Indigenous early childhood development program is rooted in traditions and goals that strengthen cultural knowledge, individual and group identity, and other aspects of holistic child development. Greenwood (2005) claims that Indigenous ECD programs promoting cultural strength, congruity, and citizenship augment children's health and well-being. For example, she cites research conducted by Chandler and Lalonde (1998) in several British Columbia First Nations communities that attributes strengthened resiliency and reductions in

negative health outcomes to increased cultural continuity. I find these results perplexing at the community level vis-à-vis alarming social and health data in Inuit communities, where surface indicators of cultural continuity, such as heritage language and features of traditional life, endure. Evidently the relationship between cultural continuity, resilience, and positive health outcomes and their attributions is complex and subject to additional influences and, probably, regional disparities.

Greenwood (2005) refers to the right of cultural continuity as specified in the Canadian Constitution (Government of Canada, 2015), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1959), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (see Chapter Six). In culturally based ECD programs such as AHS, a cultural intervention could be seen as rectifying the omission of a right (i.e., to cultural continuity). An intervention is generally a consequence of an identified need for unique services to meet immediate and broad or long-term goals. Recognizing Canada's colonial legacy and the health disparities between Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians, the AHS cultural intervention reconnects children with their traditional and contemporary culture in an educational setting intended to restore and revitalize community culture (i.e., cultural continuity). In the ECD world, AHS is distinctive for its cultural foundations and Aboriginal management as well as its goal to contribute to the health and well-being of participants, as stated in the Principles and Guidelines:

> The purpose of the Culture and Language component is to provide children with a positive sense of themselves as Aboriginal children and to build on the children's knowledge of their Aboriginal languages and experience of culture in their communities. More specifically, Projects will enhance the process of cultural and language revival and retention, with the ultimate goal that, where possible, children will aspire to learn their respective languages and participate in their communities' cultures after AHS. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010)

Greenwood and her colleagues have written extensively about Canadian Aboriginal ECD programs on and off reserves, their challenges, and the importance of their cultural foundations

(Greenwood, 2005, 2006, 2011; Greenwood & Shawana, 2000; Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Frazer, 2007; Terbasket & Greenwood, 2007). Correspondingly, Jessica Ball (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Ball & Janyst, 2007; Ball & Pence, 2006) writes about Aboriginal children in Canada, their development and programs, and promising practices, such as AHS. She also makes a number of strong policy recommendations for monitoring, measurement, and data analyses applying to Aboriginal children. The consultations, presentations, and published research of these scholars has contributed to ECD knowledge and practice nationally and internationally, and is a most informative resource for my research.

AHS and other Aboriginal culturally based programs understand a cultural knowledge and practice component as strengthening children's identity and self-esteem, which in turn promotes resilience and social and educational success (Ball, 2008, 2012; Delpit, 2006; Greenwood & Shawana, 2000; Lockhard & De Groat, 2010; Paki & Rameka, 2009; Stairs, Bernhard, & Colleagues, 2002). These cited scholars and others advocate for the voices and knowledge of minority and/or Indigenous people to have substantive influence on the educational practices that affect their children. While the cultural component contributes, the concept needs to be understood in comprehensive terms that go beyond culture and language experiences in the classroom.

Aboriginal language is an inherent attribute of the cultural component in Aboriginal ECD programs. Contemporary Aboriginal children, particularly those living in urban areas, are increasingly separated from their cultural and linguistic roots. Although they may not be heritage language speakers, rudiments of that language, including speech patterns and conventions, worldview, and meaning making, may be embedded in their language practices. Wade Davis (2009) states that languages are not simply vocabulary lists and/or sets of grammatical rules; they

are "old growth forests of the mind" (n. p.), reflecting different ways of being, thinking, and knowing. For many Indigenous people, their native language is spiritual, connecting them to the land and to their ancestors. They articulate a loss of their cultural heritage with language loss, as meanings and knowledge die with the language (Davis, 2009). Educators, linguists, and other researchers have identified non-standard English/French dialects as a feature of Indigenous children's language development (Ball, 2009) that is rooted in this heritage. This reference to nonstandard dialects is significant for assessment of dominant language proficiency (early language and literacy) as well.

Cross-cultural research in culturally based programs.

The challenges for the researcher/evaluator in a national impact evaluation of an Aboriginal ECD (intervention) program [in collaboration with community partners] include the following: (a) to identify and describe cultural program elements in individual and collective sites; (b) to understand the community's cultural goals and curriculum articulated by each program; (c) to design a methodology that will show perceived and measured evidence-based effects; and (d) to ensure accurate attribution to the cultural component in the program. As stated in Chapter 1, there is vast cultural, ethnic, geographic, and historical diversity in AHS sites, coupled with disparate resource, participant, and leadership characteristics, all of which speak to the need for unique evaluation requirements. Ball (2008) argues for disaggregated analysis of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations data on children, calls for community-level analyses, and identifies some of the challenges encountered in the AHSUNC impact evaluation (2012).

I continue this discussion in the next section with a review of selected educators' and theorists' work related to cross-cultural socialization, social class, and Indigenous programs, followed by some examples of Indigenous language and culturally based programs. While

Aboriginal culture is inherent to language in the impact evaluation, and in my study, language is alternately recognized as united with culture and as a separate entity. Indigenous language revitalization literature and documentation included in Chapter 7 contextualizes the tenuous position of Indigenous languages and cultures in Canada.

International studies on early socialization.

Prior to the upsurge of group child care in North America, two studies conducted in the 1960s examined cross-cultural child rearing, drawing attention to different culturally based socialization trajectories. These early examples and related recent studies have important implications because they demonstrate how early experience shapes our worldview, values, and behaviour, which accounts in part for cultural differences. Bronfenbrenner, in his 1970 comparison of Soviet and American child socialization, observed that the Russian child-rearing and education systems emphasized group consciousness, cooperation, and compliance. Russian children develop group identity, loyalty, and intergroup competitiveness, which supersedes individual concerns, in contrast to the individualistic orientation of American children. Bettelheim (1969) asked, "How intimate is the link between the nature of a society and how its children are raised" (p. 1)? He studied Israeli kibbutz children, examining the relevance of psychologist Erik Erikson's (1963) stages of psychosocial development, and found that children raised communally did not always fit Erikson's stage profiles. Assessments of Indigenous children using Western-based developmental criteria are of continuing concern for researchers, educators, and Indigenous communities. In the design and interpretation of constructive Indigenous intervention program evaluations, meaningful indicators and outcomes for program impact require contextual discourse, noted as well in some more recent studies.

In their sociocultural, critical ethnographic study of early childhood programs in India, South Africa, and Canadian First Nations, Prochner and Cleghorn (2010) explore three early childhood programs' policies and practices and their relationship to "the recognition of the validity of local, Indigenous ways of knowing about, and working with children" (p. 107) vis-à-vis the possibly contrasting influences of globalization. They conclude: "It may be that superficial differences conceal similarities and superficial similarities conceal more fundamental, deep culture differences" (p. 107). The authors' ethnographic process and findings are significant for my study, extending the appreciation of cultural context beyond theoretical considerations and the AHSUNC impact evaluation.

Cross-cultural psychologist Kağitçibaşi (2007) introduces a contextual-developmental-functional approach, which is also cultural and cross-cultural, linking the individual and society. She argues:

> The main distinction drawn is between a self-contained, individuated, separate, independent self that is defined by clear boundaries from others and a relational interdependent self with fluid boundaries. Furthermore, this distinction holds in both self-perception and social perception (perception of others). (p. 94)

Kağitçibaşi's approach and findings correspond with Bettelheim (1969) and Bronfenbrenner (1970); communality or independent self are also considerations for cross-cultural researchers working with Indigenous Peoples.

Culture and social class.

Educator Lisa Delpit (2006) contends that American children of colour and poverty enter school with a different cultural capital than their middle-class peers, putting them at a relative disadvantage and affecting how their teachers see their learning potential. Delpit shows how the power, privilege, and perceptions of the dominant social class do not support educational success for "disadvantaged" students, and calls for education that "decodes" middle-class culture. Such

education requires knowing the realities and strengths of children's lives and creating curricula that recognize and affirm this knowledge, scaffolding children's learning accordingly to prepare them for the additional complexities of successful learning. Delpit and others (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) argue for culturally responsive teaching, particularly for children of colour and poverty. These authors go beyond daily classroom practices to include the responsibility of educators to understand the dynamics of racism and social inequality and to become forces of change for informed educational equity.

Culturally responsive teaching literature has implications for cross-cultural evaluation and the AHS impact evaluation because it recognizes cultural and social class differences in groups of children (i.e., minorities). I see this approach as both a balance for strengthening culture and school readiness and a rationale for their prominence in unique AHS programming and impact evaluations.

Aboriginal programs.

In her study of practices in First Nations early childhood programs, Ball (2004) refers to related research:

> The collective results of several studies "provides evidence that Aboriginal language and cultural programs, and student identification with such programs, are associated with improved academic performance, improved drop-out rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behaviour of children" (Demmert, 2001). (p. 83)

Many studies of early intervention and language preservation programs focus on their effects on school performance; some research converges language proficiency and school performance outcomes. Data and their implications for both are important in the arguments for resources for Indigenous language programs. However, most Canadian programs, such as AHS, prioritize heritage language programming to support positive identity and self-esteem, which includes the context of the language in the local culture.

Socioeconomic and ethnic cultural differences and their effects provide a rationale for the AHS programs and a caution to researchers and evaluators to learn about the broader culture, reflect on their assumptions, and re-examine methodology, criteria, and interpretations. The intervention in Indigenous programs can be cultural, social and educational, or both. Attribution for change or positive outcomes is challenging. I believe the most confounding questions for the AHSUNC evaluation development team concerned Aboriginal culture and language: What are the criteria for program success, and how are they measured or expressed?

Language nests: Hawaii and New Zealand.

In AHS program and evaluation development, the designers looked to successful language nest programs as potential models. The Hawaiian American Áha Pünana Leo and the New Zealand Kōhanga Reo language nests are centred within their Indigenous cultures and languages. Indigenous groups in these countries share health, social, and educational risk factors with Canadian Aboriginal people, and have experienced similar colonizing experiences resulting in threats to the existence of their Indigenous cultures and languages. These pre-kindergarten through grade 12 educational programs receive local and national support for language revitalization and preservation, and have been studied for their success in teaching language to young children using an immersion model, as well as for their contributions to children's enduring social and academic success.

The Hawaiian Áha Pünana Leo "nest of voice" has been in operation since 1984. Native language speakers and English-speaking children are educated together in either total-immersion or two-way language-immersion models from preschool to grade 12.

In their article "Resiliency in Native Languages," Aguilera and LeCompte (2007) cite findings on Hawaiian participants in their later years and identify factors that advance or impede

language instruction and language immersion models. The outcomes for these participants are complex, and although they are promising, the shadow of the No Child Left Behind legislation (United States Department of Education, 2002) is cited for its effect on American Indigenous-language immersion programs, resulting in a return to English focus in some Indigenous communities. This article reaffirms many of the challenges faced in implementing and evaluating a culturally based Canadian early childhood program. It also points to the tension for educators and parents between an academic and a cultural focus for Indigenous early childhood education.

In New Zealand, the Kōhanga Reo language nest preschools began in 1982 with a goal to preserve the endangered Māori language through an immersion program. This program is considered to be highly successful in revitalizing the language, and has been of interest to early childhood researchers for its approach to assessment, which requires the involvement of the child, the teacher, and the community (Paki & Rameka, 2009). Although very few AHS sites use an immersion model where the Indigenous language is not the dominant local language, the language nests have been instructive for AHS program planning and evaluation considerations.

The AHS language component and Indigenous Language revitalization.

There is a growing body of literature concerning Indigenous language revitalization (ILR). Selected readings have relevance for the AHS program and evaluation designs; the literature conveys the rationale for ILR and the benefits of heritage language promotion in educational programs. In Chapter 6 I explicate relevant global rights documents (United Nations General Assembly, 1992; UNESCO, 2008), and in Chapter 7 I review literature related to the AHS culture and language component (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007; Gardner, 2009; McCarty, 2003; Spolsky, 1989, 2002).

Because Aboriginal culture and language is a component of AHS, its impact is reportable. It is also fundamental to AHS, and to the methodology and interpretation of the evaluation. Some familiarity with ILR informs the researchers' planning and interpretations.

Next I discuss the fourth and final assumption that informs my literature review.

Assumption #4: Research in Indigenous communities has significant methodological considerations.

Storytelling.

My early appreciation of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) came from traditional Cree storytellers. Familiarity with narrative symbols (e.g., colours and animals), reflection, and personal interpretation inform understanding of culturally based stories. The symbols generate the listener's spiritual, emotional, and cognitive response, which is connected to his or her experiences and teachings. For me, stories are a metaphor for Indigenous worldview and research methodology. The stories and their artefacts could be appreciated as [Cree] myths by an outsider (e.g., an anthropologist), but will have profound and personal connections for the emic listener. For the researcher, then, the approach, significant data, and interpretations will be different for the emic and etic researcher as well. Recognizing the emic/etic implications, and in support of self-determination, the AHS design prioritized Aboriginal management of the impact evaluation.

In addition to the Elders and traditional storytellers, four Indigenous scholars augment my understanding for my present research in respect to both my methodology and the impact evaluation questions: Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Australian (Jiman) Judy Atkinson, and Canadian Indigenous scholars Cora Weber-Pillwax and Shawn Wilson.

The literature.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2012), in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, provides a comprehensive discussion of the history of colonization and Indigenous research and its philosophical foundations. Smith proposes an Indigenous Peoples' Project—a provocative agenda for Indigenous research situated within decolonization and self-determination politics. Her seminal work is comprehensive, ambitious, and complex. As well, Smith, Norman Denzin, and Yvonna Lincoln have edited the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (Denzin et al., 2008) which connects current critical theorists and emerging Indigenous methodologies.

Judy Atkinson (2001) and Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999) provide guidelines for researchers working in Indigenous communities. Weber-Pillwax emphasizes respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. I would add relationships as a fourth "R" as noted by Weber-Pillwax, as well as by Atkinson and by Shawn Wilson (2001). These Indigenous scholars advance a relationship-based role for the researcher in which self-examination and emotional investment are assumed. Reciprocity and informed action are process and product. Collectively, the authors raise consciousness and understanding of an Indigenous paradigm.

Indigenous research guidelines.

Two Canadian documents—*Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research* (Schnarch, 2004), and *Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010)—inform the Indigenous research agenda as well. Although both documents predate the AHSUNC development stage and are now officially outdated, they are resources for my present research process.

OCAP. In 2004, the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), which was funded by Health Canada from 2000 to 2012, published four principles of self-determination in First Nations research, widely known by their acronym, OCAP (ownership, control, access, possession). First introduced as OCA in 1998, OCAP grew from original work by First Nations people, at the grass-roots and leadership levels, who previously designed the culturally defined First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS). The main objectives of the RHS were "to provide scientifically and culturally validated information, while enhancing First Nations capacity and control over research" (First Nations Health Council, n. d.). This premise is maintained throughout OCAP. The following selected quotes explicate OCAP and impart the document's main message:

> Following a critical review of colonial research practices and recent institutional efforts to improve ethics in Aboriginal research, this paper highlights policies and strategies adopted by First Nations organizations—approaches which offer a way out of the muddle of contemporary Aboriginal research and the ethical dilemmas that characterize it. The benefits of OCAP are described including the rebuilding of trust, improved research quality and relevance, decreased bias, meaningful capacity development, and community empowerment to make change. (Schnarch, 2004, p. i)

> *Ownership:* Ownership refers to the relationship of a First Nations community to its cultural knowledge/data/information. The principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns their personal information. . .

> *Control:* The aspirations and rights of First Nations Peoples to maintain and regain control of all aspects of their lives and institutions extend to research, information and data. The principle of control asserts that First Nations Peoples, their communities and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking to control all aspects of research and information management processes which impact them. First Nations control of research can include all stages of a particular research project—from conception to completion. . .

> *Access:* First Nations Peoples must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities, regardless of where it is currently held. . .

> *Possession:* While ownership identifies the relationship between a people and their data in principle, possession or stewardship is more literal. Although not a

condition of ownership per se, possession (of data) is a mechanism by which ownership can be asserted and protected. (Schnarch, 2004, p. 2)

Canadian Institutes of Health Research. In the same period, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and its Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health (2010) developed and published *CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People*—15 articles, or guiding principles, in addition to expanded text, to support ethical and culturally competent health research involving Aboriginal people. The intent was "to promote health through research that is in keeping with Aboriginal values and traditions" (p. 2).

Atkinson (2001) recommends that in research involving Aboriginal people, the participants themselves approve the research and methodology. I would suggest that participants also need to take part in interpreting the findings. It is not only a principle of respect, ownership, or self-determination, but of accuracy or verisimilitude as well. Their unique experiences and knowledge can contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation of data.

The works of the four cited scholars correspond with the NAHO and CIHR documents and evince models of transformation for Indigenous research methodologies. As linguist Joshua Fishman (1976) so aptly states, "the quest is for modernity . . . *and* authenticity, simultaneously, for seeing the *world*, but 'in our own way'" (p. 73, cited in Delpit, 2006, p. 90, emphasis in original).

Summary

In this chapter, I have organized the literature around my main assumptions. In doing so, I prepared myself for analyses, interpretations, and propositions that challenged both my own suppositions and the ideas of others.

In Part Two I continue my narrative in three chapters that I frame around Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model.

PART TWO: MOUSE WOMAN ANALYZES SYSTEMS

In Part Two, Mouse Woman in human form structures pertinent data for context and analysis—working to report with order and accuracy. Hence, I seek to explain and analyze the discrete constituents of my adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model in order to describe the chronological, distal, and proximal intrasystem influences and interactions that shape the national AHSUNC impact evaluation. This analysis is presented in three chapters, as follows:

Chapter 5: The Chronosystem: Moving Toward Social Justice

Chapter 6: Distal Systems: Documents and Stories

    1. The Macrosystem: Global Context

    2. The Exosystem: Canadian Context

Chapter 7: Proximal and Integrated Systems: Aboriginal Head Start

    1. The Mesosystem: Program Context for Evaluation

    2. The Microsystem: The National Impact Evaluation Process

This three-part approach allows me to identify key themes and indicators in individual texts in the separate systems and to chart their various interconnections and influences, which

culminate in the design of the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation. I see the texts as threads and patterns within a vista looking toward social justice for Aboriginal children.

Each gifted fabric pulled from the embers carries a story layered with history, actions, and intent, woven in a spirit of balance and social justice. Mouse Woman easily distinguishes their patterns and shapes, but to uncover their stories and fathom their essence, she must pull at threads and unravel the wool—all in the realm of the spirit world. And she must do so carefully and respectfully. An earlier experience on Chief Mountain speaks to me:

> Before we started to fast, the Elder gifted me a blue woollen blanket to keep me warm in my lodge. I was awakened that first night by the acrid smell of burning wool. The corner of my blanket had touched the embers of my fire. I must learn to be more careful. (Robertson, 1999)

As I now proceed with my research, I throw the AHSUNC impact evaluation "into the fire" that I might "fathom its essence" in pursuit of a comprehensive response to my research questions. I examine and reorder the elements and, in the process, discover and delineate the layered, disparate meanings and possibilities. I carry a responsibility to do this carefully.

In part, this care involves mindfulness toward ethical considerations in conducting cross-cultural research. Although I walk primarily in the realm of a different, academic world of social science research, I carry my experiences with me; accordingly, the spirit of Mouse Woman guides me. I am both a visitor and an activist in the Aboriginal community, and I am respectful of alternative, Indigenous approaches to research and storytelling. To honour this respect, the story I tell must advance social values that transcend the reporting and analysis of data (i.e., the emancipatory possibilities, and reconceptualization). Such values can generate action that advances social equality.

Arguments for received views of social justice are rooted in our heritage—derived from political, religious, and philosophical approaches and from personal experiences and beliefs.

Having worked with AHS since 1995, I understand the program's development and its evaluation to be situated in global, international, national, and local interactive contexts, following the contours of social justice. The paper trail of related historical and current documents and literature foreshadows or shapes this development. The chronosystem narrative augments comprehensive appreciation of activities within the other four systems.

According to Polkinghorne (1988), "narrative meaning is created by noting that something is a 'part' of a whole, and that something is a 'cause' of something else" (p. 6). Accordingly, the texts are leading threads in the AHSUNC story; their interactive influences realized in my adaptation and examination of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which moves from distal (global) to proximal (impact evaluation methodology and tools) elements. I examine the texts in these systems, framed within the chronosystem, and consider the findings in relation to my research questions.

I approach this examination by first demarcating the indicators (the terms/concepts as outlined on page 117-118) that have bearing on my research questions. I proceed with my analysis to determine presence/absence of the concepts in the selected documents. I look for themes in the texts, and in consideration of whole/part model in qualitative interpretation (J. L. Ellis, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988). I refer to selected research literature that has relevance for the impact evaluation development, or that informs my research analysis or suppositions.

Throughout the process, early childhood development/education and indigeneity are the major themes. The macro- and exosystems provide the foundational background to the development of the AHSUNC impact evaluation; the ensuing meso- and microsystems provide details of an evaluation shaped by an ecological foreground, but also, more directly, by

communities, academics, and government authority focused on AHSUNC. It is the two inner circles that address my research questions and my four key research literature assumptions.

In the course of my research, I found the ecological systems approach and substance constructive for my study on two reciprocative levels that inform each other as well as the researcher and the reader. First, the contents raise consciousness and understanding of social justice thinking related to Indigenous and children's rights and issues; second, they reveal the social and political trajectories that shape the AHSUNC national impact evaluation.

Chapter 5: The Chronosystem: Moving Toward Social Justice

*"I view the AHSUNC evaluation as a sociocultural historical construction,
fashioned in a particular time period by concurrent events, and by individuals
and groups, based on their collective knowledge and assumptions."* (Chapter 2, p.
49)

In Part One I provided the background and context for my study that included a profile of

the AHSUNC program, related historical influences, the study's theoretical and contextual

foundations, and an outline of my research methodology. Now, in Part Two, I place ecological

influences into the system elements I have adapted from Bronfenbrenner's model (2000),

beginning with the chronosystem.

History, People, Children, and Rights

Bronfenbrenner's (2000) chronosystem augments the ecological structure by accounting

for time, people, and historical events in shaping development. In this chapter I refer to the

selected documents and events concurrent mainly to the distal system constituents characterized

by interests as regards to Aboriginal people, children, and human rights. These constituents are

fundamental to my research questions and to subsequent discussions throughout Parts Two and

Three. In essence, it is the work and ideas of specific people and groups of people in a specific

time period that contribute to chronosystem chronicles.

In the chronological timeline shown in Table 5.1 below, I recount an overview of

historical and recent events and other influences that broaden that ecological context. These

events provide added contextual reference to the ecology of the distal and proximal systems, as

described in the following chapters, that shape the AHSUNC program and its evaluation. I chose

not to reiterate influential events, studies, and literature acknowledged elsewhere in this

dissertation; however, the reciprocity between the aforesaid events and the concurrent distal and

proximal system elements is significant (e.g., *The White Paper*; *Indian Control of Indian Education*; Indian activism from about 1960 to the present day).

Table 5.1 Chronosystem timeline.

1763	Royal Proclamation
1867	Confederation—British North American Act
1876	The Indian Act
1880	Indian residential schools (IRS) set up
1884	The Indian Advancement Act
1924	Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1950s	African American civil rights movement (1950s through 1960s, and ongoing)
1951	Indian Act revisions
1959	Declaration of the Rights of the Child
1960	Canadian Indians able to vote in federal elections
1963	Federal government commissions (Hawthorne report)
1965	U.S. Head Start program begins
1966/67	Hawthorne reports on social conditions for Canadian Aboriginal Peoples
1969	*The White Paper*
1972	National Indian Brotherhood's *Indian Control of Indian Education*
1970s	Most IRS closed
1982	Constitution Act includes Métis and Inuit as Aboriginal Peoples
1982	Maori (New Zealand) Kōhanga Reo (language nests) begin
1980s	Hawaiian cultural and language revival: Pũnana Leo (language nests)
1986	Federal government's *Task Force on Child Care*
1986	3 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion
1989	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
1990	World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien)
1992	UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities (minority rights)
1993	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) begins
1995	Truth and Reconciliation Commission South Africa
1995	AHSUNC becomes operational
1996	RCAP report
1996	Last IRS closes
1997	AHS On Reserve begins
2000	Dakar "Framework for Action on Education for All"
2002	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
2002	AHSUNC impact evaluation pilot
2003	AHSUNC national impact evaluation begins

2005	Kelowna Accord (Aboriginal housing, education, economic development, and health)
2006	AHSUNC national impact evaluation completed
2007	UNESCO education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report
2007	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Indigenous Rights)
2008	Australian government apologizes for abuses to Indigenous Australians
2008	Canadian federal government apology for IRS
2010	Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), through 2014
2014	Renewed controversy over Canadian federal Indian education plan

Early history.

The present legal position of First Nations Peoples is rooted in the British 1763 Royal Proclamation (King George III, 1763), which explicitly states that Aboriginal title has existed and continues to exist, and that all Canadian land is considered Indian land until ceded by treaty or purchase by the British Crown. Key concepts in the Proclamation are that the Crown has both dominion over Indian lands and an obligation to protect the Aboriginal inhabitants on ceded land. The Proclamation is widely recognized as an important first step toward the recognition of "existing Aboriginal rights and title, including the right to self-determination" (First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009). The declarations and spirit of this document inform present-day First Nations rights and related programs, policies, and issues.

In 1867 the British North America Act (de Labroquerie Tache, 1919) transferred responsibility for First Peoples to Canada. The 1876 Indian Act consolidated Canada's relationship with Indians, making them wards of the government. Further legislation, such as the 1884 Indian Advancement Act and later amendments, proposed that being Indian was a transitory status, and aimed at their assimilation and the destruction of Indian cultural values and ceremonies (e.g., sun dances and potlatches). The Indian Residential Schools introduced in the 1880s were to be agents of the cultural genocide.

Recent history.

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Demographics and definitions.

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) does not serve Aboriginal people living on reserves; however, the history and present state of all Indigenous people in Canada is intertwined with the legislation and broader early and recent history of First Nations Peoples.

