

Anishinaabe Elders Share Stories
On their Perceptions about Anishinaabe Identity for School Success

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine Anishinaabe identity development for school success. A group of six Elder's, also known as Knowledge Keepers shared their life experiences that are integral to Mino Pimatisiwin – a good way of life for Anishinaabe people. The Elders that participated in this study are gifted with Indigenous knowledge in language, history, culture and a connection to the land/community. At a personal level and as an Anishinaabe person, this study was significant to me because my life foundation was embedded in an Anishinaabe worldview from birth. Dibaajimowin or storytelling was a big part of the learning process therefore; I utilized an Indigenous methodology of Dibaajimowin to share the stories of the Elders, which demonstrated a positive worldview, with meaningful exemplars despite the negative experience of attending residential school and government policies.

The stories, which reflected cultural practices of the Anishinaabe Elders, provided lessons about the past and present, and insight into the future direction needed in education to support Aboriginal students. This study revealed the importance of the interconnected relationships of family, community and the environment, as key elements in developing cultural identity. The Elders also identified that balance is needed for Mino-Pimatisiwin known as a good life to live in the realm of two worlds (Anishinaabe and Western). This ideal needs to be extended into the classroom and school so the teachers can build upon the interconnected relationships through program planning and creating an engaging environment that validates an Aboriginal worldview.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iv
Prologue.....	1
Greetings and Situating Self	1
Acknowledging Anishinaabe Identity.....	2
Self-identity.....	2
Chapter 1: Context.....	5
Introduction	5
The importance of Aboriginal Identity development for Anishinaabe Elders.....	9
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Location of Study.....	13
Knowledge Keepers	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Introduction.....	16
What is Identity?	17
Identity Formation	19
Identity versus Identifying	21
Storytelling/Storywork.....	21
Oral Tradition.....	27
Culture.....	30
Connecting to Aki	31
Models of Identity	35
Traditional Education.....	36
Residential Schools	37
Indian Act.....	40
Family Connections	40

Chapter 3: Methodology	43
Introduction.....	43
Research Design.....	44
Participant Recruitment	45
Cultural Protocols	48
Research Conversations	49
Accountability and Responsibility.....	50
Researcher’s Positionality and Bias.....	51
Researcher's Ethical Approach	53
Data Collection and Analysis.....	53
Chapter 4: Dibaajimowiwān (Telling Stories)	56
Participants Stories.....	56
Miskwaa Waagosh (Red Fox)	59
Nagamo Bineshiiy (Singing Bird)	59
Nibaa Mahkwa (Sleeping Bear)	61
Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe (Spring Flower Woman).....	64
Dikikan Anang Inini (Night Star Man).....	66
Mino Ode Ikwe (Good Hearted Woman)	68
Chapter 5: Discussions	70
Building Relationships.....	70
Gifts that Enable Learning.....	71
Family and Community Connections	75
Living in Harmony with Nature.....	78
School Experience	81
Where Do I Fit In.....	83
Language.....	85
Seven Teachings of Anishinaabeg Philosophy	88

Chapter 6: Anishinaabewiwinan- Anishinaabe Ways.....	91
Elder Involvement	92
Meaningful Connections	94
Sharing the Responsibility	96
Teaching in a Meaningful Way.....	97
Medicine Wheel.....	99
Sharing Circle.....	100
Storytelling.....	100
Conclusion.....	101
Questions for Further Study.....	102
Epilogue	103
Glossary	105
References.....	107
Appendix A	118
Appendix B	120
Appendix C	123

Prologue

Indigenous knowledges are understood as the commonsense ideas and cultural knowledges of local peoples concerning everyday realities of living. They encompass the cultural traditions, values, belief systems, and world views that, in any indigenous society, are imparted to the younger generation by community elders. They also refer to world views that are products of a direct experience of nature and its relationship with the social world... (Sefa Dei, Hall & Goldin Rosenberg, 2000, p. vii).

Greetings and Situating Self

Anin – Boozhoo gidinin. Marlene Indizhinikaaz shaaganaashiimowin. Miskwe Mahkwa Ikwe, Mahkwa Doodem, Sagkeeng indoonjii. My traditional name is Red Bear Woman of the Bear Clan; I am from Sagkeeng First Nation. Sagkeeng is an Anishinaabe First Nation that holds territory East of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. Sagkeeng is signatory to Treaty 1 and a member of the Grand Council of Treaty 3. Sagkeeng was once called Fort Alexander.

By using the Anishinaabe language of my family, I introduce myself by using my first language of practice and as a reminder of its importance to our existence as Anishinaabe people. I am proud of my heritage and oral traditions. For this reason, it is important for the reader to understand my perspective on Indigenous worldviews and how I position myself in this study through storytelling, similarly to Indigenous scholars who positioned themselves in their research (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Fitznor, 2002; Kovach, 2010).

Acknowledging Anishinaabe Identity

In the language of the Ojibway, "Anishinaabe" means "original people" (Warren, 1885). Indigenous author, Basil Johnston (1990) explains the name in an Anishinabe creationist context as having been created by divine breath and were made of flesh, blood and spirit, "The new men and women were called "Anishinabeg," beings made out of nothing, because their substances were not rock, or fire, or water, or wind. "They were spontaneous beings" (p. 15). Another definition is that of "the good humans or good people" reflecting those who live the good way of life given to them by Gitchi Manitou or Great Spirit (Benton-Banai, 1988). In reference to the language of Ojibway or Ojibwa, also known as *Anishinaabemowin*, it is part of a large language group known as Algonquin. Not all Anishinaabemowin speakers call themselves Anishinabeg, as diversity exists amongst First Nations. Particular Anishinaabe groups have different names from one region to the next. The Elders-Knowledge Keepers, as participants within this study context are from an Anishinaabe First Nation.

Self-identity

My sense of identity was strongly developed from an early age as an Anishinaabe (Although the terms Ojibway and Saulteaux have been used to describe the people of the area, I prefer to use the cultural/linguistic terminology of Anishinaabe) first language speaker. I learned English as a second language upon attending Residential School. My formative years were imbedded in traditional practice and an Indigenous Knowledge system based on the natural world. I grew up in a household where I lived with my (mother) Helen, mishom (grandpa) Gilbert, kokum (grandma) Liza, (brothers) Harry,

Wilfred, (sisters) Margaret, Joyce, (aunt) Mary and her (children). The children were well taken care of by every family member living in that house, but it did not stop there, as many extended family members took the responsibility of being our teachers as well. Speaking *Anishinaabemowin* provided a strong connection to family, but also a connection to the land and the environment that offered a good life “mino pimatisiwin” Young (2005). I believe that this way of life “mino pimatisiwin” was a key factor to establishing a strong foundation to my identity. According to Young, the development of identity was embedded in everyday life:

Growing up and living at home, I never had reason to question my father’s authority or his values and beliefs. His values and beliefs included respecting all living things, respecting water, knowing the land, the environment, our natural world and making sure to thank the spirit of animals, who gave up their lives to feed us. The one story I remember is one day, my father was showing me how to clean and prepare beaver. When we had finished I was going to throw out the parts we were not going to eat in the garbage. He said “those things do not belong in the garbage; go down to the river, put them in the river and say miigwetch to the beaver spirit for giving us food. That day, the teaching was very special (p. 30).

Through family relationships and experiences, Anishinaabe people realize the importance of life lessons in stories as described by Young and how such experiences are interconnected to language and identity, the way of the Anishinaabe life is not only individual but collective as a group. It is the way in which the people live, understand and think about the world around them holistically (Archibald, 2008; CAAS, 2006). This reflects a system that embodies beliefs and values as well as how to function in a community, and in society.

The oral tradition of storytelling was a major factor in learning my language; learning about my family historical connections and the community history dating back to the fur trade era. The community history pre-dates the fur trade era, however, the scope

of this study will be limited to generations from the fur trade era forward. Through this experience I gained a better understanding of Aboriginal worldviews. As a child, I was allowed the freedom of imagination and creativity through language to express my identity as an Anishinaabe child. My roots are deeply embedded in the community and my immediate family maintains the family connections to relatives living on our First Nation community (reserve to some), which provides a historical connection to the past. My schooling was based primarily on Eurocentric dominance curriculum, which differed so greatly from my earlier experiences and this is why I wanted to explore the topic of my study in order to restore what was relegated to the margins (RCAP, 1996). This research also becomes a way of honouring the legacy of my ancestors who were and continue to be knowledge keepers of the past, but also for the future. It is important to maintain this knowledge and pass it on so that future generations will continue to know where they came from in order to maintain an identity. An identity that has a rich history should not be limited to my Anishinaabe family and community, but all Canadians.

Chapter 1: Context

Introduction

Prior to contact, Indigenous people of Canada had their own education system (RCAP, 1996). Education was instilled into everyday life as part of a natural learning environment. However, with European contact the education system for Indigenous people of Canada became based on European worldviews and systems. “For the most part, the education system in Canada has been constructed using Western worldviews” (Cajete, 1994, p. 42). It is also known historically, that schools were a central element in Canada’s aspirations to assimilate Aboriginal people (RCAP, 1996). There is a long history of contention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about an educational system that was designed to change Aboriginal people’s worldviews and identities to fit into that of mainstream society (TRC, *They Came for the Children*, 2012).

The Euro-Western education system, such as residential schools (TRC Report, 2012; TRC, *They Came for the Children*, 2012), was a method of “civilizing” Indigenous people by imposing a system that isolated the children from their families. “Having generations of Indian children removed from their parents, denying them a normal childhood and the teachings of their people resulted in the loss of their cultural traditions including their native languages” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 4). Kirkness (1999) and the current Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Interim Report outline that the devastating history of residential schools was only made public in recent years and that most Canadians are not aware, given that this history has not been taught in Canadian schools until as recently as in the past decade. There has been some formal inclusion of Indigenous

history in Manitoba schools such as the Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies (Manitoba Education 2011) or Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages and Culture (Manitoba Education 2007). The integration of these documents into Manitoba curriculum brings a greater awareness to all Canadians about the loss of culture for the many generations of Aboriginal people. Similarly, the Manitoba Government declared that teachers who wish to get certified to teach in Manitoba must now have a course in Aboriginal education (Manitoba Education, 2008).

Government policies of assimilation have been detrimental to the Indian population (Indian refers to the legal term used in the Indian Act of Canada) including the Indian Act of 1876. The Indian Act is the Canadian government policy that “determines who were “Indians” in Canada” (Fitznor, 2006) and stated what constitutes an Indian identity. Further to this, the Indian Act set up the reserve system where each First Nation, elected chief and council would determine who can/could be recognized as a First Nation member based on guidelines from the Indian Act. Lawrence (2004) states that “Current legislation is far less invasive and controlling in everyday terms; however laws controlling Indian identity still shape the routes that Native Communities take in their struggles for empowerment in crucial ways” (p. 43).

This is one of the most important issues facing Aboriginal people today. Who is and who is not Aboriginal? In Canada, the term Indian is ambiguous and contested, therefore the most common term used is Aboriginal; however the term Indian continues to point to a deliberate means of identification according to legal terms determined by the government policy of the Indian Act and a term used in the Canadian Constitution. Aboriginal refers to all Indigenous peoples and communities; the term includes people

who are also commonly known as American Indians, Indigenous, Native Americans, Indian and First Nations. The term Aboriginal is a common term used throughout Canada, although the term 'Indigenous' is now advanced by many Indigenous scholars (Battiste, Kovach, ACDE), J.P. Restoule (2000) explains the term 'Aboriginal' in this manner.

I have been using the term Aboriginal because it is commonly accepted at a time as a preferred term to use when referring to the original cultures of this continent. Aboriginal unlike Indian, does not imply the exclusivity of a person with particular rights and privileges in the eyes of Canadian Law and policy (p. 104).

However, it should be noted that even the term Aboriginal does not encapsulate the distinctiveness among the First people given that there are eleven Aboriginal language groups with fifty distinct dialects (Dickason, 2002; Statistic Canada, Cat. #11-008, 1998).

The Canadian government's education policy on the Indian Residential School legislation had far reaching intergenerational impacts on identity through forced assimilation (TRC Interim Report, 2012). Historically, educational systems were established with the intent to assimilate First Nations people into mainstream society by eradicating the Aboriginal culture by altering the children's identity (Chrisjohn/Young, 1997; Milloy, 1999). This fact has also been well documented by Indigenous authors such as Battiste (2000), Campbell (1973), Little Bear (2000) and Monture-Angus (1999), and recently (TRC, 2012). This was also articulated in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), when Duncan Campbell Scott was quoted as saying, "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is not an Indian question" (p. 28).

Various strategies were used to achieve the goal of assimilation by the use of legislation, policy and educational institutions. RCAP (1996) states that "suppressing

Native language resulted in the suppression of oral tradition, which had been the primary vehicle for intergenerational transmission of Native values, culture and identity” (p. 193).

Prior to contact, Aboriginal people maintained a lifestyle where all individuals understood a cultural identity within the wider community. Particular emphasis was placed on a political society strong in language, traditional practices, history, a connection to a particular landscape and families that embodied a strong identity (Dickason, 2002). According to Crowchild (RCAP, 1996):

Our peoples, prior to the arrival of the non-indigenous peoples, were under a single political society. They had their own languages. They had their own spiritual beliefs. They had their own political institutions. They had the land base, and they possessed historic continuity on this land base (Vol. 2, p. 9).

Although residential schools are a part of the past, the multigenerational effects are evident today (TRC Interim Report, 2012; They Came for the Children, TRC, 2012), many Aboriginal children continue to feel disconnected to their heritage because their worldviews are not validated in the education process. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Aboriginal students experience a divide between home and school, “Education as they experience it is something removed and separate from their everyday world, their hopes and dreams. This sense of distance between learning in the school and the world around them does not have to exist” (Vol. 3, p. 482). There have been changes in the education system since the RCAP report was released, it is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal people are working in partnerships with government and education stakeholders to include Aboriginal worldviews in the education system (CAAS, 2002). Battiste (2004) recognizes that change is occurring:

Well into the last half of the last century, educational equity was the impetus for educational change, and provincial governments have begun to experiment with some program initiatives to improve the access and retention of First Nations students as well as review the curricula and textbooks for damaging stereotypes (p. 8).

Through this study, it is my hope that the stories collected from the Elder's (also known as Knowledge Keepers) will examine the cultural practices that can influence the distinctiveness of being Anishinaabe. The stories of the Anishinaabe Elders can contribute to the growing base of Indigenous knowledge's that can be integrated into classroom learning and within Canadian Society (CAAS, 2006).

The Importance of Aboriginal Identity Development for Anishinaabe Elders

Regardless of race (though this term is contested and critiqued as a socially constructed concept (Dei, 1996), identity is a unique characteristic that defines a person from the relationships a person develops to the lived experiences that impact how a person might create that identity (Absolon, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Restoule, 2000; Young, 2005). Thus, identity is developed in stages as a person grows from infancy to adulthood. The development process for Aboriginal people is holistic emphasizing on the whole not only physical, but mentally through historical connections of the past (CAAS, 2002; RCAP, 1996). Through lived experiences a sense of identity is created through memory of the past that connects an individual to language, to a specific landscape, cultural group and a time in history. Aboriginal identity can be asserted through knowledge of language, a relationship with the land/landscape and/or a historical perspective of the past. To be more specific, Aboriginal belonging is traditionally an intrinsic affiliation to particular

place (or set of places) (Battiste, 2002; CAAS, 2002; RCAP, 1996), in which the people live their lives.

Identity is about belonging, a connection to family and community, similar to the way that Archibald (2008) talks about holism as an “Indigenous philosophical concept. She explains further:

The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one’s family, community, band, and nation. The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimate wellness...[and]...ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behavior are essential and are embedded in the cultural practices; one practice that plays a role in the oral tradition is storytelling (p. 11).

It is about the values that individuals share with one another and what differentiates one group from another. But identity is also about conflict. Schouls (2003) talks about the power relations imbedded in Aboriginal identity from government definitions to community membership.

What is far more important from this point of view is the idea that identity is constituted by the historical continuity of relatively open-ended processes of self-definition by community members that relate to both what they take themselves to be and how they define their interests or ends over time (p. 3).

While Aboriginal peoples’ attempt to highlight a distinct identity, one is reminded that Aboriginal people are in fact influenced by mainstream social practices and political entities that legitimize certain exclusions (Giroux, 2004b; Restoule, 2007). Aboriginal people or Aboriginal stakeholders have appealed to the Assembly of First Nations (1994) and the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centre (2000) to reclaim an Aboriginal identity that represents one’s ancestral image based on definitions by community. Evidence indicates that before the arrivals of Europeans, there were many distinct Aboriginal groups in Canada that were distinguished by geography, culture and

language (Dickason, 2002; RCAP 1996). Therefore, this study explored the complexity of Aboriginal identity through Elder's – Knowledge Keepers stories.

Purpose of the Study

First of all, this study examined Anishinaabe Elders' perceptions through stories as to how indigenous knowledge can influence Anishinaabe identity development, and its place within education. For Indigenous people according to Smith (1999) the term “ ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1), so much so that there is no translation for the word ‘research’ in the Anishinaabe language, but rather a way of knowing –Kaandossiwin (Absolon, 2011). In response, a review of prior research by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people was conducted, in some cases these individuals are academic scholars that have contributed to the understanding of developing an Aboriginal identity (Restoule, 2000). For generations, language was the main means by which culture and identity were articulated; shared and passed on to the next generation. Ancestral languages are valued aspects of a group identity, whether all members speak the language or not. According to the assembly of First Nations (1990) language is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a People. Without our languages we cannot survive (p. 39).

Secondly, the aim of this study is to provide some insight into the important characteristics of an education system grounded in an Anishinaabe worldview and how an Anishinaabe worldview can transform the educational experience for many Anishinaabe students by creating a school environment that is relevant not only for the

student, by also the families. Elders tell us that the Indigenous way of knowing (mino-pimatisiwin) is based locally in our communities and therefore rely on our kinship system to build relationships that guide our personal development in relation to identity, but also our learning experience from which knowing originates (Cajete, 1994; Battiste, 2002; Ermine, 1995). Understanding, knowing or acquiring a particular Indigenous knowledge system is fundamental to making use of that knowledge and being aware of its added value.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore (through storytelling) the beliefs and values that are integral to a good way of life or Mino Pimatisiwin for Anishinaabe people. A good way of life is the beliefs and values that are the philosophy of life, a way of being, a way of knowing, and way of becoming whole and complete as we move through the different stages of life (Michell, 2005). Storytelling is an oral tradition imbedded in ways of knowing for Anishinaabe people and six Elders shared their experience, life stories and perceptions based on the following key questions that serve as a discussion:

1. What is the significance of Indigenous knowledge in cultural practices that influence a distinctive Anishinaabe identity as perceived by Anishinaabe Elders?
2. What are some of the beliefs and values that influence an Indigenous holistic identity that supports a good way of life, known in Anishinaabemowin, as Mino Pimatisiwin?
3. What would be important characteristics of a community-based education system grounded in an Anishinaabe worldview?

