

# Indigenous Language Reclamation – The Learners Perspective

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the link between learning an Indigenous language and the meanings second language learners attach to their language recovery experiences. The study delves into the factors that motivate, enhance and serve as barriers to individual language revitalization efforts. With the goal of reasserting an Indigenous world view, the traditional teachings of the Ojibwe medicine wheel were combined with the lessons of the seven Grandfathers to provide a methodological basis for conducting ethical research with and for the benefit of First Nations people. Within the context of our relationships with self, community, spirit and environment, the pairing of Indigenous theory with the practical community experiences of Indigenous second language learners, demonstrates how Indigenous systems of thought and ontology lend themselves well to the critical understanding necessary to enhance the recovery of our own endangered languages.

These research findings indicate that there is a definite link between ancestral language reclamation and increased levels of self-esteem, a sense of grounded cultural identity and resilience, an overall sense of healing and the social responsibility that comes with receiving the gift of language. The barriers associated with learning an ancestral language intersect on multiple and often simultaneous levels making it difficult for the language learners to discover their origin.

This research found that it was important for language learners to identify that they often carry a collective sense of shame associated with an internalized attachment to the modality of Indigeneity. Once the origin of this shame was acknowledged – as resulting from settler/assimilation logics, it was often possible for people to move forward in their language recovery journeys, while at the same time considering more broadly the structural barriers that make individual learning so difficult.

Thanks are owed to many to whom I am humbly grateful. To my Supervisor, June Corman, your kind and motivating encouragement gave me the confidence I needed to believe in myself. If it were not for you I would not have had the strength and courage to return to school and this project would never have been possible. You made a difference in my life and I can't thank you enough. To Margo Francis, your tough yet warm and supportive scholarship pushed me to expand the scope of this project beyond what I thought possible. Your influence was greatly appreciated. To Jennifer Rowsell, thank you for taking time out of your busy day just to listen to me as I worked through new ideas. Your support and patience during the conceptualization process gave me the courage to expand abstract boundaries and put them in print. Your warmth and encouragement provided me with inspiration when I needed it. Words cannot express the immense gratitude and overall appreciation I have for my M.A. thesis committee, each of you brought something different to this experience and for that I am extremely grateful. To my ancestral language co-travelers, I am compelled to express my sincerest gratitude for the sharing of your narratives; it is my heartfelt earnest hope that my interpretations accurately reflect our sharing sessions. And finally, to my cultural advisors; Carol Jacobs, Dr. Wendy Makoons Geniusz and Kenny Neganigwane, Pheasant to name a few, thank you for patiently answering my sometimes endless questions. It is my hope that I was able to reflect upon your cultural knowledge and wisdom in a positive way. There are many others who contributed: family, friends, colleagues and people the creator put in my path to make this project a reality. Its completion was a collaborative effort as we are all in essence, are Co-travelers on a journey.

Miikwech

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For Jim.

Love never ends, it merely changes form

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## **Forward**

### **Knowledge Extraction**

In the winter of 2013, I was privileged with the opportunity to both attend and present portions of the methodological section of this research at the International Indigenous language preservation and documentation conference hosted by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. My sense of honour was soon replaced with distress. Despite the wide range of emergent concerns<sup>1</sup> brought forth by insightful Indigenous scholars such as Marie Battiste (1995), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Bonita Lawrence (2002) to name a few, it would appear that Western research practices being carried out in Indigenous territories continue to be formed as generalized disciplinary mechanisms that although fashioned on the principle of egalitarianism, form micro-power systems that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical (Foucault, 2002).

During the conference's opening plenary<sup>2</sup> keynote speaker and ethnobiologist Nicholas Evans, placed considerable focus on the importance of documenting "small scale" Indigenous languages. While I sat and listened it soon became clear to me that the speaker's motivation for encouraging the documentation of Indigenous languages was not for the sake of preservation but rather, for the purpose of advancing his own research agenda. Evans, (2013) while drawing heavily upon field work that he had recently completed in northern Australia and southern New Guinea, pointed out that "we are in an era when there is an increasing appreciation of how much small-scale speech communities know about the natural world that have yet to be 'discovered' by

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<sup>1</sup> In-depth identification and discussion surround the ongoing effects of Western research practices on Indigenous peoples are highlighted and reflected upon throughout this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> "The Web of Words and the Web of Life: Reconnecting Language Documentation with Ethnobiology" Evans, 2013.

mainstream biology”. According to Evans (2013), since endangered Indigenous languages contain the “natural key to unlocking the full dimensions of traditional ecological knowledge”, he believed that the time had come for ethnobiologists and linguists to form a collaborative alliance. This type of partnership will be of mutual benefit for both disciplines because according to Evans (2013), the linguistic dimensions of how grammar, phraseology and sign metonymies (gender representations) are encoded and represented in a language’s vocabulary. Thus, a partnership between the two disciplines would provide the linguistic insight needed to help demonstrate how the coevolution of human knowledge and the linguistic means for express it coexist.