The terminology used in this section (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012):

Aboriginal rights: Some Aboriginal Peoples of Canada hold rights as a result of their ancestors' long-standing use and occupancy of the land. The rights of certain Aboriginal Peoples to hunt, trap, and fish on ancestral lands are examples of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal rights vary from group to group depending on the customs, practices, and traditions that have formed part of their distinctive cultures.

Indian: Indian people, along with Inuit and Métis, are one of three cultural groups who are recognized as Aboriginal people under section 35 of the Constitution Act. There are legal reasons for the continued use of the term "Indian." Such terminology is recognized in the Indian Act and is used by the Government of Canada when making reference to this particular group of Aboriginal people.

The federal Indian Act defines an Indian as a person who is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian. A "Status Indian" refers to a person recorded as an Indian in the Indian Register. Many Indians were registered at the time their communities signed a treaty or upon settlement in a reserve community. The term "Indian" is considered outdated for popular usage, and is generally replaced by "First Nations."

Indian Act: Canadian federal legislation passed in 1876 and amended several times since. The Indian Act sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys, and other resources.

Inuit: An Aboriginal people in northern Canada who live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec, and Northern Labrador. The word means "people" in the Inuit language of Inuktitut. Inuit are not covered by the Indian Act. However, in 1939 the Supreme Court interpreted the federal government's power to make laws affecting "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians" as extending to Inuit.

Métis: People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit, or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway, and Cree.

Reserve: A tract of land, the legal title to which is held by the Crown, set apart for the use and benefit of an Indian band. [Note that in the USA, reserves are known as reservations.]

Off reserve: A term used to describe people, services, or objects that are not part of a reserve but relate to First Nations.

According to Statistics Canada's 2011 survey, more than 50% of the First Nations population of Canada live in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2014), and in 2001–2002 over 50% of AHSUNC participating children were off-reserve First Nations (Health Canada, 2002). Métis families, by definition, also have First Nations roots, but do not have First Nations status. Canadian Inuit are recognized constitutionally as Aboriginal, but do not have the same status as First Nations Peoples. Historical events and policies regarding First Nations Peoples have

political and social ramifications for Métis and Inuit Peoples as well, and they reflect the associated changes in 20th/21st-century thinking and actions.

Civil rights.

After World War II, rights issues gained world attention, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was formally adopted in 1948. Civil rights movements were active worldwide, starting in the 1950s. As Canadians gained awareness of human rights issues, the living conditions of Canadian Indians became a general concern. As a result of changes to the Indian Act in 1951, Indians gained or recovered some of their rights, but were not allowed to vote in federal elections until 1960. As we have seen, the Hawthorn Reports (1966, 1967) gave rise to the 1969 White Paper (*Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*), and ultimately to the 1972 Indian Brotherhood's *Indian Control of Indian Education*. In the 1980s there was increasing interest in revitalizing endangered languages and cultures (e.g., the Maori and Hawaiian language nests). The quality and social function of education, early education, and child care became significant issues. Declarations focusing on children, education, and minorities were adopted in this period, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992). I feature these declarations in Chapter 6. Endorsements for social change and social justice begot a profusion of related research, literature, and political activity. The AHSUNC program start-up and the impact evaluation predate several of the documents and events I have selected as significant representative examples (e.g., Indigenous Rights, 2007); they are included below because they reflect contemporaneous thinking, or they are references for my research.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Report. The RCAP report

(Parliament of Canada, 1996) was commissioned to respond to Aboriginal concerns and to make

recommendations for changes that would affect Aboriginal social status and government

relationships. The five-volume report makes 440 recommendations on a wide variety of issues

concerning the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples, non-Aboriginal people, and the

Canadian government, as well as economic, social, and other governance issues. According to

the report, "perhaps the most important issue raised during the Commission's hearings was

maintenance of cultural identity" (Parliament of Canada, 1996, Volume I, 2.1), and this is

reflected in Recommendation 3.5.3 cited below.

The section of the report focusing on early childhood education is most pertinent to my

study. The development process and tone of the report itself speak loudly of political climate

change. The following two quotes from *Gathering Strength: Volume 3* (Education: 5) are most

relevant, particularly as they support a comprehensive ECD approach which recognizes both

academic performance and cultural foundation.

3.1 Early Childhood Education

Aboriginal people want to prepare their children for stronger academic performance, but their concerns go beyond a singular focus on cognitive development. . . . Most important, they see early childhood education as a means of reinforcing Aboriginal identity, instilling the values, attitudes and behaviours that give expression to Aboriginal cultures. . . . The incorporation of Aboriginal language in early childhood programs has been a focal point for the drive to ensure that learning in such settings has a distinctly Aboriginal character. (Parliament of Canada, 1996)

Recommendation: The Commission recommends that

3.5.3 Federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early childhood education funding strategy that

(a) extends early childhood education services to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence;

(b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education;

(c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration;

(d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and

(e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options.

(Parliament of Canada, 1996)

Again, academic performance, Aboriginal identity, and Aboriginal language inclusion are highlighted. Recommendations b, c, and e correspond with present AHS programming in that they refer to holistic programming, Aboriginal control, and parental involvement.

Aboriginal people and other Canadians are still waiting for a satisfactory response from the federal government to most of the RCAP recommendations; however, the 1998 expansion of Aboriginal Head Start to on-reserve communities was a result of commitments based in the RCAP *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* and the 1997 Speech from the Throne (Health Canada, 2011). In the present century, international and domestic events reflect some movement on Indigenous issues. Canadian government policies and events in this century aimed to address current and past issues, as demonstrated in the following examples.

The Kelowna Accord. In 2005 the Government of Canada and the First Ministers met to discuss support for the improvement of living conditions and housing, education, employment, health, and economic development for Aboriginal people (Parliament of Canada, 2006). The succeeding government rejected the Kelowna Accord, which had strong support from Aboriginal organizations, before it was implemented. The tabled issues and the need for the federal government to address them remain at the forefront for Aboriginal organizations and individuals.

Apologies to Indigenous Peoples for government policies. In February 2008, the Australian government issued an apology for its part in the abuses to Indigenous Australians (Government of Australia, 2008). In June 2008, the Canadian government delivered an apology to Native people for the Indian Residential School (IRS) system on behalf of the government and all Canadians (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010). This apology was predated by the Anglican Church of Canada's apology in 1993 and The United Church of Canada's 1998 *Apology to Former Students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to Their Families and Communities* (The United Church of Canada, 2008). In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI expressed sorrow for the Indian Residential School abuses (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2009). Previously the Canadian government had issued apologies to Japanese Canadians for their internment and other maltreatment from 1941–49 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1988) and to Chinese Canadians for the head tax and subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants from 1923 until 1947 (Harper, 2006).

Further to the Canadian Indian Residential School apology, the government set up a compensation program for survivors of the system, the 2007 IRS Settlement Agreement, (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010), and established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to hear and record the truths of the residential school experiences and to support healing from the trauma of those experiences (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). Intergenerational survivors were heard as well. Unlike the 1995 South African TRC, the Canadian TRC did not declare amnesty for abuse perpetrators; the focus was on IRS survivors and those with intergenerational trauma.

A formal expression of remorse, sometimes followed by a form of reparation, can provide a nucleus for healing and for social justice actions; however, commitment to

reconceptualization of the issues, and support for constructive programs to redress the damage, is de rigueur. Aboriginal Head Start programs are making a strong contribution, initially, by reconceptualizing a hopeful, successful future for Aboriginal children and communities that is grounded in a belief in positive change through community actions.

Policies and their courses. Commissions, apologies, financial "compensations," and TRCs show some government recognition of systemic problems that have been created through government policies. This dissertation is not the place to argue their merits; regardless, they need to be followed up with social and economic policies that will support progressive change. Governments and citizens are becoming more informed about the effects of posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and are making connections between IRS survivors and PTSD (i.e., recognizing the gravity and comprehensive effects of IRS experiences). Citizen and church groups are organizing to educate themselves about the issues and what they can do to contribute to "right the wrongs" (e.g., Righting Wrongs Learning Circle, Edmonton [personal communications]; Mittelstedt, 2014).

Globally, colonized Indigenous Peoples, minorities, and people of colour—and their ancestors and progeny—have suffered from racist policies that have resulted in economic, social, and cultural tragedy. Accordingly, states are being induced to take action for resolution (e.g., Education for All Global Monitoring, UNESCO, 2007). Establishing colonizer/colonized accord, together with achieving intragroup consensus on resolution, can be elusive, resulting in delays, inactivity, and/or political dispute. A recent Canadian example is the government's 2014 introduction of Bill C-33**,** The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act (Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, 2014) which was politically very controversial within the Aboriginal community and throughout Canada, and did not become policy.

Contemporary Aboriginal events and issues are rooted in the early colonizing history, and there is a clear causal chain of events that begins with the Hawthorn Reports and the White Paper, followed by responses to the White Paper (e.g., Harold Cardinal's 1969 *The Unjust Society*, Indian Control of Indian Education, and, in 1996, RCAP), all linking Aboriginal conditions and proposed policies. Assessment of policies and programs—their reception and efficacy—takes place formally and informally. Community refutation can incite policy or program changes, and formal and informal assessment at the popular level can have substantial impact on the course of a proposed policy or program, as illustrated with the rise of the National Indian Brotherhood in response to the White Paper. On the other hand, formal assessment exhibiting program support can include positive popular response, as indicated in AHSUNC evaluations, which included community perceptions of change (see Chapter 7).

Continuing support for AHSUNC. AHSUNC evaluations demonstrate that participants benefit from their involvement in the program (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). Following is an affirmative Treasury Board report based on findings from the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation. Positive outcomes based on quantitative (work sampling system) outcomes and popular responses are included.

Item 17:

Significant Audit and Evaluation Findings and URL(s) to Last Audit and/or Evaluation: The program undertakes annual program and administrative evaluations to monitor effectiveness, efficiency, and participation. A three-year impact evaluation completed in March 2006 found that the program contributes to the health and social development of Aboriginal children and their families. The Work Sampling System data demonstrated significant gains for children are in the Physical Development and Health, and in Personal and Social Development domains. *Parents reported positive changes in family nutrition and health practices, in particular: serving more nutritious foods in the home, and children improving dental and other hygiene practices. Kindergarten teachers, parents and community members indicated that AHSUNC graduates show increasing school readiness skills which they attribute to AHSUNC participation. Parents,*

AHSUNC staff and community members reported gains by AHSUNC children in the practice of Aboriginal culture and traditions, and in Aboriginal language acquisition. Parents reported positive changes for themselves through AHSUNC participation as well as increased involvement in cultural activities for themselves. (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat & Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006, emphasis added)

This 2007 government report provides an apparent example of community perceptions being recognized as data to support positive outcomes—a progressive move.

My personal historical context.

I bring a research perspective that is drawn from my personal chronological timeline. I was born during World War II; my father was overseas at the time in a war my family described as "fighting against the evil Hitler." I travelled to France with my parents in 1955 to visit my uncle's WWII grave among the white crosses "row on row." At that time we saw evidence of the rubble left by bombing in England and France. It was all very confusing for an 11-year-old girl. I remember clearly my parents cheering in 1953 when the Korean War ended.

In 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks challenged transportation (bussing) segregation, leading to the end of U.S. segregation laws and advancing attention to other civil rights. My children, born in the 1970s, found it hard to believe that "Blacks" were treated that way in my lifetime, and my grandchildren are shocked that Canadian Indian children were taken forcibly from their homes and placed in residential schools.

I mention these events to place myself in my research and to extend context for historical and present events. I am both impressed and saddened when I realize the social changes that took place over the last 70- years; however, I am saddened that change takes such a long time and that we still have such a long way to go. The March 2014 Edmonton TRC event I attended organized a number of activities for children and youth, including participating students' tributes to IRS survivors. Aboriginal youth who spoke at the sessions were confident, informed, accomplished,

and optimistic. I can see that strong, articulate Aboriginal youth will lead future change alongside their academic relations.

A Chronosystem Recap

I have selected policy documents and events for my timeline and for my distal systems examination: social justice and human rights documents, apologies, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Chapter 7, I look at the substance germane to my study in the proximal documents. While other events (e.g., change of government) affect the course of programs and other circumstances (of Aboriginal people, or the AHSUNC) at the proximal level, I would argue that the particular Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals who were in place (in the sense of a chronosystem—in a propitious place at a propitious time) had the greatest influence on the distinctive course of AHS and the impact evaluation. Among the collective characteristics I have identified in retrospect are a belief in local community governance, and Aboriginal capacity for self-determination, not just as a right, but as a natural condition; relevant and extended experience with Aboriginal communities; historical and current knowledge of Aboriginal issues; a strong sense of social justice for children and for Aboriginal people; positive community connections; and familiarity with government processes. The participating partners collectively represent experts in ECD, Aboriginal health, and evaluation, and community people who helped to create and critique the methodology, worked with the children, families, and communities, and shared their cultural knowledge and their stories.

According to Polkinghorne (1995), "for meaningfulness and understanding stories rely on people's presumption that time has a unilinear direction moving from past to present to future and on their sense that events, motives, and interpretations can affect human actions and outcomes" (p. 8). I continue, as researcher, to be influenced by past and current events. Relevant

events I witness, either in person or through the media, inform my present understanding, my research, and my interpretations. In the mouse milieu, these events underscore social justice issues for Canadian Aboriginal Peoples and their path toward resolution. Next, in Chapter 6, I build from this milieu, showing congruence of thinking between the chronological and distal systems.

Chapter 6: Distal Systems: Documents and Stories

It bears noting that there exist a number of laudable government education programs, some of which have demonstrated success. The Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program has shown achievements in eliminating disparities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children in terms of school readiness; unfortunately, this program reaches less than 10% of aboriginal children. (Anaya, 2014, para. 19)

I contend that the chronological events described in the previous chapter advance a social justice agenda for Aboriginal children. Furthermore, related global declarations and national policies inform the progressive approach that shaped the culturally based ECD program (AHSUNC) and its program evaluation. In this chapter I examine a number of these documents that are significant to the foundations of the impact evaluation. Each of them has a dynamic history and the generative potential to guide social change. To gain insight into the social construction of the AHSUNC evaluation, I begin with an examination of selected macrosystem and exosystem texts. Each of the examined constituent documents is viewed as a primary narrative with a theme and elements that have, in my view, separately, together, and in their interrelations, influenced this construction and the subsequent mesosystem and microsystem activities and artefacts. Returning to the quote from the United Nations Human Rights Council report that introduces this chapter (Anaya, 2014), AHSUNC achievements (toward school readiness) and challenges (program reach), both features of the proximal systems, have come full circle to have bearing on a (distal) global document—a kind of circular scaffolding! In turn, the Anaya report has the potential to influence policy at global and domestic levels.

Approaching Systems Constituents as Narratives

A story, or narrative, co-constructs meaning with other stories and with its audiences (Bakhtin, 1981, Foucault, 1977, Kristeva, 1986, all cited in Sikes & Gates, 2006). For example,

Foucault (1977, cited in Sikes & Gates, 2006) argues that discourses are systems of representation, with objects and actions only assuming meaning and becoming objects of knowledge within discourses. As well, Bakhtin's (1981, cited in Sikes & Gates, 2006) concept of *heteroglossia* refers to the process of narratives intersecting and thereupon forming new narratives. Kristeva (1986, cited in Sikes & Gates, 2006), influenced by Bakhtin, introduced the term *intertextuality* (intermingling while weaving) to denote that "a particular story or narrative is not simply the work of the author, [but] is in fact constituted by its relationship to other stories and systems of signs" ("Intertextuality," para.1). In this case, the AHSUNC evaluation methodology is not just the work of one author or dedicated group; it is composed of grand and modest narratives, historical and current, as evidenced in the ecological systems process. In the process of my analysis, I ask myself, *do documents (narratives) that address global or international social issues influence relevant Health Canada/PHAC policies related to Aboriginal children, the direction or the design of the AHSUNC program, its evaluation, or my present research? If so, which ones, and in what ways? If not, what gaps are suggested?*

In the process, I am mindful of my research question: *Is the AHSUNC national impact evaluation approach and methodology an instructive model for impact evaluation studies on Indigenous early childhood programs?* I also keep in mind the following guiding questions related to the analysis charts below:

- What themes related to ECD are present in global rights thinking?

- Are there references to indigeneity at the global level? Are there references to program evaluation?

- What are the references to, and messages about, culture(s) or Indigenous culture(s)?

- What do they say about education, ECD/ECE, intervention, or school readiness?

- What are the implicit or explicit references to program development, program evaluation, and policy—or their connections?

Macrosystem Narratives

      Rights declarations and international ECD studies as narratives.

      The first documents I examine emanate from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and provide a central focus to the macrosystem of my adapted ecological model as major influences for Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) development. Next, I consider international studies of early childhood development programs that have relevance for my research.

      Rights declarations.

      AHS and its evaluations have roots in modern human rights thought, policies, guidelines and applications, and their universal and egalitarian goals. I examine the influences identified in rights declarations and other pertinent global documents related to (a) children's rights (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children [CRC], 1989); health (WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986); education (Education for All [EFA], 1990, 2003, 2007); Indigenous Peoples' rights[21] (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007); and minority rights (UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992).

      In my analysis of the selected documents, I looked for references to the following themes. I used these concepts throughout my analyses to trace development within the ecological systems, noting absence of reference as well:

- Early childhood development (ECD), education and care
- Holistic or comprehensive ECD programs
- Education
- School readiness

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[21] EFA 2007 and the 2007 minority rights declaration are post-AHSUNC evaluation, but reflect the progression of thinking at the time and therefore have relevance for my research.

- Intervention

- Indigenous position

- Indigenous culture

- Indigenous language

- Program evaluation and evaluation approach

- Indicators of success

- Indigenous methodology

- Governance/policy

- Social justice

- Praxis/change/reconceptualize

- Other concepts related to AHS

- Child

- Diversity/minority

- Other

The documents described below are analyzed with respect to the above indicators.

Rights of the child. Genesis: Prior to the 1948 Universal Human Rights Declaration, post-WWI concerns for children gave rise to the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (League of Nations, 1924). The first of the five principles in the Geneva Declaration guidelines states: "The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually." The concepts articulated in the Geneva Declaration were adopted in 1923 by the International Save the Children Union and endorsed as guidelines in 1924 by the League of Nations General Assembly as the World Child Welfare Charter. On November 20, 1959, the United Nations General Assembly (1992) adopted a ten-principle Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in recognition that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs

special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth"

(para. 2).

Selected Principles: Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1959):

2. The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.

7. The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.

The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right.

10. The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

These principles endorse children's rights as a human rights issue, and argue that because children are humans with particular attributes, they have a special status, and therefore are in need of special protection.

In 1989 the UN National Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC).[22] This document, founded on the needs and rights of children, became international law in 1990. The CRC addresses the basic human rights to children everywhere: (a) the right to survival; (b) the right to develop to the fullest; (c) protection from harmful

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[22] Canada became a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Children in 1990 (ratified in 1991). Canada has been found in conflict with the Convention, particularly in relation to Aboriginal children.

influences, abuse, and exploitation; and (d) the right to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life. The four core principles of the CRC are non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival, and development, and respect for the views of the child.

The following CRC articles refer to education and indigeneity. None of the articles refer specifically to preschool education.

Article 14 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion): Children are free to think, develop a belief system, and practice their religion so long as their partaking in these freedoms does not infringe upon the rights of others. Governments should respect the rights of parents, families, and guardians to provide direction to their children on these matters.

Article 28: (right to education): State Parties should provide children with free, compulsory primary education.

Article 29 (goals of education): State Parties should ensure that a child's education allows him/her to develop to his/her fullest potential. Whether children receive an education in a school setting or are home-schooled, they should be taught to respect the values of their own culture as well as those of others.

Article 30 (children of minority and Indigenous groups): Children belonging to minority or Indigenous groups have the right to learn about and participate in their cultural customs and traditions, practice their religions, and speak in their native languages. These rights should not be infringed upon by members of majority racial, ethnic, or cultural groups.

Article 44 lays out reporting obligations for ratifying States:

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the [UNCRC] Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights (a) within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned; (b) thereafter every five years.

Early childhood care and education is recognized as an intervention strategy. In 1990, at the UN/UNICEF World Summit for Children, 159 national representatives collectively signed A World Declaration on the Survival, Protection, and Development of Children, with an accompanying Plan of Action. Six categories (health, survival, women's health, nutrition,

education, and protection) address children's survival and health, with education providing the main reference to ECD: "Early childhood development (ECD): expansion of ECD activities, including appropriate low-cost family and community-based interventions" (UNICEF, 2002b). The Plan of Action sets forth a framework for national and international goals, and for implementing and monitoring those goals.

More recently, in order to review progress since the 1990 Summit and to renew its commitments, the 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children provided an enhanced action plan to improve the lives of the world's children. Article 40 (8) of *A World Fit for Children: Millennium Development Goals* reflects a holistic approach to intervention: "Strengthen early childhood care and education by providing services, developing and supporting programs directed to families, legal guardians, caregivers and communities" (UNICEF, 2002a, p. 36). Supports to families, parental rights, and cultural identity and practices are featured, and indigeneity is introduced:

> **Article 29:** States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: . . . (c) the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. (p. 73)

> **Article 30:** In those States in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities or persons of Indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is Indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language. (p. 74)

> See also pp. 11 (provision of education), 64 (freedom of thought and religion), and 66 (parents have primary responsibility).

The Millennium Development Goals committed the UN member states to reach eight overarching goals by 2015. Canada's response is described in the next (exosystem) section.

Commentary: Early children's rights declarations affirm children's special status, and support holistic development without discrimination. They acknowledge both state and parental responsibilities. The more recent documents attend to issues related to early childhood development, and to Indigenous and minority populations as well.

World Health Organization documents. The World Health Organization (WHO) is the United Nations' directing and coordinating authority for health activities. It is responsible for "providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends," thereupon providing needed information for state policy and funding decisions (World Health Organization, 2015).

Health provision is regarded by WHO as a fundamental human right. The WHO's 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion outlined a global health promotion strategy that aimed for Health for All by 2000. Under this charter, health is seen as holistic and as a social justice issue, specifying that health services be respectful and sensitive to cultural needs. WHO principles comprise social determinants of health, which are described as:

> the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities—the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. (World Health Organization, 2011)

The determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviours.

> The contexts of people's lives determine their health, and so blaming individuals for having poor health or crediting them for good health is inappropriate. . . . These determinants—or things that make people healthy or not—include the above factors, and many others:

- Income and social status. Higher income and social status are linked to better health.

The greater the gap between the richest and poorest people, the greater the differences in health.

- Education. Low education levels are linked with poor health, more stress, and lower self-confidence.

- Physical environment, social support networks, genetics, health services, gender.

- Culture. Customs and traditions, and the beliefs of the family and community, all affect health. (World Health Organization, 2011)

In response to increasing concerns about these persisting and widening inequities, WHO established the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) in 2005 to provide advice on how to reduce social inequities. The Commission's final report (August 2008) contains three overarching, action-oriented recommendations:

1. Improve daily living conditions

2. Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources

3. *Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action*. (World Health Organization, 2011, emphasis added).

Socioeconomic status, education, and culture contribute to health status and focus attention on global inequalities, reframing our understanding of health and our research approaches and applications to population health problems. I have emphasized the third recommendation (measurement and assessment) because it has direct implications for program evaluation. Global recognition and leadership around social determinants is significant for augmenting Canada's health strategies, and understanding and measuring the problems and the impacts of interventions are imperative to advancing these strategies.

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities (United Nations, 1992). The UN declaration on minority rights "offers guidance to States as they seek to manage diversity and ensure non-discrimination, and for

minorities themselves, as they strive to achieve equality and participation" (Circassia, n.d.). It declares:

> States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.

> States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.

> States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole. (United Nations, 1992, p. 3)

The document does not contain specific references to early childhood development, and it refers to education only once. Its significance lies in its recognition of minority rights as human rights, and the mandate it provides to advance and protect them. An introductory clause, however, does include supporting the realization of principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I suggest that one plausible approach to advancing minority and children's rights could entail a systematic strengthening of minority identity in early childhood (e.g., through Aboriginal Head Start).

Commentary: The protection and promotion of patent minority cultural and linguistic traditions reflects the progressive thinking of the time. As well, the reference to educational measures to inform the general population with respect to local minorities, and to provide minorities with resources to learn about the broader society, extends the characterization of nondiscrimination practices and contributes to global development within a democratic framework. Regrettably, according to a 2012 minority rights report (United Nations, 2012) a significant gap in minority rights protection still exists. There is no reference to Indigenous

peoples in this document. Fifteen years later, the UN addressed distinct rights in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007). I include this post-AHSUNC document in the macrosystem because it reflects the earlier understandings and views of many groups and individuals that influenced the development of the AHSUNC and AHS On Reserve programs (e.g., as evidenced in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples).

In the past decade, significant Indigenous programs, documents, and events have impacted the lives of Aboriginal people and raised awareness of Indigenous assets and issues. The influence of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007) is significant. This historic document, which is guided by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, was developed to support "significant improvements in the global situation of Indigenous peoples" (p. 3). The 46 articles in the declaration reflect changing world views on Indigenous status and rights, and recognition and affirmation of self-determination, including cultural development. Article 14, cited below, is particularly pertinent for the macrosystem in relation to AHSUNC. The introduction to the cited articles provides a comprehensive rationale and direction for the declaration. Following are eight of the introductory remarks most relevant to my study:

> Concerned that Indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests,
>
> Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples which derive political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources,

Welcoming the fact that indigenous peoples are organizing themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and in order to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression wherever they occur,

Convinced that control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs,

Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment,

Recognizing in particular the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child,

Acknowledging that the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, affirm the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development,

Recognizing that the situation of Indigenous peoples varies from region to region and from country to country and that the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration,

Solemnly proclaims the following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect. (United Nations, 2007, pp. 11–16)

The following selected Articles speak to rights related to culture and education:

Article 3

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 8

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:

(a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;

(b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;

(c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;

(d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;

(e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

Article 14

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (United Nations, 2007, pp. 22-23).

Commentary: The selected articles above underscore self-determination in social and cultural domains and embrace education. While Aboriginal Head Start programs can be seen as economic contributors through community hire and anticipated school readiness / progress outcomes, the local control and cultural base are most significant. The tenor of the introduction and the articles is in alliance with AHS programs, but neither the minority nor the Indigenous rights declarations give direction on how programs might demonstrate contributions to their goals, or what reasonable expectations might be. Suffice it to say, there is alignment between rights goals for education and culture and the AHS programs.