Through this study, the questions guided the stories collected from the Elders (also known as Knowledge Keepers) to examine the cultural practices that can influence the distinctiveness of being Anishinaabe? My reference to distinctiveness is in

relation to identity development through mino-pimatisiwin and transforming how we look at education when grounded in an Anishinaabe worldview. Shawn Wilson (2008) affirms the reality that, “Knowledge is relational and dependent upon the relationships that are learned in childhood” (p. 6), therefore the community relationships are essential to our knowing.

Location of Study

This study was carried out in an Anishinaabe community with strong oral traditional connections, an Aboriginal community where many citizens STILL engage in cultural practices and processes; AND where many citizens are also Christian. The focus is to seek Elders as participants. As an individual, I have a close connection to this community; I am familiar with the community and the people that reside in this community. The community is located near Lake Winnipeg. The focus community has been well established from before the days of the fur trading era and family ties going back five to six generations for this study.

The location is a critical element in establishing a positive environment since Anishinaabe people have a close relationship with the land or the landscape in which the individual is embedded. This relationship between an individual and the experience of cultural practices will provide insight as to how indigenous knowledge particularly the connection to community and/or the relationship to the land/landscape sets the tone for this study. Through this setting, the stories will emerge through the lived experience of their ancestors. Stories provide lessons about past and current events. Bruchac (1998)

adds, “They teach us the importance of community generosity, the importance of the individual” (p. ix).

As expected, some of the interviews occurred in the participant’s home, traditional lodge or community center office. The participants were given the choice to select the location to ensure that there were no distractions, a place of comfort and privacy as needed. It was understood from the beginning that the process of interviewing or gathering stories (Archibald, 2008), would take its own journey over a period of hours to days to get to know the Elder’s depending on each participant’s knowledge. This study required the researcher to spend many hours or in some cases a full day with the participant in the community.

Knowledge Keepers

The focus was interviewing Elders who are also known as knowledge keepers or older people that have lived the particular way of life known as Mino-Pimatisiwin – a good way of life (Young, 2005) and gained respect in their First Nation territory. It is a common belief that Elders are gifted with knowledge of being, living and doing; and sought as advisors for their guidance about language(s), history and stories that come from within (Archibald, 2008; Ermine, 1995; Fitznor, 2012; Manitoba Education, 2007). Battiste (2002) believes that Elder’s are an important resource that should be valued, “View elders, knowledge keepers and workers who are competent in Aboriginal languages and knowledge as living educational treasures. These individuals comprise a functioning Aboriginal university based on Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 21). Elders or knowledge keepers are recognized as holding knowledge/wisdom about

community history, ceremonies, songs, dance, symbols, landscape and cultural background for their First Nation. According to the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education:

The wisdom of the Elders is central to cultural learning according to Aboriginal perspective. Elders are the “Keepers of Knowledge” and it is their guidance that Aboriginal people seek as they strive for balance in their relationships with the Creator, the natural world, other people and themselves (p. 5).

Although many Elder’s or knowledge keepers are known to hold knowledge/wisdom about the traditions in their territory, there are Elders that hold knowledge and have accepted Christianity as their religion as a result of the residential school system that indoctrinated Aboriginal children into a Christian way of living (RCAP, 1996). For many Elders this became a way of life into adulthood and having Christian knowledge does not diminish the lived experience and stories the Elders share about their community, and this does not mean this is an easy existence (Fitznor, 1998).

The gift of Indigenous knowledge comes from a lived experience in a setting, a place or a landscape that is familiar and has been a part of the psyche since birth (Archibald, 2008). Establishing a safe environment allowed the participants to express their thoughts freely, but more importantly to allow them the opportunity to share their stories on the importance of Indigenous Knowledge to the people.

I contend that Indigenous research methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Cardinal (2001) asserts that “They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships” (p. 182).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The primary objective of this literature review is to share relevant and related literature that discusses Indigenous Knowledge and the development of Anishinaabe/Aboriginal identity throughout an individual's life journey. The literature examines how Indigenous peoples relate language, environment, cultures, land, community and family to a distinct identity. In this section, I attempt to discuss the issues/themes related to the subject of identity. Many definitions can be found in dictionaries, articles, and research studies however, this topic is complex for Aboriginal people given the influence of government policies in Canada. The concept of identity development is dependent on individual experience based on social situations. As an oral culture, stories were weaved from the past to the present and to the next generation. Connecting to the land provides a sense of place that not only physical, as Cajete (2000) states that this relationship to the land builds our personal identity, but this was not always true given that the establishment of the residential school system was to eradicate the cultural connections through assimilation. Residential schools interrupted family connections that model the culture and way of life (RCAP, 1996). Family interactions and connections were lost during this time, however, Aboriginal people are reclaiming their identity through the revitalization of ceremonies.

There has been significant research h conducted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on the subject of identity (Absolon, 2008; Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2002; Restoule, 2000), in some cases these individuals are academic scholars that have

contributed to the understanding of developing an Aboriginal identity. Throughout this research I found that there were several individuals that have done a commendable job describing their findings and the challenges of conducting research on a topic that is very personal and sensitive. Some of the literature reviewed focused on group studies conducted in urban Aboriginal communities; historical writings, school systems and/or memoirs.

What is Identity?

Several definitions of identity can be found in many places such as dictionaries with a variety of definitions that reinforces the fact that identity is a complex topic. Here are some examples:

1. The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group. (www.thefreedictionary.com/identity)
2. The state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing (www.thefreedictionary.com/identity)
3. Identity is “people’s concept of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others (Hogg and Abrams 1988) or
4. Identity “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals” (Jenkins 1996).

In reality, identity is a complex question (Schouls, 2003) especially for Aboriginal people whose identity has been questioned as to whether or not one's identity is legally and/or politically recognized (Fitznor, 2006). If one identifies with, but is not recognized by their Nation (or band), this makes the continued assertion of one's identity more difficult. Similarly, the *Indian Act's* status provisions have been imposed on Aboriginal peoples for so long that some Aboriginal people question other individual's Aboriginal identity through a colonial lens (Fitznor, 2006; Henderson, 2000) of oppression and power. As

noted by TRC Interim Report, (2012), this is a direct result in that Aboriginal people have been educated in a system constructed in a Western worldview since Indigenous education has and continues to be ignored. Revitalization of Indigenous education will empower the next generation to learn their language and culture, thus developing a positive Aboriginal identity (Absolon/Willett 2004; CAAS, 2002; Cajete, 1994; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; TRC Interim Report, 2012). I believe that Aboriginal people's fight to regain control of their education is an attempt to participate in Canadian society on their own terms (RCAP, 1996; TRC Interim Report, 2012). Battiste explains that education is a critical factor in the developmental processes of children (1997). Therefore, it is critical for Aboriginal children to be educated in culturally sensitive ways (CAAS, 2002). Furthermore, being able to learn one's language and culture makes one more empowered, which is crucial for the survival of Aboriginal cultures and worldviews (Neegan, 2005, p. 9).

I contend that legal recognition as a status Indian has absolutely nothing to do with Aboriginal heritage, or practices (Fitznor, 2006). The Indian Act has been and continues to be an administrative tool for the government of Canada and establishes legal boundaries for a majority of bands (First Nations communities) in Canada who determine who can be a band member (as in having 'Indian Status'), and therefore who can access programs and services such as who can live on reserve. For this reason, status carries more weight than is acknowledged by the government and therefore status is significant in determining Aboriginal identity.

Identity is a sense of who we are as individuals, who we become; how we project ourselves to others and the way we are seen by others - a sense of self (Absolon, 2004;

Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000). Identity is nurtured through social interaction with others, but mostly within one's family and community. We judge who we are by how we act towards others and their reaction to us. Jenkins (1996) terms this "the internal – external dialectic of identification." "Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed, a product of the processes or primary and subsequent socialization, and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives.... An understanding emerges of the "self" as an ongoing and, in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (p. 113). Therefore, identity is never static, rather as noted by Restoule (2000) it is a developmental process of becoming and a life journey that involves continuity and change that can influence how we identify ourselves in the world.

Identity Formation

Identity formation can present complex issues given that Aboriginal identity is a multifaceted concept depending on each individual and how that person identifies her/himself. Many Indigenous authors in educational research have written and discussed the concept of Aboriginal identity, (Absolon 2008; Archibald 2006; Atleo 2004; Fitznor, 1998; Restoule 2000). Some of these authors have provided insight into the lived experience as being an essential component, while others discuss the connectedness to language, culture or kinship. However, the most important facet is that identity formation begins with the family as to how they instill their personal beliefs and values in other

family members. Being part of a community will build on the family beliefs and values, as people in the community will identify family members as kin and/or community relations (Cajete, 2000).

The lived experience mentioned earlier, is essential to a good way of life or Mino Pimatisiwin, which is accrued through daily-lived experiences. It is a way of life that is all encompassing of our relationships with self, others and the environment. Cajete (2000) explains relationships in this way: “Relationship is the cornerstone of tribal community, and the nature and expression of community is the foundation of tribal identity. Through community, Indian people come to understand their “personhood” and their connection to the communal soul of their people (p. 86)”.

Historically, the process of colonization continues to be linked to how we develop an Aboriginal identity (Battiste/Youngblood 2000, Broad, et al, 2006). The process of colonization has extended over several generations through the Residential school system where families were unable to impart cultural knowledge, and I would argue through our primarily Eurocentric schools that still favour Euro-western knowledge’s (Banks, 1998; Fitznor, 2002; 2006). According to Schoule, (2003), “The basic claim is that personal identity is formed in a symbiotic relationship with a collective identity nourished by the culture that the community shares” (p. 40). Aboriginal identity within a community is specific to language and cultural beliefs; but each community will have specific stories that connect to creation stories or the geographic location of the community (Atleo, 2004).

At a legal level, the government recognizes identity of specific groups such as First Nations that encompass an enormous group within this broad category (Archibald

2006; Haig-Brown 1998), but one has to consider the diverse groups such as the Ojibway, Cree, or Dene who in turn identify to sub-groups such as the Plains or Woodlands Ojibwa just to name a few (Fitznor, 2006).

Identity versus Identifying

J.P Restoule's (2000) article, "*Aboriginal Identity: The need for Historical and Contextual Perspectives*", he distinguishes the difference between identity and identifying. Restoule states that identifying is shaped by historical perspective while identity encompasses social situations. Reference is made to the Indian Act of 1876 and the definitions that the Government legislation imposed upon Aboriginal people since its inception. Restoule asserts how this law effectively considered all Indians as being equal amongst each other, but different from other Canadians. No consideration was given to the importance of Aboriginal cultures or histories. This article helps clarify the difference between identifying and identity, which are often misinterpreted as meaning the same. Anyone can say they identify with a cultural group, but have not shared the same experience in developing an identity within the contextual perspective of social situations. This reinstates the importance of understanding this question and how it relates to the participants, as well as the methodology in the form of storytelling/storywork (Archibald, 2008; Fitznor, 2012).

Storytelling/Storywork

"If you tell a story properly, you don't have to explain what it means afterwards."
 - Basil Johnston

Historically, Indigenous Knowledge was passed through oral communication from one generation to the next through storytelling. In RCAP (1996) it states, “Oral accounts of the past include a good deal of subjective experience. They are not simply a detached recounting of factual events but, rather, are facts enmeshed in the stories of a lifetime” (vol., 1, p. 38). This sentiment is further expressed in Murray’s (1996) research as an important aspect,

Storytelling, he claims, weaves people into the very fabric of their societies.’ Through speaking, hearing, and retelling, we affirm our relationship with our nations, our tribal community, our family networks. We begin to understand our position in the long history of our people. Indeed, we become the people and places of our past because our identity is created, our perspective formed, of their telling (p. 54).

This statement clearly demonstrates how Aboriginal people are linked to the history of their societies. Oral communications convey the innermost feelings which emerge through the storyteller and from within the depths of each community. It has deep roots in Aboriginal traditions and is preserved in memory. Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episken (2002) state that the form of storytelling can provide some insight into the Aboriginal community, “Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (p. 110).

According to Murray and Rice (1996) authors Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer express that it is necessary to tell Native stories; Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer use a quote by a poet to show the importance to storytelling,

a hostage of eternity, and a prisoner of time.’ The poet is of and from eternity, held captive for the moment by time. The orators and storytellers of Native American oral tradition are poets and hostages as well, craftsmen and creators. We view the text as a vehicle of release to all eternity. We believe that in the final analyzes, the Muse will still be found in control of poetry. ‘Sing in me, Muse, and

through me tell the story,' opens Fitzgerald's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. We often feel like that, working with a text from oral tradition (p. 34).

Storytelling is critical to the preservation of maintaining knowledge and the key components of a story as they relate to the values, cultures, languages and the history of the people (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000; Fitznor, 2012; Kirkness, 1991). It is through these gifted knowledge keepers that we continue to maintain our historical identity.

Helen Agger (2008) shares stories about her family and the importance of oratory practice to a person's historical identity. Agger's (2008) family are strong orators that preserve and maintain knowledge about the identity of Anishinaabe people in their community through stories shared from one generation to the next. Agger (2008) explains it this way,

All of Dedibaayaanimanook's uncles particularly Naadowe Robert, Kiiweyaasin William and Jiiyann Donald were blessed with the gift of oratory. They were also endowed with ability for aadasookowun that is, the telling of timeless stories. This particular form of storytelling was critical to the people in many ways, not least of which was the preservation of the people's historical identity (p.79).

It should be acknowledged that these stories are Indigenous stories, even though stories may differ from one context (language, location, time, culture) another. Through stories, we have a rich connection to identity and who we are as Anishinaabe people. Over the years our stories have evolved and changed with times, but stories are still considered sacred as they are rooted in our customs and everyday traditions (Fitznor, 2012). In my Anishinaabe language, my identity is connected to our customs and traditional way of life as mino-pimatisiwin – a good way of life. More importantly, narratives are like personal identities, they do not merely exist and arise, they are constructed (Mehl-Madronas, 2007).

Storytelling is a powerful teaching technique of oral tradition as it is through this practice that stories of the past are shared and brought to life; a way of learning about history and life lessons of our people (Fitznor, 2012). The practice of storytelling honours our oral traditions in a contemporary society/setting. This includes sharing myths (Archibald 2008; Cajete 1994) that function as education, entertainment and building social relationships. Myth stories tell of creations and recreations. Educational narratives

were set in genuine historical past because these characters were not seen to be confined solely to the mythic past. This ensured that myth remained a vital and meaningful force in the lives of the people. The telling of myths kept alive and reinforced their history and worldview (Brown & Gray, 2009). ??????

The practice of myths in entertaining served as a path of communication with other-than-human beings (Atleo E. R. 2004; RCAP 1996, Fitznor 1998) such as *Nanabusho* (Ojibway) or *Wisakedjack* (Cree) with lively narrative often told in a humorous manner that is more delightful when spoken in an Aboriginal language. Myths are connected to dreams and an essential practice of holistic living. Indigenous people apply their beliefs through origin stories; believing that experiences are marked by a sense of connectedness beyond the self, but that experiences are shaped, interpreted and understood through the relationships with nature and creatures (Atleo E.R. 2004; Ermine 1995), but that storytelling creates cultural identity, memory and meaning.

Storytelling and language connects people (Cajete 1994; Atleo E.R. 2004; Fitznor 1998, 2012) bringing stories to life through imagination and spiritual strength. These are all crucial to language and identity. For this reason, it was important for the children to gain the voice of their traditional language to connect to the Indigenous world around them. Likewise, if we connect Canadian students (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)

to these life ways by sharing Elders knowledge through language and Indigenous knowledge they would gain the worldviews from an Aboriginal perspective. To a great extent, the cultural, spiritual and intellectual life of Aboriginal people is experienced through language. Battiste (1998) puts it this way:

Aboriginal languages provide a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of tribal knowledge. They provide the deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of Aboriginal life. Through sharing a language Aboriginal people create a shared belief of how the world works and what constitutes proper action. The sharing of these common ideals creates a collective cognitive experience for tribal societies that is understood as tribal epistemology. Aboriginal languages are the repository of vital instructions, lessons, and guidance given to our elders in visions, dreams, and life experience (p. 18).

Language is central to Indigenous peoples' worldviews because they show the collaboration of the interrelatedness through stories (Archibald, 2008, Battiste, 1998). This is reiterated by Kirkness (1998), "Language is the principal means whereby culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from one generation to another. Language expresses the uniqueness of a group's world view" (p. 4).

Aboriginal people believe in the sacred power of language, imagination and memory. A person who is proficient in his/her language regardless of skin color will be respected and others will be receptive to hear the words of that individual. "Indigenous languages are often used as markers, or "badges" of ethnicity, that is, of a perceived cultural identity" (Murray, 1996). Words are a sacred source of power that can bring a distinction between reality and imagination. "A word has power in and of itself." Words in an Aboriginal language are multi-dimensional in the sense that one word can encompass greater meaning that cannot be described accurately in translation. For example, the word Anishinabek does not only refer to the Ojibway people, but also their way of life and language. The language is alive; it is not only words; but a spoken feeling

and thought process. Through stories, we learn about our history, but more importantly the practice of oral traditions.

Historically these stories have been disrupted by Eurocentric policies of assimilation such as the establishment of the Residential School system that undermined Aboriginal culture; language (Battiste 2004) and disrupted families by severing the ties between parent and child. The residential school system was a means towards assimilation and removing the children from their Anishinaabe environment meant severing the ties that sustained a culture which contributed to the general loss of language and culture (RCAP, 1996; CAAS, 2002). This government policy on education was a powerful force that contributed to the dilemma of lost identity and disrupted languages for many generations.

The assimilation process included traditional values being suppressed and ceremonies being banned (RCAP, 1996) and this included the suppression of stories that carried the cultural teachings. However, the banning of cultural customs was not adhered to in many communities and many families continued to teach the children about traditional values in secrecy. Aboriginal people were resilient by incorporating the restrictions into their lives and subverting the laws to practice their culture because it had meaning and the culture enriched a good way of life (Pettipas, 1994). The banning of culture(s) was an attempt to extinguish an Aboriginal perspective and assimilate the people. “Colonization created a fragmentary worldview among Aboriginal peoples. By force, terror, and educational policy, it attempted to destroy the Aboriginal worldview – but failed “(Little Bear, 2000, p. 84).

During the past several decades, there has been a resurgence to reintroduce the

cultural traditions. The Elders/Knowledge Keepers have provided advise and shared their knowledge with their children, family and community. The people we now call Elders were young children that experienced the banning of their culture, but were taught in the privacy of their home to carry this knowledge forward. Elders have skillfully guided the reclaiming of cultural traditions (RCAP, 1996) by teaching those who will listen and participate in the various ceremonies. According to Battiste (1998), this is the traditional way of learning between the generations,

In the Aboriginal tradition, societal practices and customs are passed from one generation to the next by means of oral description and actual demonstration. As such, to ensure the continuity of Aboriginal customs and traditions, a substantive Aboriginal right will normally include the incidental right to teach such a practice, custom, and tradition to a younger generation (p. 49).

Sadly, the education system has not been beneficial to Aboriginal people and government policies that were ill conceived through the various systems (Battiste, 1998). Under the guise of education, Aboriginal worldviews, knowledge, languages and cultures have been debilitated. However, the biggest change will occur through education (CAAS, 2002; RCAP, 1996; TRC Interim Report, 2012) when Aboriginal perspectives are weaved into the curriculum to ensure that the traditions being taught are accurate.

Oral Traditions

As the preceding paragraphs indicates, the history of Aboriginal peoples is embedded in oral tradition, which have been threatened by assimilation and colonization processes (Fitznor, 2006). One cannot simply learn the language without having an understanding in its meaning within the traditional value and belief system. For individuals who speak an Aboriginal language, there is a common sentiment that it must

be understood in its own cultural context. In other words, a speaker has to understand the stories or meaning to truly understand the meaning of the words used in the language.

The voices in Robert Bensen's (2000) study reveal the same sentiment on the meaning of words,

knowing the real meanings behind certain terms clarifies their importance. The terms for man, woman and child are also revealing... The word for child is also illuminating when we look at its parts. Wakanyeja is our Lakota word for child. It is made up of two parts, wakanyan (sacred) and najin (to stand); so for us a child stands sacred in this world, a special gift from the Creator (p. 19).

Knowing the meaning of words is very important, especially since the meaning can be lost or misunderstood in translation. The means of communicating in an Aboriginal language is an important aspect in teaching the traditional culture. The Elders play a vital role ensuring that all generations were educated in this manner and young children were well versed in their Aboriginal language, first, and foremost.

In reality, oral traditions in Aboriginal languages will remain alive as the next generation continues in the footsteps of the Elders in their communities (Archibald, 2008). They are committed to the language, to the community, to the traditions, as storytelling in Aboriginal languages has a strong connection to Aboriginal society. Murray's (1996) research reveals this as an important characteristic, "Storytelling, he claims, weaves people into the very fabric of their societies.' Through speaking, hearing, and retelling, we affirm our relationship with our nations, our tribal community, our family networks. We begin to understand our position in the long history of our people. Indeed, we become the people and places of our past because our identity is created, our perspective formed, of their telling" (p. 54). This statement clearly demonstrates how

Aboriginal people are linked to the history of their societies. Traditional language storytelling is simply one of many forms of expression, as the author states, “Oral traditions are the expression of a tribe’s sovereignty in matters of culture and belief, encapsulating the totality of its understanding of life and living. The expression of our understanding of life is in the conception of our language” (Murray, 1992). In other words, the lived experiences of Aboriginal people are intertwined in the stories told by the knowledge keepers.

Goodfellow (2003) discovered that the K^wak^wala^w speakers in her study believe that their language, whether spoken fluently or not is a necessary part of their cultural identity. “Although the language may be changing, and perhaps undergoing the process known, in the literature as “language death” that is, declining in use as an everyday means of communication, different generations of speakers retain it in various degrees of competence as a marker of cultural identity” (p.190). However, I contend that individuals do not have to be fluent, to maintain a cultural connection. Only a small number (29%) of Aboriginal people speak an Aboriginal language (Census, 2006) while more than a million claims Aboriginal ancestry (Census 1991). Many Aboriginal people did not have the opportunity to learn their language, but can attribute a strong cultural identity to other factors such as relationships to Elders, community or family members.

Language is an important part in the telling of our stories, which have always been recognized as a window on who we are, what we experience, how we understand and present ourselves to others. But stories are more than a window on identity. We actually construct who we are in discourse through a process, which involves an individual’s identity with the images and cultural narratives that dominate our ways of

seeing, and representing the world, language is central to Aboriginal identity (Kirkness, 1989; RCAP Vol. 1, 1996).

Culture

In the Ojibway culture and others, there are many ceremonies that are integral to developing a personal identity (Johnston, 1992). It is through the practice and participation of ceremonies from an early age that we learn about our culture. These practices were a part of our everyday lives and although they continue to be important to who we are today, the practice has evolved to include the old with the new traditions. One of the oldest ceremonial practices provides a connection to our personal characteristics that contributes to our identity from birth. As Johnston (1992) states, “For a name was not merely an appellation or a term of address; it was an identity at the time it was bestowed, merging later into reputation” (p.15). In some families, the grandparents take the responsibility of name giving as they are instructed by the spirits. For the first time, the spirit world accepts and recognizes the child as a living thing. Along with the community, all relatives assumed a certain responsibility to provide guidance in the child’s development toward adulthood. Such ceremonies were not only an important event for the family, but it was a sense of renewal for the entire community as they celebrated with the spirits with a feast offering. After all, this was “the most important event in a person’s life: the receiving of an identity through ceremony and name. From then on the child would bear a name and have a place near the tribal fire and in tribal thoughts” (Johnston, 1992, p. 15). Elders are given the task of name giving as a gift of the spirits through vision quests. It is for this reason that the naming ceremony is so

sacred, since the Elder has given a part of her/himself to the identity of the child and are as one through this ceremonial connection. Children that are taught the traditional language and culture are more secure with their identity and where they belong. J. Weaver (1998) shares this view through the biographical stories of individuals in his study:

Our Elders, our teachers, urged us to “know who we are, where we came from, and where we belong.” They told us to cling to our language. Our language and traditions, they said, are God-given gifts that no human could change! Through these teachings, my family ties remained strong. We found ways to keep in touch, even though we were separated and not free to practice fully our traditional way of life (p. 7).

For this reason, it is important for children to learn about the traditions from a very early age, so they are immersed in knowing who they are and where they belong. It is through enacting, living, and reclaiming cultural traditions that we maintain a sacred bond to the land, the landscape that is intertwined into our psyche of being an Aboriginal person.

Connecting to Aki (Land)

Understandably, one of the recurring themes is the issue of identity in correlation to land. What is sometimes hard to grasp is that "identity," is not always the individual's characteristic, the environmental context, the language or the cultural traditions in which the individual is embedded. Rather, identity is an event of life's journey that takes place in the creation of the relationship between the individual and context.

The original traditional teachings about the land have been passed on by Elders who have lived on the land since birth and understand the cultural importance to the

people. Lischke and McNab (2005) believe that the novel *Keeper'n Me* expresses the importance of land based on facts of traditional teachings from Elders in the community,

Land is the most sacred thing in the Indian way of seeing. It's where life comes from and all the teachings and philosophy that kept Indians alive through everything that happened to them all over all these years comes from the land. Lose that connection you lose yourself, according to something bigger than everything. Kinda tapping into the great mystery. Feeling the spirit of the land that's the spirit of the people and the spirit of yourself (p. 341).

Aboriginal people have had a long relationship with creation, a connection to a physical landscape that surround them such as plants, animals, land, water, sun, moon and the sky world (Fitznor, 1998). According to Ermine (1995) our ancestors left us teachings in order to understand our relationship with the world around us. In her research, Battiste (2002) interprets this relationship in this way,

Indigenous Knowledge is also inherently tied to land, not to land in general, but to a particular landscape, landforms, and biomes where ceremonies are properly held, stories properly recited, medicine properly gathered, and transfers of knowledge properly authenticated (p. 11).

This relationship with nature provides a sense of place for those who live in balance and harmony.

Having an Indigenous Worldview is a way of learning that is not always scientific, but having an innate awareness to nature as a part of identity. Aboriginal authors, Cajete (1994), Ermine (1995) and Fitznor (1998) emphasize that interconnectedness is an important concept of our worldviews that applies to each individual and as a collective. As Fitznor (1998) reminds us, "that we are all related and all have a responsibility to each other's healing and growth" (p. 33). Indigenous worldviews teaches people to live in balance that is grounded in the self, to develop relationships with others and the environment. The most prevalent concept is in the belief

that land is alive and the lifeblood to our traditions, an interrelatedness that is most often rooted in a shared relationship, a landscape that is connected to the spirits of the lands (Battiste, 1998). The land provides sustenance to the people, and in return Aboriginal people offer thanks through song and dance, as well as showing respect for the land that sustains our traditions from one generation to the next. Unfortunately the notion of a human relationship to the land probably does not always come easy to non-Aboriginal people (and sometimes Aboriginal people) who all too often have a romanticized impression of these worldviews. Paula Gunn Allen (1986) puts it this way,

We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life and culture in the Southwest. . . . The land is not really the place (separate from ourselves) where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies. . . . It is rather a part of our being, dynamic, significant, real. It is our self, in as real a sense as such notions as "ego," "libido" or social network. . . . Nor is this relationship one of mere "affinity" for the Earth. It is not a matter of being "close to nature" (p. 191).

The relationship is more one of identity, in the mathematical sense, than of affinity. The Earth is, in a very real sense, the same as our self (or selves), and it is this primary point that is made in the fiction and poetry of the Native American writers of the Southwest. Native people are born into families and cultural traditions that are the very foundation of identity. Within our traditions, the most fundamental experience we can acknowledge is the act of seeing oneself as a living part of the place where one's life takes place (Battiste, 2002).

Aboriginal people believe in sacred sites, but that no one place is more sacred than the other. Kulchyski, Little Bear, and Bobiwash (1998) “caution about the use of the word “sacred” – not so much because it evokes narrowing images from the Christian tradition, but because it leads us to imagine landscapes as being fractured into a small

number of special places” (p. 102). There are a series of relationships that brings all places together and these particular landscapes will have greater significant to the people living there. How we develop our identity in connection to the land is unique in every part of the world. The knowledge that is gained is in relationship to the interactions with the living. Since land is comprised of living things and beings, we have to learn by observing nature in order to be aware of who we are. The skills we learn in nature are educational, but can also be humbling when nature outwits us.

At contact, Aboriginal people lived closely with mother earth and therefore defined themselves by the land, the sacred places that shaped their worldviews. Culture to us means a whole way of life — our beliefs, language, and how we live with one another and creation. Vernon Roote, Deputy Grand Chief Union of Ontario Indians North Bay, Ontario, 10 May 1993 RCAP.

Many Aboriginal people believe that identity is also connected to community, more specifically, the land on which community is so deeply rooted. Some people will argue that identity, like life itself, derives from the land, “The landscape, the language, to whom one is related, this is all part of her identity, and it is very strong” (Goodfellow, 2003, p. 16.). Whoever wishes either to recover or to sustain a healthy state of existence, then, must enter into some working identity not only with a cultural tradition but also with a particular landscape. It is through this means that Aboriginal people form an understanding of their identity, as Lischke and McNab (2005) share a story by K. Akiwenzie-Damm from his study,

It is our connection to the land that makes us who we are, that shapes our thinking, our cultural practices, our spiritual, emotional, physical, and social lives ... Land, community, culture, and spirituality are intricately woven together. This interconnectedness is expressed and reinforced through our arts, language and

Ceremonies (p. 341).

Cajete (2000) highlights the importance of understanding that our ancestors understood the importance of building respectful relationships with oneself, with nature, and with one another. Through these relationships, we build a personal identity that is connected to the history of our people, our families and the landscape of the land. These connections shape the future in what we are to become through our interactions with people and the environment around us. The role of the family is to nurture the child in their developmental stages from infancy to adulthood. The family in this context includes parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and the extended members within a cultural community with a common language that share specific cultural practices such as stories, ceremonies, dance and interaction with each other. One of the most important characteristics that link the people within the cultural community is its connection to land or traditional territory where the community engages in practices based on certain beliefs or ways of understanding the world. These models focus on what people learn about their culture from family and community. In other words, a sense of ethnic identity is developed from shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship as well as proximity (Torres, 1999).

Models of Identity

As indicated by this literature review, there are many things that contribute to our identity, mainly who our parents or grandparents are and how they model the culture they come from. These models of identity development typically outline commonalities that are from a family within a particular ethnic group. Aspects that make up learned culture

include rituals, symbols, and behavior that manifest themselves from underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions (Ott, 1989). Belonging is one of the experiences a person needs to connect, to be able to experience culture, language and community. The laws of relationship are integral to Aboriginal based perspectives grounded in traditions.

Traditional Education

Traditional education was largely, an informal process that provided the young with the specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within the context of a spiritual worldview (Kirkness, 1992). Traditional education was based on the laws of a respectful relationship with the natural world as we relied on nature for sustenance as we harvested food in different seasons and showing gratitude by following cultural protocol of giving thanks (WNCP, 2000). Everyday living was based on the cycles of the season(s) and having an understanding of the territory to know where certain berries grew or hunting/fishing practices (Absolon, 2011). Developing these skills started at an early age by observing, participating, reflecting and the use of dialogue. An essential approach of indigenous learning is through stories and to use language in storytelling, oratory and songs (Cajete, 1994). Through oral traditions, Indigenous knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the next as a teaching tool. In my family and as Kirkness (1973) indicates, Elders are patient teachers that nurtured the young, taught the rites of passage and skills to develop respect for one's self, which are essential to developing a strong identity of belonging.

Residential Schools

However, government policies of education such as the residential schools system tried to eradicate cultural, language and family connections for the purpose of assimilating Aboriginal children, as outlined in several documents (CAAS, 2002; RCAP, 1996; TRC Interim Report, 2012; For Those Left Behind, 2012). Several generations of Aboriginal children were taken away from their families as part of the government's policy on education. For roughly seven generations nearly every Indigenous child in Canada was sent to a residential school. They were taken from their families, tribes and communities, and forced to live in those institutions of assimilation. Education, delivered through residential schools, was the tool for assimilation. It was education that helped to perpetuate the situation we see today for Indigenous Peoples in Canada (RCAP, 1996; TRCC 2010, 2012).

According to John Milloy (1999), the Bagot Commission began the formulations that brought forward the assimilative policy and eventually the residential school system. The central rationale of the Commission's findings was that further progress by communities would be realized only if the civilizing system was amended to instill Indian people with the primarily characteristics of civilization: industry and knowledge." Regulations under the Indian Act of 1876 provided federal support for the establishment of residential schools. The legislation stated it was shouldering the responsibility and authority to define who was an Indian as a preliminary to making it feasible for the Indian to cease being an Indian. Part of the process was forcing Native children into church-run schools that were funded by the Canadian government. The government felt obligated by the laws of the Indian Act to provide education for Indian people across Canada.

However, the government was not really concerned about actually educating the Indian people. Rather this was another means of control toward the process of assimilation. Removing children from their Indian environment prevented them from speaking their language and learning their traditional culture.

The administration of a residential school was based on an agreement established between the government and a religious organization. According to the Indian Act (Hawley 1990), section “114. (1) The Governor in Council may authorize the Minister, in accordance with this act, to enter into agreements on behalf of Her Majesty for the education in accordance with this Act of Indian children, with ...section 115, “The Minister may c) enter into agreements with religious organizations for the support and maintenance of children who are being educated in schools operated by those organizations”.

In Canada, missionaries commonly thought of Aboriginal people as “savages” needing to be saved, so the employees became the role models of change. Indian Residential schools were a reality in my childhood and for thousands of other children who were in most cases forcibly removed from their families and homes (RCAP, 1996; TRC Interim Report, 2012; For Those Left Behind, 2012) Most of the children that attended Residential schools did not know what was happening and did not ask questions. What they did not know was that they would be given a new identity with the common practice of assigning numbers to the students as identification, assigning Christian names and new clothing. The church felt that the Indian names and traditional clothing kept the children uncivilized. The cutting of hair removed identity connections to culture and English was the only language spoken. Finally, the schools understood that Aboriginal languages had

to be eradicated if the children were to be completely assimilated. A lost language had direct correlation to the loss of identity and this made it difficult for the children to communicate with family members. Mary Young (2005) remembers how her family had to remind her, about who she was, “In his caring way, my father reminded me of who I was. The nuns wanted me to forget who I was and to become who they wanted me to be. How could I have unraveled what I had been taught at the Residential School for ten months in a few hours?” (p. 18). This government policy on education was a powerful force that contributed to the dilemma of lost identity for many generations of Aboriginal people. Many residential school survivors lost the use of their language, lost their connection to the land and community. The government policy of residential schools is an example of failed assimilation that disrupted the cultural values that are critical to the identity of the people. The ramification of such policies weakened the social structure of Aboriginal communities, families and a loss of cultural identity. Such policies had a significant impact on the Aboriginal people not only in Canada, but also for our brothers and sisters in the United States.

According to Bonita Lawrence (2004) the government has played a significant role in the deterioration of our traditions that contributed to our identity, “In both Canada and the United States, bodies of law defining and controlling Indianness have for years distorted and disrupted older indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation not only to collective identity, but to the land” (p. 1). Aboriginal people have always had a close connection to the land, and prior to colonization, Indian identity, human rights and equity were not an issue.

Indian Act

Without Aboriginal consent, the Indian Act was passed in 1876 and to this day regulates almost every aspect of Indians' lives. This was one of the most pervasive pieces of legislation in Canadian society. The Indian Act is consistently applied to Aboriginal people as a means of recognizing, and confining Indian identity according to the Canadian government's definitions of status and non-status (Fitznor, 2006). The government has and continues to have complete discretion over who is designated an Indian. The Indian Act had a great impact on Aboriginal people who were forced from their ancestral lands either by relocation due to white settlements or being enfranchised due to marriage or education. According to Kim Anderson's (2000) study, "We are a land-based people, and as colonized people we've had no home. And because we have had no home, there are a lot of other problems that are attended to that. The dispossession of land and homeland factors heavily into identity problems for Native peoples and the struggle towards a healthy sense of identity is linked to reclaiming that space" (p. 181). This is a concern for Aboriginal people who have made their home in urban centers. Reclaiming Aboriginal identity is an all encompassing task of reconnecting with the land, the language and in some cases with family/community that are a part of identity formation. Therefore, rebuilding this relationship is vital to understanding our origins (RCAP, 1996).

Family Connections

Personal identity is more than who the individual is, there is a connection linked to the history of our people, our families (RCAP 1996). These connections shape the

future in what we are to become through our interactions with people and the environment around us. The role of the family is to nurture the child in their developmental stages from infancy to adulthood. The family in this context includes parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and the extended members within a cultural community. Leroy Little Bear (2000) states that

From the moment of birth, children are the objects of love and kindness from a large circle of relatives and friends. They are strictly trained but in a “sea” of love and kindness. As they grow, children are given praise and recognition for their achievements both by the extended family and by the group as a whole. A cultural community is a group of people who communicate with a common language and share specific cultural practices such as stories, ceremonies, dance and children learn through experience who they are through kinship (p. 81).