The Dakar "Framework for Action on Education for All" (UNESCO, 2000). The first goal of Education for All (EFA) is "the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early

childhood care and education, particularly for highly vulnerable and disadvantaged children"
(UNESCO, 2000, p. 15). This document reaffirms the 1990 Jomtien statement when it states:

> The vision of the World Declaration on Education for All, supported by the
> Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the
> Child, that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit
> from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest
> sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live
> together and to be. (UNESCO, 2000, p. 73)

While references and indicators found in these documents generally refer to children of
primary school age, they impart the character of children's educational rights and State
responsibilities, which can be extended to early childhood education. The document states that
governments "have an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained"
(UNESCO, 2000, p. 8). 2015 was the target year for reaching the EFA goals.

The related 2007 UNESCO document *Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring
Report, Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)* addresses the
education of children in difficult circumstances and promotes ECCE for its contributions to
children, families, and society (UNESCO, 2007). This report denotes the importance of ECCE as
a contributor to children's well-being and early brain development, their school preparation and
success, and the greater goal of eradicating poverty (UN Millennium Campaign, 2002). It states:
"Investment in ECCE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality,
especially for children from poor families" (2007, p. 4). However, the evidence suggests that
those in most need are most unlikely to access programs. The report assesses the EFA goal to
expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most disadvantaged children. The
report makes a strong case for the centrality of ECCE as a right, and presents its economic,
educational, and other social benefits.

Summary of Documents: The five documents presented in this section support a variety of universal human rights. The rights approach evokes a different concept and program focus than a deficit, or needs-based, foundation. Rights suggests a fundamental view of what it means to be human, and systematic protection or support for individuals and groups whose rights are not met due to either victimization or lack of access to requisite social and economic resources, or both.

Each of the five documents carries key themes and references that inform Canada's responses and strategies to address social determinants. In my study I use a checklist rubric to determine presence/absence of predetermined concepts, and monitor the text for additional themes and messages (e.g., the context or purpose of the document). The text analysis and the relationships of the data to exosystem documents, are recorded at the end of this chapter. The worksheet example shown below in Table 6.1 records document analysis data.

Table 6.1 Worksheet example of individual documents.

Key Assumptions and Concepts	Yes	Not	Document Name
			Documents and Literature Data
ECD/ECE/ECEC			
Holistic/comprehensive			
Education			
School readiness			
Intervention			
Indigenous position			
Indigenous culture			
Indigenous language			
Program evaluation and evaluation approach			
Success indicators			
Indigenous methodology			
Governance/policy			
Social justice			
Parents			
Praxis/change/reconceptualize			
Other AHS concepts			
Child			

Diversity/minority			
Other			

International ECD programs and studies.

Throughout my dissertation I refer to a number of highly publicized studies that I believe have affected the trajectory of ECD intervention programs and their evaluations. The first group advances the narrative theme that early intervention in low-SES families and their preschool children can affect subsequent school success and social status. Evidence-based findings from evaluation of these programs, derived from longitudinal child outcomes, show that the program participants are many times more successful than control groups of nonparticipants.

Three American studies on ECD intervention programs—Perry Preschool (Schweinhart et al., 2005), Abecedarian (Masse & Barnett, 2002), and Chicago Child-Parent Centre (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001)—provide strong evidence that early intervention programs targeted for low-income, high-risk children can provide measurable, positive impacts for participants. None of the three studies were national program impact studies; rather, they were detailed case studies of individual projects and their intervention outcomes. My own assumptions about the power of early intervention (Assumption #1: Early childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes for participating children, families, and communities, and to social justice) are likely linked to this research, and all three studies are frequently referred to in related literature. Later studies, such as Kaǧitçibaşi's (2007) Turkish Early Enrichment Project, support these ideas, but are not included in this section because they took place after the AHSUNC impact evaluation.

The second group of studies supports an early intervention by means of culturally based ECD programming. I refer to examples from this group periodically as well. The Hawaiian and

Maori language nests have been influential reference models for the design of the AHS programs. The research aspects of the language nest programs demonstrate the success of early intervention for language and culture revitalization, but they are less clear about their impacts on other areas of children's development, although McCarty (2003) and Spolsky (2002) show promising results when Indigenous languages are supported for school-age children. Some of the New Zealand studies report on groups of children who are not identified as being at risk according to SES (Cooper, Arango-Kemp, Wylie, & Hodgen, 2004), which would confound a comparable analysis with children from higher-risk groups.

The third group of studies, drawn mainly from examples in the literature review, provides examples of innovative approaches to child assessment and program evaluation.

Intervention programs such as AHS build on the evidence provided in the three American longitudinal studies to argue for their programs' social and financial benefits. I refer to differences in methodological approaches between these studies and AHSUNC in the subsequent context of the challenges in selecting a methodological approach for the impact evaluation. Specific intervention and Indigenous issues are reviewed as well.

The following section discusses Canada's response to the global perspectives, and policies and programs that address Aboriginal health and inform program evaluation.

Exosystem Narratives

The exosystem includes the Government of Canada's responses to global ECD concerns and their accountability requirements, providing additional context for the AHSUNC evaluation design via Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) programs and policies. Both parties play a role in AHS's development and programs—Health Canada as the

initial home of AHSUNC and the present department responsible for AHS On Reserve, and PHAC as the present department responsible for AHSUNC.

Health Canada's mandate is to help Canadians maintain and improve their health (Health Canada, 2014), while PHAC's mission is "to promote and protect the health of Canadians through leadership, partnership, innovation and action in public health" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). Canadian provinces and territories are responsible for the health care of the majority of Canadians, but Health Canada supports the health of Status Indians and Inuit through the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch. The 1974 Lalonde Report, titled *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians* (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981), prompted a focus on preventative health, leading to the federal government's population health approach (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). The present policies aim "to improve the health of the entire population and to *reduce health inequities among population groups*" (2012, emphasis added). This approach draws on the health determinants elucidated later in this section. Because Aboriginal status, education, and early childhood development are recognized as health determinants, AHS is considered a health program and is described and evaluated as a contributor to health in that context.

The Canadian context for AHS and its evaluation is organized below under the following subtitles: Canada's approach to programs for children; a Canada fit for children; Canada's response to the WHO principles; Health Canada/PHAC approaches: Population health / determinants of health; healthy child development as a determinant; and program evaluation.

Canada's approach to programs for children.

Brighter Futures.

Following the 1990 World Summit for Children, Canada initiated Brighter Futures, a five-year national plan of action. It focused attention on the conditions that commonly put Canadian children at risk, and was the forerunner for other commitments to children—many of them directed to Aboriginal families.

The National Children's Agenda.

The National Children's Agenda (Battle & Torjman, 2000) was developed through federal, provincial, and territorial public consultations "to ensure that all Canadian children *have the best possible opportunity to realize their full potential*" (p. 3, emphasis added). The agenda supported "the critical and primary role that parents, families, and communities play in the lives of children" (p. 3) and it identified four goals for children: physical and emotional health, safety and security, successful learning, and social engagement and responsibility. It listed among its values "the range of rich traditions and cultures in Canada" and sought "to reflect these in the services developed pursuant to this agreement" (p. 3).

The Caledon Institute for Social Policy's proposed model framework for the agenda's ECD services addressed ECD programs' accountability "to governments and to the public for financial, administrative, and *service performance*" (Battle & Torjman, p. 5, emphasis added). The latter required "*ongoing monitoring and periodic quantitative and qualitative assessment of inputs, outcomes, and community decision-making processes*" (p. 5, emphasis added).

A Canada Fit for Children.

The action plan "A Canada Fit for Children," drafted in response to the May 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children, indicates four priorities for protecting children's rights:

supporting families and strengthening communities; promoting healthy lives; protecting children

from harm; and promoting education and learning (Government of Canada, 2004, p. 14). While

parents/guardians are recognized as having primary responsibility for upholding the rights of

their children, "the role of government and society with respect to children is to provide the

legislative and policy framework, the institutional and organizational structures, the fiscal and

other supports and services to enable families to ensure their children's healthy development" (p.

16).

Prior to 2002, Canada has a history of federal, provincial, municipal, and private

enrichment and intervention programs that are framed not only by the venerable rhetoric of

world organizations that focus on the rights and potential of children, but also by the

demonstrated evidence of economic benefits of investing in early childhood development

intervention programs. As indicated in this paper, U.S. longitudinal studies on intervention

programs such as Head Start have pioneered research showing economic benefits of participation

in quality ECD programs, and these outcomes have influenced Canadian policies and programs,

including the AHS programs.

Government expectations.

The following section from the 1994 Speech from the Throne illustrates the Canadian

government's position as regards to the proposed AHS program:

> Healthy children are also very much at the heart of a program we proposed for
> Aboriginal families living off reserve in urban centres and in large northern
> communities. The Aboriginal Head Start program would provide enriched
> programs for young children and include such important elements as nutritional
> counselling, physical activity, and child care.
>
> However, it also involves parents as both leaders and learners. The program
> would be designed and managed by Aboriginal people at the community level and
> would be sensitive to both cultural and linguistic realities. . . . *Successful Head
> Start programs can help reduce some of the effects of poverty by stimulating a
> desire for learning, by entrenching a positive self-image, and by providing for*

social, emotional, and physical needs of these at-risk children. If successful—and I am very positive it will be—this program could be extended to other Canadian children in need. Children are the future of our country and their well-being is everyone's responsibility. Healthy, confident children can develop and grow to their potential and all of us benefit. (Marleau, 1994, emphasis added)

The following remarks reflecting Health Canada's position (as put forward by Marleau, 1994), were recorded in Hansard January 28, 1994:

Another area that deserves our attention is the situation of aboriginal peoples. We know they face discrimination. The needs of the aboriginal women have long been neglected and the lives of the younger generation will not improve without proper access to education.

The Aboriginal Head Start program and post-secondary education assistance for these students will be the foundation of the future independence and economic well-being of the aboriginal communities. (Hon. Sheila Finestone, Secretary of State [Multiculturalism, Status of Women])

This government will address the staggering problem of poverty among aboriginal children through our specific head start program. This is something I am very excited about. It is something that has been absent forever and it is something that should cause us all to hang our heads in shame, that we have allowed this to go on as long as it has. (Beryl Gaffney, Member of Parliament for Nepean)

The 1994 Speech from the Throne and ensuing parliamentary remarks recognize risk factors and gaps associated with determinants of health and suggest that AHS can contribute to their resolution through comprehensive ECD programs, albeit community strengths such as culture and language or local control are not mentioned.

Canada's approach to WHO principles.

Canada's determinants of health approach to AHSUNC is based on WHO principles (World Health Organization, 2011). These principles and reports hold three key features of health determinants: (a) they are directly related to health inequities; (b) they are interrelated with policies; and (c) they suggest that we need to assess the problem of inequities and to take action.

Social determinants of health.

According to Raphael (2009), social determinants of health can be understood as the social and economic conditions that shape jurisdictional, individual, and community health. Raphael lists the 14 social determinants identified in 2002 at a national York University conference on determinants of health (2009, p. 7, emphasis added):

Aboriginal status	gender
disability	housing
early life	income and income distribution
education	*race*
employment and working conditions	social exclusion
food insecurity	social safety net
health services	unemployment and job security

Aboriginal status, early life, and education are most relevant to AHS. Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) refer to "pathway effects" (p. 23), where children's exposure to risk factors (which may include several of the above determinants) does not show immediate health-related effects (e.g., readiness to learn), but health consequences are evident later (e.g., low educational attainment). They suggest that one way to mitigate the risk effects is to provide high-quality early childhood education. This suggestion, of course, implies policy commitments.

ECD as a social determinant of health.

The following quotes inform the evidence-based approach to ECD that has influenced development of the AHSUNC program and its evaluation. They are taken from a summation of papers presented at the 2002 "Social Determinants of Health Across the Life Span" conference:

There is strong research support for the idea that ECEC can be a central factor in healthy child development (Shonkoff, 2000). There is good evidence that high quality ECEC programs:

provide intellectual and social stimulation that promotes cognitive development and social competence, that can establish a basis for later success in elementary school.

produce positive effects that persist into later life, especially, but not exclusively, for low-income children (Espinoza, 2002; Andersson, 1994; Osborn & Millbank, 1987). For example, a recent longitudinal study on outcomes for very low-income children in the U.S. found that, in addition to better school performance and lower juvenile crime rates, participants in the program since infancy had much higher earnings as adults—AND so did their mothers. The study participants were also much less likely to be smokers. (Masse & Barnett, 2002). (Friendly & Browne, 2002, p. 2)

I note a similar evidence-based policy approach to ECD on the PHAC website, in the

"Underlying Premises and Evidence" section of *What Makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy?*

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011) which includes the sections shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2. Key Determinant 8: Healthy Child Development

UNDERLYING PREMISES	EVIDENCE
New evidence on the effects of early experiences on brain development, school readiness and health in later life has sparked a growing consensus about early child development as a powerful determinant of health in its own right. At the same time, we have been learning more about how all of the other determinants of health affect the physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of children and youth. For example, a young person's development is greatly affected by his or her housing and neighbourhood, family income and level of parents' education, access to nutritious foods and physical recreation, genetic makeup, and access to dental and medical care. (para. 1)	Evidence from the **Second Report on the Health of Canadians**: Experiences from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on the connecting and sculpting of the brain's neurons. Positive stimulation early in life improves learning, behaviour, and health into adulthood. (para. 1)

Public Health Agency of Canada approaches.

PHAC takes two approaches to health that incorporate population health and

determinants of health. The following information regarding these approaches is taken from the

PHAC website (2011):

Population health is an approach to health that aims to improve the health of the entire population and to reduce health inequities among population groups. . . . An underlying assumption of a population health approach is that reductions in health inequities require reductions in material and social inequities. (para. 3)

A population health approach uses 'evidence-based decision making.' Quantitative and qualitative evidence on the determinants of health is used to identify priorities and strategies to improve health. An important part of the population health approach is the development of new sources of evidence on the determinants of health, their interrelationship, and the effectiveness of interventions to improve health and the factors known to influence it. (para. 5)

The above quote highlights both the importance of evidence in directing decision making

and the development of new sources of evidence. This approach is important to the rationale and

direction of the subsequent AHSUNC evaluation. The PHAC website (2011) lists the following

determinants of health [emphasis added]:

- Income and social status

- Social support networks

- *Education and literacy*

- Employment/working conditions

- Social environments

- Physical environments

- Personal health practices and coping skills

- *Healthy child development*

- Biology and genetic endowment

- Health services

- Gender

- *Culture*

AHSUNC programs are designed to reach children, families, and communities. The

impact evaluation addresses several of the health determinants through an evaluation framework

that includes the six components and their effects on all three participating entities.

Program evaluation.

Evaluation is linked to policy and program design as well as to assessment results. The

following Treasury Board of Canada policy statement outlines the broad expectations of a

federally funded program evaluation:

It is government policy that departments and agencies embed evaluation into their management practices:

- to help design policies, programs, and initiatives that clearly define expected results and that embody sound performance measurement, reporting and accountability provisions at their outset; and

- to help assess in a rigorous and objective manner the results of government policies, programs, and initiatives, including their impacts, both intended and unintended, and alternative ways of achieving expected results. (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2001, para. 1)

As I review the proximal systems and my evaluation timeline (see Chapter 7), I recognize

that, apropos social construction, it is particular individuals and groups who operationalize the

distal concepts and particulars that have given the distinctive shape to the AHSUNC impact

evaluation, not withstanding requisite government conditions.

Next, in Chapter 7, I describe the AHSUNC development phase and methodology that

emerged from the associated proximal system documents, approaches, and studies.

Chapter 7. Proximal Systems: Aboriginal Head Start

The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of people in the setting. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 6)

In this chapter I move to a more narrative approach, which complements the proximal features temporal correspondence to my evaluation work with the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs. This shift in voice implies increased subjectivity attributable to my role in the evaluation process and my prior familiarity with the material. My story is in part an autoethnography, wherein, according to C. Ellis et al. (2011), "an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences" (para. 5). At times I bring this subjectivity and selectivity to the discussion in my adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model, which is central to my work.

Prior to the launch of my narrative, I include Tables 7.1 and 7.2 as chronological reference summaries for the proximal events that Chapter 7 describes.

Table 7.1 Proximal features timetable: A chronological summary of the development process for the evaluation tools and methodology.

The Mesosystem

1. The *AHSUNC Evaluation Framework* (1997) describes the framework's development process and recommended evaluation approach and its related specifications.

2. Budgell and Robertson (Health Canada representatives) meet with participants at the1999 AHS national training conference to review indicators specified in the evaluation framework. Workshop participants emphasize the importance of Aboriginal culture and language, and school readiness, as evaluation features.

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3. September 1999: Two-day AHS colloquium of selected Aboriginal community members takes place and the members meet with Health Canada representatives to advise on the evaluation approach. Participants emphasize the importance of cultural appropriateness in the methodology and reiterate the significance of Aboriginal culture and language competencies as indicators of program success. They advise Health Canada to seek broad input from a wide-ranging field of experts.

4. Spring 2002: Health Canada representatives meet with a selected group of 20 advisors with collective expertise in ECD, program evaluation, statistics, and Aboriginal culture and language, and familiarity with Aboriginal associations and communities. This group, known as the Instrument Development Team, meets for three days to explore and recommend an approach for the impact evaluation. The team leaders, Anne Chabot and Debra Wright, are later contracted by Health Canada to select three participants with requisite specialties to make up a Tool Development Team (TDT) and to lead the team in designing the impact evaluation.

5. Ongoing National Aboriginal Head Start Committee/Council (NAHSC) involvement, and involvement of the NAHSC Evaluation Subcommittee.

6. Over a two-year period, the TDT meets, identifies and modifies the approach and instruments, devises criteria for site selection, and selects five representative pilot sites and ten sites for the impact evaluation study.

The Microsystem

7. Preliminary data are collected by TDT team leaders in 2000. Design work continues.

8. Anne Chabot leaves the team in 2001; artist Leo Yerxa joins to create illustrations for the Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition test. Methodology and instrument

selection/development are completed.

9. Carol Rowan, ECD educator and Inuit member, attends WSS training in 2001 and becomes a certified WSS trainer, training three early childhood educators from each pilot site and subsequently three from all ten sites.

10. In 2002 Health Canada selects an evaluation contractor, Johnston Research Inc. (Andrea Johnston [Ojibwe, Chippewas of Nawash], and a team of evaluation support people).

11. Participating sites nominate community evaluators, who receive evaluator training from HC/PHAC.

12. In 2002 five sites pilot the methodology and instruments.

13. From 2003–2005 data are collected from ten impact evaluation sites.

Table 7.2 My AHSUNC evaluation timeline.

1994	Early AHSUNC program consultations under Health Canada (HC).
1995	AHS Advisory Committee formed (AHSUNC—HC); HC contracts Sheila Clark and Associates to write *Literature Review: A Reference for Aboriginal Head Start Project Operators*; Treasury Board Secretariat requires AHSUNC evaluation framework.
1996	The *AHS Initiative: Program Principles and Guidelines* developed; evaluation consultants contracted; conduct data collection for framework; HC group and I visit High/Scope office and Perry Preschool, Ypsilanti, MI; I attend U.S. Head Start national research conference in DC.
1997	AHS evaluation framework published; 90 AHSUNC sites become operational; regional evaluation workshops held; all HS sites supported to send representatives.
1998	AHS sites conduct local evaluations; I attend U.S. Head Start national research conference in DC.
1999	(AHSUNC) *Program Principles and Guidelines* revised; first national process and administrative evaluation data collection; colloquium held to set guidelines for impact evaluation.
2000	Instrument Design group meets; tool development team (TDT) selected; I attend U.S. Head Start national research conference in DC.
2001	*Johnny National, Super Hero* by Tomson Highway published; 2001–2002 TDT designs impact evaluation and carries out preliminary study.
2002	2002–2003 impact evaluation pilot study; *Considerations for Evaluating Good Care* (Stairs et al.); I attend U.S. Head Start national research conference in DC.
2003	2003–2005: impact evaluation data collection takes place.
2004	2004–2005: impact evaluation data collection continues; I attend U.S. Head Start national research conference in DC.
2005	2005 impact evaluation data collection completed.
2006	Impact evaluation completed and report approved.
2007	I transfer to the Health Canada On Reserve AHS program to work with a community and academic team set up to explore a potential school readiness evaluation.
2009	I retire from the Government of Canada.
2012	PHAC publishes current program evaluation.

The *mesosystem* (described in the chapter's first main section) comprises AHS evaluation approaches and structures, and issues related to ECD research and evaluation and to this study. The *microsystem* (described in the chapter's second main section) combines the general and particular features of the 2006 Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) national impact evaluation and its development process. Attributes of these two systems are intricately connected to my specific research questions, which refer to culturally appropriate design and school readiness (see Chapter 1), and with three of the framing assumptions considered in the literature review in Chapter 4: (Assumption #1) that early childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes for participating children, families and communities, and to social justice; (Assumption #2) that early intervention program evaluation is complex, hence, it requires a range of innovative approaches; and (Assumption #3) that Indigenous early intervention programs and their evaluations have unique characteristics and requirements.

In the previous chapter I explicated the two distal systems, striving to represent the premises of the texts accurately and to be consistent in the data analysis for my document examination. In this chapter I provide a descriptive and narrative account of the AHSUNC national impact evaluation development phase—part story, part argument. I include personal experiences and observations. For me, a description of the development process and the subsequent tools and methodology, and the rationale for their selection, makes the study's greatest contribution to Indigenous ECD evaluation discourse. I anticipate that this section of the study will offer a resource for researchers and practitioners working in the various fields of Indigenous ECD. On the contrary, it may serve as a (welcomed) foil for scholars who would argue against my position or make a critical denunciation of the process and tools. Such

arguments could forward an enhanced understanding of the issues around Indigenous ECD and, through this discourse, could generate progressive methodological alternatives.

The chapter focuses on description and context for the impending examination of the impact evaluation's innovative proximal features with respect to their cultural appropriateness. I follow the outline below to expand on the constituent headings that are included in this chapter.

The Mesosystem: AHSUNC National Impact Evaluation Foundations

- AHSUNC and program evaluation oversight

- 1997 AHSUNC Evaluation Framework

- A team to develop the 2006 national impact evaluation

  - AHSUNC tool development team: Challenges

  - AHSUNC tool development team: Contemporaneous methodological

    considerations:

    - NAHO/OCAP and CIHR.

    - Considerations for Reviewing 'Good Care' in Canadian Aboriginal

      Early Childhood Settings (Stairs et al., 2002)

    - School readiness considered (or not) as an intervention outcome

    - Culture, language, and the culture and language component

    - Standardized testing

  - AHSUNC tool development team summary

The Microsystem: AHSUNC Impact Evaluation Methodology and Tools

- Evaluation approach

- Evaluation methodology

- The evaluation tools and data collection

- Changes in children

- Changes in families and communities

- A child observation tool: The Work Sampling System

- A qualitative approach: Key informant interviews

- Providing cultural context: The Enviroview

- An innovative endeavour: The Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition test

- Contributions of the methodology and tools to the research questions.

The Mesosystem: AHSUNC National Impact Evaluation Foundations

The adapted mesosystem features AHSUNC evaluation foundations and a number of

related elements and issues that bear on the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation

methodology and tool development. I first introduce three AHSUNC government-initiated

entities (program oversight, the AHS Evaluation Framework, and the Tool Development Team),

and I then follow with three subsections that expand on program component issues and

methodologies (school readiness, language and culture, and standardized testing). Conceptually,

the six subsections are connected through their significance to the impact evaluation design and

management.

AHSUNC program evaluation oversight.

The management of national program evaluations is the responsibility the AHSUNC

national evaluation analyst (a position I held from 1999 to 2007), who reports to the program

manager. National evaluation budgets and designs (methodologies) and final evaluation reports

are submitted for approval to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS). Government

policies include strict contracting processes for all Requests for Proposals, selection of

(nongovernment) evaluation contractors, and regular monitoring of the selected contracting

firm's work.

Evaluation analysts from all regional and national childhood and youth programs[23] meet

and correspond regularly to take part in training, to provide each other with support and input,

and to share knowledge about evaluating ECD programs. In addition, the National AHS Council

(NAHSC) and its evaluation subcommittee, in partnership with government representatives,

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[23] PHAC children's programs included AHSUNC, Community Action Program for Children, and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program; the analysts' group was National Evaluation Team for Children. Program evaluation structures have now changed; evaluations are managed centrally rather than by the programs.

provide guidance and approval for all AHSUNC national evaluation activities. NAHSC members (regional AHSUNC community representatives) have been influential in all AHSUNC national programming concerns from 1995 to the present.The NAHSC's role is "to provide a community perspective and a forum for discussion among community representatives and AHSUNC program staff . . . [The council] was established to provide advice and expertise on the development of national policies, national-level evaluation, research priorities and other activities relating to the AHSUNC program" (Public Health Agency of Canada: Program governance, 2010, para.6.).

Together, community and government representatives work to ensure rigorous, appropriate, high-quality program evaluations.

1997 AHSUNC Evaluation Framework.

The evaluation framework (Evaluation Consultants, 1997, referred to in this section as the Framework), including its development process, can be regarded as the pivotal piece influencing the course of the impact methodology development. The Framework builds on and replicates early government AHS consultations and proposes a similar approach for the AHS evaluation activities (i.e., meaningful community involvement at all levels). The development of the AHS Initiative *Principles and Guidelines* (1996), and a revised 1998 edition, used community-oriented, participatory practices as well, as stipulated in the AHS mandate (Health Canada, 1995).

Throughout this section I highlight the Framework's development process and denote references both to Aboriginal culture and language and to impact indicators associated with school readiness. The Framework provides significant direction for the approach to AHS

evaluation, but does not prescribe, except by suggestions and examples, indicators for culture, language, education, or school readiness impacts.

Developing the Framework.

The Framework, a 1995 TBS requirement, was designed by six Aboriginal consultants (Evaluation Consultants, 1997) who were selected by the National AHS Committee's Subcommittee on Evaluation and contracted by Health Canada in 1996. The consultants reported to the subcommittee at each stage of the Framework development process.

The consultants' fundamental approach was informed by the AHS Initiative *Principles and Guidelines* (Health Canada, 1996), including the following:

- Empower parents to play a major part in planning, developing, starting up, and *evaluating the project*.

- Include the broader Aboriginal community as part of the project throughout all of its stages, from *planning to evaluation*.

- Make sure the resources are used in the best way possible in order to produce *measurable and positive* outcomes for Aboriginal *children, their parents, families, and communities*. (pp. 8–9, emphasis added).

The evaluation consultants attended to AHSUNC's overall goal of "provid[ing] Aboriginal preschool children in urban and northern settings with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning, and opportunities to develop fully and successfully as young people" (Evaluation Consultants, 1997, p. 2). With the AHSUNC goal in mind, the consultants drew on related literature and community-generated data to develop project monitoring and program assessment tables.

The consultants used a participant-oriented approach with extensive consultation and collaboration with program stakeholders at the national, regional, and community/local levels. This approach was intended to be inclusive and to insure that the different perspectives, values, and needs of individuals and groups involved with AHS would be reflected in the evaluation framework. Furthermore, by asking a representative sample to produce input to the evaluation framework, the evaluation consultants believed that an important education function would be served through the development of better-informed participants (Evaluation Consultants, 1997, p. 6).

The consultants reviewed relevant literature, including Sheila Clark and Associates' 1995 *Literature Review: A Reference for Aboriginal Head Start Project Operators* (summary in Framework, p. 3); AHS background and documents, including AHS Initiative *Principles and Guidelines* (Health Canada, 1996) and the AHS regional environmental scan[24]; Mary Cronin's 1995 study on preschool excellence criteria (summary in Framework, pp. 4–5); and literature on other early intervention programs, such as U.S. Head Start. They prepared four standard interview guides for specific groups of informants, conducted interviews, and collected data from 104 respondents.

At this time, AHS sites were preoperational. The consultants visited nine diverse, representative sites, all in developmental stages. In 1996 I accompanied one of the six consultants, a Mohawk woman, to Ile-à-la-Crosse, a northern Saskatchewan community known for its wildlife and fishing, blueberries, and wild rice. It is an old community with a rich fur-trade and Catholic mission history, populated mainly by Métis and Cree. English, French, Cree, and Michif are the local languages. We drove through several of the AHS communities in this boreal

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[24] Regional assessments completed in 1995 to identify high-risk off-reserve Aboriginal communities that could support an AHS project.

forest region, where we were welcomed in one community at the home of Joseph Naytowhow and Cheryl LaRondelle—native storytellers, singers, and drummers—and we participated in a traditional sweat lodge in Ile-à-la-Crosse that evening. The following morning we met with community members at the Friendship Centre to collect information on the status of their projects, their project expectations, and evaluation issues (Evaluation Consultants, p. 9). As each community has its own stories and customs of community participation, local events are important, not just as evaluation data sources, but also as indicators of the intricacies of diversity as it affects national evaluations. Community contact (as part of the Framework development process) also served an educational function for the consultants.

An interim report of tabulated and summarized data from the community consultations (Evaluation Consultants, 1997) was circulated to participants for their validation and additional input. Ultimately, short-term goals (one year) identified through consultations included early recognition of gifts of Aboriginal children through child assessment; early diagnosis and treatment of learning difficulties; improved language skills; and increased cultural awareness and participation in cultural activities. Long-term goals (five years) included improved health and well-being; enhanced cultural awareness; increased knowledge of cultural teachings, activities, ways, and history; and increased pride in Aboriginal identity. The evaluation consultants wrote that children who are well grounded in their culture will start life knowing who they are (Evaluation Consultants, pp. 9–10). Respondents also noted improvements expected in "differences [in readiness scores] measured by the school system [assessments]—high achievers in grade one" (Evaluation Consultants, pp. 9-10). Respondents identified several evaluation issues/challenges (pp. 11–12) and highlighted the importance of having an awareness of diversity

and of conducting evaluation in local languages; involving community members; and achieving clarity in evaluation documents and communication.

Early AHS evaluations and evaluation approaches.

The Framework advocates a community-oriented, participatory approach to evaluation, using multiple indicators, sources, and methods for data collection. It guides both formative (process/administrative) and summative (impact) evaluations. All AHS national evaluations are required to report on each of the six components: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental involvement. Formative data are collected by AHS project staff, while summative evaluations should be conducted by external evaluators.

Formative evaluations. Prior to the national impact evaluation, Health Canada conducted national process and administrative (formative) evaluations to collect demographic, statistical, and descriptive information on all operational sites. Regional community representatives reviewed the formative evaluation's initial draft questionnaire, which was then revised as indicated and piloted in several representative sites. Health Canada annually requested participants' ongoing suggestions for improvements to the process and document, which contributed to improved annual national evaluations. Evaluation findings were published in summary popular reports (Health Canada, 2000, 2001, 2002; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002). Formative evaluation data analysis was contracted to Kishk Anaquot Health Research, an Aboriginal company (principal investigator, Kim Scott [Algonquian]), and the popular reports were printed by an Aboriginal publishing firm. The collected/analyzed data informed aspects of the national impact evaluation, such as guiding site selection and providing input into questions related to the language and cultural component.

Local and regional evaluations. As well, in their early operational stages, sites were

required to conduct local evaluations to describe and assess the function of the six components in

their programs. These evaluations were regionally managed.

In 2000, Health Canada contracted Tomson Highway, an award-winning Cree playwright

and storyteller, to review the individual site reports, to visit some AHS programs, and then to

produce a narrative report that told the AHS story in a dynamic way, capturing more than just

program statistics. The ensuing story, *Johnny National, Super Hero* (Public Health Agency of

Canada, 2001), is illustrated by Ojibwe artist Leo Yerxa, a Governor General's award winner for

children's literature. This project demonstrates the program's commitment to the communities to

make the evaluation process inclusive and accessible—extending to the reporting and its

dissemination. In this case, the story/report became a discussion tool for parent groups, as

Highway characterized issues and resources in many participants' lives, personifying their

program experience in his story of Johnny and his mother. As well, participants were honoured

and proud to have prominent Aboriginal artists involved in an AHS project.

The foregoing reporting process highlights a potential direction for AHS evaluation that

has inclusive and functional features that go beyond requisite accounting (i.e., potential for

praxis). The positive community response to this evaluation project was instructive for me, as

national evaluation analyst, in extending my understanding of appropriate, inclusive, innovative

reporting (i.e., reconceptualizing evaluation).

Commentary.

The AHS evaluation framework and its development illustrate the relationship between

policies, programs, and evaluations. The requisite federally funded AHS evaluations follow

general evaluation policies as well as specific program criteria, as directed in Treasury Board of

Canada Secretariat (TBS) documents (e.g., in this case, reporting on the six program components, staying within the allotted budget, and meeting reporting deadlines).

The concepts of *participatory evaluation* and *community based*, while not exclusive to Indigenous methodologies or to this study, raise a number of pertinent points. Many Aboriginal communities, including small and urban populations, are rich in more than one Aboriginal language and community cultural practice. An AHS centre's curriculum or practices—while locally generated or adapted—don't necessarily represent the viewpoint or practices of all participants, or even a large majority of community members (i.e., simple majority, or position-driven decision making, not necessarily consensus). It sometimes more accurately reflects the views of the sponsoring organization members, parent advisory group, or program directors than those of the participating families. I am reminded of a prairie Native day care I worked with where one year the parent advisory council wanted the caregivers to start the children's day with a traditional sweetgrass smudging ceremony. The following year, a different parent council advised that there should be no reference to Native spirituality or traditional ceremonies/practices in the centre (reflecting the power of those in charge). I also worked with an AHS centre using a Catholic catechism preschool curriculum, as well as with centres with a strong Christian core that doesn't allow for Native spirituality (possibly reflecting the wishes of the majority of the parents or community members). The question of "whose culture?" niggles.

In the same sense, democratic institutional policies may reflect the objectives of those in power but not necessarily the opinions of individual constituents, or even a majority. However, the process can be either respected, or in some cases, challenged, as it has been in some AHS communities where members have ousted and replaced the incumbent sponsor group or leadership. Generally, in formal AHS procedures, consensus is the goal and practice, and

opposition is noted for consideration. In designing the Framework, the sensitivity, general and specific knowledge in diverse Aboriginal communities, and combined expertise of the consultants were important factors for moving from the community complexities to representative and constructive methodologies and indicators of program impact.

While the Framework addresses the four TBS requisite evaluation issues—program relevance, program success, cost effectiveness, and program administration—and includes all six AHS program components, my present research focuses only on the Framework's relationship to the impact evaluation approach and to identified indicators of success or change (impact) related to Aboriginal culture and language and to education/school readiness. As demonstrated below, the Framework document guided the AHSUNC tool development team in their resolve to design an evidence-based, culturally appropriate impact evaluation.

A team to develop and design the 2006 national impact evaluation.

As national evaluation analyst, I was a member of the team assembled by Health Canada in 2000 to design the AHSUNC national impact evaluation. The team comprised seven members[25] with combined expertise in program evaluation, early childhood education and development, and Aboriginal culture; all members were directly connected to Aboriginal communities or programs. Over a two-year period the team members, who named themselves the Tool Development Team (TDT), developed a methodology and tools to be piloted and used in the impact evaluation. Four major evaluation tools, discussed in detail in the microsystem section of this chapter, were developed or adapted to demonstrate change and perceptions of change in participating children, families, and communities. Again, although the evaluation examined all

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[25] The tool development team members: Richard Budgell (AHS program manager), Anne Chabot (left in 2001), Hillel Goelman, Lynne Robertson, Carol Rowan, Debra Wright, Jean Woods, and artist Leo Yerxa (joined 2001).

six AHS program components, in this study I focus on culture and language, and education (and school readiness, which is understood in a broad, or holistic way, not limited to the education component.

AHSUNC tool development team: Challenges.

Creating a national impact evaluation to assess the success of Aboriginal Head Start presents challenges, particularly in a research and evaluation culture where "evidence" is equated primarily with classic experimental research models and quantitative data. Following are the major challenges identified by the development team:

- ensuring the evaluation approach and tools are culturally appropriate;
- respecting issues of confidentiality and ownership of data and outcomes;
- addressing both federal government and individual community evaluation requirements;
- determining the indicators of impact on children, parents, and communities;
- locating or developing tools that are age appropriate and ethical;
- locating tools validated in French, English, and Inuktituk;
- attribution of impact to AHSUNC participation;
- addressing all six program components;
- ensuring representative and valid pilot testing;
- ensuring meaningful community participation and capacity building;
- considering comparisons with American and other ECD intervention studies;
- addressing the diverse nature of AHSUNC participants (i.e., First Nations, Inuit, and Métis; urban/rural and other demographic and community program differences); and

- funding the high costs of training and travel in conducting an evaluation of this scope. (revised from my own notes)

The TDT contended with those challenges while it developed an evaluation approach and the four main tools described in the microsystem section of this chapter to assess the program's contributions and impacts.

The team members exuded excitement and commitment as all recognized the unique opportunities the project and its challenges presented (i.e., demonstrating the contributions of an exceptional program and creating a potentially innovative participatory, capacity-building, culturally sensitive methodology). I believe the resultant synergy and the dedication and individual contributions of the members were central features in the advancement of the project. These were optimistic times for Indigenous ECD program development, as the importance of early childhood experience and the possibilities for self-determination and positive social change in Aboriginal communities were both acknowledged and reflected in programs or policies. Following are two examples (published after the TDT completed most of its work) that reflect progressive research considerations in that period.

AHSUNC tool development team: Contemporaneous methodological considerations.

NAHO/OCAP and CIHR. Two documents—Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2011), and CIHR Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010) [26]—reflect progressive thinking during the period in which the TDT was working. The research principles of these two programs were introduced prior to their publication, at health and Aboriginal research-themed conferences, and, as a result,

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[26] See the literature review (Chapter 4) for details of these two programs.

many professionals in those fields became familiar with the concepts—that is, consciousness raising took place among many professionals that influenced subsequent work. It is the tenor as well as the specific texts of the OCAP and CIHR documents that have relevance for the TDT project because they reflect and affirm a movement in Canada toward recognition and respect for Aboriginal worldview, rights, and self-determination in health research. This respect is also evidenced in the 2000 article by Stairs, Bernhard, and Colleagues, reviewed below.

In 1999, ECD experts Stairs and Bernhard were requested by Health Canada to review AHS and related ECD evaluations and to make methodology recommendations for future AHS evaluation projects. The researchers, though not Aboriginal, had done extensive early childhood research in numerous and varied cultural settings, and they included Aboriginal "colleagues" as co-authors and researchers in this project. The TDT seriously considered their critiques of child observation and other measurement tools, and concurred with their assessments (discussed further in this section). The authors discussed their conclusions and provided an expanded discourse on culturally appropriate methodology in a subsequent cited journal article, "Considerations for Reviewing 'Good Care' in Canadian Aboriginal Early Childhood Settings" (Stairs, Bernhard, & Colleagues, 2002). The authors "revisit deeply problematic issues in conventional evaluation approaches" and "theorize and speculate on alternatives grounded in Aboriginal experiences and values of 'good care' in childhood" (p. 309).

I make pertinent references to this article in discussions on the evaluation approach and tools, starting at present with "de-colonization/un-colonization prospects" informed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2012). The Stairs et al. article refers to three of Smith's points that inform Indigenous approach to evaluation: democratizing (includes the process of reinstating Indigenous principles of collectivity), reframing (to define issues in the community's own terms), and

questioning purposes (what is being evaluated, consciously or not). In consideration of the third point, Stairs et al. wrote:

> At least four intertwining visions can be seen for early childhood Aboriginal programs. These encompass the mainstream academic success of children and thus a choice in their futures; the support of Aboriginal families in overcoming poverty and marginalization; the 'coming home' literally and/or figuratively of children being lost to Aboriginal communities both personally and legally . . . and the essential establishment of children's identity valuing and giving expression to Aboriginal cultures. (p. 312)

The authors point out that because "good care"—or, in this case, most favourable outcomes—is not clarified, selecting measurement tools is further confounded. They identify methodological issues as:

> (a) colonized research models which exclude relational participation among Aboriginal and other evaluators, their perspectives, and their tools, (b) confused purposes underlying Aboriginal child care and education which confound what is being evaluated, how, and why, and (c) isolated 'evaluation' as a disintegrated step in ECE processes. (p. 313)

The lack of clarification of favourable outcomes was certainly an issue in the AHSUNC impact evaluation design, and in the qualitative interpretation of data. While it is condescending to limit expectations, very high expectations may not correspond to evaluation of program success.

Stairs et al. stated as "final words": "We stress that Aboriginal ECE practices and reforms must return education of Indigenous peoples, and its evaluation at any level, to their own hands, and keep it there" (p. 323). Their article raises important, complex issues—including the message in "Authors' Final Words"—for ECE researchers considering evaluations with Aboriginal participants, as well as for other cross-cultural evaluations. It has informed both the AHS tool and methodology selections.

School readiness considered (or not) as an intervention outcome. The "mainstream academic success of children and thus a choice in their futures" is listed above by Stairs et al.

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(2002, p. 312) as one vision for Aboriginal early childhood programs. While academic success is best determined in a longitudinal study, preschool developmental measures can provide constructive data related to the success trajectory. This is generally approached through developmentally appropriate or school readiness testing. One common, functional definition of readiness[27] is provided by the North Carolina Ready for School Goal Team (2000):

> School readiness is defined by [t]he condition of children as they enter school, based on the following five domains of development:
>
> - o   Health and physical development
> - o   Social and emotional development
> - o   Approaches toward learning
> - o   Language development and communication
> - o   Cognition and general knowledge. (p. 4)

AHSUNC addresses the above conventional developmental domains. The program mandate includes the intention to (a) "foster the spiritual, emotional, *intellectual* and physical growth of each child" and (b) "foster a desire in the child for *life-long learning*" (Health Canada, 1995, emphasis added). The AHSUNC education component is generally associated with the intellectual (or educational, or cognitive) and life-long learning attributes. Previously I stated that one approach to assessing the educational outcomes or success of early intervention programs is to consider participating children's readiness for kindergarten or grade one. But, how do evaluators determine a program's success in contributing to this readiness?

Constructive AHSUNC evaluation questions might be: *How many of the participating children are ready for school, or, has the program contributed to their readiness? In what domains has their readiness been enhanced? Are there areas that are problematic? Are some*

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[27] Note that culture and/or spirituality are not included.

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areas more significant than others (e.g., early literacy, language development)? How much of a

gain constitutes program success? (As identified by Stairs et al.: *What constitutes favourable*

outcomes?) *What should we be measuring?* The team pondered a number of questions related to

school readiness; at the same time, while recognizing their significance, they renounced

mainstream standard measures of school readiness as appropriate indicators of AHS program

success. School readiness per se was not a principal evaluation objective, whereas related

individual/aggregated gains were to be considered as primary success indicators.

Developing a common understanding of school readiness and its possibilities as an

indicator of program success was problematic for the team because identifying gains in

component areas, rather than calculating standard categorical scores that ascertain readiness, was

the focus for discerning child impacts. Stairs et al. make a prudent observation that "confused

purposes underlying Aboriginal child care and education … confound what is being evaluated,

how, and why" (p. 133), which serves as a reminder that we are seeking to evaluate the

program's success in contributing to children's health and well-being, not in determining how

many of them are school-ready according to conventional checklists.

In the following sections, I discuss variants of school readiness demarcations that are

relevant to the development of the AHSUNC impact evaluation approach and indicators that

include children's health risks and Indigenous and intervention issues.

Health risks in Aboriginal children and their role in development. I have maintained

previously that children's school readiness includes their physical readiness. I would argue that

physical readiness and health status are particularly significant concerns in the AHSUNC

population and should be addressed as both contributors to educational (readiness) outcomes,

and separately, that is, as health promotion indicators and outcomes for an impact evaluation.

Aboriginal children are overrepresented for some of the health issues that affect their readiness to learn, and their problems need to be identified and managed at the preschool level, both to improve health and to support overall performance and well-being.

Hearing and dental problems. Statistically, young Aboriginal children in Canada are at higher risk than the general population for health problems that can affect language skills and social and intellectual development, such as hearing, visual, and dental problems, as discussed below (Statistics Canada, 2008; Waldram, Herring, & Kue Young, 1999/2006).The frequency and nature of occurrence, access to diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up are health issues, particularly in isolated communities.

For example, in Arctic areas, rates of otitis media (middle ear infection), which leads to hearing loss, can be 40% higher than in southern urban areas (Bowd, 2005). Bowd cites a northern Quebec study (Julien, 1987) comparing Inuit and Cree children that found evidence of ear disease in 78% of Inuit children and 12% of Cree children. Related ear disease statistics show the following rates of ear disease in Indigenous populations: Inuit of Alaska (30–46%), Canadian Inuit (7–31%), Greenland Inuit (7–12%) and Navajo/Apache 4–8%). Among Cree and Ojibwe populations in Canada, signs of present otitis media within communities ranged from 8% to 30%, and when signs of past otitis media were added, the figure rose to 41% (Bowd, 2005).

When hearing loss and/or acute dental issues are present in children, cognitive and speech and language performance outcomes are affected. According to the 2006 Statistics Canada Aboriginal children's survey,[28] 30% of off-reserve First Nations and Métis children aged 3–6

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[28] The 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey (ACS) sampled 12,845 First Nations (off-reserve) and Métis children, representing a population of approximately 135,000 Aboriginal children younger than age 6 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

have had [unspecified] dental problems. The 2008–2009 Inuit oral health survey reports that Inuit children aged 3–5 years average 8.22 decayed, missing, or filled deciduous (baby) teeth.

Health and school readiness. Given the high incidence of hearing and dental problems among Indigenous children, an ECD program promoting school readiness should include facilitating medical/dental check-ups or screening and follow-up treatment in their programming. Identifying individual health problems and demonstrating the program's part in their resolution has relevance for program evaluation as well as for supporting families. If, for example, children are not progressing in the (assessed) speech and language domain, the causes may be related to physical/health challenges rather than to the program's educational (cognitive, social) programming deficits.

The TDT generally focused on children's physical well-being as a component of health promotion, but members were cognizant of the relationship between children's physical/health challenges (e.g., speech and language problems, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder) and standard educational or readiness outcomes. Recognizing that when children are experiencing health challenges the benefits of a strong educational preschool program may be compromised, the team took steps to insure comprehensive data collection and interpretation, as demonstrated in section 2, "The Microsytem" (i.e., individual child profiles). Each participating child's health record and present health status were noted for reference prior and post participation. Data describing national AHSUNC site partnerships with local health organizations, and health promotion activities, as well as aggregated data on children with diagnosed and suspected health challenges, are collected in the national administrative/process evaluations. This information provided additional context for the evaluation design.

Impact evaluation in Indigenous intervention programs. I have previously argued that Indigenous early intervention programs and their evaluations have unique characteristics and requirements. An impact evaluation of an intervention program such as AHS also takes into account the constraints of a part-time program and the realistic expectations of its potential outcomes. In framing the evaluation questions and expectations, the dimensions of the evaluation context include a comprehensive assessment of baseline measures, and recognition of interrelated factors, such as the goals of the program and the purpose of the evaluation. It is also important to consider the cultural contexts and take into account the indicators of cultural impact, as I do in the following section.

Culture, language, and the culture and language component. AHSUNC is a culturally based program; accordingly, the national impact evaluation aims to be culturally appropriate. References to culture abound in my study. Building on the course of the initial and ongoing TDT discussions, I, as the researcher in this study, explore three emerging questions: *What is meant by culture? Whose culture? Is the evaluation process culturally appropriate (or relevant)?* Foundational AHSUNC documents underscore the importance of the culture/language component but do not provide clear definition, demarcation, or assessment approaches. For the TDT, this omission offered both a hindrance and an opportunity.

A common understanding of *culture* is important to my study. The term refers most often to the plurality of cultures in reference to Aboriginal communities, and it is also germane to the key questions of cultural appropriateness. In this section, I set up this discussion by delineating the term "culture" in three basic, successive classifications:

a)   *Culture:* the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought (Farlex, 2014).

b) *Surface culture:* the visible aspects of culture, such as food, art, dress, holidays, language, etc.; no actual values are explicit at this level (Murillo, n.d.).

c) *Deep culture:* the non-tangible aspects of culture, such as feelings, emotions, attitudes, and rules for interaction (Murillo, n.d.), which are passed from one generation to another, but not always at the conscious level.

While the team did not work with formal definitions of culture, I use these concepts to embody the import of practical and theoretical applications considered in the evaluation design and in my study.

In section 2, "The Microsystem: AHSUNC Impact Evaluation Methodology and Tools," I illustrate and extend the implications of these terms throughout the explication of the four tools and their development, notwithstanding another confounding aspect of the question "Whose culture?"—the tangential continuum of traditional to modern culture and all its variations, even within small communities, and perhaps more so in large urban areas.

The AHSUNC culture and language component presented two initial challenges to the team: What exactly is being evaluated, and how do we evaluate it? Subsequently, the team explored three additional questions: Do we use observation? Do we derive measurements? And ultimately, how do we interpret and evaluate findings? The *AHS Initiative: Principles and Guidelines* (Health Canada, 1998) and the 1997 evaluation framework (Evaluation Consultants, 1997) provide partial answers. The former outlines the purpose and goals of the culture and language component:

> The purpose . . . is to provide children with a positive sense of themselves as
> Aboriginal children and to build on the children's knowledge of their Aboriginal
> languages and experience of culture in their communities. More specifically,
> Projects will enhance the process of cultural and language revival and retention,
> with the ultimate goal that, where possible, children will aspire to learn their

respective languages and participate in their communities' cultures after AHS. Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

1. encourage thoughtfulness and reflection about how to ensure that this is a comfortable place for Aboriginal people to be who they are;

2. demonstrate an understanding of, respect for and responsiveness to Aboriginal cultures and languages;

3. focus on the Aboriginal cultures and languages of the children attending the Project;

4. create an environment in which children, families, employees and volunteers participate in relevant and significant activities on a daily basis;

5. provide opportunities for Elders, traditional people and cultural people to participate;

6. provide opportunities for children, families and communities to enhance their knowledge of their respective Aboriginal culture(s) and language(s); and

7. apply Aboriginal cultural values and beliefs to all aspects of daily programming, program governance and administration. (p. 11)

The 1997 AHS evaluation framework provides some potential culture/language indicators for program monitoring (p. 17) and program assessment (p. 27). Program monitoring includes identifying examples of sites' culture and language programming, and demonstrating [evidence of] a "child's ability to speak language(s)," and "increased awareness and understanding in children related to Aboriginal values, beliefs and practices"; it also provides some examples. Program assessment / success indicators include "enhanced identification with First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit culture; enhanced self-esteem/confidence . . . more aware of the First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit spiritual beliefs, customs and practices" (p. 27). In both the program monitoring and assessment sections, direct observation/assessment and key community informants are suggested as the data sources.

The Framework draws attention to the relationship between the formative evaluation and the outcome-based summative evaluation, contending that individual project-level information is important to a national impact evaluation. Again, the context (ecology) is key in evaluation design, process, and interpretation, and this has implications for the methodology and approach. In the following discussion I separate the two elements of the culture and language component, because challenges and arguments for each, while congruous, are different.

Assessing the impact of the culture component. Team members were determined to capture the diversity and nuances of deep culture, if possible, and travelled down several paths in this endeavour, led by their vision and resolve to "get it right." I describe some of the details encountered on these paths in my discussions of the tool and the evaluation approach in section 2, "The Microsystem." I see the assessment of the culture component as the most complex challenge, and show some of this complexity in the following two illustrative examples.

In my past role as an ECD consultant, I visited a preschool program in northern Saskatchewan in a woodland lakeside community of Cree first-language speakers. Although this program was off reserve, I saw it as a very traditional northern Cree community, where fishing and trapping were regular activities for the residents. I was surprised to see that the preschool children had crafted little tipis as an art project. I didn't think that tipis were characteristic of the area, and I remarked on this to the director. She responded that, since they knew I was coming and assumed I would want to see that they were including something cultural in their programming, they made the (borrowed) tipis because they had lost their own Indian culture. I looked around the room and saw Cree-speaking Native people—I knew some of them to be traditional dancers, fishers, trappers, and harvesters of wild rice—and I wondered what to make of it all.