Leroy Little Bear (2000, p. 81), further explains the important role the family plays in teaching the children about their culture and connections to community:

Teaching through actual experience is done by relatives: for example, aunts teaching girls and uncles teaching boys. One of the most important characteristics that link the people within the cultural community is its connection to land or traditional territory where the community engages in practices based on certain beliefs or ways of understanding the world, but more importantly the interaction of relatives with each other. These models focus on what people learn about their culture from family and community.

In other words, a sense of ethnic identity is developed from shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship as well as proximity (Torres, 1996). There are many things that contribute to our identity, mainly who our parents or grandparents are and how they model the culture they come from. These models of identity development typically outline commonalities that are from a family within a particular ethnic group. According to J. Youngblood Henderson (2002) kinship is a necessary part of Aboriginal society “The Aboriginal order of kinship implies a distinct form of responsibilities or rights.

Everyone strives to live in harmony not only with all the forces of the circle of life but also with one another” (p. 425). This creates a sense of belonging to a place and to a people. Belonging is one of the experiences a person needs in order to experience culture, language and community. The laws of relationship are integral to Aboriginal based perspectives and therefore adhering to Indigenous research protocols specific to the community in involved are crucial to collecting data in a respectful manner.

As the themes suggest in this literature review identity is an important aspect of knowing who we are from several viewpoints. In particular for the purpose of this study, embedding this knowing within what the Elders have to share is a critical piece of this puzzle.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The approach in Indigenous research has been evolving in ways that includes Indigenous methodologies. Researchers such as Fitznor (2002), Smith (1999) and Weber-Pillwax (2004) are a few that have used methodologies that are consistent and reflect the Indigenous way of knowing, the practice and activities that reflect our ways of being. The principles of ethics that reinforce cultural values such as caring, kindness, sharing, trust and respect (Absolon/Willett, 2004; Archibald, 2004; Castellano, 2004) are important to effective research and building a positive rapport of trust with participants. “Trust is crucial...and the researcher must have a deep sense of responsibility to uphold that trust in every way” (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 170).

This chapter explains the methods used in this study including participant selection, sources of data, cultural protocol, structure of interviews, validating research, researcher positioning, bias, confidentiality and ethics, as well as the limitations of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

The research strategy utilized methods based on grounded theory where the first step was collecting data through stories. The data was analyzed whereby key points were taken from the text of the stories and coded to determine categories. This method also allowed the researcher to gather detailed narratives from the audio taped interviews, which is one of the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data. Using a grounded theory approach also allowed flexibility in collecting and analyzing data to construct theories, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) this study captured Dibaajimowin (stories) of six Anishinaabe Elders also known as Knowledge Keepers of history, ceremonies,

song, dance, landscape, language and culture; knowledge that guides a Mino Pimatisiwin (a good way of life). It is important to develop theories from Knowledge Keepers as storytellers with life experiences based on personal narratives (Kovach 2010). A narrative/storywork research method (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Mehl-Madrona, 2007) is especially suitable for Aboriginal research, because it is predicated on the importance of story and encourages researchers to gather stories respectfully that can be shared (Smith 1999, Cruikshank et al. 1992; Clandinin and Connelly 1999; Young, 2003).

The words story and work together signal the importance and seriousness of undertaking the educational and research work of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experience stories, Archibald (1997). Storyworks through storytelling is more than a pastime; stories are critical to learning the language, traditions, social behaviour and the relationships in daily lives. Storytelling is a powerful method of sharing cultural knowledge through lived experiences in ceremony, songs, as well as rituals (Fitznor, 2012; Mehl-Madrona, 2007). Storytelling was an oral university that taught people traditional beliefs and guiding principles of personal behaviour that is as relevant today as they were in centuries past (Absolon, 2011; Absolon & Willet, 2004; Cruikshank, 1990). Through storytelling, the researcher explored the meaning of the individuals' experience as told through the Elder's stories in his or her own words and then to restory them into a framework that makes sense (chronological, themes).

Research Design

The design of this study focused on Indigenous methods that acknowledge customary practice of sharing information through storytelling within a conversation process. Our ancestors understood the importance of storytelling in building relationships with families and communities. As outlined in this paper, stories through intergenerational transmission are pivotal in recording historical events and are integral to cultural survival. Traditional stories reflect cultural customs, life experience, spiritual being, a way of thinking and entertainment, but more importantly, stories were and are used to teach history, values, beliefs and morals as an Indigenous learning practice. Stories are essentially a social institution that taught the people traditional qualities to help them in their daily relationships within the community. Storytelling has the value to empower a link to a sense of identity in the traditional knowledge of Indigenous people (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Cruikshank, 1990; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Cajete (1994) explains that stories are integral to way of life as well as the way the people learn, “These stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn” (p. 41). Storytelling is a very old custom that is culturally supported by Indigenous people as an Indigenous method of gathering data through interviews and conversations; an Indigenous practice utilized by Indigenous researchers (Fitznor, 2005; Kovach, 2010).

Participant Recruitment

It was imperative to follow community protocol and for this reason the community education counselor was contacted through the First Nations education office

to discuss the study and provide the necessary information to be shared with possible participants, the participants being Elders or Knowledge Keepers. The selection was based on what they could potentially contribute to the study as well as meeting the criteria of being Anishinaabe speaker(s), with cultural and community knowledge (Kovach, 2010). It was important to initially contact the education counselor since this position has the community connections to successfully contact possible participants. Having connections to the community for many years, and having extended relationships within the community, the researcher was ideally positioned to seek permission to conduct the study.

Anishinaabe Elders, with traditional knowledge were identified and contacted by the education counselor, and they were provided with the information regarding the research as well as contact information for the researcher. Seven participants were identified and six (3 men and 3 women) agreed to participate. The participants initiated contact with the researcher upon hearing of the study from the Education counselor. The researcher informed the Elders – Knowledge Keepers that their participation in this research study will not be tied to any of their work within the community. Their participation was strictly confidential and the First Nation office staff was not informed of which Elders or knowledge keepers participated in the research study.

Participants were advised that they do not have to answer any question(s) if they choose not to and that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time if they so choose. The Elders were informed that feedback regarding the results of the study will be made available to each participant if they requested the information. The conversations were audio taped with the exception of two, however detailed written notes

were kept to record the participant's ideas and responses. Only the researcher has access to these documents. The written documents did not include any names or any identifying information about the participants and all documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet at all times to ensure confidentiality of the information. Upon completion of the interviews, the stories were categorized according to themes that emerged from these stories.

The researcher has had both direct and indirect relationships with participants over the course of her lifetime leading up to and following this study, giving emphasis to the importance of relationships in indigenous contexts (L. Smith, 1999; CCL, 2007).

In the next step, the researcher read the information letter (see Appendix C) to each participant and provided clarification upon request. If the individual indicated that he/she was indeed interested in participating, the letter of informed consent (see Appendix D) was reviewed and informed consent obtained. The information letter and consent form explained that all interviews would be held in strict confidence. In addition, the consent form informed the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and withdrawal from the study could occur at any time. Participants were also informed that all data would be destroyed upon completion of the study.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher substituted the real names of the participants and places by using pseudonyms (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Precautions were taken by assigning each participant a code number and they assured that their identities will not be revealed and all identifying information will be stripped from the data.

Additionally, the researcher read the questions to each participant. All records were kept

under a code in a locked filing cabinet. Stories were transcribed verbatim from a digital voice recorder.

Cultural Protocols

It is imperative to follow cultural protocol when conducting research in an Aboriginal community (Castellano 2004; Kovach 2000; Smith, 1999). Cultural protocol in Indigenous research reflects the values of respect for individuals and community; values that honour the people and the traditional territory. Any community Elder or knowledge keepers that contact the researcher will be required to give written consent prior to being interviewed and the process was explained to ensure mutual understanding by both parties.

In keeping with tradition, each participant was offered *asemaa* (tobacco) (Absolon, 2004; Michell, 1999) as a sign of respect and honour for the knowledge to be shared. Many Anishinaabe communities recognize *asemaa* as a sacred medicine and should be given when a person is asking someone for their knowledge or help. Many Indigenous researchers follow the practice of offering *asemaa* to demonstrate respect for knowledge given by an Elder (Absolon, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Fitznor 2002). Tobacco offerings convey sincerity of our purpose and Lavallée (2009) explains the purpose this way:

Tobacco is placed in a cloth bundle and given as a gift to an elder when seeking advice. These bundles are also given to a person requesting knowledge and help. This is done to ensure that things are done in a respectful or good way. Accepting a bundle carries a responsibility to do what is asked of you (p. 27).

Any community Elders that contacted the researcher gave written consent prior to being interviewed and the process was explained to ensure mutual understanding

by both parties.

Research Conversations

The research conversation process was conducted to reflect an Indigenous method which included an initial visit to get to know each Elder – Knowledge keeper prior to following the Western method of a semi-structured interview. The actual conversations took approximately two hours, with a couple taking more time. More specifically the process method I followed is characteristic to that of a natural setting whereby allowing the researcher to observe and/or engage with the Elders where they are most comfortable and willing to share stories with open and honest opinions.

For this reason, the interviews were arranged at a time and location that was convenient to each participant. Interviews were conducted in English with Anishinaabe language being utilized when necessary to place an event/experience in an Indigenous context comfortable to each Elder – Knowledge keeper's preference. The primary method of gathering data was through the process of conversation where the Elders shared stories. The interview was guided by a list of questions; however prior to any of the conversations, a rapport was established with each Elder following traditional protocol essential to a successful interview and providing opportunity for both sides to engage in conversation as Archibald (2008) refers to as “research as storytelling”. The method of storytelling, as a way to respond to interview questions, accommodate the Elders because it allowed for the use of a familiar process during the interview as they share their lived experiences; but more importantly the comfort and freedom to divulge personal events/experience.

The location is a critical element in establishing a positive environment since Anishinaabe people have a close relationship with the *Aki* (land); since identity like life itself derives from the land or the landscape in which the individual is embedded. Identity is an event that takes place in the creation of the relationship between an individual and the experience of cultural practices, such practice will provide insight as to how indigenous knowledge particularly the connection to community and/or the relationship to the land/landscape sets the tone in developing an identity (Battiste, 2002; Cajete 2001). As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) would suggest, narration for a way of understanding experience” or in the words of Julie Cruikshanks (1992), “Life Lived Like a Story” (book title).

Accountability and Responsibility

As an Indigenous researcher, I am compelled to be accountable to my research and use that knowledge responsibly (Sefa Dei, 2006). Having connections to this community places me in a position to be respectful by following Indigenous protocols, as a means of honouring my relations and acknowledging another way of interpreting the world (Little Bear, 2000; Wilson, 2008). Therefore the expectations of my work are high given my community connections and this responsibility guided my research. One of the responsibilities as an Anishinaabe person and researcher, is the acceptance by the community to conduct the research and for this purpose, spending time in the community setting validates the research. A qualitative research method within a community does provide another perspective and distinct view of identity based on a cultural group that is

not being defined by an outside system or social scale when they are observed in their natural setting.

Researcher's Positionality and Bias

In qualitative research, the self of the researcher is central to the research process and this method allows the researcher to access inner experiences and perspectives of the participants to decipher meanings formed in the culture. Eisner (1991) describes the self as “the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It is the ability to see and interpret significant aspects. It is this characteristic that provides a unique, and personal insight into the experience under study” (p. 33).

According to Absolon (2008) positionality and restorying ourselves is as important as the methodologies we employ; in other words my research is an extension of myself (Wilson, 2008). An extension as a First Nations member where my experiences have been positive in the sense that I am readily accepted as a fluent Anishinaabe speaker with strong community connections going back five generations. My Great Grandparents and Grandparents were well respected as traditional knowledge keepers.

As a researcher, my belief in this research study is that I position myself as an insider given the connection to the people and community. Given that I have community connections, I have made sure that I honour the participants by using words that are the most accurate and that those words carry accuracy with negligible loss. As a First Nation woman, I hope to maximize interpretations through in-depth conversations based on support and trust by both parties. Understanding cultural behavior will help me navigate an interview process that is respectful.

I understand that being both an insider and outsider can create difficult relations depending how the community perceives the researcher. But as Sunseri (2007) puts it, being a member of a nation does not mean you are an expert,

Not flaunting one's own knowledge is another principle within an Indigenous methodology. I didn't consider myself an "expert" merely because I was a member of the Oneida Nation or because I had a high level of post-secondary education. I do believe that my experiences and my insider position in the research allows me to have some tacit knowledge of the topics and issues that "outsiders" may not have. (p. 101).

As an insider, I am aware that the sharing of certain knowledge is sometimes limited to sharing within a First Nations community as a means of being protective with outsiders (Cruikshank 1994; Smith 1999). I contend that my situation of growing up Anishinaabe allows me to stand on the boundaries looking in and out of the community setting. I am expected to know and understand the history and apply that understanding in my role as a researcher in an Aboriginal world (Absolon/Willett 2004; Gilchrist 1997; Smith 1999).

As a researcher with community attachment, the mainstream approach would perceive this as a source of bias that could impair the research, but an Indigenous methodology would see this as strength in building capacity with the community. Using stories (Archibald, 2001) is a culturally safe, culturally respectful and culturally relevant research method. As I locate myself in this research I bring certain knowledge and worldviews from a context based on my reality of connecting with my community (Mihsuah 1998; Miller 1998). Corbin and Strauss (2008) acknowledge the realization that in order to understand experience that experience must be located within, and cannot be removed, from the larger events in a social or cultural framework. This realization is supported by Indigenous researchers such as Absolon and Willett (2004) who stated "Our histories, our traditions and our culture have always been inside of us" (p.15). It is

important to locate myself in an Indigenous research framework that is objective and neutral, (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Restoule 2005) although I offer that my subjectivity through the positioning of my location is evident in this study. The rationale is in that I identify myself as Anishinaabe and a First Nation member with ancestral connections. This allows other people to know who I am, to establish trust, and to identify the worldview from which I speak.

I am aware that researcher bias is frequently an issue, especially when the researcher is grounded in relationships (Wilson 2008) with family in the community. I acknowledge that my subjectivity may influence the research as a result of selective observation or recording of information and allowing one's personal views and perspectives to affect data interpretation. To deter such biases, as researcher I have solicited participant feedback and discussion of the interpretations with each participant for their insight and verification to validate the findings.

Researcher's Ethical Approach

As an Anishinaabe person, my position is grounded in utilizing Indigenous methods and the practice of storytelling. Using this process allowed me to go back and forth, what I mean by this is that when storytelling is activated, the stories contain the past, present and future of respectful relationships and *mino-pimatisiwin* (a good life). Anishinaabe *mino-pimatisiwin* is a wholistic way of life, a concept that is significant to Indigenous researchers and their communities (Absolon, 2009; Toulouse, 2001; Young, 2005).

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to collecting data, an application was submitted to the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). Data collection integrated an Indigenous and Western methods that complemented each other through interviews based on storytelling.

Collecting data in research is about learning, a way of knowing through conversation known as or identified as storytelling/re-storying from an Indigenous perspective, I used the method of storytelling to gather knowledge, while ensuring relational accountability and respecting local protocol(s) in a good way (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews, even though the idea of an interview is not an Indigenous method. Since childhood, I was taught that you cannot structure the process of storytelling; rather it is a process that is conversational Kovach (2010). The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. As Kovach noted, “it is relational at its core. (p. 40)”.

I audio taped and transcribed stories to obtain an understanding of the emerging themes through the process of reviewing the transcripts on more than one occasion. Qualitative research requires interpretative and analytical methods to make meaning of the data, grouping the data and reviewing the transcripts, which are often referred to as coding (Kovach, 2010). In order to fully understand the data, I had to look at the data not only from the researchers perspective, but also from the perspective of the Elders who

shared their experiences. The phenomenological inquiry was appropriate in gaining meaning from the participants' perspectives. In addition, the researcher is Anishinaabe, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences, giving the data credibility from the point of view of an Indigenous person. The data was coded into clusters and reviewed several times for repetitive patterns until specific thematic groupings emerged from the data. Upon further analysis, it became apparent from a wholistic worldview that the various themes were interconnected and relational to each other, making the process difficult to break down and categorize the themes (Wilson, 2008). Given that coding is not precise and depends on the researcher's interpretation, an Indigenous worldview was used initially to reflect what the participants talked about based on their individual values and beliefs. The preliminary interpretations of themes were verified with the participants themselves (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Therefore the practice of coding was utilized to corroborate the commonality of the several emerging themes. Only the pertinent themes related to the importance of relationships, cultural teachings, school experience, belonging, fitting into two worlds and being judged by other people were fully explored and analyzed. In some cases, direct quotes were used to either clarify or make sense of the data.

All participants signed a consent form that provided the details of the study. After the interviews were transcribed into the stories, each participant received a copy for their approval to ensure accuracy and avoid any misrepresentation that has occurred in the past research within Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2010). The participants asked to receive a copy of the final paper and opted to have the audiotape of their interview destroyed.

Chapter 4: Dibaajimowin (Telling Stories)

This chapter provides the summaries of individual stories by six Anishinaabe Elders also known as Knowledge keepers following the tradition of Dibaajimowin. As Anishinaabe people, we acknowledge the transmission of the spoken word as valued knowledge. The summaries have been edited to only include pertinent information, but the exact dialogue has not been changed. Through my experiential knowledge, I have come to know the importance of listening to knowledge keepers to learn and make meaning in the ways of knowing from an Indigenous perspective. In the following stories, Elders share their perception(s) on identity development and the significance of teaching the younger generation to sustain our ways of knowing for their success. The participant's actual words are written in italics to differentiate from the researchers explanation and/or understanding.

Participants Stories

Miskwaa Waagosh (Red Fox)

I met Miskwaa Waagosh at his place of work as he decided that using the boardroom for the interview was more convenient and also private. We each had a drink as we made ourselves comfortable for the stories ahead of us. Miskwaa Waagosh told me that he identifies as Anishinaabe who is First Nation and speaks Ojibway. He told me that he grew up on the reserve, but moved away for many years trying to find his way before realizing that he had to return to his community in order to reconnect, find peace and to heal from the past if he wanted a better life for his children.

Miskwaa Waagosh attended residential school for ten years where he was forbidden to speak his language or learn about his culture. He spent the next ten years learning that his culture was not as important as the dominant society and that he had to change to fit in. The one thing he liked about school was the physical activities such as hockey, but he believes that one of his best abilities was running. When he had the opportunity to compete in races, he felt that he could do anything. He became competitive in sports when he discovered that he was good at it and believes this helped him get through the difficult times in school. He stated, *“getting involved in competitive running taught me to be motivated and to finish whatever I started”*. *I was a role model to younger boys in residential school and I didn’t even know it until years later when an Elder talked to me about the teaching of humility*. Miskwaa Waagosh believes that this positive experience helped him to gain confidence and build his self-esteem, even though it was not a characteristic that the school liked to see in the children. *I did not openly show how I felt about this, because we were expected to be obedient and compliant to all the rules*. Never the less, he realized that this was one of his gifts, as he continued to enjoy the sport of running. He said, *“The parents and teachers need to work together to help children discover their gifts”* if they want to see a positive change. He believes that if his circumstances had been different, he would have had the support of his parents and more opportunities would have been available to him.