Indigenous language scholar, Ethel Gardner, provides some insight into this challenge:

> The discussion on the cultural component illustrates great challenge as it relates to the impact evaluation. This challenge is certainly related to the chronology of events where Indigenous cultural evolution was compromised by IRS and colonization leaving many individuals and even communities ambivalent as to what their own culture means. Living their way of life in the case of the northern Cree community is not recognize as their "culture." And even speaking their language. It is just their taken for granted way of living, while popularized aspects of "Indigenous culture" favors tepees, feathers, medicine wheel and so on. (Gardner, personal communications, June 2015)

As another example, early in my career with AHSUNC I was interested to read an article describing the pending AHS program in the local paper of another northern community. It stated, in my recollection, "Mrs. Robertson wants us to take the kids trapping, but we want our kids to learn computers, like white kids."

These two accounts point to possible programming/curriculum issues, and communication issues, because seemingly something is lost in translation in both directions. At first I felt that some of the community members in the AHS sites saw me as another White bureaucrat (with a romantic and misconstrued view of their lives) rather than as a facilitator and advocate for local articulation. It took time to develop a good working relationship in some of the communities because we needed to learn more about one another in order to build trust and understanding. These critical concerns are evaluation issues as well. As a program evaluator, especially as an etic civil servant, I often felt I was walking a tightrope in a dark space. I was unsettled by these experiences because many of the Aboriginal informants stated strongly that AHS was a vehicle for promoting traditional cultures and languages, while others wanted a more mainstream educational focus.

The team intended to structure definitive questions, both broad and focused, that led to a clear description of the impact of the AHSUNC culture component on participating children. They envisioned a participatory, multisite evaluation featuring qualitative approaches, all

building on the AHSUNC principles, documents, and literature generated by Aboriginal people. They wanted to find the questions and answers that would satisfy federal reporting requirements and also provide program participants with meaningful information.

The text of the Framework sparked team discussion, but it did not spell out practical guidelines or indicators for assessing the cultural component. *Project monitoring* (Evaluation Consultants, 1997, p. 17) refers to numbers and types of cultural activities; increased awareness in traditional First Nations, Métis, and Inuit values, beliefs, and practices; evidence of understanding their own culture; and evidence of understanding First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures. *Program assessment* asks the evaluation question (2.2) "What evidence is there that children . . . have changed as a result of the AHS Program . . . spiritually (have they been taught to listen to their inner voice & how to feel connected to the spirit)?" (2.2) and lists the following indicators: "(c) enhanced identification with First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit culture; enhanced self-esteem/confidence; (d) more aware of First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit spiritual beliefs, customs and practices" (Evaluation Consultants, p. 27).

The *AHS Initiative: Principles and Guidelines* (Health Canada, 1998) describes the purpose of this component, in part, as *to provide children with a positive sense of themselves as Aboriginal children*, but does not elaborate on this goal. The TDT supported the described aims of the cultural component, building on them with their own innovative ideas of how to capitalize on this opportunity to collect meaningful stories and other data that could inform programming and evaluation in similar ECD programs.

Assessing the impact of the Aboriginal language component. Evaluation of the language component is equally complex. In many of the isolated and remote AHSUNC communities, preschool children speak their Aboriginal languages exclusively, and they are eventually taught

English or French in primary school. This pattern is customary in Inuit communities. On the other hand, in many southern communities, and in urban areas, there are few Aboriginal language speakers, and AHS plays a role in introducing Indigenous languages to the children. Later in this section I include a discussion on language revitalization, as its academic discourse is significant to the evaluation issues and to my study.

The Framework offers little direction to the impact evaluation for the goals of the Aboriginal language component or to the structure of a methodology to assess impact. The project monitoring section (Evaluation Consultants, p. 17) suggests as potential indicators "child's ability to speak language(s)" and "Do children know . . . how to greet an adult in their cultural language?" The program assessment section (p. 27) provides cultural indicators without specifying language.

The 1998 Principles and Guidelines references, included on pages 165-166 in this section, refer mainly to programming features, with little reference to observable outcomes: "Aboriginal Head Start projects will: demonstrate an understanding of, respect for and responsiveness to Aboriginal cultures and languages" (p. 11).

The team recognized the Aboriginal language component, realized through Aboriginal language use or direct teaching in the sites, as an integral part of Aboriginal culture, with the intended purpose of enhancing Indigenous identity, developing a competency, contributing to aspirations for learning Aboriginal languages, and playing a role in language renewal and revitalization. The challenge in assessing this part of the component was distilled over time into ascertaining whether or not children were learning an Aboriginal language as a result of program participation, and what was the nature of their learning? Ultimately, three of the four impact evaluation tools were to address questions directed at Aboriginal language acquisition. I discuss

their development and rationale in section 2, "The Microsystem," primarily in the section on the

Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition tool.

   Aboriginal language status. Anthropologist Wade Davis (TED Talks, October, 2009)

states that languages are not simply vocabulary lists and/or sets of grammatical rules; they are

"old growth forests of the mind" that reflect different ways of being, thinking, and knowing. For

many Indigenous people, their native language is spiritual, connecting them to the land and to

their ancestors. They articulate a loss of their cultural heritage with language loss because

meanings and knowledge die with the language. In Canada, as of 1876, the Indian Education Act

policy of forced assimilation accelerated Indigenous language loss (Lockhard & De Groat,

2010).

   Within a few generations, more than half of the estimated 7,000 languages spoken in the

world today may disappear. Indigenous Peoples living in over 70 countries account for more

than 5,000 of the languages spoken (United Nations, 2004). According to Mary Jane Norris

(1998) of Statistics Canada:

> As of 1996, only three of Canada's 50 Aboriginal languages (Cree, Ojibway and
> Inuktitut) had large enough populations to be considered truly secure from the
> threat of extinction in the long-run. This is not surprising in light of the fact that
> only a small proportion of the Aboriginal population speaks an Aboriginal
> language. Of some 800 000 persons who claimed an Aboriginal identity in 1996,
> only 26% said an Aboriginal language was their mother tongue and even fewer
> spoke it at home. (p. 8)

   The Statistics Canada 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey—*Profile of Aboriginal*

Children, Youth, Adults—which is based on a sample of 17,472 children living off reserve,[29]

provides background information on families' language acquisition expectations of their

children. Table 7.3 below shows families with children under six years who identify as urban

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[29] *The 2006 census shows 91,000 Aboriginal children under six living off reserve.

North American Indian, Northwest Territories residents, and Inuit Peoples (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Table 7.3 Aboriginal children and Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal languages spoken or understood	North American urban Indians	NWT residents	Inuit
Able to speak or understand an Aboriginal/Inuit language	22%	12%	76% (Inuit 74%)[30]
Expected by parent/guardian to become fluent in an Aboriginal language	31	62	71
Children for whom parent/guardian believes it is important to speak and understand an Aboriginal language	34	70	74

The 2011 Canadian census reports that there are 60 Aboriginal languages grouped in 12 language families. Some urban communities, reserves, and rural communities with large Aboriginal populations who are at risk for losing their languages have introduced language immersion or instruction classes in their schools to support community language revival. The preceding chart shows that, for many Canadian Aboriginal families, it is neither expected nor considered important that their children learn an Aboriginal language. However, bearing in mind individual and community benefits for language retention and revitalization, there are significant numbers of off-reserve Aboriginal people who realize these benefits, which include reinforcing their primal relationships to their culture. Advocates of the AHS program support early language introduction for a variety of reasons, including its contributions to strengthening children's Aboriginal identity.

Aboriginal language revitalization. Selected native language immersion or instruction is offered across Canada at the university, elementary, and high school levels in a number of urban centres, as well as in some preschool programs on and off reserve.

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[30] Some Inuit children speak an Indigenous language other than Inuktitut or another Inuit language (e.g., an Inuk child living in the Northwest Territories may speak a Dene (Athabaskan) language.

There are a number of recent examples of successful **revival and revitalization projects**. Gardner (2004, 2009), in her study of Stó:lō Halq'eméylem (Coast Salish) language revitalization, relates how learning Halq'eméylem helps her community members to understand their Stó:lō identity and worldview. She examines her community's mission statement, which asserts that language is central to cultural identity, that it enhances self-esteem and pride, which promotes effective social adjustment, and that it expresses the worldview of its speakers. She writes: "The fluent speaking elders can appreciate how our Stó:lō culture and worldview is embedded in our Halq'eméylem language. This knowledge is being passed on to the rest of us today, how our land, language and selves are inextricably interrelated, how spirit permeates everything and how these concepts are expressed best in our Halq'eméylem language" (2009, p. 76).

The Stó:lō project is only one example of community language revitalization in Canada. Mohawk language revitalization at Kahnawake, Quebec, is an example of a successful revitalization program aimed at Mohawk youth (Hoover & Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Centre, 2013). As we have seen in the language nest children's programs in New Zealand and Hawaii, languages at risk of extinction can be revitalized, and members of many Canadian Aboriginal communities are actively involved in similar projects for young children, while many large urban centres offer Aboriginal language classes or immersion programs in selected schools.

While it has been clear to me that the AHSUNC language component is important to children's identity and self-esteem, my support for individual Aboriginal language revitalization has been based mainly on my respect for its proponents and on some personal, anecdotal insights. In the 1990s I took several Cree classes to try to understand the importance and the connection of language to worldview, or to culture. As a foster parent of young Cree-speaking

children, I learned some Cree words and phrases (surface language) to facilitate communication

and comfort. One of the most significant things I learned through a variety of teachings was

about the unique Algonquian animate/inanimate classifications of nouns. This was the beginning

of my appreciation of the language/culture/spirit connection. At the same time, I was pushing

Cree-speaking friends to elaborate on this connection. The first thing I learned was that you don't

push for answers, because knowledge must be earned. An old Cree lady who taught me lots of

things would chide me for being so rude, or ignore me, when I demanded (as she put it) answers.

Tapwe! The culture is also in the process! I continue to be interested in the language

revitalization topic. I have recently taken a graduate class in Indigenous language revitalization,

and I am becoming clearer on the importance of language retention and revitalization and its

cultural centrality.

Additional Indigenous language revitalization scholars. UNESCO and United Nations

Indigenous language revitalization scholars, and others, provide a rationale based on knowledge

loss and human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1992; United Nations, 2007).

McCarty (2003) refers to "scars of shame and ambivalence" (p. 148). She is concerned

about the impact of globalization on cultural and linguistic diversity. She sees language loss and

revitalization as human rights issues, and says they cannot be separated from "larger struggles of

democracy, social justice, and self-determination" (p. 148).

Spolsky (1989) argues there is a basic principle which "recognizes the right of the

individual or the group to do whatever is possible to preserve or strengthen varieties of language

that have important ethnic, traditional, cultural, or religious values for them" (p. 93). However,

he observes in the Māori bilingual education system that the language is kept alive by learners

through cultural knowledge as much as from language use. Spolsky points to the emerging need

for heritage language standardization. He refers to the revival of the Hebrew language as a modern success story, and attributes its triumph to the use of Hebrew in kindergarten and schools, and to a strong community ideology for its support.

Spolsky (2002) cites research on language endangerment and revitalization and concludes that there is still no model with predictive power to reduce language shift. He refers to the effects of colonialism and the associated linguistic imperialism, and of the Western modernizing schools, and discusses concepts of ideology and language loyalty, which includes Indigenous attitudes and beliefs about one's heritage language. Included in these concepts are attitudes of the older generation rooted in their own experiences where they were punished or shamed for speaking their language, and the growing status of English. These issues affect Canadian and other colonized groups as well.

Aguilera and LeCompte (2007) observe the comprehensive nature of heritage languages. They assert that:

> revitalization is critical, because 'tribal languages contain the tribal genesis, cosmology, history, and secrets within [them], and without them' the sociocultural and intellectual heritage they embody is lost to Indigenous communities (Kipp, n.d.). This heritage includes knowledge of medicine, religion, cultural practices and traditions, music, art, human relationships and child-rearing practices, as well as Indigenous ways of knowing about the sciences, history, astronomy, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology. (p. 12).

Again, AHS alone will not revitalize a fading culture or language, but it does have the potential to contribute to revitalization. The language revitalization literature helps to clarify the intrinsic culture-language relationship, and demonstrates, as Davis says, "that languages are not simply vocabulary lists" (TED Talks, October, 9009). However, it may be that for Aboriginal children, learning some of the vocabulary is a good start, and can contribute to a sense of competency, identity, self-esteem, and a desire to continue learning their traditional language.

The cultural base of AHSUNC, local management, and its culture and language

component differentiate this program from most other Canadian ECD programs. I would argue

that the complexity, need for innovative approaches, and recognition of unique characteristics

and requirements go beyond the assumption status I identify in the literature review, and are, at

the least, important operational principles in the evaluation design. Returning to Chapter 6, at the

macrosystem level, Indigenous language and culture are included as rights issues and are

recognized globally and domestically in the realm of social justice. The TDT persistently

considered the foregoing issues in designing the approach and tools described in section 2.

In section 2, "The Microsystem," I review the TDT approaches to assessing AHSUNC's

impact on the language component. The team was challenged as well with developing

assessment tools to measure impact in other component areas.

Standardized testing. There are frequent references in my study to the objections to

standardized tests as impact tools. In contrast to the arguments renouncing standardized testing

for Aboriginal children (Ball & Janyst, 2007; Greenwood, 2006; National Indian Brotherhood,

1972; Niles et al., 2007), Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, a Canadian Aboriginal lawyer and child

and youth advocate of great distinction, puts forward a strong case for basic skills testing for

vulnerable children (Turpel-Lafond, 2007). She argues that because early school performance is

an indicator of future success, we need to know the educational standings of individual

students—particularly the high-risk children—to know if policy interventions designed to

support educational outcomes[31] are successful. Although she refers to testing school-age

children, the same arguments would apply to preschool children, including their school readiness

assessment, where early identification of learning delays and problems is crucial. The inferences

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[31] AHS is an example of such an intervention.

for ECD evaluation emerging from Turpel-Lafond's position relate to some of the significant evaluation issues discussed throughout this paper.

Over the years, I heard Aboriginal parents and educators voice their objections to the mainstream standardized tests, particularly for young children. They feared children would not be fairly or accurately tested, resulting in underestimating of their abilities, which they attributed in part to cross-cultural disparities in testing processes and materials. Parents were concerned that a reported misdiagnosis could affect a child's classroom placement, parent and teacher expectations, and/or the child's self-esteem. They worried that children would be stigmatized throughout their school lives. As Aboriginal Head Start national evaluation analyst, I met a few AHS directors and educators who were reluctant to provide formative evaluation information or numbers regarding children with, or suspected to have, special needs because they considered this kind of labelling detrimental to the children. (They told me that all children are considered to be special.)

My position would be that because early screening, referral for diagnosis, and appropriate treatment are beneficial to children's development, some form of early assessment is essential; however, the message of the community concerns is loud and clear. There are many standardized screening tools available that can assist educators and parents to spot significant delays and problems and to respond accordingly; this process contributes to school readiness. However, because school readiness comprises multifaceted indicators, a more comprehensive assessment is called for. In support of the impact evaluation of an Indigenous intervention program, the focus is on the impact of the components, where evidence associated with gains is more important than scores.

Racial stereotypes can be fostered by data that show poor preschool outcomes for Aboriginal children, and can put children starting school at a disadvantage regardless of readiness testing; accordingly, this is a fragile and complex issue. In response to these complexities, I see that three categories of further research and development are required which focus on the children, the testing instrument and process, and the teaching environment:

- *Children:* Early and intermediate preschool testing is required to ensure constructive intervention and to show whether or not the program is effective—and in which areas.

- *Testing:* Tests need to be appropriate; meaningful testing instruments needs to be located or developed.

- *Teaching environment:* Assessment of the teaching environment is essential (including curriculum, training, and practice of the educators, length of program).

Standardized test scores (individual and collective) do not give us enough appropriate information to assess the impact of the program. As well, local school readiness checklists can provide important information about a child's status, but cannot be used as a standard for program evaluation.

Tool development team summary.

Team members were anchored in their familiarity with the evaluation framework and relevant literature (e.g., Stairs et al., 2002), as well as their personal experiences and convictions. After studied consideration[32], they abandoned most mainstream approaches to assessment and evaluation in general as culturally and practically inappropriate, and were resolute in their goal to develop an improved, culturally appropriate approach that would produce constructive, evidence-based outcomes. All four tools the team developed were designed to maximize building

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[32] The TDT invited representatives from several companies to present screening and assessment tools, and reviewed other recommended and popular tools.

community capacity (in programming and evaluation) or community participation, and to minimize intrusiveness. Throughout the evaluation process, the methodology and tools were designed to be culturally sensitive. Next, in section 2, "The Microsystem," I describe the four tools, and in the process link the holistic development / readiness assessments to a culturally responsive approach.

The Microsystem: AHSUNC Impact Evaluation Methodology and Tools

I contend that the AHS evaluations and their course of development are instructive models for evaluating Indigenous and other early intervention programs. Accordingly, my doctoral study describes and analyzes the development phase of the 2006 Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities national impact evaluation. (p. 16)

This section describes the impact evaluation's approach and methodology, and includes arguments and considerations that guided the TDT to particular constructs. It describes and critiques the four selected evaluation tools and their applications, and traces their development stories. These accounts include the team members' rationale for their selection, their challenges, and some complementary academic citations and community examples. I believe the greatest potential of my study to make a contribution to Indigenous and other ECD program evaluations lies in the description of the AHSUNC evaluation methodology and the tool development; hence, I document the development process in some detail—all the while attending to the question of cultural appropriateness of both the tools and the methodology.

Evaluation approach.

The TDT's goal was to develop a culturally appropriate, participatory, and scientifically rigorous impact evaluation methodology to describe change and perceptions of change in

participating AHSUNC children, families, and communities in the six program component areas:

culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental

involvement. (Evaluation Consultants, 1997). Because I am most concerned with the education,

health, and culture/language components in this study, they are featured in my discussion. I refer

to cultural appropriateness throughout the study, and I expand on the TDT's concept of

participatory evaluation and scientific rigour below.

Participatory evaluation: Mandated and promoted.

The following excerpt from Zukoski and Luluquisen (2002) speaks to the spirit of

participatory evaluation, where knowledge is shared, and

> [efforts are made to build]the evaluation skills of beneficiaries, implementers,
> funders and others. The process seeks to honor the perspectives, voices,
> preferences and decisions of the *least powerful stakeholders and program
> beneficiaries*. Ideally, through this process, participants determine the
> evaluation's focus, design and outcomes within their own socioeconomic, cultural
> and political environments. (p. 2, emphasis added)

The TDT supported a community-based research approach concordant with both the

above quote and the AHS evaluation framework (Evaluation Consultants,1997), which describes

a dynamic evaluation partnership between the federal government and other primary

stakeholders, including AHS participants as the least powerful stakeholders[33] and as program

beneficiaries. The participants as primary stakeholders comprise AHS families and communities.

The AHS evaluation process honoured this spirit of participatory evaluation throughout the

planning, operational, and interpretation stages.

All through the development phase, the team was conscious of the various capacity-

building potentials of the project for parents, educators, evaluators, and community members.

Emerging principles and guidelines for conducting research in Indigenous communities were

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[33] While "least powerful" may be an arguable description, in this case it applies vis-à-vis federal
government powers.

considered, as was the team's responsibility to develop a model that could inform other research and evaluation studies. In the spirit of "sharing knowledge and building evaluation skills," cited above, "others" would include researchers in related Indigenous and ECD fields of study, with the potential to inform Indigenous research methodologies.

The participatory evaluation used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches that called for a range of measures of rigour and verisimilitude.

Scientific rigour: Qualitative and quantitative.

The evaluation drew on multiple data sources, both qualitative and quantitative, and used a multisite, multiple method design. The methodology did not include control or comparison groups for two main reasons: (a) it would be unethical to exclude children, families, and communities (control group) from a program designed to generate significant benefits for participants, and (b) due to local control of site programs and intercommunity diversity, it would be near to impossible to find a community match for comparison purposes. However, whenever a standardized test is used in child assessment or evaluation, there is an assumed broad comparison group, and possibilities for following this model were considered; for the most part, however, they were found to be not feasible. As I have previously noted, for an impact evaluation of an intervention program, the focus is on gains (change) rather than on an optimal score (for comparison to a standard, e.g., I.Q. score, regional readiness criteria). This discussion is continued further on in the section on the work sampling system (WSS).

Ultimately, the methodology included triangulation procedures that used the various data sources to enhance validity and reliability standings and verisimilitude. The rigour of standardized testing and interpretation (WSS) was balanced with qualitative methods of

assessment in key informant interview responses, where an annotated range of outcomes could capture features that would inform ECD programming as well as evaluation findings.

In spite of the diversity of the sites, the methodology allowed for qualified generalization to similar—or, in some cases, all—sites. For example, the data could show that in a remote site, where all community children attend AHS and then enter the local school, kindergarten and grade one teachers report a particular outcome, whereas in a large urban site, where only children with the highest needs are enrolled, they report a different outcome.

Prospective evaluation sites were told that for reasons of confidentiality their data would be aggregated at the site and national levels, and that their outcomes would not be compared with data from other sites. This move was imperative because of the small numbers of participants and sites, with the possibility of site identification though profile recognition. There were two major challenges to the principles of confidentiality: (a) sites wanted to know details, and how they compared with others; and (b) it would be difficult to accurately represent distinct outcomes related to diversity in an aggregated presentation of findings. For example, while there could be many anonymous but illustrative parental or kindergarten teacher accounts of children's success, it would be difficult to say, for example, "In an urban Inuit site, we noticed a distinctive pattern" because there is only one such site. These data could be wonderful material for an ethnographer, but would be questionable in an evaluation where participants are promised confidentiality. In any case, there is definitely a tension here between confidentiality concerns, meaningful reporting, and possession/ownership of data as it is envisioned in Indigenous research methodologies.

Evaluation methodology.

The selected evaluation sites reflect AHSUNC diversity. Regional Health Canada AHS consultants each recommended two AHS sites that were considered to be administratively stable and of good quality. The final selection of 10 participating sites was balanced to include representative Inuit, Métis, and First Nations sites, one French-speaking site, and a mixture of large and small urban, isolated, and remote sites. Participation in the impact evaluation was voluntary, whereas participation in administrative/process evaluations is compulsory. As indicated above, the TDT envisaged a participatory, culturally appropriate methodology. The majority of contractors and evaluators were Aboriginal. Orienting the selected sites and communities and training community members in evaluation work were integral to the design.

Subsequent to site selection, the methodology involved five major steps. The details of the steps and their development follow in this section:

1. Participating sites recommend community evaluators and educators to attend group training sessions.

2. Community members are invited to local evaluation orientations.

3. Evaluators and educators collect data.

4. Data are analyzed by the contractor; raw evaluation material is send to Health Canada/PHAC. Contractor submits report to Health Canada/PHAC for approval.

5. PHAC representatives visit participating communities to share outcomes.

The evaluation tools and data collection.

Prior to the foregoing evaluation cycles, during the development phase, four major evaluation tools were developed or adapted in order to demonstrate change and perceptions of change. The tools and data collection methods, which are described below, are the Work

Sampling System, key informant interviews, Enviroview, and Aboriginal Vocabulary

Acquisition Test. All four tools were designed to maximize building community capacity and

participation and to minimize intrusiveness for children. The tools and methodology were

piloted, and modified as required, in five sites. The pilot sites also participated in the two-year

impact evaluation, along with five additional sites.

Changes in children.

One challenge the TDT faced was how to capture impacts on children in AHS component

areas? Changes in education, health promotion, and culture and language were identified as areas

where direct impacts on children could be assessed using qualitative and/or quantitative methods.

Keeping in mind the debatable suitability of standardized tests, the team first examined many

available tests and assessment guides because, since we were not including a control group, it

was useful to have standardized comparison material.

Because education and health promotion components complement the cognitive,

social/emotional, and physical attributes generally associated with various development

assessments directed at preschoolers, the TDT reviewed many examples of such tools and invited

some representatives to demonstrate their products. The team looked for resources that would be

culturally appropriate, scientifically rigorous, and would not place children in unfamiliar testing

situations—keeping in mind that to be standardized, a test would need to be available (validated)

in French and Inuktitut. As well, I called several provincial and territorial departments of

education to ask for their kindergarten or grade one readiness/entrance checklists and learned

that, for the most part, they are locally developed and are not regionally standardized. We also

accessed readiness lists electronically, and carefully considered them all.

Changes in families and communities.

Changes in the families and communities were captured in key informant interviews (discussed below). Because the program's focus is on contributing to children's health and well-being, the evaluation methodology prioritized change and perception of change in children.

After reviewing many mainstream tools and literature on child assessment, including, among others, the informative Stairs article on child observation (Stairs, Bernhard, & Colleagues, 2002), the TDT settled on a standardized child observation tool that came closest to meeting their guiding criteria: Work Sampling System.

A child observation tool: The Work Sampling System (WSS).

The Work Sampling System (Meisels, 1993) was selected to show changes in children. In this approach to assessment, children are observed in context and not placed in testing situations with strangers (Meisels, 1993; Stairs et al., 2002). Meisels and Atkins-Burnett (2000) advocate that assessment should:

1.   be based on an integrated developmental model;

2.   draw on multiple sources of information;

3.   follow a certain sequence;

4.   be informed by the child's most trusted caregiver;

5.   be a collaborative process drawing on family members and professionals;

6.   draw on parental information and feedback;

7.   address children's current levels of strength as well as anticipated growth areas;

8.   be conducted in context;

9.   be seen as a step in the process of intervention and continued feedback; and

10.   be nonthreatening, safe, and nonjudgmental for children and parents. (adapted from Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2000, p. 232).

The TDT was impressed with the WSS approach and its rationale, and accessed additional articles that report on WSS methodology before deciding to include it as an evaluation tool. I have noted in my research process that the above assessment statements align with the respect and relationship values (for both children and their families) that are inherent in Indigenous research methodologies (e.g., pp. 93-94 of the dissertation).

The WSS records status and changes in participating children from program entrance (T1) to term end (T2) for each year of program participation. The main data source is the child observation notations over six-week periods, carried out by the trained AHS site educators using a developmental checklist. Term observations are completed on individual coded (unidentified) WSS reporting forms, which are sent to the contracted researcher. Copies are kept by the site, where they are also used as guides to evaluating a child's skills, knowledge, behaviours, and accomplishments for individual and program enhancement, and for references in communicating with parents/guardians. Direct observations and portfolio collections are used in the assessment, and occasionally educators discretely set up opportunities for the children to demonstrate specific skills if their status is not evident otherwise. Portfolios are made up of samples of children's work, and can also contain photographs of the children engaged in various activities, and related notes based on observations or from parental/guardian input. Checklist ratings are *not yet*, *in process*, and *proficient*.

Although there are seven domains in the WSS and the checklist, the AHS evaluation used only four. This decision was based in part on advice the AHS trainer received in her training as

an instructor—that the educators, being newly trained, should not be overwhelmed by all seven domains in the beginning. Hence, the children were to be assessed in the physical/health, personal/social, language/literacy, and mathematical thinking domains.

WSS data collection. Prior to the data collection, AHS families were provided with an information package describing the evaluation and the WSS. Parents/guardians signed permission forms indicating their willingness to have their children participate in the assessment. For each participating child, the parent/guardian filled out a health and social history, which was identity-coded and attached to the child's WSS findings. In this way, the analyst (contractor) could potentially separate aggregations for children identified with special needs, for example, if it were deemed pertinent. As well, sites identified children with low attendance.

The fall data collection (T1) recorded baseline data on the 3-year-old children once they became accustomed to their new settings (in October). The second data collection took place the following spring (T2). The process was repeated for this group of children, who were now 4-year-olds, in their second program year (T3 and T4). The portfolios and copies of the checklists remained on site in the children's files, and were subject to the site's confidentiality guidelines.

Training educator/evaluators in WSS. Three early childhood educators from each of the 10 participating sites were trained in the WSS process. French and Inuktitut interpretation was offered using a whispering technique in which the interpreter simultaneously interpreted the presentation in a soft voice to the two or three participants requiring translation. The contracted interpreters were Aboriginal, and all were familiar with AHS. The training sessions were offered to the pilot group of five sites, and the following year educators from the five new sites gathered to train. In the third year, due to educator turnover in some of the sites, the training was repeated to reach replacement staff.

The four-day training sessions focused on observation techniques and discussion around the indicators of specific scales and competency. One example of cross-cultural differences was particularly instructive in this exercise because it pointed to the dangers of assuming universal values in child rearing and assessment. Mainstream ECD practices value independence (vs. dependence and separation issues). The trainers were advised by the trainees that in some communities, dependence is valued—they *want* to keep their children childlike and dependent until they start school. I have since been informed that this desire is common to many cultures worldwide. Ensuing discussions on this topic and other problematic categories and indicators augmented modifications that were within the scope of the system but also culturally suitable. This is a good example of Smith's *reframing* (to define issues in the community's own terms), referred to in Stairs et al. (2002).

Each participating educator receives a manual that guides her through the process, and provides examples of "evidence." One advantage to the group training was that the educators benefited from the questions and ideas provided by the others, and the learning experience extended to other exchanges of programming and cultural information.

Discussion. A formative advantage to training the educators and systematically using child assessment and other child observation tools is that the educators advance their ECD knowledge and their understanding of each child's status in a variety of domains. In most isolated and remote communities, it has been difficult to access ECD training, and all related workshops and speakers are welcomed and appreciated. Hence, the WSS training contributes to the quality of child care/education beyond the evaluation parameters. (Most of the participating sites continued to use this instrument post evaluation, and several extended their observations to include all seven domains.)

The present discussion has sidestepped the school readiness question. Does the WSS provide outcomes that indicate whether or not children are ready for kindergarten/school? Again, my short answer would be that the authentic question here concerns whether or not the program has contributed to the child's progress in the four observed domains (the domains and indicators having many commonalities with "readiness" and ECD standardized tests). The WSS does not account for "school readiness"; rather, it describes developmentally appropriate "proficiencies."[34] The WSS reports demonstrate areas of strength and identify areas that need to be strengthened. Findings based on WSS ratings tell a more meaningful story when they are combined and compared with data collected in the key informant interviews, which I discuss below.

A qualitative approach: Key informant interviews.

The TDT created a series of prescriptive questionnaires tailored separately for parents, educators, kindergarten teachers, Elders and traditional people, health professionals, social workers, and other community members. The questions addressed their perceptions of change in children, families, and communities in each of the six mandated program components.

The interviews were conducted by trained community evaluators. Each participating site selected two local individuals to be trained as community evaluators in a four-day training session delivered in the fall by TDT members and the contracted principal researcher (contractor). As in the WSS training sessions, several sites were trained together, which afforded intragroup idea sharing. Again, interpretation/translation was provided by a whisperer.

In most instances, the sites selected community members with appropriate skills or potential. A few communities chose to nominate non-Aboriginal outsiders who had a good track

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[34] For additional details, see Meisels, Jablon, Marsden, Dichtelmiller, & Dorfman (2013).

record doing similar work with the sponsoring agency. In each of these cases, the administration was concerned about possible conflict of interest or selection difficulties if community people were nominated, and thought that an outsider could be more objective. While this may be a familiar challenge in small communities, one drawback is a missed opportunity to build community capacity for evaluation and other skills. The evaluators are paid for their work through government (Health Canada/PHAC) individual contracts. (The site educators are not paid for their evaluation work because it is considered to be part of their job descriptions.)

The community evaluators received an orientation to the questionnaires and interview process and were trained in interviewing techniques and coding and recording data. In the piloting year, the five pilot sites received training, and the questions and process were modified as indicated. An additional training session was held in Year 1 of the evaluation for the five new sites. Because two evaluators were trained from each site, there was no need to train replacement staff. In the two cases where evaluators had to terminate their contracts, the second ones extended theirs to meet the community requirements.

The interviews took place in the spring of each year. The evaluators made their own arrangements for the interviews in their communities. The confidential completed questionnaires were forwarded to the principal researcher for data entry and analysis, and were then forwarded to PHAC for ongoing confidentiality/storage.

Providing cultural context: The Enviroview.

Because AHS sites have diverse characteristics, participation criteria, and priorities, a case study approach for interpretation of impact outcomes was appropriate. To support meaningful analysis for the impact of the cultural component, the TDT developed a graduated-

response checklist of 14 categories (areas)[35] with associated culturally related indicators (actions). Its purpose was to provide a cultural context to guide interpretation of impact evaluation outcomes, rather than a way of evaluating the cultural inclusion or expression, or other qualities of an ECD environment. Using the Enviroview as a guide, outcomes—for culturally related items in particular—could be differentiated as individual cases and better understood as products of their program environments. In addition, profiles could augment allocation of attribution. For example, if children were gaining competency in learning their Aboriginal language and the Enviroview did not show evidence of Aboriginal speakers on site, it was unlikely that the language gains were attributable to program participation.

Checklist items were organized to reflect Aboriginal staff characteristics (including Aboriginal language presence), the physical environment, language and cultural activities, and other resources and activities (similar to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale [ECERS][36], Harms & Clifford, 1980). The Enviroview scale moved from *never* to *very frequently*.

Table 7.4 below provides two examples that illustrate the Enviroview format.

Table 7.4 Enviroview checklist segments.

Area: Action	Never	Occassioanally	Frequently	Very frequently	Not applicable
Language:					
Aboriginal speaker on staff.					

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[35] The 14 areas were music, dance, art, dramatic play, toys, games, visual displays, activities (Aboriginal), language, books and story time, food, people, play areas, playground.

[36] The ECERS scale includes "use of space, materials and experience to enhance children's development, daily schedule, and supervision provided" (Harms & Clifford, 1980, p. 1).

Lessons in Aboriginal language are provided to children.					
(There are 13 action/items in this area.)					
People:					
Staff is of Aboriginal ancestry.					
Elder/traditional advisors are involved in training areas.					
(There are 5 action/items in this area.)					

The site evaluator and the AHS centre staff completed the checklist together at the start of the evaluation period (T1) and again in the spring (T2). This process offered the advantage of further familiarizing the evaluator with the centre. The evaluator forwarded the completed forms to the evaluation contractor for future reference.

Incidentally, this checklist has been well received as an instructive guide to cultural programming and discussion in many AHS communities.

Revisiting culture. Recently I asked Max, my 4-year-old grandson, what they talk about in his (mainstream) preschool. He replied, "We mainly talk about dead artists [Monet, Seurat, and Carr, for example]. I don't know why we don't talk about any live ones." And now I am preoccupied with questions about the role of institutional education and early education in cultural transmission! Those questions could generate another study; however, spurred on by Max's account, I return to some of the issues raised earlier concerning the nature of culture.

One goal of the AHS cultural component is to strengthen Aboriginal identity and self-esteem. I am not suggesting by relating Max's comments about dead artists that traditional culture is about dead things; my intent is to emphasize that there are many positive role models and artefacts in modern Aboriginal lives that need to be featured in the cultural component if we aim to build identity and self-esteem in young children. There are outstanding Aboriginal artists, film makers and writers, athletes, actors, leaders, and professional people, such as the Cree

architect Douglas Cardinal, for example, who could be added to the curriculum. (In some of the centres I have noticed posters showing illustrations of Indigenous policemen and women, doctors, and dentists. It is also important to show Native people doing ordinary and domestic things as well as those that suggest high achievement.)

If I were to recommend amendments to this instrument and to the concept of a cultural component, I would propose items (and curricula) that include both traditional and modern cultures. I seriously consider the words of the Saskatchewan community that indicated they want their children to learn computers, not trapping, at AHS! First, I would include items specific to contemporary culture, as mentioned above, with more emphasis on using modern technology to access cultural resources. (The Enviroview mentions the use of videos in programming; modern technology does have a place in the ECD cultural world.) Second, I would add more items that address home-school cultural continuity (see, for example, the reference to Hennig and Korova's 2012 cultural artefacts study in the next section).

An innovative endeavour: The Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition test.

The AHSUNC evaluation calls for an evidence base to show the impact of all six program components, including culture and language. The TDT recognized the two component elements as enmeshed, but tackled (Aboriginal) language separately, and eventually modified the focus of the inquiry further by identifying Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition as one quantifiable indicator of program impact for the Aboriginal language element. To that end, the team designed the Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition test (AVAT). Team members acknowledged this assessment choice as a possible compromise to the integrity of the Indigenous language and culture bond, but thought it a practical and respectful resolution to an evaluation approach that

comprises diverse cultures and languages, and at the same time requires a systematic evaluation model.

Chronicling the instrument development. In this section I trace the thinking and the steps and (tentative) dead ends that led to the AVAT design, as the eclectic development process itself can yield valuable information for future evaluators interested in pursuing the complex assessment of language acquisition. The AVAT was not used in the impact evaluation because a number of problems were identified in the validation process. However, the evaluation methodology captures language and culture in the Enviroview, which shows individual site contexts; as well, the perceptions of change instruments report on children's understanding of, and competency in, speaking Aboriginal languages, as perceived by community informants. These sources provided relevant programming and impact data to inform the evaluation study.

In this chronicle I focus on the principal AVAT tool, which is basically a picture identification test. I also discuss methodological considerations, and two associated minor tools. But first, I include brief discussions of the Doll Family and of group testing, as these approaches are some of the other options the team considered, then set aside.

The Doll Family. Aboriginal vocabulary and its usage are layered with cultural overtones (e.g., understandings of animate/inanimate nouns). The words for family members and their relationships carry traditions and meanings that go beyond vocabulary (i.e., deep culture), and for this reason they have high cultural and linguistic value and function. While there are few family-related words that can be meaningfully taught to 3- to 5-year-olds separate from their lived family relationships, the team members wanted to pursue this field of inquiry because of its strong cultural significance. In brief, the team recommended we make/dress culturally appropriate dolls that the children could use during their dramatic or free play in the centres, and

educators and language instructors would scaffold (family name/role) language acquisition informally while engaging in play with the child. Children would be "tested" in situ by familiar educators, possibly through structured observation (T1/T2; T3/T4), on their knowledge of related Aboriginal language and relationship roles.

The Doll Family was not developed because it was deemed to be daunting with respect to establishing rigour in design and interpretation, and therefore was not practical for immediate evaluation purposes. The discussion process, however, did highlight two recurring challenges that are applicable to any of the proffered second-language testing methods for preschool children: developmental range and variation, and attribution. As 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children develop first language (L1) skills at differing rates and baseline scores vary, these variants confound second language (L2) acquisition assessment in an impact evaluation. For example, how would we decide what would be a reasonable (acquisition) expectation, and how would we design measures? One difficulty we foresaw, among others, was that a child might understand a word or concept as a gestalt, but not be able to fragment or express it. Second, how would we attribute gains to program participation when some of the children's learning was no doubt taking place in their homes? These questions suggest an interesting expanded research topic, but they do not speak to the evaluation question.

A cross-cultural ECD ethnography. In a related research project, Hennig and Kirova (2012) conducted an ethnographic study during which they observed refugee children's play activities in an intercultural preschool program, with cultural artefact engagement as a focus for examination. They argue that

> the presence of cultural artefacts allowed the child's home culture to emerge as the dominant one in the early childhood setting. The authors believe that the mindful, deliberate introduction of cultural artefacts by the first-language facilitators and cultural brokers who were members of the classroom teaching

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team allowed the child to consolidate her learning from both her home and her school environments in a manner consistent with her cultural background. (Abstract)

Once more, while the findings in Hennig and Kirova's study contribute to our understanding of culturally appropriate programming to support ethnic or cultural identity and respective learning styles, they do not resolve the complexities of program impact attribution. However, they correspond with the spirit of the Doll Family because they call attention to some of the intimacies that connect children's learning to their cultures, and show that this process can be better understood through direct child observation or ethnography. I see the findings contributing to the argument for culturally based ECD programs, and thus demonstrating the research-programming connection and possible ECD policy influences. Kirova, one of the cited authors, suggested the following with respect to attribution of children's learning (personal communication, June, 2015):

> Is it possible or even desirable to separate the impact of any program from the impact of children's learning outside the context of that program? Such separation has been (and continues to be!) the goal of pure experimental research designs (by introducing and measuring a limited number of independent variables), and as qualitative researchers have pointed out, this can be achieved only in lab-like settings.

She also asks a provocative question that confounds the methodology design: "Is this [program attribution] an achievable/desirable goal for program evaluation studies?" In this case, perhaps the learning assessment is not as much a program/child impact question as it is a programming question, i.e., in what ways does the program contribute (or not) to the child's learning goals? Notwithstanding, the AHSUNC National Impact Evaluation was required to report on the impact of the culture and language component, which presumes program attribution.

Because family relationships are so important (in any culture), and because the Doll Family could offer possibilities for language and cultural data in impact assessment, the TDT often returned to the potential of this model, but set it aside with the hope that an ethnographer or other ECD researcher might pick it up.

Group testing. The TDT also looked at including testing methods that referred, for example, to a group of children performing a song in their Aboriginal language. This is a common activity that could probably be attributed to program participation. As another example, children in a group setting could respond to a probe (such as an AVAT illustration). If one, or some, of the children respond correctly (T1, T2, T3, or T4), can we attribute this correct response to program impact? Both of these group possibilities were considered, but they seemed to be related more to programming than to impact (i.e., the activities could be included in the Enviroview for reference). However, the idea of testing individual children in various group settings was retained for further consideration (e.g., testing the children in pairs).

The team sought to develop an instrument that would have lasting usefulness to the communities, perhaps as language development resources, as well as providing data related to program impact. Accordingly, the idea for the AVAT evolved.

A comprehensive examination of an innovative instrument. Team members initially collected information from 20 AHS sites (preliminary research) regarding their Aboriginal language and culture programming (e.g., what words/phases/concepts do you "teach," and how do you "teach" them?). The ensuing list guided the structure of the language acquisition instrument, as described below.

Description of the AVAT methodology and tools. In brief, the AVAT is made up of a series of 70 illustrations based on the initial responses collected from the sites in the preliminary

research phase. The team artist[37] drew on words identified in the collected preliminary data to generate images for the AVAT picture identification package. The illustrations were to be presented to the child, four at a time, to elicit correct receptive or expressive responses (similar to the Peabody picture vocabulary test[38] [Dunn & Dunn, 2007]).

The pictures were intended to be used for both Aboriginal vocabulary expression (naming the presented illustrated object) and response (pointing to the named object). As methodology development proceeded, questions emerged around children's ages and stages and developmental capacity, as well as how we could capture language acquisition in a testing situation. In addition, we pondered, for example, the pertinence of the instrument in an Aboriginal [Inuk] community where L1 is Aboriginal [Inuktitut]. Obviously, in such a case program attribution would be not feasible, and the objective of such an exercise would be skewed from the intent of the instrument.

The test, and the selection and organization of the illustrations, was intended to be flexible and adaptable to specific cultures, teaching practices, and targeted vocabulary within the prescribed methodology. The majority of the pictures are of animals and are geographically and culturally representative (i.e., a buffalo, eagle, or caribou may not be a familiar sight to an urban child, but may be recognizable through media or other cultural resources). The picture presentation was to be administered by a familiar person in a casual and customary setting, such as the reading corner of the classroom. This is one situation in which the TDT considered having more than one child present so that the tested child did not feel isolated or under pressure.

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[37] In keeping with the principle of Aboriginal hire, Ojibwe artist Leo Yerxa created the illustrations for the AVAT.

[38] A test measuring participants' receptive and expressive vocabulary, based on simultaneous presentation of four pictures representing words norm-referenced to measure verbal ability according to participants' selected identification or expression.

The copied illustrations were laminated, and site-tailored presentation was structured to include at least one object of the four (I will use animals as examples) that the site had identified as something they were teaching/using in their Aboriginal vocabulary programming, whether it be formal or otherwise. For example, a prairie site might have an educator and a child seated comfortably on a blanket in the reading corner. The educator places four pictures on the blanket, and says, "Can you show me maskwa (bear)?" to test receptive vocabulary. In a northern community, the educator could point to a caribou and ask what the animal is called. Perhaps the child will pick up the cards (and that's fine). Item responses would be recorded, aggregated (and showing range), and later triangulated/compared with related responses from the key informant interviews (to discover whether parents', educators', etc., perceptions support AVAT findings). To extend the vocabulary cache beyond the 70 illustrations, the TDT considered two additional approaches: dolls and coloured balls.

Dolls and coloured balls. Two other tools were included in the AVAT package: dolls and coloured balls. Infant-sized, dark-skinned dolls with dark hair and Aboriginal appearance were purchased, dressed in infantwear, and blanketed. Again, each tool was to be presented in a structured play situation with familiar surroundings and evaluators. The evaluator could use a doll to "test" Aboriginal vocabulary knowledge of face or body parts, if the site indicated they were taught. (The original Doll Family relationship concept was not included.) The balls would be used to "test" Aboriginal words for colours, if they were taught (i.e., can the child name/identify the ball colour in L1?). Challenges and complexities of tool application and data interpretation were extensive. Again, cognitive and linguistic developmental levels were factors (e.g., before the child has mastered the concept or colour identification in L1, it is unlikely that the Aboriginal colour name will be acquired), as well as the possibility of colour-blindness

confounding outcomes. These identified problems and further considerations elicited more difficult questions and design issues for the TDT.

   Further considerations for evidence-based decision making using the AVAT. In assessing what constitutes evidence in this case, once again, baseline measures that tabulate correct answers would be taken at the beginning (fall) of the school year (T1) and the testing would be repeated in the spring (T2). There are several confounding assessment issues: How many more (T2) correct answers would show significant impact? If the Aboriginal language "taught" is not a child's L1, what would be a reasonable or desirable number of words for the child to learn? Can the child identify the object in his L1? Is she stressed by the testing situation? To get a sense of the child's L1 proficiency and emotional state, the child could be asked to identify the objects in L1 as a warm-up exercise. Once the tester is confident the child knows what a bear is in L1, then she can be asked to name it in the Aboriginal language. One of several questions that arises is, what do you do with an incorrect expressive answer if it is close (e.g., the child answers *atim*, [dog in Cree] when the correct answer is *mistatim* [horse, which is translated literally in Cree as big dog])?

   In summary, ascertaining and demonstrating Aboriginal vocabulary acquisition as an outcome will require additional work by experts if it is deemed a meaningful pursuit. A simplistic checklist for right/wrong picture identification responses does not provide meaningful evidence of program impact. Further methodological issues were identified during the validation process.

   Validation of the instrument. The AVAT was not included in the pilot, or in the final impact evaluation, as was originally planned. Designing and validating an instrument to demonstrate individual children's knowledge and/or practice in either language or culture proved

too demanding for the TDT, in part due to time constraints for instrument validation, and the project was never completed. It was obvious that more sophisticated, specific expertise is required to construct a complex instrument capable of showing language acquisition and program attribution.

The contracted validation exercise pointed out some of the methodological issues the team had not foreseen. In one of the pilot sites, for example, the traditional language teacher said that if the children were going to be tested she would no longer be involved in the teaching process. This statement was significant, both practically and culturally. In another site, the Aboriginal evaluator who conducted the exercise was a young male—an unusual sight for children in the program—and the children were reluctant to engage with him. Although the contractors had trained and prepared the evaluators, who were Aboriginal and linguistically "matched" to the sites, they were not familiar to the children, and in one case the evaluator spoke a different Cree dialect from the one spoken in the community. Feedback to the TDT supported their argument that evaluators should be known to the children. Another challenge to the piloting was to ensure that the setting (casual, in situ) and the stimulus presentation were carried out as prescribed.

The validation exercise diverged from the general AHSUNC evaluation pattern of using familiar evaluators. Although we were fortunate to engage academic specialists who provided excellent leadership for the validation, the AVAT "child testers" were not "of the local community." By comparison, the trained community evaluators and educators who conducted the key informant interviews and the WSS child observations were, in almost every case, known to the local AHS project, and, in the case of the educators, they were well known to the children. While there are a number of good arguments regarding objectivity and reliability in testing, and a

possibility that the educators might have a vested interest in showing positive outcomes for their subjects, this risk is offset by the advantages of examiner familiarity and trust, both for children and adults. "Teaching to the test" was not considered to be an issue, because in fact the instrument was designed to "test to the teaching." In considering the suitability of familiar examiners, it is also possible that involvement in the group training sessions, community orientations, and ongoing contact with the site director and other staff engaged them in a comprehensive evaluation culture that would not be available to an outside tester. While this point is tangential to the reported validation issues, it merits further consideration in the testing of young children.

Structure and policy considerations. Two structural problems limited the time and contracting resources available for the validation exercise and the impact evaluation study, and they raise issues general to government program evaluation. First, evaluation budgets and reporting schedules are predetermined (Health Canada/PHAC was required to report impact evaluation findings to Treasury Board by March 2006); consequently, time (and financial) constraints can limit the design and reach of a program evaluation. For example, it would not be possible in this case to conduct a longitudinal study in a four-year time period, nor would it be possible to include 20 or more sites in the evaluation. Second, it is difficult to draw on the expertise of university departments or personnel due to contracting constraints related to intellectual property rights and indemnification (Public Service Commission, 2013, GC3, 5, 11.12). Both parties (universities and government) want to retain the ownership rights and disallow liability. Fortunately, we were able to contract several exceptional academics independently throughout the evaluation study, but regrettably they were not able to acquire

intellectual property rights for their work[39], which prohibited independent publishing of their findings.

I include the AVAT for discussion in this study because both the development of the instrument and the lessons learned from the validation project are instructive, particularly as they elucidate challenges to explicating and measuring Aboriginal language and culture acquisition in young children. The Doll Family tool is included for similar reasons. Evidence for the impact of the culture/language component was to be gathered by qualitative means.

In addition to the AVAT, open-ended questions on the culture and language component in the key informant interviews addressed acquisition. Again, cultural diversity increases the complexity and highlights the importance of assessing or interpreting findings using a case-study approach to individual site outcomes. This approach is more appropriate for a national evaluation embracing diversity; aggregate outcomes can be shown using an annotated range, and individual site profiles will be more meaningful to the participating sites. However, for this impact evaluation, the qualitative data collected in the key informant interviews are more graphic, making this the preferred method of capturing Aboriginal language development. Nevertheless, the AVAT's development and validation undertakings contribute to our quest for a culturally sensitive methodology for assessing the nature and impact of the AHS culture and language component.

The afterlife of the AVAT. To extend the use of the tools, copies of several of the illustrations used in the AVAT were made into large postcards and distributed to all of the AHS sites to be used for correspondence, decoration, or as literature or language teaching resources. In

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[39] There is a notable exception when the contract is for a work of art. For example, Tomson Highway retains the rights to *Johnny National* and Leo Yerxa retains the rights to the artwork he created for the evaluation projects.

the design of the evaluation methodology, it was suggested that the resources to be used in the

testing be distributed ahead of time, both to support programming and to familiarize the children

with the materials. In education circles, teaching to the test is sometimes criticized, but, as

discussed above, in this case there was an attempt to organize the test to reflect the teaching,

which can make for a fairer and more useful assessment. While illustrated cards are not "the real

thing," pictures of caribou, elk, seals, etcetera, help to bridge the knowledge gap for urban

children who are told traditional and modern stories from their home communities where animals

are central to the story. The dolls and the coloured balls were given to the sites as well. None of

the AVAT tools were promoted as testing materials.

 Discussion. In addition to the familiar questions around attribution to program

participation, considerations for geographic and cultural diversity, allowances for developmental

rate differences (especially language development), and confronting standardization/validation

challenges, two important and pervasive issues emerge from the AVAT discussion. The first is

related to the Elder's comments about refusing to teach if the children were going to be tested.

One issue for her could be that she might see their progress measures as a reflection on her or her

teaching. There is, however, a greater tenet to consider that is related to cultural appropriateness

and Indigenous research methodologies. As Aboriginal languages are a revered aspect of culture,

is there a respectful way to evaluate children's language acquisition? The question itself is moot.

How could a researcher qualify to evaluate an Aboriginal language speaker's vocabulary

acquisition or proficiency *if* such a process were considered to be culturally appropriate?

 Here again we have two masters: Treasury Board and Indigenous research

methodologies. First, I consider this problem through the lenses of internal and external validity.

Imagine a vocabulary acquisition test that attends to everything we have considered in

developing an evidence-based, culturally appropriate test. We find that reliability and internal validity are consistent. We are still faced with the question of external validity: Can the findings be generalized? I would argue that so many intersite variables exist that generalization is irrelevant for a national evaluation in this case. Furthermore, such a test might be considered inappropriate, unethical, and profane in an exacting Indigenous paradigm.