He believes that, *I know from experience that a cultural barrier exists between the children today and their parents. In order to bring the generations together, we (families, community, schools) need to work together to teach the culture to the parents due to the loss that resulted from residential schools, and once the parents are on this learning*

journey, then the students are more likely to embrace learning the history that was hidden for so long.

In many cases, the parents are disconnected with their children; Miskwaa Waagosh realized that this was happening to him and his children, *well I didn't realize at the time but the fact is that I didn't trust the school due to my experience in the residential schools. As a parent I didn't know enough about the culture, and then my own kids don't want to learn about it either, so I had to learn more to help them.* If both parent and child are learning or know the culture, then the parent and child would spend more time together and talk about what the children are learning at school. *I think that this would support knowing your culture, but also how to identify yourself (knowing where you belong) to a cultural group.*

Miskwaa Waagosh talked about learning his culture as an adult and was motivated to learn so he could teach his children at home. It was important for him to share this knowledge with his children since he did not have this experience himself with his parents...*I wanted to be a good parent and to be involved with my children's education, so we could talk openly about their experience. When I realized that my son loved to golf, I made sure to go out with him and this experience helped us build a good relationship. Having a good home environment helped my children do better in school and they were comfortable to ask questions or share personal experiences at home.*

I think we need to go back to the ways our families cared for each other, we had good relationships with everyone, and that's why our children knew about who they were, not like now. We lost this way because of the residential schools, but we can regain what we lost.

He went on to say that, *children today are lucky and they don't even know it, as First Nations people everywhere are attempting (some successfully) to bring back the culture at the community level.* He talked about the culture camps or lodges that students can attend and learn from Elders about the teachings, such as the seven teachings or medicine wheel. When the students learn about their history, and the good things our people have done, it makes them feel good about themselves and to be proud as Anishinaabe people.

Nagamo Bineshiy (Singing Bird)

I met Nagamo Bineshiy at her place of work after hours, so the building was quite with no interruptions. We drank coffee and ate some cookies while we talked. Her office had a great ambiance with the sofa and soft lighting of the lamps. We prepared a sage smudge that was very calming. Aki is First Nations with Metis ancestry going back several generations and is very proud of her mixed heritage. She speaks Anishinaabe (Ojibway) and grew up on the reserve, but moved back and forth between the reserve and Winnipeg during her adult life to work or attend school.

Nagamo Bineshiy tells me that she came from a family of 12 children, 8 brothers and 3 sisters. She is the second youngest and the only one surviving sibling. She talked about her parents in a loving manner and how they raised her and her siblings in a close relationship to always take care or help each other. She remembers how the families would get together after church to have a feast and visit with each other. During this time we would learn about culture such as our grandparents telling us stories about family or community events in our language. She talks about the resiliency of her mother in seeing

all the changes that occurred in the community during her life and how her mother lived to the age of 96 years old.

Nagamo Bineshiy is proud to be Christian and attends church regularly, but shared this, *I believe that the traditional ways should not be forgotten, because those traditional teachings make us who we are as Anishinaabe people. Today, the younger generations do not always know about these teachings and it is our job as Mishom, Kokum's and parents to teach them. When I was a child and before attending the residential school, we learned about the beliefs and values every day, because that was the way we lived. Our parents and grand-parents taught us our language from birth so we would be fluent speakers and they built-in the beliefs in everything we did such as picking plants and showing that respect for all living things. This is what we have to do to help our children today, we can teach them about the seven teachings at home and school, but if they don't put it into practice, it doesn't have much meaning this way. We have to go back to the old ways of teachings our traditions, not only to the children, but to their parents as well.*

She went on to say, *I believe that if children were taught about the beliefs and values that make a good life, they would have a better understanding about who they are, but the parents don't always know these things and they need to find out so the children can have a better life too.* But to have the better life, people need to know about themselves; that they have gifts and abilities to learn. We have to teach them how to deal with emotions, and that there's good and bad behaviors. They can learn these things in everyday life and through the teachings that the Elders can tell them using our stories.

We need to do a better job so that the children can learn about their family and that their community is also a family that can provide support in life and school.

Nagamo Bineshiy explained that the residential schools took away the relationships of family and community; and that we are still trying to pick up what we lost so long ago. *Children need to feel that they belong and that they are connected to a place, a home and a community. If they make a connection, let say to the land, this will help them to get grounded in their identity. When we know where we come from, we are more confident about ourselves and how we carry ourselves in this world.* She went on to say that, *As Anishinaabe people, we have always had a respectful relationship with nature, this is just as important today as it was years ago, maybe it is more important now for our children to connect because so many have lost their way. I think that schools could do more about this by including programs where the children learn about the outdoors by spending time out there and learning how to respect things everywhere. This would be one way that the teachers could build a good relationship with their Aboriginal students, by showing them that their culture and traditions are important to everyone. If we do this in schools, maybe there would be less racism and more acceptance of other cultures.*

Nibaa Mahkwa (Sleeping Bear)

Nibaa Mahkwa and I met at my home, as it was much easier for him. We drank coffee and shared some food while he told me his stories. Nibaa Mahkwa is Anishinaabe with First Nations status. He is fluent in Anishinaabemowin and lived on the reserve until

he was a teenager. He lived in many other communities throughout the province such as Selkirk, Brandon and Winnipeg, as well as moving out of province for a few years.

He stated, *I consider myself Anishinaabe, I don't like the word Indian because it is a title given to us by the government to fit the Indian act. We are a part of the Algonquian Nation as Ojibway people.* He also went on to say, *I didn't learn English until I started school and the difficulty in not knowing what was being said to me often got me into trouble. So my older sisters tried to prepare me for my first day of school, but it didn't matter what they told me, nothing could have prepared me for the negative experience I had on that day.* He believes that, *this first day was a cornerstone to what my educational experience was going to be and not long after day school I attended residential school. I remember not fitting in at school and wishing I wasn't there.*

Nibaa Mahkwa stated that, *my mom never went to school, but believed in the church and she use to say the Lord's Prayer to us children in Ojibway, I wish I would have learned that from her. I also remember my mom telling me stories about her childhood and using dogsleds to go places. I know that my Mishom (grandfather) lived in both worlds as he worked in the nearby community and lived a traditional life on the reserve. He was astute and understood how society functioned in an economy where you worked to be able to purchase goods.* He goes on to say, *my Mishom was kind of ahead in the way he thought, and an example is in how he was able to obtain a title to his land when Aboriginal people were denied ownership during his lifetime.* Even though he lived a traditional life, his family was also Christian and attended church.

Nibaa Mahkwa talked about community disputes; *I heard stories from my family about how the church was a part of the or maybe even started the disputes, so there was*

a division between religious beliefs. He goes on to say that, many people were devoted to the church and didn't believe in the traditional cultural practices, so the traditional people practiced in secrecy by taking the culture underground so it could not be disputed and people could continue to learn about it. My mother believed in the Roman Catholic religion even though our family was involved in cultural practices.

Nibaa Mahkwa attended residential school for five years, along with one of his sisters. After residential school, I really didn't know who I was. I started questioning why I prayed to someone on a cross. I was embarrassed to be Aboriginal, so I wanted to be white. Later I was reintroduced to the sweat lodge and realized I had to find myself by following certain cultural practices. It made me realize the importance of our spirit world and that there was more to spirituality than what I learned in residential school about heaven and hell. I learned the difference between traditional and western worlds. I decided to follow the culture and went for help to stop drinking, I went to an Elder for advice and he told me that I would have to learn the way of the pipe. So that is what I did and I stopped drinking to have a better life or as some people call it, I follow the red road of mino-pimatisiwin.

Nibaa Mahkwa thinks that Aboriginal people today need to reconnect to the land. I learned this through an Aboriginal professor at University; she took us to the land and discussed our work in the Tipi, she believed that we should sit and talk, go back to basics. He said that students discovered that this experience made a difference in the way they think and relate to things around them. He said, to me I know that the land is a living entity that shows us that we need to balance our lives; we just have to listen. Now I know there is a difference as to how we learn from sitting in a Western classroom where the

space is square while learning in the Tipi where we are all connected like the circle.

There is no competition in the tipi; we are all equal. The Western school system teaches us in steps and traditionally we learn from the land and place.

Nibaa Mahkwa said that we need to teach the children about these differences in how we learn and another issue that comes to mind is about self-esteem and how children see themselves fitting into mainstream society. He stated that, *the young people need to find their own image, not what they see in the media and learning about the culture will help. There is a prophecy in this day that there will be young people seeking Elders and those Elders will be hard to find, but the young people will have to seek them out to learn about their history and bring balance to their lives if they want to succeed; this is starting to happen already.* He noted that many people believe in this prophecy and they are committing to make a change for a better life.

Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe (Spring Flower Woman)

To accommodate Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe, it was more convenient to hold the interview at her home. We drank tea and I brought some homemade banana bread that we enjoyed as we got to know each other. Ziigwan waabigwan is First Nations but identifies herself as Anishinaabe and speaks Ojibway fluently. She says she spent most of her life on a reserve in North Eastern Manitoba, with the exception of a few years when she lived in Winnipeg.

As a child Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe explained, *my family lived off the land and my father would go hunting and fishing to feed our family, as well as sharing with our close neighbors who didn't have food to eat. Other times our whole family would go camping to pick berries that were in season and our parents would go rice picking in the*

fall. From an early age, she says her parents taught her and her siblings about survival and that they had to be respectful of nature and learn to live within those boundaries of a good life. She also shared that her family had a very close relationship and that they helped each other during difficult times. She stated, our family only spoke Anishinaabe at home, so I was fluent from an early age and I didn't learn English until I attended school.

Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe attended residential school at the age of seven where she completed all her schooling up to grade eight. She said that getting a grade eight education was the highest grade you could complete while she was there and everyone thought that was a good achievement. But, *looking back on my experience, I realize that I spent many hours doing chores at the school that were not academic such as sewing, cooking and cleaning, so we didn't learn as much as we should have about writing or anything else.* She realized after leaving the school that a grade eight education was not at the same grade level as other schools, but despite that experience, *I really believe that education is still the key to living a well balanced life in today's society given the changes in the way our people live, I know from experience that I can't support my family the same way my parents did, you know to live off the land or pick up odd jobs like cutting bush or selling fish. The young people need a good education to get good jobs so they can support themselves and their families, but lots of these children don't know what it was like long ago with their people.*

She explained, *when I worked in the school, one of the issues I noticed was that the children today don't know their own history and what I mean by this is that many families don't know their own family history; they have become disconnected and don't have the close relationship to their family like I had when I was a child.* The other

concern she has is that, *Aboriginal children do not learn enough about their history in school and if they do, it is usually negative, but there are some teachers out there that are really good about including the good stuff. If the children don't know about their families, how will they know about who they are?* The family is the first teachers to the children, but for some families Residential schools took this away when the families got separated. So the traditional teachings were lost and in some cases a couple generations of knowledge were lost too. *The children and some adults too need to find the old people who carry these stories and know about the community and the families that lived there. This is how they will learn about who they are and that they belong to a strong people.* They need to learn to be proud about their culture and where they came from.

Dikikan Anang Inini (Night Star Man)

I met Dikikan Anang Inini at his place of work but he decided it would be better to go to his home where he has a small outdoor lodge. He made a fire and we placed tobacco in the fire. We also decided to smudge with sage before we started and made tea over the open fire. His wife came out later with some bannock and jam, this was a real treat. Dikikan Anang Inini is Anishinaabe and explained that he is a traditional person and follows the good life of min-pimatisiwin. He was born and raised on the reserve and has lived there his whole life. He speaks Ojibway fluently and stresses the importance in knowing your language to be totally immersed in the culture.

Dikikan Anang Inini attended residential school until he finished school, but looked forward to going home during the holidays so he could spend time with his family learning his culture. He still seemed excited like a child when he was talking about this,

the time I spent with my grandparents learning about the stories and how humor was such a big part of storytelling. As I got older he says, I started to recognize the value in these stories and how they taught us about values and beliefs. His family was also traditional in the way they lived and the traditions they practices. He explained, my father was one of the community people that volunteered at the ceremonies so he could learn and then pass those teachings to us.

Even though he attended residential school he immersed himself in any cultural activities whenever he had the opportunity, *but I had to make sure to keep it to myself you know or I would be in big trouble at the school because they wanted to believe that our people weren't practicing the culture.* He said the hardest part was to not talk about it with his friend when they asked him what he did when he went home for the summer. He explained, *to this day I do not attend a Christian church, but I a member of the Midewiwin society where I learn about the culture from an Aboriginal perspective.* He stated...*Anishinaabe children need an Aboriginal perspective in their schools if they want to learn about who they are and where they come from.* People need to know their family and community history to completely understand the principles and teachings about relationships in our traditional society that guided our people.

Dikikan Anang Inini explained, *my grandparents and parents were my first teachers and they made sure that all us children had a strong foundation in our identity as Anishinaabe people from birth.* He was very close to his late Nokomis and spent a lot of time with her; *my Nokomis was a very energetic woman who knew how to treat sick people the traditional way using plants to make medicine. She encouraged me to finish school and I went to the nearby community to complete grade twelve.* Those were

difficult years given the racism the students faced on a daily basis, but it was Nokomis that told me I couldn't quit, *You are not quitting schools she would tell me, that is exactly what they want you to do and you are a strong person, do not get discourage*, she would say. *I am glad I listened to her because her support and believing in me helped me finish school. We all need this kind of support to build our confidence and self-esteem so we know that we are capable of achieving great things if we set our minds to it.*

Mino Ode Ikwe (Good Hearted Woman)

I met Mino Ode Ikwe at her home at her request. She explained that getting around is getting harder given her bad knees. Her daughter was there visiting when I arrived; and offered to make us tea to go with the apple pie she baked earlier that day. I asked if we should smudge. To which she agreed, she said the smudge will help us calm down so we can share stories and have good thoughts. She reminded me that kinship is important and that she knew my family. She went on to say that she is First Nation and that many families (including her family) in her community have Metis ancestry going back several generations. She identifies herself as a fluent speaking Anishinaabe Ikwe and has lived on the reserve all her life.

She explained, *I didn't attend Residential school because I was the oldest, but my younger brothers and sisters did, and both my parents attended Residential school for most of their lives.* Her parents knew each other from residential school and got married shortly after leaving the school; *I think they would have been around seventeen years old when they got married and needed their parents' permission.* She talked about her parents as role models in the way they cared for each other and how they raised her and

her siblings in a strict but caring home and remembers her grandparents being at their home a lot and moved in later as they got older.

Her parents attended church regularly and instilled certain Christian beliefs to their children while making sure they didn't forget their culture such as knowing their first language and learning about the environment or the landmarks by where they lived. She talked about the great supports, *we learned to help each other and I live close to my brothers so we see each other anytime if we want to*. She went on to say that these are some of the values we learned from a young age and passed on to our children, so they too can experience the support of a loving family, despite the residential school experience.

She explains, *the residential school experience was negative for my parents but because they had good family support after leaving the school, they were able to learn about their culture (even though they were adults) from older family members*. She says that, *it doesn't matter how old you are, you always have the ability to learn, this is what the old people use to tell us and this is what I tell my grandchildren*. *I encouraged my children and grandchildren to do their best in school and that sometimes they will have to take some responsibility for their own learning...like learning some of the stories about their culture or going to ceremonies, these are lessons you won't get in the classroom*. On the other hand, teachers and schools also have a responsibility to include Aboriginal history when they teach and this is equally important for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children sitting in that class. When this happens regularly, *I believe that the Aboriginal children will see some worth in going to school and fully participating*. *Then you will see good changes and our children succeeding*.

Chapter 5: Elders' Perceptions of Anishinaabe Life

This chapter examines the discussions and summary of findings. As a qualitative method, this study was conducted through an Indigenous method of storytelling and I expect that the emerging themes will be interpreted from the point of view of the reader; I only hope that my innate point of view is also appreciated. The themes discussed in this chapter include the interconnectedness of the many relationships that are interconnected to an Aboriginal worldview such as our relationship with family, community, the natural world and of course the self. These relationships were also embedded in a traditional Indigenous education system whereby the learning occurred on a daily basis as part of a lifestyle where the children learned holistically from their family, but most importantly from the Elders. Other themes that emerged include language, culture and a sense of belonging. These themes were examined in the literature review such as language, culture and the relationships we have with our families, community and land, but equally important is how we form a distinct identity that connects us to our culture.

Building Relationships

“The wisdom of the Elders is central to cultural learning according to Aboriginal perspective. Elders are the “Keepers of Knowledge,” and it is their guidance that Aboriginal people seek as they strive for balance in their relationships with the Creator, the natural world, other people and themselves” (WNCP, 2000, p. 5).

From generation to generation, the Elders as Knowledge keepers have passed on to succeeding generation's traditions and knowledge that have sustained Aboriginal people over the centuries. Spiritual, rational and empirical knowledge transmitted through Aboriginal languages and the oral traditions continue to illuminate the path

defined by the laws of relationships, which promote mino-pimatisiwin (a good life). Through these relationships, Aboriginal children learn cultural understandings to develop a personal identity through participatory practices with others and the natural environment. This knowledge, if continued into the classroom must be respectful of Indigenous worldviews to help Aboriginal students succeed. (Absolon, 2011; Kanu, 2002; Kirkness, 1998; Toulouse, 2008; WNCP, 2000).

Mino Ode Ikwe explained that you have to know where you belong in order to come to terms with your identity, for example if someone asks me, *“who are you? Well...my identity is how I define who I am”*, so in order to know this I need to reflect and learn about myself. An aspect of ourselves that is in some way important to us and a part of our personal story.

Gift that Enable Learning

“The freedom and strength of the individual is the strength of the group. } The individual does not form an identity in opposition to the group but recognizes the group as relatives included in his or her own identity” – Eber Hampton, Chicksaw Nation, Oklahoma, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (1993, p. 279) (as quoted in WNCP, 2000, p. 7).

Within the Aboriginal teachings, it is believed that “each person is born sacred and complete” (WNCP 2000). At birth Gitchi Manitou, the Creator gives each person gift(s) such as their body and to use that body in a respectful way. In most cases, a person is given many abilities that the Elders call “gifts” where each person is given talents, and strengths to be discovered, developed and shared. One of the great lessons of the Sacred Circle is that all human beings can acquire gifts in all of the symbolic directions (Johnston, 2008; Tobacco, 1989). At an early age we are taught to get strength from

within the body that Gitchi Manitou has provided for us and to recognize that we have instinctive knowledge. In our traditional education system, knowledge was earned and through stories, a person would learn to understand the meaning in the story, which correlated to beliefs and moral choices. It was the responsibility of the person to attain direction and learn to their full capacity. According to Johnston (2008), each person developed individually based on his or her gifts,

To foster individuality and self-growth children and youth were encouraged to draw their own inferences from the stories. No attempt was made to impose upon them views. The learner learned according to his capacity, intellectually and physically. Some learned quickly and broadly; others more slowly and with narrower scope. Each according to his gifts (p. 70).

Through the teachings, an individual would learn about their physical self, their gifts of talent and how those gifts enabled their learning. The first phase of developing identity knowledge came from the first teachers, which were the parents, as well as other relationships in the family and community such as the knowledge keepers. Although Aboriginal children are taught about their value at an early age, all the teachings they received were diminished when they were sent to residential schools, Ziigwan Waabigwan Ikwe shared how her experience in the schools changed how she perceived herself:

As a child I remember being happy and having fun, but when I went to the residential school, I became different. I didn't talk much, I guess I became withdrawn as I began to lose any confidence I had. Everything I thought I knew about my culture was wrong or at least that was what I was told...so I became ashamed of who I was, an Indian. I was even ashamed of my family and didn't want to be with them. This experience affected my life negatively in the way I did things throughout my life. When things bothered me, I kept them bottled in and now I know that wasn't good. All those feelings of anger just made me hate myself when I should have been thankful to the creator for being alive.

The negative experience at residential schools shaped the lives and direction for Aboriginal students with many of them spending most of their lives in the school with the exception of going home for the holidays, Nagamo Bineshiy expressed her experience this way, “I spent ten years at the school and when I finally left, I was disconnected from my family...it was like we were strangers’. This was a common experience for most students who were indoctrinated in the Western perspective. It was not uncommon for students to never go home because the home environment had become foreign to them compared to the ways they were taught in the schools, so many did not have a sense of belonging. Like many students, Nibaa Mahkwa explains how he felt confused about himself:

After residential school, I really didn't know who I was. Why I prayed to someone on a cross. I wanted to be white. I rejected the idea of being an Aboriginal person so in a way I rejected my family, my roots. Years later I was reintroduced to the sweat lodge, so I started attending ceremonies and realized I had to find myself, follow certain cultural practices to rediscover my culture and who I was meant to be. My life changed for the better when I embraced my culture. Now I know I am Anishinaabe and I am proud of that, I made sure my children were proud of themselves too, even when they faced struggles in school such as racism.

The goal of residential schools was to convert Aboriginal children to Christianity and force them to pray to an entity to which they had no connection. This process of forced assimilation is directly related to the loss of identity, parenting, language, and family relationships and of course the educational gap that exists in schools today (RCAP, 1995). Dikikan Anang explained how his grandparents were fundamental in his development of a positive identity and how they immersed him in cultural practices despite his residential school experience,

It wasn't until I was much older that I realized how much my family supported me ... you know, I wasn't learning my culture at the residential school... well no one was I guess, but...my parents and grandparents being traditional decided that

they could teach me whenever I came home...I especially remember going home in the summer and going to ceremonies. It was hard too, you know...because I couldn't say anything about it when I went back to school, so I had to lie about what I did in the summer or I would get into trouble. I never questioned my parents about this...I just did what they told me; anyway they knew what they were doing. It was confusing at first, but as I got older it helped me understand who I was...I guess I didn't feel so lost when I left that school...I visited some old people, those are the ones that taught me to be a proud Anishinaabe man, but it wasn't an easy road.

The manner in which a person learns or gains knowledge about oneself is in connection to our relationship with the land and our relatives (Cajete, 1998). This knowledge is attained through our relationship with our family, participating in ceremonies, our observation of the world and interacting with nature. Nagamo Bineshiy “believes that the traditional ways should not be forgotten, because the tradition of the seven teachings make us who we are as Anishinaabe people.” The teachings govern our behaviors to maintain a balanced life, which is the basis for developing a sense of self-worth and good character. Nagano Bineshiy expressed that it only takes one negative experience to have a powerful, lasting effect:

My family was quite poor given that my parents had so many children, so I had to wear hand me down clothes and the other children would tease me, but the teachers didn't do anything about this. I think they looked down on me too. I was a shy kid to begin with ... so this experience made things worse. I lost any confidence I may have had and struggled with the schoolwork, this is the way it was most of the time through school. Always just barely passing and I didn't think I could do any better. Years later when I was about thirteen years old, I was walking home one day and I met this old woman who stopped to talk to me. She asked me about my family, but I think she already knew which family I came from. Anyway, she told me to ask my parents if I could go to her place and help her clean up her house. My parents said it was okay, and to make a long story short...it was this Elder who taught me some of our traditions. This is when I started to feel better about myself, but it sure didn't happen overnight. Because ... there were times I thought about quitting school, but I didn't.

For many students, self-esteem provides them the connection to live in balance in the

four directions of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual worlds. If these views are respected in the educational setting, more and more Aboriginal students would have a sense of belonging and feel more connected to the school environment (Toulouse, 2008).

Family and Community Connections

Indigenous Knowledge thus embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing knowledge. (Battiste, 2002, p. 14)

The relationship with family and community is essential to developing a positive identity and educational success. Developing our identity comes from being in a respectful relationship with one another, especially in the family, clan, community and nation. Within our communities, the families or clans provide mutual support that enabled each person to be strong individually or within the family. In a sense, the freedom and strength of the individual will strengthen the group by recognizing the group as relatives within their own identity. Historically the family or clan is responsible for anyone within his or her family and to ensure that everyone's basic needs were addressed. If a situation was not dealt with, then the problem would extend to the community or nation to be resolved. In other words, the group agrees on rules that enable cooperation and group strength (Steinhauer, 2001; Wilson, 2008; WNCP, 2000).

According to Miskwaa Waagosh,

From an early age I spent a great deal of time with immediate and extended family, they were my first teachers...they taught me to speak Anishinaabemowin and that the support of family is very important to our survival... that support really counts if you want to finish something you are doing...you know, like finishing school. When I went to residential school, they discouraged my family to come visit...I didn't know they would come to ask for me instead they (school staff) let me think that my family abandoned me. You know, this made me feel really bad about myself.

The mutual support is not only essential to developing identity, but what is equally important is the encouragement you get from family and Dikikan Anang explains it this way:

I didn't have a good experience in school, so I was just waiting to turn sixteen years old because I wanted to quit so badly. So... that's what I did and then I went looking for a job, but it was hard to find a good job. I guess that's why my family didn't discourage me...they wanted me to learn from this experience, so when I said I wanted to go back to school they encouraged me to go back ...I didn't feel any pressure, so I tried my best knowing that...well you know, I wouldn't be judged if I failed.

There was a time when the older family members taught the younger generation about their family history, traditions, community, language and economy along with the success and failures. The children were taught to dream and have aspirations (Deloria, 1997), unfortunately many children would never have the experience of spending time with Elders, not to mention not hearing the stories of their family or community. Another aspect to hearing the stories is that the children missed out in learning to view the world from an Aboriginal perspective. Nagamo Bineshiy shared her thoughts about the intergenerational transmission of information,

I think that I missed out on learning about my community because I didn't have the opportunity to hear stories from my Kokum or Mishom, and other family members, that's what I missed – getting to know my family – I guess I didn't know what I missed until I had children, now I wonder about that...would it have made a difference in my life? I think the most important thing about learning, is to learn alongside other people but to also learn from them. When I listen to other people, it opens my eyes to another way of seeing things, that's why people need each other you know.

Families, extended family members, community and nations provide one another with support and identity. Families are able to share cultural knowledge or skills with the greater community such as protocol or ceremonial practice. Developing identity relies on

cultural histories such as the clan system, the seven teaching and traditional practices. Part of developing an identity is to recognize that we are born with abilities that the Elders refer to as gifts that form our personality through our everyday life experience(s) (Johnston, 1992). Prior to contact and the inception of residential schools, there was mutual support of all community members in beliefs, values and building relationships for a stronger community (RCAP, 1996).

However, the residential school system disrupted Aboriginal families and severed the ties that bound Native families and individual communities (Chute, 1998; RCAP, 1996). The residential school experience impacted participant's relationships with parents and family members, particularly in parenting skills, language and cultural practices.

Nibaa Mahkwa explained that his relationship with family was severed the day he attended residential school,

I really didn't see my family very much after that day, except for the holidays like Christmas and summer. After a while I didn't go home at all because my family separated and whatever relationships we had became strained by alcoholism. The strong connection that existed seemed to disappear and there was a feeling of not belonging anymore; a feeling of shame. I didn't even see my sister ...yet we were in the same residential school. It's ironic that the school wanted us to assimilate...to be Christian, when my mother was already a Christian...and yet this so called good intent tore my family apart.

Due to the severed family ties mentioned earlier as a result of the residential school system, it is more important now to celebrate family. According to Melnechenko and Horseman (1998), there is a strong correlation to success when the family is involved in their child's education.

Living in Harmony with Nature

Aboriginal thought and identity are centred on the environment in which Aboriginal people live. As Aboriginal people experienced the forces of an ecosystem, Aboriginal worldviews, languages, consciousness, and order arose (Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 252).

Our relationship with the natural world provides gifts of life and place where we must live in harmony with the laws of nature in order to be sustained by Mother Earth (Fitznor, 1998). Aboriginal teachings believe that the natural world has its own laws that must be respected if we are to live in harmony and be sustained by Mother Earth. The natural world provides the people with a sense of place and identity tied to the land/water that has given the people life. We learned to respect nature by listening and observing, asemaa (tobacco) was offered when an animal was taken for sustenance. Even in death the animal was respected in the manner in which it was divided for family and community distribution. Resources were respected by keeping the waters clean and caring for the land by not depleting its resources such as minerals, trees and animals. The Elders share stories to teach the younger generation about safety on the land and that it is necessary to live within the laws of nature. Historically, we identify ourselves by the land that we inhabit and the relationship we develop by living in harmony with the natural world. Within the laws with the natural world, there are concepts of sustenance, sense of place and harmony (Battiste, 2002; Deloria, 1999; Fitznor, 2012).

Part of our identity is developing values and personal responsibility in learning to live with nature. It is important to know the traditional territory and land patterns of our ancestors not only for survival, but the spiritual effects associated with this learning process in knowing personal identity. Aboriginal people have always had a close

connection to the land through the many stories that intertwine humans, nature, animals and the spirit world.

Long ago, Creation stories told about how Aboriginal people came to be the first people on the land. These stories tell about time; land/water creatures; the people; place and belonging. There are family and community stories associated to ancestral lands that show importance of a place for the people, a gift from the Gitchi Manitou. Ancestral land places a feeling of home or belonging, such as a community or neighborhood. Many Aboriginal people realize that the earth is sacred and as such, have to live within this landscape respectfully and in balance with the animals and plants. A sense of place includes narratives about clans, animals and plants, a semblance to nature (Battiste 1998; Cajete, 2004).

Dikikan Anang shared his experience of living in balance with nature, and how he developed his knowledge and skills from his family so he would know how to survive; he stated,

Living on and with the land is part of the traditional knowledge we learn throughout our lives. You see, when I was young I didn't spend too much time in a classroom like the children today, our classroom was outside and we learned by watching what our parents did, so we came to understand the land this way. My parents and grandparents showed us how to take care of plants and all living things. You know, they would say that we are all connected and that we need things from the earth to survive, so we should take care of it in a good way. Well...I remember the old people telling us stories about how we came to this earth and that we can't separate ourselves from the rest of the world. I want to do my best for the sake of my grandchildren.

He goes on to say that his parents taught him to value his relationship with the land

“makes me feel good in the sense that I feel connected to this land, and I don't mean just the dirt, I mean when I go in the bush where my parents took me, I know I belong here, this is my home.

This relationship with the land is equally important to Mino Ode Ikwe as she talked about the summer camps and picking berries, but how her family understands the lay of the land by knowing exactly where to go for certain berries, or knowing when the wild rice was ready to be picked. She mentioned how her father,

Every summer our family would pack up all supplies we would need to go camping as we followed berry-picking season. But you know, almost all of the families did this and yet we would hardly ever see them once we were in bushes. I remember my dad boarding up some of the windows on our house, I guess because we were going to be away for a while. But we had a neighbor, this old man lived close by and he would check our place when we were away. My mom would invite him to our place to eat sometimes and after supper he would tell us stories. Anyway, I was talking about camping, I really liked doing this and learning about the plants, but we only took what we needed, never more.

The findings indicate that Aboriginal people have always been aware of the interdependent relationship with all living things. There is a sense of responsibility to take care of the earth, for the next generation and that is what Mino Ode Ikwe was alluding to when she said, “we only took what we needed”. According to Ziigwan Waabigwan, “from an early age, our parents taught us about survival and that we had to learn to live within those boundaries of a good life”. Ziigwan Waabigwan understands the importance of those boundaries as she shares a story that her dad told her about a time he went hunting alone.

My dad liked telling stories, but this one was different. He told me that when I was little, just around the time I was learning to walk, we hardly had anything to eat. I guess it wasn't a good year for berries or harvesting. Anyway I guess he decided to go hunting and my uncle couldn't go with him right away, but they would meet him the next day. I think they had a favorite spot where they met. Well the story goes like this, my dad made a fire at his camp and he woke up in the middle of the night with the sound of wolves. As it turned out, the wolves were hungry too and checked out where he was camping, so my dad spent the rest of the night up in a tree. So when my uncles got there they thought something had happened because the wolves messed up the camp. He never went hunting by himself again; I guess he learned a lesson the hard way and sometimes that's the way we learn if we

don't listen.

Having a strong connection to the land is a very important part of the learning process, and Nibaa Mahkwa shares how his experience in University was a positive experience, but believes that this was due to having an Aboriginal professor,

You need to reconnect to the land, that's what I learned from an Aboriginal professor at University; she took us to the land and discussed our work in the Tipi. We sat around and went back to basics. The other students in my class also discovered ... that this experience made a difference in the way we think and relate to things around us. You know the land is a living entity that shows us this. We just have to listen to the birds; sitting in a Western classroom will not do this where the space is square while the Tipi is round like the way we are all connected. There was no competition between us in the tipi, unlike in the classroom ... we were all equal. The Western system teaches us in linear steps and traditionally we learn from the land and place.

Further to what Nibaa Mahkwa was saying, we need to have that relationship with land or place, even if it's not our homeland. The experience can provide an appreciation for the way our ancestors lived with the land, despite the changes in our environment.

School Experience

The residential school system and the educational experience since then for the most part did not instill a proud identity in Aboriginal children; in most cases it had the opposite effect with children being ashamed of their identity. Aboriginal children grew up not knowing their language or customs of their culture. The negative school experience has been and continues to impact families on their relationship with the school system (Milloy, 1999; Young, 1997). This has affected family's intergenerationally, thus creating barriers to improve the home to school relationship.

Ziigwan Waabigwan shared her personal experience with schools as a student, but also as a parent and how her experience affected her relationship with the school.

My experience in residential school was difficult and I never spoke up about anything because I was scared of the repercussions. I think that's why I have low-esteem and besides, you know...the people at the school did our thinking for us, so it didn't matter what I thought about anything, I just listened to what was being said. The education we got was not very good because when I left the school I thought I was smart, but I didn't even understand how to have children ...and there I was pregnant. When my children started school, because of what happened to me I didn't trust schools and I never felt good about going there, so it wasn't important on what was happening...I just knew I had to send my kids to school, that was it.

This was not uncommon for young adults leaving the residential school; many had low self-esteem and were confused about their identity. Many were unprepared for the outside world and did not fit in upon returning to their community. The students did not learn much about their culture while in school other than a negative representation as Young (1997) reveals, "I hated sitting in the classroom when my teachers presented anything that had to do with Aboriginal people because it was negative" (p. 17). Dikikan Anang recalled a similar experience whereby he did not know much about Aboriginal history and that it was omitted from his education;

You know, I never heard anything good about Aboriginal people when I was in school and so I dropped out of school as soon as I could. When I was in the residential school, I learned the ways of the white people that were teaching us, so I thought that was the way our people lived too, but I was wrong and soon found out when I went home for a while...but, I didn't stay cause life at home was not good, there was drinking and fighting ...so I left home again. Because of this way I lived, it was hard to build a good relationship with the school once my kids got old enough.

With the closure of residential schools, Aboriginal students were sent to public schools where they reached higher levels of education, but problems persisted. Aboriginal students had to adjust to a new system and often faced discrimination by other students and some cases by the teachers. Aki talked about her experience in a public school

When I left the residential school, I attended the public school off the reserve but there were only a few Aboriginal students at the school. I don't think the other students liked us being there ...cause they called us names like savages, drunks and other names. That was hard you know ...but the teachers didn't say anything when this happened. We didn't learn very much about Aboriginal people, I remember a teacher saying that Aboriginal people are lazy and drunks. There was lots of discrimination at school that we had to put up with. I remember thinking of quitting...my parents told me not to give up. They knew I wanted to go to University so that's what kept me going...their help and support.

Stories such as Nagamo Bineshiy are stories of perseverance. But through exclusion of Aboriginal history in the school system, Aboriginal people were invisible to most Canadians and discriminatory practices persisted (Milloy, 1999; Sewell, 2001). However, in recent years, circumstances have improved with the inclusion of Aboriginal content in school curriculums. It is the teachers' responsibility to put students in contact with great subjects, but mostly in Western tradition, when the teachers should ensure a wide range of content is represented to capture the interest of diverse populations.

Where do I Fit In?

With colonialism came a negative effect on Aboriginal people as government policies dictated a legal definition of the people and the way Aboriginal people lived as a family and a community (RCAP, 1996). Aboriginal people in Canada have been identified by many names and many of those names are ones given to us either by government or other people, Nibaa Mahkwa states, "I don't like the word Indian because it is a title given to us by the government to fit in the Indian Act". We are Ojibway people; we are a part of the Algonquian Nation. Nibaa Mahkwa said that he didn't think about his identity when he was younger, it was a way of life passed on from his mother, grandparents and other family members. He says that he did notice later in life that,

I noticed that appearances influence the identity that other people place on us as Aboriginal people. But other Aboriginal people can be harder on us as their own people. One thing I learned is that people will decide who we are based on our appearance, and not even knowing us. A good example on this is if an Aboriginal person keeps their hair short, well ...they assume that person doesn't know their culture and therefore can't be traditional. You know, not everyone has to have long hair with braids to be culturally proficient. This is not a determining factor of cultural practice or the education a person has. In fact it can be completely the opposite, so we need to be careful about our assumptions.

Dikikan Anang shared that living a balanced life today means that you need to fit into the Aboriginal and mainstream societies, “this is part of the challenge our children face when they are trying to get an education, are the schools or teachers ready for this. Maybe that’s why Aboriginal children are not succeeding in school”.