Contributions of the methodology and tools to the research questions.

The evaluation methodology, with its participatory approach and its attention to community diversity, provides a foundation for cultural appropriateness. The development process and the evaluation procedures include community members and protocols (e.g., AHS meetings are opened by Elders or traditional teachers with prayers, burning sweetgrass, lighting the *quilliq*[40]). The process falls short of meeting OCAP/CHIR and IRM principles and methodologies (e.g., data possession and traditional methods). In part, the limitations are related to the inherent requirements in government-sponsored programs. However, in the evaluation methodology, the principles of respect, control, and access are honoured within the parameters of the program.

The tools and their development story contribute to an increased understanding of the place of school readiness, culture, and Aboriginal language acquisition in the evaluation of Indigenous ECD programs. These contributions, their limitations, and their implications for further research are discussed in Part Three.

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[40] The quilliq is an Inuk stove/lamp which was originally carved from soapstone. It usually burns seal oil. While it was traditionally used as a heat and light source, it is generally used today for ceremonial purposes.

PART THREE: THE ESSENCE

In Part Two Mouse Woman, as researcher, aimed to identify and refine themes significant to this research through an analysis of the bioecological systems data. This process evokes the mythological Mouse Woman's gifts being thrown into the fire to release their essence. The themes I gleaned from the process inform my research question: *Is the 2006 AHSUNC National Impact Evaluation approach and methodology an instructive model for impact evaluation studies on Indigenous early childhood programs?* In Part Three, Mouse Woman, being true to her rodent nature, unravels the four impact evaluation elements that emerged as central themes in the preceding analyses: education, culture, social justice, and policies. She examines their intrasystem relationships and their significance to this study, and envisages their creative potential for equity and praxis. Mouse Woman, known also as Grandmother Mouse, privileges indigeneity in her approach, together with her mousy attributes.

In my approach to the fundamental research questions and findings, I apply traditional hermeneutic methods in my analysis, but I also explore and draw on Indigenous perspectives to inform both my methodology and my interpretation. I identify indicators of cultural appropriateness and the strengths of the impact evaluation methodology and tools, as well as associated unresolved and arguable issues and further research considerations.

As I begin to "forage in the data," seeking their essence, I consider myself as cross-cultural researcher vis-à-vis the tiny mythological creature, Mouse Woman. Consequently, I begin in Chapter 8 with some reflections on that theme, and on Indigenous perspectives. Next, I review the data generated in Part Two and restructure my approach; in Chapter 9 I apply further analysis to the evaluation themes. Finally, I reflect on the challenges and changes, both personal and textual, that I experienced as a result of the research process.

> *In my home I have a brick crawl space under my kitchen. It is sometimes used for storage, but years ago it was appropriated by my grandchildren as a play space and a home for Mousey, their stuffed mouse. So, now my creative processes take place above a construct of structural foundation and mouse nest—substance and metaphor in harmony.*

Chapter 8: Mouse Woman Muses

A Seal Story

My friend took part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada[41] hearings in a coastal Arctic community and shared the following story (personal communication, December 2013):

> The meeting room, situated near the shoreline, was filled with local people who shared their personal, heart-wrenching stories with the TRC officials and their community. During the hearings, a chilling ambient howl broke through the collective tears and sobs in the room, and continued to the point where a recess in the proceedings emptied the room, and the assembly made its way to the shore, to the source of the unearthly baying. An injured seal lay dying on the beach, his wailing seemingly in concert with the anguish in the TRC meeting room. In response, the formal hearings were suspended while traditional rituals were held for that seal. The seal's cries are now part of the community's healing story.

Traditional Indigenous people in Canada have strong connections to the natural world. The poignant Seal Story evokes old legends, the cycles of life, and the harmony between humans and animals. Taking part in a story, or hearing it told, can shape the participant's understandings and beliefs. The nature and degree of influence will be related in part to the participant's familiarity with the message, the story elements, and/or the storyteller. When I hear the Seal Story, I am horrified yet again by the systematic, collective abuse and cultural genocide perpetrated on Indigenous Peoples. I am haunted by the seal's prescient role, which reminds me that there are so many worldly and spiritual things I question, even as I witness them. My cultural background, including my mainstream elementary and advanced educations, supports ways of seeking, viewing, and interpreting questions and answers that both limit and enhance my

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[41] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) "is a component of the federal Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (established June 2, 2008). Its mandate is to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools (IRS). The Commission [documents] the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the IRS experience" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, n. d., paras. 1–2).

approach to research; it also promotes an authentic and functional respect for other worldviews—in this case, as it affects research with Indigenous People(s).

Many traditional North American Plains Peoples articulate their worldviews and their various understandings and interconnections through circles, or Medicine Wheels. Their northern neighbors, the Woods or Bush Cree, may well envision paths rather than circles that reflect their regional topography. Coastal Indians may have a layered understanding of nature, conduct, and justice shaped through the teachings of Mouse Woman, Raven, or other Creation figures. Traditional Polynesian Indigenous people, accustomed to island life, interpret their world through teachings from the water, weather, and sky, as well as from earth-bound natural life and relationships. Although their histories, geography, weather, and legends differ, Inuit people have similar connections to the natural world.

Could I enter an Inuit community and return with anything credible to say—anything that touched on deep culture—about the injured seal? Could I evaluate the impact of that incident on community members? And, can I design a way to evaluate both the impact of that enigmatic happening and the cultural impact of AHS on the participating Aboriginal children, their families, and their communities?

Below I draw comparisons between the Seal Story and AHS to call attention to some of the shortcomings and challenges in conducting cross-cultural research, and to the underlying principles supporting emic researchers, methodologies, and partnerships. I see the AHS impact evaluation as serving two masters—the participating and broader Aboriginal communities (emic) and the federal funding agency and broader research communities (etic). The evaluation priorities, questions, methodologies, and interpretations of the outcomes may differ, or they may conflict with one another; nevertheless, recognition of the needs and goals of both "masters" are

requisite in this case. I am also aware of the spectrum of approaches and skills within the emic community of researchers, and I acknowledge that they may share many of the shortcomings and challenges I myself face.

Positioning Myself

My research/evaluation relationship to the etic community is becoming clearer to me as I reflect on my earlier comments about the power of stories, the evaluation narrative I take part in, and the related stories and text I hear and read with their reiterations of connected themes, such as *relatedness*, *participatory*, *cultural base*. This reflection extends my understanding but also presents a dilemma. How do I, as etic researcher, honour and justify my position as researcher in a doctoral study wherein I examine cultural appropriateness in an Aboriginal culturally based program?

Empathetic unsettlement.

I see Canadian Aboriginal Peoples' social issues as rooted in the historical trauma of colonization and cultural genocide; at the same time, they are situated in a current movement that is alive with revitalization, healing, strong leadership, and social progress—attributes that support their potential for self determination. Historical intervention in Canadian Indigenous lives, when framed as trauma, can draw on recent research and findings on posttraumatic stress and its repercussions to augment healing, and the need for redress as regards personal and social issues resulting from the legacy of IRS. This is one reason it has been important for all Canadians to hear the IRS and intergenerational survivors' stories.

Trauma theorist Dominick La Capra (1999) points out that a secondary witness is not entitled to the subject position of historical trauma, and that it is not possible to become a surrogate victim, or to appropriate that position. I draw a parallel to myself as an etic researcher

who is clearly not in Indigenous Peoples' subject position. Both La Capra and Gail Jones (2007) write about trauma, empathy, and empathic unsettlement[42], as well as the importance of secondary witnesses maintaining a sense of alterity. Jones refers to the necessity for them to recognize the "affective dimension of cultural understanding" (p. 168), and to have empathy for the other. Moreover, Hannah Arendt points out that acts of empathy should not overshadow "the political action that [they] can hypothetically initiate" (1978, p. 187). Thus, understanding and empathy advance to assume the emancipatory position referred to by Habermas (1968/1971), where reflection and action are instrumental in the move toward social justice.

I see Jones's, Arendt's, and La Capra's messages regarding trauma as significant to me and to my study in three ways. First, these messages have application for the cross-cultural researcher, who may have experience, a secondary witness's "affective dimension" or empathy, and accord with the issues, but nonetheless retains alterity. Second, they further extend my research focus beyond the dimensions of context and description to a more critical and forward-looking realm; that is, my research focus moves from *what?* and *why?* to *so what?* and *now what?* Thus understanding and empathy are only part of the research puzzle; identifying action for equality and empowerment is required as well. Third, the messages call attention to the role of governments and policies in supporting and developing constructive programs for intergenerational victims, as the effects of trauma are palpable in Canada's Indigenous population and communities.

I see AHS as an important Aboriginal-controlled instrument for healing past and ongoing injustices and inequalities in Aboriginal communities. This image has been reinforced by my (volunteer) experiences and later reflections at the 2014 Edmonton TRC hearings, in the AHS

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[42] The "desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis" (La Capra, 2001, p. 78).

program, and elsewhere, wherein I have seen the local and national accomplishments of strong Aboriginal leaders, academics, and youth. Accordingly, in order to support present and additional investments in AHS and perhaps to reframe its objectives, appropriate, descriptive, evidence-based research and program evaluations are essential.

My research position.

Because I am a prairie girl, I have settled on the following working position for my research: Using my interpretation of the Medicine Wheel, I see that we all sit in different places and directions around the circle; in fact, the traditional four sacred directions recognize the perspectives of four different races as well as other vantage point characteristics. I bring my own worldview to my perceptions, which integrates my lifelong experiences with teachings from a number of storytellers who impart their Aboriginal worldview, or who speak of Indigenous methodologies. I attempt to incorporate pertinent values and direction from these teachings into my own research methodology, both in my storytelling approach and in my analysis of cultural appropriateness in the AHS impact evaluation. I do so with a belief that my experiences have generated personal empathy, and that they grant me some authority to make a contribution to my research field.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith: A modern storyteller.

I introduce several of the storytellers I refer to in the literature review (Chapter 4). In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a contemporary academic and storyteller, discusses the intersection of the two worlds of Indigenous Peoples and research and describes how, as a mixed ancestry/Maori scholar, she moves between them and advocates for decolonization. She is concerned with "the context in which research problems are conceptualized and designed, and with the implications of research for its participants and their

communities" (p. ix). The first edition of this book was published in 1999; decolonization is not a new concept for Smith and her colleagues.

Smith refers to the loss of cultural knowledge and marginalizing social conditions of many Indigenous Peoples, and maintains that cultural remaking and retrenchment, rooted in Indigenous historical resources, can yield resistance and hope for positive change. Within this framework, "Indigenous academics and researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice" (p. 4). ECD reconceptualization literature and "remade" research and evaluation methodologies can contribute to this retrenchment by developing and presenting progressive arguments and models. Again, Smith privileges reflection and social action in research.

Indigenous Research Methodologies and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model.

I adapt Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model to organize my conceptual theory. This illustrative circular model comprises concentric systems that correspond to a different dimension both structurally and theoretically, to that of the Indigenous wheels and circles referred to earlier in this section. In my adapted model, the two distal systems include the global and national documents I identify as major texts influencing the rationale and structure for AHS and providing direction for its evaluation. I discuss their individual contributions and their collective influence and authority on the foundations and evaluation of AHS. I do not attempt to provide a political analysis that includes self-determination or colonization; however, I do support Smith's action-oriented self-determination agenda, and I see the AHS programs and the AHSUNC evaluation methodology as contributors to goals of social justice and Indigenous influence which are based on current and historical Indigenous resources.

My adapted ecological systems model does not actively promote a decolonizing methodology, but I find that it does, upon examination, demarcate loci and delineation of values and power (albeit selected by me and based on my own perspectives on where I see the ideological power), particularly within the distal systems. Research and literature have informed the cited distal documents, that is, they are socially constructed; they have also influenced my approach to my doctoral research. I do not attempt to use an Indigenous research methodology, but I value some familiarity with the IRM literature (e.g., L.T. Smith, 2012) because it supports my understanding of its importance for research in Aboriginal communities. It would be an incomplete story, and a serious omission, if I did not acknowledge this association.

The literature.

Most of the academic literature I cite belongs to a separate ecological dimension; in this instance I refer to literature relating to Indigenous methodologies. In my mind I place it in my adaptation of the chronosystem because it represents the history and impact of ideas that inform the impact evaluation. Academic literature plays an important role in my life as a researcher—its influences often move symbiotically between ecological systems; its dynamic attributions are often circular, multiple, or aggregate. Smith's two editions of *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999/2012) are a pertinent example of the history of ideas, as they record for the reader and researcher how the core arguments endure through 13 years, and also show the progressive changes that have taken place—possibly advanced by the messages in the 1999 edition!

Again, I bring my experiences, including the literature and conversations that have enriched my life, to this research. A preliminary examination of the research suggests that the impact evaluation's participatory development and evaluation processes, including a community-based approach, have broad, substantial coherence with a culturally relevant approach. What

constitutes school readiness and its indicators, and their applications for Indigenous program evaluation, needs further definition and exploration; however, what is clear is that school readiness, if it is considered in assessment or evaluation, must include health factors as readiness indicators and as an essential dynamic in the interpretation of overall readiness status.

Government policies and academic literature pertaining to program evaluation, and Indigenous ECD programs and associated evaluation methodologies, have strong influences on the AHS evaluation design, but it is less clear in what ways the design affects government policies or decision making. For example, will it stimulate a research agenda for delving further into the nature of school readiness or the impacts of the cultural component in Indigenous ECD programs? Will it promote redirection of AHS evaluation funding toward either local or longitudinal studies? The AHS evaluation process and design influence programming by building community capacity through public education and evaluator training, and through a process model that draws on community participation and values. This presents a potential functional model for other government consultations and program evaluations in Indigenous communities, particularly because the AHS evaluation is designed to generate qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes.

AHSUNC Impact Evaluation Parameters

The tool development team did not make a conscious effort to place their work within the political framework L. T. Smith references, or to explicitly adhere to the fledgling formal ethical principles discussed earlier (i.e., NAHO [OCAP], CIHR). Their evaluation approach relied mainly on members' prior education, experiences and intuitive sensitivities, together with supporting resource materials, which included federal government requirements and the evaluation framework. For example, the group recognized that comprehensive individual child

development and social advancement are dynamic progressions. Their variants confound

attribution for change, and for determining the optimum time for capturing inclusive, informative

developmental assessments. Because Treasury Board required a final AHUNC impact evaluation

report by March 2006, it was only feasible to propose immediate or intermediate impacts for

children (not longitudinal impacts); the outcomes were to be considered as contributions to

children's health and well-being and assessed in relation to current literature on early

development and related longitudinal studies on the impacts of ECD intervention programs. The

TDT was not able to find comparable studies that evaluate or show the specific impact of the

cultural component in an ECD program.

TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair reminds us that for seven generations Aboriginal

children attended Indian residential schools; there is no quick fix to recover from the damage to

the communities and to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships. While Sinclair describes the

education system's critical role in the destruction in Aboriginal communities, he also affirms

education as a key to their healing (Sinclair, 2010). His judicious comments put into perspective

the expectations of the AHSUNC program and its impact evaluation, and they acknowledge the

potential contributions of education. I would argue that high-quality preschool education must be

included in this affirmation.

The Seal and the Polar Bear

I return to the Seal Story I recounted above. In that instance, the community recognized

that the seal died due to injuries inflicted by a polar bear. Such a death is a natural occurrence,

whereas cultural genocide and child abuse are aberrant. What is significant is that the Seal and

Polar Bear episode became part of a community healing story, and that stories make a significant

contribution to knowledge. I believe that AHS must be part of the IRS healing story for Canadian

Indigenous Peoples, and that articulate program evaluations can support improved, continued, and expanded programming that will contribute to this healing process and to cultural reframing in Indigenous ECD programs.

Next, in Chapter 9, I bring together data and ideas I presented in the preceding chapters and reexamine their relationships to the AHSUNC impact evaluation and my research questions.

Chapter 9: Mouse Woman Completes Her Tapestry: Analysis, Findings, and Conclusions

In the Odyssey*, Homer's Penelope weaves her tapestry every day for three years, only to unravel it again at night. Her creation is regenerative, and never-ending.*

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I reassemble ideas generated from the various research data sources and carefully interpret their implications in response to my research questions. This process involves expanding on findings associated with previously established themes and categories to show in what ways the AHSUNC national impact evaluation methodology is a constructive model for other ECD program evaluations. Disparate threads come together in a montage of Indigenous early childhood programs, program evaluation, social justice, and Indigenous perspectives. I return to these themes in this chapter, focusing on their interrelationships and on the research questions and the four assumptions I stated in the literature review.

Although my motives differ from Homer's Penelope, I have expended three years designing, unravelling, and reweaving my tapestry: This is the hermeneutic process! My part in its creation will end. My hope and intent is that upcoming researchers and others will find the process of taking up and advancing the tapestry to be worthwhile.

Culture, readiness, and social justice in relation to my research questions.

Throughout my dissertation, I have described the development of the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation methodology. In the course of this description, in Chapters 5 through 7, I put forward a framework for the evaluation design, which I organized in an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems, and then I critically analyzed the evaluation methodology. In each of these two operations I focused on culture and cultural relevance,

education, and social justice, which are all subsidiary to a number of global principles of human rights. I also examined the role of public policy in association with the culture, education, and social justice themes, in addition to its relationship to programs and evaluation, as it was a major consideration in shaping the impact evaluation methodology.

Bronfenbrenner's model comprises permeable and interrelated concentric circles. In this final chapter, as I trace the provenance of my subject elements (e.g., culture) from the distal circles to their microsystem hub, I envision subject wedges dissecting the system circles en route to their shared core, and, in the process, assembling the related factors that influence the final evaluation products. I label the wedges *culture*, *education/school readiness*, *social justice*, and *policy*. I consider the ecology of the separate wedges in relation to my research questions, as illustrated below in Figure 8.1 below.
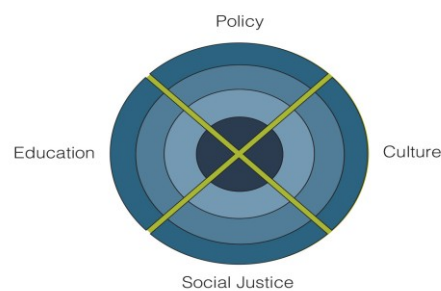
Figure 8.1. Overlay of wedges on concentric ecologic systems circles.

Finally, I give an account of my findings, which are drawn together in response to my overarching and guiding research questions. In doing so, I first organize my material by recounting an analysis of each of the four central themes, or wedges, and then demonstrating their relationships to each other and to the research questions, as well as to my related assumptions.

Guiding Question #1

In what ways is and/or is not the design and process of the AHSUNC national impact

evaluation culturally appropriate?

References to culture in the texts.

In Chapter 1 and elsewhere in this dissertation I acknowledged notable Indigenous

voices, actions, and programs that preceded and informed the AHSUNC program. Various

culturally based and educational/social intervention programs are cited as well. Themes of

Indigenous cultural and holistic approach in ECD programs are common to these sources. The

chronosystem (Chapter 5) provides a historical context for the distal systems documents that

reflect the progressive ideas of the time, and chronicles Indigenous Canadians' struggles and

progress toward self-determination and cultural revitalization. I examine additional ecological

influences in Chapter 6 and find that contemporary global documents and policies referred to

children's cultural rights and protection as early as 1959 (UNICEF, 1959), and extended

promotion of minority rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1992) and cultural rights for

Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), as well as clarifying children's rights in more recent

documents (UNESCO, 2006) and (UNICEF, 2002a, 2002b).

Placing the AHSUNC evaluation and its development in a context of Indigenous voices

and other historical, social, academic, and political influences grants recognition to the cultural

realities of Aboriginal populations, their vulnerability, resilience, transitional states, productivity,

and potential. This foundational approach initiates a process of actualizing cultural

connectedness in my research as it tracks the social and policy-related origins of AHSUNC and

its evaluation through the distal systems. The AHSUNC evaluation framework and methodology

reinforce the centrality of culture, and of the community realities, through their participatory designs, focus on the AHS cultural component, and sensitivity to diversity.

The Canadian government identifies *culture* and *Aboriginal status* as determinants of health, and develops programming for children through its population health approach, as shown in the exosystem narrative. The 1999 National Children's Agenda (NCA; Battle & Torjman, 2000) claims to value diverse Canadian traditions and cultures, and to aim to reflect them in their services for children. The mesosystem discussion in Chapter 7 shows how one of these services, AHSUNC, and the government-mandated evaluation framework, define the program's cultural component and the possibilities for a culturally appropriate methodology (i.e., accommodating diversity).

Evaluation Framework: Evaluation issues.

The Aboriginal Head Start Evaluation Framework was designed by Aboriginal consultants and informants with key cultural issues in mind (Evaluation Consultants, 1997); informants to its design identified ten evaluation issues (pp. 10–12), four of which relate directly to cultural appropriateness. The first three issues relate to awareness and accommodation of diversity in

- "community needs and expectations;
- community levels of capacity and infrastructure;
- geographical location and settings, particularly in the far North; and
- community cultural groups (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit)" (p. 11),

in addition to language accommodation, and local involvement of community members in the evaluation process. The AHSUNC evaluation design demonstrates sensitivity and practical application to the above concerns in accommodation of diversity, as shown in Chapter 7.

The fourth issue, which is related to community capacity, considers the additional transportation costs of projects in isolated northern communities. Because the Health Canada/PHAC AHSUNC evaluation budget provided for all transportation and accommodation costs for community training events and other costs associated with the evaluations, this was not an issue for the participating AHS sites. (It can, however, be a challenge for sponsors or researchers considering evaluation projects in these communities, or including them in national evaluations.) As a result of inclusive and representative Health Canada/PHAC evaluation policies and a well-planned, comprehensive evaluation budget that accommodated the unique requirements of the remote sites, AHSUNC was able to facilitate representative, diverse site participation.

I previously indicated that the Framework was completed in the AHSUNC preoperational period, and referenced its potential culture and language indicators. The subsequent impact evaluation design adheres to the Framework's approach and guidelines and continues the storyline that originates in the rights documents. Should the AHSUNC evaluation methodology be considered as a model for subsequent AHS evaluations, evaluators would need a postoperational review of the national and local priorities and indicators (i.e., a revised Framework that incorporates recent literature and evaluation findings). As well, evaluators of distinct Indigenous and other intervention programs would need to draw on participating communities to identify their priorities and indicators of success for their customized evaluation framework(s). With benefit of several years of operational experience, their priorities may shift.

Revisiting guidelines, scholars, and assumptions that influence cultural

appropriateness.

In response to my specific question regarding the cultural appropriateness of the

AHSUNC evaluation, I cite two documents—*Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession*

(OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research (Schnarch, 2004), and *CIHR Guidelines for*

Health Research Involving Aboriginal People (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010)—

and various guidelines for conducting research in Aboriginal communities, noting works by

several Aboriginal academics (Atkinson, 2001; Kovach, 2009; Smith , 1999/2012; Stewart-

Harawira, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2001). Throughout the dissertation I have

critiqued the evaluation as well as my own research methodology in reference to these sources.

The four assumptions I make in relation to my research topic (and to social justice and

equity in particular), which I addressed in the literature review, are most directly linked to the

proximal systems elements (i.e., the impact evaluation methodology) as they attend to the

evaluation mandate, approach, and particulars. The cultural element has a significant role in AHS

and its evaluation, as illustrated in the following response to the first assumption, that early

childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes

for participating children, families, and communities, and to social justice. This assumption

builds on academic and other evidence-based research. One of the research gaps in the literature

on Indigenous ECD programs concerns the impact of cultural intervention (i.e., the cultural

component) and culturally based programs. I would argue that many families and communities

choose to participate in AHS because of these cultural aspects and that, as a result, they are

exposed to holistic ECD programming, which, if it is of good quality, is shown throughout this

dissertation to have positive outcomes. Nonetheless, in spite of arguments supporting the cultural

component's contributions to self-esteem and identity, this is an area that is in need of definitive research to describe its effects.

My first three assumptions (including the unique characteristics and requirements of Indigenous programs and evaluations) are addressed throughout Chapter 7, and can be traced from text in the macrosystem rights documents through Canadian approaches located in the exosystem. Assumption #4 (Indigenous research considerations) speaks to culture and cultural appropriateness in evaluations related to Indigenous Peoples, and is most directly addressed by the Indigenous academics and research cited throughout.

I have a corresponding concern: Throughout my analysis I question the cultural appropriateness of my approach to my research, because I realize the selections and interpretations I employ in focusing on my questions and assumptions may cause me to overlook significant cultural principles or findings that I am unaware of or may consider as irrelevant. I draw on a number of hermeneutic and diverse strategies, including Indigenous research guidelines, to self-monitor throughout my research process. I also utilize metaphors—common features of Indigenous stories—to kindle divergent possibilities for capturing the outliers or alternatives perspectives, that is, to intuit outside of the linear box.

Circles and Indigenous perspectives.

In the course of organizing the four theme attributes in a linear fashion, it strikes me that, as an overlay to the wedges, I am picturing circle quadrants (see Figure 8.2, below). The outer circle becomes a Medicine Wheel that unites the four quadrants. As stated in the prologue, Mouse Woman is my muse. I call on her for balance and guidance; in the same tenor, I pause to consult a Medicine Wheel, as I understand it.
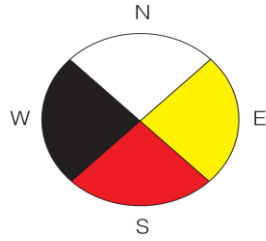
Figure 8.2 Medicine wheel image.

Holistic, dynamic Medicine Wheels[43] are a feature of Plains Indians' worldviews, and

have various manifestations associated with individual tribes or traditional teachers. They hold

spiritual, social/emotional, physical, and cognitive realms or quadrants. The lines sectioning the

circle into quadrants are also permeable; the quadrants (representing the four directions) work

together to provide balance and holism for individuals and communities. The directions, along

with the colours, animals, and characteristics associated with each quadrant, are spiritually

significant. In Aboriginal storytelling tradition, understanding is enhanced by the listener's

knowledge and experience, for example, that particular animals and their attributes are associated

with one of the four directions. The circle and its quadrants are also models for understanding

human development and characteristics. For example, as I understand it, the mouse and other

small animals sit in the South position, which is associated with emotion. Because the mouse

lives close to the ground, she tends to see only what is in front of her. For balance, she must

work together with the spiritual Eagle, who sits in the East with wide-ranging vision.