Mino Ode Ikwe said that people make assumptions about her because of her religious beliefs and that going to school was a struggle in the sense that she tried to fit in too:

I believe in our traditions, but I was brought up a Christian and attend church regularly. But it doesn't mean that I don't have knowledge about our culture...or that I don't believe in it, because I do. I think that it's important for children to learn their language and know about their cultural practices. The children need to know this...how else will they know where they belong. The way people see others can be very damaging, and I have seen this happen right here in my community. When I went to University, some people quit talking to me because I attended a white institution; it was almost like I betrayed them or that I thought I was better than them when I was still the same person. The fact was that I wanted to do something to help the children in schools that was why I went to University.

The reality for many people, in some cases due to residential schools is that feeling of not belonging to either world (Milloy, 1999). The struggle to fit in is just as detrimental as the discrimination a person faces from both societies. Miskwaa Waagosh shared that he returned home after leaving the residential school, but his experience wasn't what he expected,

I went home for awhile you know and I guess I had some expectation for the way life would be, I guess I was thinking it would be like before I was taken to residential school...but it was different. I knew I didn't belong for some reason, maybe a gut feeling. In some ways I was treated different by people like I was a white person or something. Of course I was different...who wouldn't be after what I went through in that school, but deep down I was still Anishinaabe...you know. But I soon found out that I didn't fit in with non-Aboriginal too. I worked in a lot of places and then I had a family, that's when I decided to come home. I wanted my children to know their family and a place to call home. That's one good thing I did (laughs).

The colonial relationship from the past continues to impact the well-being of students', family and community. It is only in the last decade that Aboriginal people have been able to uncover the intergenerational impact and family disruption (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996). The road to healing has also been a difficult journey in overcoming the trauma on an ongoing basis as a long-term goal rather than as a needed basis. It is also difficult to work on the positive changes when there are negative biases in the way media represents Aboriginal people, so Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people grow up with a biased view that all Aboriginal people must be inferior. All of these events have had a negative influence on the education, culture and language of Aboriginal people.

Language

Language embodies the way a society thinks. Through learning and speaking a particular language, an individual absorbs the collective thought process of a people (Little Bear in Battiste; 2000, p. 78).

According to the United Nations, Aboriginal people have an inherent right to speak a language and belong to a language family, however this right is one of the most ignored given that schools offering Aboriginal language courses has been mostly in the last decade (AFN, 1992; Battiste, RCAP, 1996).

A strong sense of identity was maintained through Aboriginal languages. The ability to retain a language was connected to its use in the home with the family as the first teachers, “The family also plays an important role in preserving languages. If a language is not spoken at home, its chances of survival are limited (RCAP, 1996, vol. 5, ch.6). With the children’s forced removal from their homes to attend residential school, the loss of language contributed to the loss of identity (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996).

For many children, Anishinaabemowin was their first language at home until they attended school and then they had to learn English. When the students started school, they faced language barriers making their life at school more complicated. The first days at school were most likely the most complicated upon entering a new environment as Nibaa Mahkwa explains:

When I started school, I only spoke Ojibway and on my first day of school, my older sisters coached me on what to say in English. I remember the kids laughing at me because I guess I didn’t know what the teacher was asking me, so ... I just said what I had rehearsed and you know ... I didn’t know any better and the teacher was angry with me. I remember not fitting in at school and just wanting to go home...I felt humiliated and I guess confused because I didn’t know what was going on.

Children were forbidden to speak their language and this undermined their self-esteem and their relationship with their parents. The government and churches were very strategic in this plan, knowing that killing off the languages would sever the connection between children and parents, thus being more successful in their assimilation process (AFN, 1994; RCAP, 1996). The assimilation process not only severed families, but entire communities. Nibaa Mahkwa goes on to explain,

My mother only spoke Anishinaabemowin, so as the years went on I was losing my fluency making it hard to have a conversation with her. We were forbidden to speak our language, I guess this forced us to learn English so we would be

disconnected from our families...I think that was the plan and for a while it worked. They almost succeeded, but I was one of the lucky ones, because I regained most of my language, well...maybe not as good as it was before, but good enough to speak to my family.

These early experiences with language also influence the educational attainment of the students. As Atleo and Fitznor (2010) stated, “successful Aboriginal students are associated with early-life experiences of themselves in languages and cultural contexts” (p. 13). Further to this is that early life language experience endorses lifelong achievements regardless of the obstacles the person encounters (Atleo and Fitznor, 2010, RCAP, 1996). This statement resonates with the experiences of Nagamo Bineshiy, whereby language in her early life positioned her to understand the value system in knowing her culture,

I have to say that language was strong in my family; my Kookum spoke several languages and instilled a strong conviction of language in all us children. In some ways, I guess it was expected that we would flourish. A high expectation ...something we didn't experience in school. You know though ...despite that, I always wanted to do well in everything I did. I grew up having a strong foundation not only in language, but also our way of life, you know...mino-pimatisiwin. Some of my friends weren't as lucky as they barely speak our language today.

The value system of mino-pimatisiwin was integral to everyday life and the development of relationships with all living things. The following quote from the Assembly of First Nations clearly defines how language represents a way of life for Aboriginal people:

Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other...It gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group... Now, if you destroy our languages you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit, and the order of things. Without our languages, we will cease to exist as separate people. (AFN, 1992, p.14)

Seven Teachings of the Anishinaabeg Philosophy

Our Creator taught us all that was wise and good and, then, gave us a language that we could pass on this knowledge to our children so that they might be able to survive and flourish (Battiste, 1986, p.).

The Seven teachings are also known as the seven sacred laws are the teachings given to the Anishinaabeg by the Seven Grandfathers to guide the Anishinaabe people:

- (1) To cherish knowledge is to know **WISDOM**.
- (2) To know **LOVE** is to know peace.
- (3) To honour all of the Creation is to have **RESPECT**.
- (4) **COURAGE** is to face the foe with integrity.
- (5) **HONESTY** in facing a situation is to have courage.
- (6) **HUMILITY** is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation.
- (7) **TRUTH** is to know all of these things. (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 64).

Central to this worldview is an emphasis on how these set of teachings affect the family and community on their behavior toward each other, as well as their belief in the Aboriginal value systems. The gifts of these teachings were designed to bring balance to the people so they could live the good life – mino-pimatisiwin (Johnston, 1992; Toulouse, 2008).

In order to bring balance to our families and communities, we must remember to practice these teachings and pass them on to the children. Each of these teachings must be used collectively, but we must remember “that for each gift there is an opposite, as evil is the opposite of good”. From an early age and in their daily lives, the children were taught about the good and evil. They learned about these ideas in order to understand how these teachings can influence a person’s character, and to keep us in balance for a good life. According to Benton-Benai (1988), the teachings he shared from the concept of Seven

Grandfathers Anishinaabe principles of living a good life, included teaching children to be aware of the malevolent side to every person's character:

He is with you ...do not seek him.
 Do not wish to know him, but understand him

You will walk the path of peace ... he will not.
 You are kind ... he is not.
 You are humble ... he is not.
 You are generous ... he is not.
 You seek the good in things ... he does not.
 You shall respect others ...he will not.
 You will seek the goodness in others ... he will not.
 You are the light ... he is the darkness.
 Know that he is with you, understand him, but do not seek him (p. 47).

Nibaa Mahkwa talked about the value of these seven teachings, and the seven character flaws, "Most people do not talk about the seven character flaws such as greed and jealousy. People tend to sugar coat things to the positive side". He goes on to say,

We need to teach children the two sides so they can recognize and be aware of their own behavior. Before I started school, I was learning about these values from my family and that being boastful was not a good characteristic. My grandparents spent a lot of time with us children told us stories in the oral tradition way of teaching people about the wonders of the world, they taught us about life, ourselves and others. Stories help us develop a balanced view to understand, respect and appreciate our culture and others while promoting positive relationships with people within our communities, the natural world and religious practices.

Cultural teachings were forbidden in residential school and banned in the communities as part of the assimilation process. The children were forbidden from speaking their language, which was integral to their identity. The old ways of knowing were lost, or at least that is what most people believed, but in fact the culture went underground into hibernation until such a time when the Anishinaabe people would be ready (Benton Benai, 1988). However, prior to the resurgence we see today, many aspects of the

Aboriginal culture were forgotten. Now that the Aboriginal communities have awakened, there is now a resurgence to learn and follow cultural practice; Miskwaa Waagosh explained his views this way,

When I was a child, practicing our culture was a part of our daily lives, the teachings were a part of everything we did, and so we didn't really think about it, it was a part of our learning. All of this changed around the time I went to residential school, our culture was banned cause they (church) said that it was a bad influence on us kids. Kids today do not realize how lucky they are...they get to learn about their culture, but they need to get out of the class to really learn.

As I previously discussed in the research method, I believe that this study has been an extension of myself as an Anishinaabe Ikwe. The research indicates that the themes discussed are integral to forming a strong identity through cultural experience(s) to have a sense of belonging, but these cultural experiences are not limited to these themes and it should be noted that cultural experiences can occur in many settings such as on traditional lands, cultural camps, rural and/or urban communities, and schools. More and more, we are seeing that schools are infusing cultural components into the classroom or whole school such as the seven teachings. Other related studies by researchers and scholars have also revealed that building on relationships from an early age is undeniably important. Through this research, I have also come to understand how the family and community relationships have changed over time from living a traditional lifestyle embedded in oral traditions to that of the Western perspective and that more relationship building between school and families is needed to nurture an environment of lifelong learning and success.

Chapter 6: Anishinaabewiwinan- Anishinaabe Ways

In this study, stories were the foundation of the research as an Indigenous methodology and a critical feature of Indigenous oral traditions that reveals a history; cultural practice; a lived experience and a connection to the past. This method of storytelling is a valuable method of collecting authentic data and gaining insight into the Elders Kaandossiwin (ways of knowing), a way that we learned as Aboriginal people and was interrupted by the residential system as documented in the literature review. I honour these stories and the Elders that were willing to share their lived experiences, and to keep alive the orality of our traditions I was able to interpret through my innate viewpoint as an Anishinaabe Ikwe (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

The following themes are based on interpretations/findings related to how we can build and/or improve the relationship between Aboriginal parents, students and teachers for the benefit and success of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students in search of knowledge and success (remember that success can be interpreted differently by many) are often confronted by a Euro-Western system of education. Prior to the past decade, there have been challenges in bringing an Indigenous worldview or methodologies into an education system that has been less than kind or respectful of Aboriginal peoples. The Elders/Knowledge Keepers pointed out that we can no longer accept less than a full acceptance in the education system, we are not a substitute or filler in the curriculum, while it has been well documented that our ancestral knowledge is being carried into the future (Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2000a; Kovach, 2005).

The main themes that emerged from the data are imbedded in our traditions and the following themes, along with sub-themes are discussed in more detail as they relate to helping students succeed at school.

Elder Involvement

Parents and family have diverse roles to play in their children's learning. They are the first educators in the home; the central partners with the school and the chief advocates and key decision-makers for children and youth (CCL, 2009, p. 19).

The Elders – Knowledge Keepers shared their life experiences and through these stories provided some insight that an Anishinaabe foundation is rooted in the traditions of the family, community, language, and ceremonies, but also that key relationships are integral to the good life. The Knowledge keepers were adamant that in order to close the gap for Aboriginal students, the education system(s) needs to enhance their programs to be inclusive to Aboriginal worldviews (Battiste, 2002, RCAP, 1996)

Aboriginal Elders, cultural resource people, and Indigenous scholars believe that to identify, to comprehend, and to nourish the learning spirit requires educators to recognize that all learners consist of “spirit, heart, mind and body” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2008, p. 3)

An educational environment that honours the culture, language and worldview of the Aboriginal student is critical. Schools need to meaningfully represent and include Aboriginal people's contributions, innovations and inventions. Aboriginal students require a learning environment that honours who they are and where they have come from. These strategies nurture the self-esteem – the positive interconnection between the physical, emotional-mental, intellectual and spiritual realms – of Aboriginal students (Toulouse, 2008, p. 1).

The Elders discussed how they did not learn about their history when they were in school, but that students today should all learn about it so that they do not feel inferior like they did, as Ziigwan Waabigwan shared

In school I thought we had no history because I never heard anything about it, but I guess it was when I got a little older...I wondered. You know... the reason was that our teachers didn't even want to know it, let alone want us to know we had a history and so we only learned the white man's ways. I guess to them, it had no value, just like we were not valued in residential school.

This was further explained by Dikikan Anang who is a traditional Anishinaabe man. He believed that schools need to work with the community, families and Elders to ensure that they are including Indigenous perspectives when they are planning their lessons. He went on to say that,

As an Elder, I have been invited by teachers and schools to work with them when they are planning cultural events. I have gone with many groups of students over the years to cultural camps and sweat lodges. Going to these events is the first time for many of these kids, and you should see them...they light up when they get to participate. This is what learning should be about, igniting that fire that is in all of us...that's why I do this. So you see, that is why it is important to go outside to learn and it should be fun. More and more schools are doing this now and we need to help all of them reach this way of learning.

Elders continue to play an important role in our culture and communities as keepers of traditional knowledge. As knowledge keepers of history, ceremonies, language and stories they are often sought out as advisors and important resource that should be valued (Ermine, 1995; Fitznor, 2012). According to Battiste (2002) in her research, the Elders/Knowledge keepers are akin to libraries given the wealth of knowledge they hold within their given territories. For this reason, it only makes sense that involving Elders in school programs would benefit everyone from the students, parents, teachers and community.

As suggested throughout this study, the education system needs to find a way of valuing Elders knowledge and insight about Aboriginal students and their way of learning. The involvement of Elders can only build positive relationships between home and school, as well as act as a liaison to build a good relationship between the student and teachers.

Meaningful Connections

Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support and relationships, (Melnechenko and Horseman, 1998, p. 9)

The importance of relationships in forming connections with Aboriginal students is critical for all educators to support and nurture the lifelong learning process. What is evident in this study is that the Elders are saying that educators' need to build a relationship with the parents and Elders to provide support in and out of the classroom or school.

The relationship between students and their teachers requires interpersonal skills that demonstrate respect, trust, and compassion while being broad and flexible. Approaches that include listening to the student to understand what matters to them most is another important factor for school success. The Elders believe that effective and positive student-teacher relationships are characterized by the following positive practices that they have encountered through their positions as Elders working in the school system.

1) Initiate activities outside the classroom, not just going on field trips, but more in-depth teachings that allow the students to include the local Aboriginal community as part of their learning. Students will develop a positive attitude about school when their culture is reflected in the lesson plans and appreciated in the school.

- 2) Allow opportunities for students to express their thoughts/feelings in a safe environment – to have a voice and know that what they think matters. Be genuine, it is essential to a good relationship and students are astute to this.
- 3) Establish clear but attainable expectations and encourage students to work towards goals that are achievable. Teachers that set guidelines demonstrate a method of fairness, not favouritism and in turn will earn the respect of their students.
- 4) Teachers need to build trust by getting to know each student, connect with the students by showing sensitivity, humour and warmth. Allow opportunities in the classroom for students to share something about themselves. This can be done through a sharing circle or stories. Be open to communication.

Some of the Elders in this study did not have a positive experience in school since they attended residential schools that were designed to assimilate Aboriginal children. However, they were willing to share their knowledge on this topic based on their experience as parents and grandparents who have seen the changes in schools over the years. According to Ziigwan Waabigwan, “While working in schools years ago, I noticed that Aboriginal students were not learning about their history, but now I see that changing with my grandchildren who attend ceremonies, so we are making progress”.

Teachers need to enhance their teaching practices that utilize a wholistic worldview that reflects the Aboriginal students. According to Kanu (2002) when teachers incorporate the practice of including Indigenous knowledge into their classroom, it contributes to Aboriginal students succeeding. In addition to developing lessons and implementing curriculum expectations, teachers need to develop communicative techniques that establish favorable relationships with students. In fact, relationship building is essential to a positive classroom environment that is more conducive to learning and educators are aware that students’ achievements will depend on the influence of the family.

Sharing the Responsibility

The literature review and the findings in this study reveal that the family and community are essential to educational success, given that they are the first teachers and provide a relationship of support. The Elders in this study reiterated this sentiment and believe from their own experience that the support and encouragement they received from their families made a difference and influenced their success in school. This points to the importance of enhancing the home - school relationships. When Miskwaa Waagosh talked about his relationship with his son, he stated,

I had to work hard to be a good parent because I didn't learn that in residential school, but I knew that I wanted to be involved in my son's education experience and so I made sure he knew that I was there to support him. I had to go back to the traditions; you know how the families looked after each other to make sure we were doing our best.

It was not uncommon years ago for families to set high expectations for their children given that education was as important then as it is now. Schools can enhance learning opportunities for their students by encouraging parent, Elders and community participation. When Mino Ode Ikwe spoke about her family, she stated,

My parents were quite influential on the choices I made, but they were also very supportive. So now I am a Kokum (grandmother) and I remember what my parents taught me about our values and beliefs, so I pass these teachings on to my grandchildren cause they don't learn about this school. It is also our responsibility to help take care of these young ones and to encourage them to do their best in school. You see, when you know that someone cares about what you do, you will strive to do your best.

In the Anishinaabe tradition, the Elders indicated that we must understand that all children are born sacred with gifts and therefore have the full potential to learn and take responsibility for their learning. Our families provided the learning opportunities and

Nibaa Mahkwa recalls a learning experience he had in an outdoor classroom,

We went out to land where a tipi was set up and we all sat in a circle inside there talking about our work. That was a really good feeling and I remember thinking, if only I had this experience when I was much younger, maybe I would have stayed in school. But I lost interest in school because I didn't see any value in what I was learning, but I learned from that experience. Now I encourage my children to do their best in whatever they want to do and they know that I will support them.

With the strong influence of the family on the child, schools need to build a better relationship so that the parents and community members are involved in their child's education at the school level. This is in line with the traditional worldview of raising a child where the whole community is responsible for all aspects of the child's learning and development. So teachers and schools need to develop or build on existing curricular strategies to promote this idea.

Teaching in a Meaningful Way

According to Manitoba Education (2003), the goal of curricula is that "It provides direction for the integration of Aboriginal perspectives within the various curricula taught in Manitoba classrooms (p. 2)". Although resources material is readily available, not all educators utilize the material(s) unless they employ instructional approaches that are inclusive. There has been a transformation in the past decade as more and more schools embrace an Indigenous worldview, but more work needs to be done to make education equitable for all students.

Prior to this, the Elders spoke about how Aboriginal history did not exist in the classroom when they were students, as though Aboriginal people had no history. Now the students are learning that the history of Aboriginal people is extensive and teachers need to be culturally responsive to meet the needs of their students. Miskwaa Waagosh talked

about the cultural programs offered in communities and school,

As a parent and community Elder, I know that students are given opportunities to attend cultural camps, sweat lodges and pick medicines. This is a good way for the students to learn about their culture and identity. Using these methods really helps the student understand the values and beliefs such as the seven teachings.

If schools, along with the teachers are going to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, then they too will need to expand their knowledge and learn about the history, culture, and social issues of Aboriginal peoples through teacher education programs (Kanu, 2005). Since 2008, faculties of education in Manitoba were mandated to establish a 3 credit hour pre-service course on Aboriginal perspective for teachers in training.

Although the Elders agree with the course being mandated, they feel that this course is not enough and that there continues to be a void given all the teachers that are already in the school system and didn't receive this training. Dikikan Anang Inini had this share,

When I was a young boy, even though I went to residential school, I spent a lot of time learning from my kokum and mishom. They told me many stories that immersed me in our cultural teachings. One thing that really stood out for me was this one time they told me it was up to me as to how or what I wanted to learn, they couldn't tell me what I needed to know, just that they could give me the teachings they knew. You know I wondered about that for awhile, but then it came to me...they wanted me to know that it was up to me to seek the knowledge I needed.

The Elders as advisors believe that teachers need to initiate their own learning journey to seek the knowledge like Dikikan Anang Inini described to be competent and that someone should not have to mandate them to learn. The Elders believe that many teachers take the time to prepare lessons on a variety of topics but for some reason, are reluctant to delve into Aboriginal material. This should not be the case, given the invaluable resources that are available to teachers, including the living resource of Elders. If teachers truly believe in lifelong learning for their students, then they need to walk the

talk so they can integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. The education system and Educators alike need to embrace the fact that Aboriginal history is in fact Canadian history, and therefore should be mandated to be embedded throughout the provincial curriculum, rather than a specific learning outcome which is simply a suggestion for teachers to include as part of their teaching.

Having relevant curriculum content and accommodating instructional approaches can also demonstrate an attitude of caring about students. Some of the teaching techniques that are commonly used in schools are listed below, but should not be limited to these few.

Medicine Wheel

Traditionally, the Anishinaabe people placed the foundational worldviews within a circle, which is a wholistic concept, framed as a medicine wheel, and that is a symbolic interpretation of the interconnectedness of life. Some Anishinaabe groups according to Williams (1989) prefer to use the term Pimatisiwin wheel as living a good life. Williams goes on to describe it this way,

The four directions, North, East, South, West, are represented respectively by the colors white, red, yellow and blue. Within these colours are the four races of Man: the White Man, the Red Man, the Yellow Race, and the Black Race, the four life-givers: air, food, sun and water; the four seasons: winter, spring, summer and fall; the four vices: greed, Apathy, jealousy, and resentment; the four moral principles: caring, vision, patience and reasoning (p. 49).

The concepts of the medicine wheel provided the teachings for individuals to make sense of their world and to live in harmony with a balanced life. The use of the medicine wheel

from an Anishinaabe perspective can nurture an understanding of the seven sacred teachings within the circle that can assist an individual to develop their gifts wholistically.

Sharing Circle

The sharing circle is a traditional technique that was used to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to speak when bringing groups of people together. This method was a respectful process with the purposes of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing. Participants are encouraged to speak not only from the mind, but also from the heart. Each person in the circle is given the opportunity to speak, but may pass if he/she desires (Fitznor, 1998).

According to the Elders in this study, the circle is an empowering process for many individuals who may not have had a voice in their past and through this safe process, they are able to articulate their story and know that those in the circle are listening and learning. It is also the responsibility of those listening to learn from each other and support each other. The time spent in the sharing circle is also a time for self-reflection and a reclaiming process on the direction that an individual takes on their life journey.

Storytelling

The method of storytelling has been around for years given that Aboriginal people are historically an oral society. Through this practice, stories can inform us about history, our communities, life lessons and appropriate behaviours (Fitznor, 2012). The oral

traditional teachings were transmitted by word from one generation to the next generation. Elders and other community members are a great resource to be invited to tell stories as a way of illuminating Aboriginal worldviews.

Storytelling is a very old custom, however educators should be aware that there are differences between stories depending if you want to use stories more for entertainment or those that are more focused on teaching about culture or ceremony (Mehl-Madrona (2007)). The Elders stated that stories were also utilized to teach about appropriate behaviours and how to live a balanced life. Unfortunately, this method of teaching is underutilized today, but the Elders felt that this method of teaching could be revitalized to address some of the issues surrounding the youth today.

Conclusion

While re-reviewing the data, some themes that emerged more prominently such as building relationships that support wholistic lifelong learning, without a healthy relationship between the students, family and school, success for Aboriginal students will be difficult to attain. Educators, along with the parents are the frontline teachers of students and need to facilitate the change in learning by following integral approaches. Building respectful relationships can help educators and students feel safe engaging in complicated and contentious conversation, but even the relationship building itself can be an important marker for students' sense of worth.

According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2009), the well being of Aboriginal people depends on their learning about their culture, language and traditions (RCAP, 1996). The Elders in this study went on to say that learning is a lifelong process,

a social process that comes from introspection, reflection, observation and the ability to apply knowledge in diverse context that is necessary to nurture the learning spirit (Battiste, 2002).

Questions for Further Study

Through this study, several themes emerged and only a few were discussed in detail. In the Aboriginal culture, we use stories to motivate others and thus create dialogue to discuss the many points of views and where we go from here. This study is a small sample with six individuals, each with a unique story and combined share some collective perspectives. I believe that there will be numerous other research studies, so the questions for further study will need to reflect where we have been on this topic and where is it that we want to go? Aboriginal education has moved forward and made progress in the past decade; if we want to continue on this lifelong journey of learning, we must continue to work together. We must focus on what is important to each community in connection to the relationships, philosophies, values, objectives and outcomes. In other words, what direction do we want to take in education for the next generation?

In closing, I would like to share the following,

Indigenous Knowledge is being revealed both nationally and internationally as an extensive and valuable knowledge system. It is not only a remedy to the continuing failure of the education system, but also the opening to understanding distinct knowledge's that the twenty-first century education must learn to operate in (Battiste in Villegas, Neugebauer and Venegas, 2008, p. 87).

Meegwetch Kitchi Manito

Epilogue

As stated in chapter five, the Elders view education from an Anishinaabe model that fits the characteristic of the traditional Indigenous education system. Under the traditional education system, curriculum would not be separate from the daily life of the student(s), yet the Elders in this study believe or see that many schools and the non-Aboriginal teachers as separate from the community; if progress is to be made then building relationships or working as partners is long overdue.

Further to curriculum, there needs to be an education plan/policy whereby the education system listens to community members to better understand the issues around Aboriginal education and meet the needs of its students. There is also a need to implement specific equity and inclusive education endeavors at all levels of education to improve practices that ensure successful student achievement. As stated by the Elders, the idea of equity is more than just working with the students and changing curriculum, it is a change to the mindset of all educators, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It is about eliminating barriers that prevent students and their families from being fully engaged in the school community. Aboriginal students need to feel that they have a meaningful place in school.

As mentioned in chapter six, Elder involvement is crucial to curriculum development and teaching the culture as their previous Elders taught them. The current education system perpetuates a colonial education system based on a Euro-Western worldview and continues to privilege educators to teach from a Euro-Western perspective. In order to change the mindset of teaching from this perspective, there needs to be more training at the post-secondary level prior to teachers working in the system,

and those already in the system should be mandated to take professional development courses in Aboriginal history as part of their certification. The Elders believe that part of the equity issue is that many educators have been gently encouraged to be inclusive in their teaching styles, however it is apparent that the gentle nudge approach is not working otherwise the current disparity in academic achievement would not be so vast. There is a need for drastic change that evaluates school success with measurable outcomes of Aboriginal students as an indicator of how inclusive pedagogy really is and the success of the student should be a reflection of the educator. In the Anishinaabe model, all students have gifts and the ability to learn when given the opportunity and the teacher is as responsible as the student is for their learning, which promotes success. In the Euro-Western style of teaching, educators do not accept when they have failed an Aboriginal student, instead the fault lies with the student or family, but that is not always the case as the Elders contest.

If educators want to be true partners, and as the Elders in this study shared, they must learn from their Aboriginal students and families. Developing a good relationship with the Aboriginal community must be established and cultural barriers must be addressed before collaborative work can be successful. Working together takes time and commitment, but is critical to the success of any initiatives if the intent is to reflect Aboriginal values. The education system needs to commit to change by starting with a curriculum that focuses on including more equitable ways of programming. Educators can either make or break the school experience for Aboriginal students' positive identities for school success.

Glossary

Anang - Star

Anishinaabe – Original people

Anishinaabemowin: The Anishinaabe language

Asemaa: Tobacco.

Bineshiy – Bird

Debwewin: Truth.

Dibaajimowin – Stories

Dikikan – Night

Gitchi – Great/Big

Kendaaswin: Knowledge

Kokum – Grandmother

Manitou - Creator

Mahkwa – Bear

Meegwetch – Thank you

Mino - Good

Mino-Pimatisiwin: The Way of a Good Life is to be free from illness, to live to the fullest. Pimatisiwin is based on a concept of good living, prevention and not only healing, but to eat well, act well, and live physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually well.

Mishom – Grandfather

Miskwe – Red

Nagamo - Sings

Nibaa - Sleep

Ode –Heart

Waabigwan – Flower

Waagosh - Fox

Ziigwan - Spring

See John D. Nichols and Earl Nyholm. *A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xxiv-xxviii.

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Appendix A: Letter to First Nations Education Counselor



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Boards
CTC Building, 208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Phone: (204) 474-7122
Fax: (204) 269-7173

DATE

Research Project Title: Anishinaabe Elders Share Stories on their Perceptions about Anishinaabe Identity for School Success

Researcher: Marlene Gallagher, Graduate Student

Sponsoring Institution: University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Laara Fitznor, University of Manitoba, 204-474-7158

Dear (name), Sagkeeng First Nation Education Counselor

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I am interested in conducting a study the impact of indigenous knowledge on the definition of Aboriginal identity. I am aware that through your place of work you have initiated research projects related to indigenous knowledge and identity.

I am writing to you at this time to request your assistance to invite six Elders/Knowledge Keepers to participate in my research study titled *Anishinaabe Elders Share Stories on their Perceptions about Anishinaabe Identity for School Success*. The focus is to interview Elders/Knowledge Keepers who have lived a particular way of life known as Mino Pimatisiwin – a good way of life; and gained respect in their First Nation territory. Possible participants should meet the criteria as Anishinaabe speaker(s), as well as having cultural and community knowledge. Specifically, the participants are recognized as holding knowledge/wisdom about community history, language, ceremonies, songs, dance, landscape and/or cultural traditions.

This will require you to send the attached information letter to possible community participants. If any Elders/Knowledge Keepers are interested in participating in this study, they should contact me directly to make the arrangements. In this way their participation will be completely voluntary and they will recognize that their participation in this study is not tied to their place of work or the community. I will obtain written consent from interested participants prior to conducting any interviews. As you will note, their participation will involve being interviewed for one to two hours to share stories and/or experiences relating to their perceptions about Anishinaabe identity and its place in education. The interviews will be arranged for a convenient time and location suitable to each participant. Participants can withdraw from this study at any time.

This information provides background information about this research study and what your role in the recruitment of participants will involve. At the completion of the study, I will share the final results with each participant. If you would like more information or clarification of any of these points, or if you are interested in helping with the recruitment of these participants, as outlined above, please contact me, Marlene Gallagher at (204) 257-4898 or merle3612@msn.com

The Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board has approved this research. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Marlene Gallagher
Graduate Student

Appendix B: Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Boards
CTC Building, 208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Phone: (204) 474-7122
Fax: (204) 269-7173

DATE

Research Project Title: Anishinaabe Elders Share Stories on their Perceptions about Anishinaabe Identity for School Success

Researcher: Marlene Gallagher, Graduate Student

Sponsoring Institution: University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Laara Fitznor, University of Manitoba, 204-474-7158

Dear Participant:

I am planning to interview six Elders/Knowledge Keepers from the First Nations community of Sagkeeng who are recognized as holding knowledge/wisdom about community history, language, ceremonies, songs, dance, landscape and cultural background for their First Nation community. You have been chosen as a potential participant for this study because you represent a person who meets these criteria. The data collected from the interviewees will be analyzed into emerging themes to determine how Anishinaabe identity relates to educational success for Anishinaabe students.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and references, is only a part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

1. Purpose of the Research

This study is for the completion of my thesis for the Master's of Education Program. It is also a study that I am very interested in as a First Nations person and educator. The purpose of this study is in part to access traditional knowledge's of Anishinaabe Elders/Knowledge Keepers through stories. I would like to explore the beliefs and values that are integral to a good way of life also known as Mino Pimatisiwin for Anishinaabe people. Anishinaabe Elders perceptions through stories as to how indigenous knowledge can influence Anishinaabe identity development, and it's place within education. I look forward to hearing the stories and what might emerge from this study, and especially on how it relates to educational success for Anishinaabe students.

2. Research Procedure

I wish to interview six Elders/Knowledge Keepers or older people that have lived the particular way of life known as Mino Pimatisiwin – a good way of life and have gained respect in their First Nation territory of Sagkeeng, who are Anishinaabe speaker(s), as well as having cultural and community knowledge. I will use the method of storytelling that is embedded in oral tradition in order to provide participants with the opportunity to share and express their life experiences. The interviews will take place at a time and place convenient for you (the participant) and where you can be assured that you can speak freely. Interviews will take approximately one hour to complete, and you will be provided with the questions ahead of time so that you can prepare for our discussion. All discussions will be audiotaped and transcribed by me. After our discussion, you will be provided with a copy of the transcript. You will have two weeks to confirm, change, add or delete information on the transcript, after which I will assume that the information you provided can be analyzed as it is. The information provided will be analyzed by key experiences or themes.

3. Risk Assessment

Since the purpose of the study is to access traditional knowledge's of Anishinaabe Elders/Knowledge Keepers through stories and explore the beliefs and values that are integral to Anishinaabe people; and how indigenous knowledge can influence Anishinaabe identity development, and it's place within education. I do not foresee any risk involved in this study. By accessing Indigenous Knowledge, this study attempts to gather the stories of Anishinaabe Elders/Knowledge Keepers who are Anishinaabe speaker(s), as well as having cultural and community knowledge. However, at the time of our interview I will inform you of qualified counselor's or traditional healer's in the community should you feel any distress during the interview. In addition, you can stop the interview at any time and/or you can withdraw from the study and have your information deleted from the study. You have complete control over the stories you share with me. Should you choose to withdraw, you can contact me, the researcher or my advisor through the contact information provided below and indicate a desire to withdraw from the study. My role as a researcher is to grow and learn from the knowledge, stories and experiences you share with me in this study.

4. Confidentiality

Historically, for many years Aboriginal peoples' silence existed in matters related to Indigenous Knowledge, therefore it is important as the participant to have the opportunity to choose whether or not your identity is made public. If you choose to remain anonymous, you can be assured that your identity will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be used in any data reporting or presentations, and any quotations that may identify you or the community will not be used for reporting purposes. If you would rather your name be used publicly in this thesis, you must sign the waiver attached to this form that grants me permission to use your name publicly. At all stages, participants can choose to withdraw from the study, and should you choose to do so, your information will be stricken from the record. Should you choose to withdraw, you simply need to contact me the researcher or my advisor at the contact information provided below and indicate a desire to withdraw from the study. The results of this study may be used for presentations at conferences and may be used for publication in journals in the future. All data and information will be securely locked in a filing cabinet in my home and on a password protected computer. No one but me, the researcher and my advisor will have access to the data. All audiotapes and data will be destroyed once the final thesis has been approved by Graduate Studies.

5. Participation and Compensation

Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. There will be no repercussions. There is no financial compensation for taking part in the interview. However, you will be offered tobacco (asema), as customary, in the First Nation culture as a gesture of respect and appreciation for your participation in sharing your knowledge.

6. Interview Feedback

After our discussion, you will be provided with a copy of the transcript. You will have two weeks to confirm, change, add or delete information on the transcript, after which I will assume that the information you provided can be analyzed as it is. You will also receive a summary of the study that will be mailed to you. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, please sign and provide your address on the space provided at the end of this form.

Your signature on this form will indicate that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your participation in this research project and you agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors, or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any of the questions, you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or ask if there is new information throughout your participation.

You may contact me, Marlene Gallagher, Graduate Student, @ 204-257-4898 (home) or 204-803-9899 (cell) or my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Laara Fitznor @ 204-474-7158

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's
Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's
Signature _____ Date _____

I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY.

Participant Signature: _____

Provide address where the results are to be sent:

Email: _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Storytelling is an oral tradition imbedded in ways of knowing for Aboriginal people.

Storytelling was a social institution, an “oral university” that taught people young and old about being “human” -- that is, how to function in the community. Traditional repertoires of oral tales embody systems of belief and guiding principles of personal behavior that are as relevant today as they were in centuries past (Cruikshank, 1990, p. x).

Prior to the interviewing process, cultural protocol will follow an Anishinaabe smudging with sage where the interview is to take place as well as to cleanse away any negative thoughts, bad spirits, cleansing is both physical and spiritual. The cleansing process allows for guidance and strength from the Creator for the researcher and participants to complete the study.

I will use a semi-structured interview method that will allow me to adjust the questions according to how the Elder or Knowledge Keeper is responding. The method of storytelling will be utilized to collect the stories.

The following is a checklist that may be used by the interviewer to ensure that hard data is collected. The interviewee may also add additional questions that she feels are pertinent to the study.

As part of getting to know the Elders, I will ask them to share general background information about themselves. Information shared may include but is not limited to the following list. If further information is required, then I will ask for it.

1. Describe yourself, nation, marital status, children/grand-children, your siblings, family, upbringing, where you lived, etc
2. Did you have the support of an extended family?
3. Did you learn other languages from family, school, community, etc.
4. What were your educational experiences like, where did you attend school, how long did you attend the school, what grades did you attend at this school, what grade did you complete etc.
5. Do you remember a time when you faced a challenge in school, at home, or in the community?
6. Can you share a story about a happy time with your family? School and community?
7. What kind of supports did you have at home, school, or community?

8. Can you share a story on family or community activities that you participated in?
9. Can you describe one or two cultural beliefs/customs that are important to you?
10. Could you please tell me a story as to how traditional practices influenced you, your family or community?
11. What do you feel are the beliefs and values that support a good way of life or Mino Pimatisiwin?
12. What are some of the barriers that Anishinaabe children face as they struggle with their identity?
13. Can you tell me about some examples to help children feel that they belong to their culture as Anishinaabe people?
14. Can you describe what an appropriate education environment would look like?
15. Can you share an experience where First Nations children were motivated to learn their culture, language, etc.
16. Can you provide an example as to how educators/teachers could support Anishinaabe students to succeed in school?
17. How can we as a community or school better support Anishinaabe children and families?
18. What do you think about the current education system, both First Nations and provincial schools?