The Wheel provides me an added dimension in seeking out the connotations and

relevance of my research questions and findings; it complements the hermeneutic course by

introducing a cultural, or spiritual, dimension to my process and my comprehension—the circle

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[43] Medicine wheels can also represent four stages of life, the four seasons, the four races, aspects of life, elements of nature, sacred plants. Four is a sacred and significant number.

imagery appearing again as both the hermeneutic spiral loops and forward-backward arcs, as described on page 62. In a similar way, the cited Indigenous research guides, IRM, and Indigenous scholars raise my consciousness to cross-cultural distinctions that inform my research. For example, I see the education/school readiness component clearly straddling the cognitive, physical, and social quadrants, and I see the interrelatedness of each of my four wedges with a fresh perspective. I earlier demonstrated that physical or health considerations are connected to children's capacity to learn. As well, I have previously acknowledged education as a transmitter of traditional culture, and from this vantage point I see a relationship between the spiritual element and education. I would argue that making these textual relationships explicit facilitates an understanding of their nature, and hence augments cultural relevance in my research.

A culturally appropriate evaluation design and process.

In Chapter 7 I reviewed the proximal system sections, providing a history of the AHSUNC evaluation's development phase, methodology, and rationale. The cultural strengths of the development methodology are evident in its participatory and local-community approaches and its adaptations to diversity, which, in the process, build on local assets and support capacity building for community members, both through training and experience and by means of ECD and evaluation knowledge transfer. The methodology and tools that were developed and adapted to assess the culture-language (and other) components appear to meet functional cultural appropriateness criteria referred to in this dissertation, notwithstanding the federal government parameters for authority, funding, and ownership. Questions concerning the ethics and appropriateness involved in evaluating cultural aspects of the methodology are unresolved, as are the more technical questions associated with providing evidence that describes and assesses the

impact of the cultural component. In any case, the account of the development phase identifies challenges and provides models and ideas for evaluating culturally based Indigenous ECD programs.

In summary, I would argue that the evaluation design and process are culturally appropriate based on the following particulars and findings:

- Aboriginal representatives with a variety of expertise advise Health Canada on the approach for program evaluation.

- Aboriginal consultants, together with AHS communities, design the evaluation framework.

- Aboriginal academics and community members inform the evaluation approach.

- Community members define indicators of success and other evaluation considerations.

- Site selection, tools, and methodology respond to cultural and linguistic diversity.

- The National AHS Council oversees the evaluation design and operations.

- AHS sites select their community evaluators.

- Key informants to the evaluation process include AHS parents and Elders.

- The impact of the AHS cultural component on participating children, families, and communities is assessed.

- The Enviroview informs interpretation by providing a cultural profile of the sites.

- Aboriginal companies and individuals are contracted whenever possible.

- Findings are shared directly with participating sites.

The evaluation methodology falls short of meeting all of the criteria outlined in the OCAP and CIHR guidelines. The evaluation process and my research approach are not centred

in the Indigenous research paradigm described by Indigenous scholars Atkinson, Kovach, Smith, Stewart-Harawira, Weber-Pillwax, and Wilson, albeit their words inform both. These are areas that require ongoing investigation, which I see presently as moving in the direction of academic decolonization, as evidenced, for example, in the worldwide graduate student group Student Storytellers Indigenizing the Academy (2014), as well as in the acclaimed and emerging literature from Indigenous scholars.

In the following section I trace the ecological paths that traverse the education quadrant, and include their relationships to the cultural component.

Guiding Question #2

How do the AHSUNC program and its evaluation contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of "school readiness" or "readiness to learn" for Indigenous children?

Education and school readiness: Cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual elements.
Education and ECD as core determinants.

When I examine the second wedge of my model (see Figure 8.1), I find evidence in the macrosystem of justification and advocacy for accessible, appropriate education for children, and in later documents, support for early childhood development and education. Collectively, the distal documents refer to education as a right, a determinant of health, and a factor in reducing economic disparities. Because education has been declared as a right at the global level, there is a responsibility and urgency to ensure that all children have access to an education that nurtures potential to reduce social and economic disparities. Implicit in this goal are a comprehensive grasp of the existing nationwide conditions, judicious intervention in those conditions as

required, and a need for systematic, evidence-based outcomes that advance the equity goals promoted through these interventions. The more recent distal documents recognize the research that has demonstrated the importance of early childhood development (including attention to prenatal care and infancy) and of quality preschool education and care (e.g., Friesen & Krauth, 2012; McCain et al., 2007; Peters, 1999; World Health Organization, 2011). This acknowledgement leads to the prospects or responsibilities of (state) intervention when children who are considered at risk do not have equal access to appropriate ECD and other educational opportunities—a situation that generates many other social justice concerns. Because the Canadian government identifies early childhood development as a health determinant, it is responsible for ECD programs, through its health ministries, for vulnerable families both on and off reserve.

ECD and readiness.

One common risk and intervention marker is school readiness status, or readiness to learn, which I have argued needs to be considered holistically and include physical health status. Limitations for capacity to learn are linked to hunger, stress, and fatigue as well, but these factors, though important, are not included in this discussion. The guiding question that examines contributions to a more comprehensive understanding of "school readiness" or "readiness to learn" for Indigenous children is discussed at some length throughout my study, and I find the following:

- Mainstream school readiness checklists and their individual and cumulative scores are not appropriate instruments for gauging the success of ECD intervention programs, particularly for Indigenous children.

- Standardized testing, used and interpreted conditionally, can be one indicator of a child's development status in a cross-cultural population.

- School readiness, generally classified as an educational indicator, must be seen in a holistic context and health status must be included, particularly for vulnerable children.

- The use of child observation tools administered by trained observers is recommended to show children's gains in various readiness areas.

- Perceptions of change in children by educators and parents are constructive sources for assessment and interpretation.

These five points and their inferences, as previously delineated, impart a response to my second guiding question. In addition, I refer to my literature review in Chapter 4, which I have organized around four personal assumptions, revisited below.

Revisiting assumptions.

The first two of my four assumptions are relevant to the education and school readiness discussion: (a) that early childhood intervention programs for vulnerable populations can contribute to positive outcomes for participating children, families and communities, and to social justice; and (b) that early intervention program evaluation is complex; hence, it requires a range of innovative approaches. These assumptions are based on and supported by cited literature. The AHS programs are based on principles and evidence related to the first assumption. In the detailed proximal systems section (Chapter 7) I show in my descriptions and analyses how the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation builds on AHS program goals and structure, and develops a process that responds to the complexities and need for innovation noted in the second assumption. Again, because education and early development are health

determinants, sound ECD programs, and appropriate evaluations of those programs, are requisite, notwithstanding challenges in determining positive outcomes and their indicators.

The microsystem and education.

There is a straightforward path for the education component that leads from the distal components through the mesosystem to the microsystem, which comprises the AHSUNC methodology and tools. In Chapter 7 (section 2) I describe two evaluation instruments that are significant to the education component: the work sampling system (WSS) and the key informant interviews—respectively attending to change and perceptions of change in children. These instruments are intended to show to what extent, and in what ways, AHS contributes (or fails to contribute) to positive outcomes for children (WSS), and for children, families, and communities (key informants). These tools assess education and school readiness gains, both in the narrower mainstream sense and through a broader, more holistic application where, for example, social development, improved health, and positive cultural identity could be reported as contributors to school readiness. The tools were selected and adapted to meet the challenges identified in evaluating intervention programs, as discussed in Chapter 7, as well as the evaluation characteristics and requirements acknowledged in my second (quoted above) and third previously considered assumptions and their summations (i.e., that Indigenous early intervention programs and their evaluations have unique characteristics and requirements). In addressing AHSUNC's unique characteristics and requirements, the evaluation methodology contributes to a culturally responsive approach and interpretation that advances a social justice agenda.

Social justice as an element of the AHSUNC evaluation.

Social justice is "a broad term for action intended to create genuine equality, fairness and respect among peoples" (Multicultural Affairs, n. d.). The promotion of social progress, or social

justice, is inherent to the cited rights declarations and the World Health Organization and Education For All documents, as shown in Chapter 7. Both education and culture are significant features of most of these documents, particularly because they are recognized as determinants of health (World Health Organization, 2011).

Social justice and AHS.

Social justice is implicit to the macrosystem documents with respect to specific inalienable rights and the obligations of governments to address equity through advancement of those rights. The common and central message is that when the means to attain these rights are not equally accessible, states have the responsibility to intervene, and to be publicly accountable for that intervention. Canada's response to the global documents is, in part, implemented through a population health and determinants of health approach, which means to support universal health and well-being. The approach includes instituting a number of ECD intervention and support programs that aim to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

AHS, which is formulated on this approach, aims to contribute to children's overall heath, preparation for school, and strengthening of cultural identity by drawing on community values and resources and building community capacities in the process. The program intends for children, families, and communities who participate in this comprehensive program to gain skills, knowledge, and resilience that will support their ongoing health and well-being, and which will contribute to altering the trajectory that has placed them at risk. By providing such a program, one step toward social justice for Aboriginal children is realized, albeit the present program can accommodate only 10% of those eligible, which falls far short of universal access (for equity).

Social justice and the AHSUNC evaluation.

A second step toward social justice for Aboriginal children is to ensure that the program is accomplishing what it is intended to do. This point calls for descriptive, evidence-based impact evaluations at the local and national levels and establishment and ongoing monitoring of program quality standards. There is existing informative literature that addresses quality standards for Indigenous ECD programs (e.g., Cronin, 1995, in Evaluation Consultants, 1997; Dahlberg & Moss, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999/2007; MacNaughton, 2008; Niles, Byers, & Krueger, 2007; Pence, Rodríguez de France, Greenwood, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Stairs, Bernhard, & Colleagues, 2002). AHS sites are encouraged to follow regional ECD standards, but compliance is not legally required in all regions, and to date there is not a national set of licensing standards.

In order to attribute gains to program participation, longitudinal evaluation and research are needed in addition to the more formative methods that provide immediate and intermediate data. This means that before a longitudinal study can be effective, considerable research is required to design its methodologies and tools. In the meantime, the AHSUNC impact evaluation methodology has the capacity to inform such ventures and to provide detailed, constructive evidence of program performance.

Social justice is actualized in AHSUNC on several levels. First, the program and its impact evaluation are built on rights principles and determinants of health. Second, the development of the AHS program and the impact evaluation development phase and methodology are participatory, and they build on and strengthen community capacity. Third, the program and evaluation are built on respect for democratic principles and for diversity. This principle is visible through the meaningful participation and consultation at all stages of

development and operations, and in the methodological attention to national geographic and ethnic diversity in AHS communities and participants.

I have presented AHS as a contributor to healing and equity for a vulnerable population. Social justice, of course, is relevant not only for those on the extreme end of the risk spectrum, even though Head Start programs are generally associated with the most vulnerable. I return to the macrosystem documents, where the rights of minorities and Indigenous Peoples, and of children in recent children's documents, include references to culture and education. If we are concerned about universal access to these rights, program participation in culturally based ECD should not depend on family risk factors—it should be accessible to all who choose to participate.

A specific relationship to social justice.

The Indian residential school (IRS) policies and their legacies are notorious examples of political and social injustice for Indigenous Peoples. As noted, representatives for agencies responsible for the residential schools have issued formal apologies and some compensation for this injustice and its consequences, as discussed in several places in this dissertation. The TRC events provided venues for IRS survivors and intergenerational survivors to tell their truths, bear witness to the stories, and celebrate Aboriginal cultures. I believe AHS can play an important role in the healing and in the restoration of holistic health and Aboriginal culture for intergenerational survivors and their children and communities. I have seen renewed hope and resolve in parents and other community members as they experience and witness AHS in action. Earlier I outlined WHO key features of health determinants (pp. 121-123), and now I return to the need to assess the problem of inequities—and to take action (World Health Organization, 2011). Canadians are growing in our understanding of the problems; we need to come forward

with AHS as a contributor to the action. While evidence for the efficacy of ECD intervention can be found in the literature, still, comprehensive and appropriate AHS evaluation will be required to support this proposition and its associated investments.

Guiding Question #3

What is the relationship between government policy, program development, and

program evaluation in this case?

I respond to my third guiding question in three parts. First, I have shown how the AHS programs are rooted in a number of rights documents that are entrenched in social justice principles, and how the policies they generate are linked to Indigenous ECD program evaluation. Second, I have shown how Canadian policies have shaped the AHSUNC program and its impact evaluation. In conclusion, I have put forward possible ways in which the findings and the questions raised by my research describing the AHSUNC impact evaluation methodology have the potential to influence Indigenous ECD policy development.

Global and Canadian policies influence Indigenous ECD evaluation design.

The Government of Canada, as a global actor, is required to intervene when children's rights are compromised and to be accountable for the results of the intervention. Canada has addressed the issues for vulnerable children, in part, by developing policies and programs for pregnant woman, young children, and their families through a health determinants approach. ECD policies and programs are founded on rights principles and developed with consideration for evidence-based research and literature, statistical sources, and political and advocacy group pressures.

Funders place a high value on programs that show long-term financial savings to society. Much of the ECD literature and research is framed around child care issues, which have a direct connection to employment and other economic factors. For example, possibilities for employment, particularly for women and low-income people, are enhanced if we have affordable, accessible daycare spaces. Coupled with the advocacy for more spaces, proponents argue for national standards and sufficient funding to support high-quality child care. Early childhood education and development programs are the beneficiaries of subsequent research and literature that has defined quality care and standards.

The arguments supporting economic investment are more complex for the education/ development stream than for child care, and the main evidence for long-term gains is still found in the American studies cited earlier (Perry Preschool Study, Carolina Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centre Study). To date the Government of Canada has not required evidence of this nature for AHS programs, and has relied on the American studies to show evidence of financial savings when comprehensive ECD intervention programs target vulnerable populations. I previously outlined the challenges in conducting a national or representative evaluation in the diverse AHS sites. Although the government has long considered the feasibility of a longitudinal AHS study, the costs and other challenges associated with an inclusive study (e.g., program attribution, the shifting priorities within Aboriginal organizations and communities) are daunting. Given these constraints, the AHSUNC impact evaluation is required to report on all six program components, which provides a unique potential to understand what is working well and what the gaps are, and to assess the efficacy of the evaluation methodology. At this early stage in AHS operations, qualitative data in each component area are especially significant

ECD intervention programs are generally concerned with groups who are in the high-risk category, which is often understood as comprising social problems or low socioeconomic status (SES) populations. However, SES needs to be balanced with the rights of Indigenous and minority groups associated with education, language, and culture, whether they are living in poverty or not. One culturally based program, the Maori language nests, is available to all children and is not stigmatized as a poverty-reduction program (whereas the US Head Start programs are seen as poverty intervention). As long as AHS has capacity to reach only 10% of the eligible children, social risk factors will have precedence in enrollment criteria. The focus that presently defines program success primarily in economic terms needs to be expanded to include a robust rights construal. Needless to say, policy makers will require well-articulated and evidence-based evaluations and arguments to support policies that extend these rights within a social justice agenda.

Policy implications related to Indigenous ECD evaluation.

It is evident to me that in order to inform public policy on Indigenous ECD and to be accountable to sponsors and participants, constructive, evidence-based program evaluation is essential. Future evaluations, particularly longitudinal ones, will need to rely on additional research (perhaps with reference to the present study) to affect policy and programming. Should the program be deemed successful, this outcome could influence policy to affect program expansion (reach). In any case, federal and regional policies that promote rigorous ECD research and evaluation, particularly for Indigenous children, ought to support high-quality programs and research.

In addition to longitudinal studies, funding for relevant future research would affect the direction of ECD evaluation and, hopefully, policies that would improve program reach and

quality. This process could include ethnographic studies using observations and analyses that

would enhance understanding of the AHS cultural component, including strategies to evaluate its

impact and to assign attribution. Other research could include interviews with Aboriginal parents

who are choosing to use alternative ECD programs rather than AHS. Their responses could

inform program improvement or change of focus (e.g., combining child care and AHS, enhanced

or reduced focus on culture). In addition, it is important too for policy makers responsible for

children's programs and for program evaluators to conduct timely reviews of relevant research

literature.

Research implications.

Final reflections on my research methodology.

The Spirit Mouse scrutinizes her handiwork and is satisfied that the evaluation's

integrated warp and weft tell a story that honours principles of social justice. In human form,

Mouse Woman weaves a tale that describes the development process; she shifts to her rodent

persona to perform the critical and analytical tasks. Throughout her transformations she

maintains a self-reflective stance.

My doctoral study is as much about a researcher examining her role and responsibilities

in cross-cultural research as it is about the Aboriginal Head Start national impact evaluation. In

the course of my research I have paused to reflect on my values and my methodology, and I have

recorded my thoughts intermittently throughout the text. My primary intent is to describe the

evaluation's development phase and to explore cultural appropriateness in the methodology of

that undertaking. I structured my investigation around three guiding questions that examined

three prominent themes of the study: culture, school readiness, and policy. As I review the

ecology of the evaluation methodology through an examination of the systems' attributes and the

advancement of each theme through the systems, I find that the employed qualitative, hermeneutic approach is well suited to an explicit, descriptive analysis in that it contributes to an appraisal of innovative resources that support meaningful Indigenous ECD program evaluation strategies.

In the hermeneutic process, I consider each loop in the spiral as a step into a scaffold that takes me deeper into an understanding of the texts or activities. In the course of this process, I aim to study meanings and relationships that lie under their surfaces (i.e., deeper) by examining the contexts, assumptions, implications for Indigenous perspectives, and critical aspects related to their parts. I describe my findings, and proffer the analyses derived from my understanding of related literature and research and from my own experiences and sensibilities.

I did not realize when I began my study that several of the questions I considered for my examination of the AHS evaluation's cultural appropriateness and other qualities also apply to my qualitative research approach and methodology, and to my self-examination. The cross-cultural nature of my study led me to uncover unexpected challenges related to my approach, methods, interpretations, and conclusions. For example, a major challenge was to ascertain received delineations of culture as it is understood in AHS, as well as its applications in theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in this study. The subtexts and nuances associated with defining culture also challenged my own assumptions and values. In addition, my exploration of the AHSUNC evaluation methodology's cultural appropriateness paralleled my assessment of the cultural appropriateness of the approaches used in this study: I drew on many of the same literature and methodological resources throughout. Features of Indigenous methodologies informed each level of analysis and, in particular, my role as cross-cultural researcher.

Interpreting dreams. Indigenous methodologies privilege axiology; the associated significance of my perspectives vis-à-vis Indigenous or community values and practices lends itself, in part, to a narrative, autobiographical genre in which my story is explicitly embedded in my individual axiology and experiences. When I was five I had a powerful archetypal dream that has stayed with me. I was in a cavernous underground space, being led by my mother through a labyrinth surrounded by pools of waves in undulating concentricity. I was afraid, but was reassured by my mother, who led me up and out through a (round) manhole that was just outside our house. It was a scary dream, but even at that young age I was curious as to its meaning, and I wondered why everything was in circles. As a child, I sensed that below the surface there is enigmatic activity that I may never know or understand, and that circles have significance in my life. Later, in the 1970s, my husband declared that one of our communication difficulties lay in our different world views. He, with his engineering background, viewed the world in relation to right angles, whereas, he observed, I saw the world in circles. Different paradigms, different epistemologies.

I will sidestep a Jungian dream analysis and say that I find correspondence in my dream to my relationship to cross-cultural research and to Indigenous perspectives. Dreams play a role as social constructions in qualitative and Indigenous research; however, they can have disparate interpretations. As an illustration, I was on a reserve playing "hide the doll under the blanket" with 5-year-old Kendra. "Where can it be?" she said. "I don't know where to look." And later, after she searched for a few minutes: "Oh, yes I do. I know where it is! It came to me in a dream!" My first response was to see her acceptance of dreams and intuition as reliable information sources as being related to her Cree culture and to her earlier experiences. I also note that there is an additional "cross-cultural" element that has to do with the progressive human

developmental stages (i.e., adults and children can be considered to be in different "developmental cultures," and correspondingly, they will experience and express events differently). Or, perhaps this child was simply engaging in imaginative play! In any case, I was reminded of our different perspectives, grounded in our various cultures; moreover, Kendra's reaction highlights the difficulties in ascribing program participation to reported or observed behaviour.

My approach to my dreams—which I see as rooted in my own psyche—is to question and analyze them. For Kendra, dreams may be from a spiritual realm, their messages acknowledged without question. Divergent ontologies and epistemologies may be operating here. Again, for the etic researcher, hermeneutic understanding and attribution can present cross-cultural challenges as well as extraordinary insights. When considerations for Indigenous perspectives and guidelines for Indigenous research are included as loops in the hermeneutic spiral, the process can extend the cross-cultural researcher's understandings.

Cultural sensitivity. I have demonstrated that both the impact evaluation and my research are culturally sensitive in approach, and each of them contributes to identifying multilayered research considerations related to culture, Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous methodologies. Notwithstanding that there are unique aspects in the IRM paradigm (Wilson, 2001), I would argue that some of the defining parts of a qualitative research approach support IRM principles, for example, the aforementioned relationships and respect. This alignment advances qualitative methodology toward an appropriate approach for an etic, cross-cultural researcher.

Case study approach. My case study approach contributes to knowledge through descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory reporting, as described by Yin (2003). These data

sources facilitate Runyan's (1983) "ideographic interpretations" and their potential for insights and context-specific predictions that characterize a case study methodology, as noted in Chapter 3. Hence, the descriptive data that highlight Indigenous participation and voice, and my narrative reflections, incorporate respect and relationships as methodological constituents. According to Habermas (1968/1971), knowledge is classified as technical (descriptive) and practical (interpretive). As a point of connection, both the evaluation methodology and my research data, considered either separately or together, comprise Habermas's emancipatory (active/critical) processes that inform prospective evaluation and research designs. Hence, a case study approach in both cases becomes dynamic, with potential to influence future programming, evaluations, and related policies. Accordingly, it is in concert with the CIHR guidelines (2010), which state that "research should be of benefit to the community as well as to the researcher" (Article 9). A case study approach (to my research) that mines comprehensive, qualitative data in an ecological context can create knowledge that is of value to the broad Aboriginal community.

Comparable observations for the AHSUNC evaluation methodology.

I contend that the impact evaluation methodology is culturally responsive in that it comprises design elements that respect diversity, meaningful participation, and community control. It uses a multisite, mixed method approach, which accommodates and features site diversity, considering each site's data in the specific cultural and demographic context of that site. As discussed above, the multisite methodology, which employs a case study approach to each participating site, maintains the interpretive and predictive advantages advanced by Runyan (1983). The mixed method approach captures quantitative and qualitative data, affording increased verisimilitude.

My research shows that the AHSUNC program evaluation:

- provides a constructive model for evaluations of ECD intervention programs;

- advances scholarship in the field of Indigenous ECD program evaluation;

- contributes to the delineation and application of a comprehensive approach to school readiness as an indicator of ECD program success;

- imparts considerations for assessing Aboriginal culture and language program impacts;

- explicates concepts of cultural appropriateness as they apply to research and evaluation with reference to Aboriginal participants and ECD programs;

- endeavours to align with accessible culturally appropriate methodologies;

- shows relationships among policy, programs, and program evaluation, and delineates links among programs, program evaluation, and government declarations and policies;

- presents evidence and proposes resolutions in support of my four assumptions;

- positions intervention programming as a component in social justice concerns;

- augments the arguments for Indigenous perspectives as inherent constituents of cross-cultural and Indigenous research and evaluation; and

- generates possibilities for reconceptualization of ECD program evaluation.

Final Personal Reflections, and Implications for Further Research

My hope is that the AHSUNC evaluation methodology and its rationale, as described in this study, will have practical application for future Indigenous ECD evaluation methodological design and data interpretation. Developing such a design is a considerable undertaking which will require additional research into the nature and impact of an Indigenous culture and language

component in a culturally based ECD program. As well, reliable formative and summative ECD program evaluations will benefit from reconceptualized and culturally relevant readiness to learn concepts. This research, which may be primarily rooted in ethnographic or other child observation studies, has the potential to benefit ECD program quality as well as child assessment and program evaluation. I believe that high-quality, culturally based ECD programs can make a significant contribution to Indigenous intergenerational healing strategies, and in order to influence social policy in this direction, wide-ranging evidence that demonstrates their potential is requisite, both for community members and participants, and for politicians and sponsors.

In the course of my doctoral research I was grateful to the Indigenous scholars who write about emerging Indigenous methodologies and challenges in conducting cross-cultural research, because their work offered me guidance in my thinking, analysis, and writing. While I identify those topics as important area for future research, increasingly I see earnest, progressive, constructive ideas, action, and research at work in the academic and broader Indigenous communities; present accomplishments are feeding the future. Accordingly, as this movement toward increased understanding and innovative approaches advances, it has the capacity to inform culturally appropriate ECD program evaluation.

In summary, I find that while the 2006 AHSUNC national impact evaluation provides a useful model for cross-cultural evaluations, and that it is in many ways culturally appropriate, its strength as a model is that its innovative features (similar to my doctoral study) position issues and resolutions that offer divergent prospects for further research that can augment evaluation efficacy and cultural relevance. In the course of my study I had to restrain myself from taking off in a number of different directions because the ECD and Indigenous worlds generate wide-ranging research questions and possibilities. I found a resting place for myself in that I have

recorded my AHSUNC evaluation story, and in the telling have included personal events and perspectives that unexpectedly led me to a fuller appreciation of the interpretive research process. And now I rest easily because I have seen a new generation of capable Indigenous writers, scholars, and activists, and a younger generation of AHS graduates, who are re-visioning their lives and landscape.

Structure, substance, and metaphor.

With light from the glowing coals, Grandmother Mouse sits stroking her tapestry, and makes known the ways in which the annotated warp and weft interweave in her composite story. She is attentive to their structures and their substance, and sees that the discrete essences of the rich parts and whole story—taken separately and in concert—contribute to an informed approach to Indigenous ECD research and evaluation, and that they also reveal their relationships to social justice. She plucks the tail end (tale end) of the tapestry, whirls it over the coals, and coils it into a soft, round nest, wherein she rests for just a while.

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