What is absent from Evans’s discussion is a motivational ideology that would suggest that he is even remotely concerned about contributing any potential benefits to the Indigenous people who are both the subjects and co-contributors of this ‘research’ being conducted in their territories. Instead, Evans plenary discussion contributes to a fatalistic museum perspective. This is evidenced by the fact that at no time during the plenary discussion did he frame his motivation for language documentation in a manner that advocates for its vital preservation. On the contrary, his drive toward knowledge extraction was justified in terms of how the small scale Indigenous languages of the Indigenous people in the study will contribute to the advancement of his own research agenda.

Evans’ presentation demonstrates how “knowledge [continues to be] collected, classified and presented back to the West” in ways that continue to fulfill a system of knowledge extraction (Smith (1999, p. 1). This experience embodies the infamous words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 1), who claims that for Indigenous people “research is



a dirty word” and given my first-hand account it appears the degree of interdependence in which humans live within a capitalistic system of knowing is cloaked under a veil of ideological individualism that is not conducive to social and moral responsibility for the collective actions of its intelligentsia. This contention is further supported by arguments put forth by critical race theorists who claim that race and racism are social constructs that evolve within the context of the socioeconomic policies that are intended to implicitly preserve the interests of the members who adhere to the dominate social order. Equally upsetting were the knowing looks that were exchanged amongst the handful of Indigenous scholars I found myself seated with. According to Lawrence and Dua (2005, p. 126) “to acknowledge that we share the same land base and yet to question the differential terms on which is it occupied is to become aware of the colonial project that is taking place around” us. This experience asks more questions than it answers. Why is it that although we did not know each other, we found ourselves seated together amongst those who are intended to save ‘us’.

## **Motivation to Pursue this Research: Idle No More**

Imperialistic systems of constraint are manifested by the implementation of legislated policies employed to govern First Nations people. In order to internalize the concept of being Canadian as a viable identity, the Canadian government has a vested interest in silencing the historical record and erasing the truth about the colonial nature of settler society in Canada. Furthermore, in order to expunge the realities surrounding how it is that settlers established, what they now lovingly refer to as ‘Our Home and Native Land’, the legacy of human suffering, the “forcible and relentless dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the theft of their territories, and the implementation of legislation and policies designed to affect the total disappearance of First Nations as peoples” needs to remain suppressed, subjugated and submerged (Lawrence, 2002, p. 25). In order to illustrate this point I offer the following journal reflection:

While crossing the border today on my way to Ojibwe language camp I had the strangest conversation with the United States border guard. The immigration officer asked me where I was going? Well I am traveling to Manistee Michigan sir, I replied. “Why are you going there” he inquired? Why, I’m going to Manistee, Michigan to attend an Ojibwe language camp” I told him. “What are you going to do there” he states. Why work on learning the Ojibwe language sir. The border guard commented, “What, aren’t you born with that”? Why no sir, due to the process of colonization my ancestors had their languages forcefully stripped from them, this made it very difficult for them to be able to pass the language to me as a child. It is for this reason that I must now learn it as a second language. He looked at me speechless for a moment and waved me through wishing me a good day (Journal entry, July 28, 2011).

At the time this thesis was being written, First Nations people in Canada were beginning to publicly voice their frustration with the conservative Harper government’s ongoing efforts to strip Native people of their treaty rights. They were concerned with the move to alter existing legislation and previously agreed upon treaty agreements in light of a pending trade agreement with China. After eighteen years of negotiation between China

and Canada, through the solidification of a new deal entitled the China Foreign Protection and Investment Act (FIPA), Prime Minister Steven Harper was preparing to set his neoliberal<sup>3</sup> footprint in the sands of Canadian political history.

FIPA is one of the largest deals since the highly debated passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Canada in the early 1990's. However, although NAFTA was subject to public debate, up until recently, the terms of the FIPA agreement have been largely kept quiet, thereby leaving little to debate in the political or public sphere. When the terms of the agreement began to come forward, many people were beginning to question why is it that a deal that has the potential to profoundly impact the future of all Canadians for the next thirty years, had been pushed through cabinet without benefit of public scrutiny. The question begging for reflection remains, who does the government represent, the larger body of peoples or a select few?

In accordance with the Harper government's neoliberal agenda, the FIPA agreement is touted as a progressive method from which to increase the levels of Chinese investment in Canada and is intended to serve as a mechanism to simplify the operation of Canadian businesses within China. What is absent from the conversation is the fact

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<sup>3</sup> Although there are several definitions of the term neoliberalism it is employed here to demarcate a set of political principles that embrace the ideology that the state should function as a mechanism from which to colonize the commons. With the main goal of the state being to operate as an apparatus that ensures the safeguarding of a free entrepreneurial enterprise for both individual and especially commercial, liberty and private property rights. These beliefs have become extended and applied at the international level in ways that substantiate the implementation of political policies that facilitate the creation of a system of free markets and free trade opportunities that allow for the global trajectory of commercial liberty and strong property rights (Norberg 2001; Friedman 2006). Proponents of neoliberalism assert that free markets and free trade opportunities support a more effective allocation of resources in ways that will lead to expanded levels of individual liberty and well-being (Rothbard, 2004). I argue that neoliberalism and the legislative activities that facilitate it serve as a mechanism to ensure that the highest concentration of resources falls in the hands of the select few who have the power to enact policy to ensure it.

that in order to comply with the terms of FIPA, the current Harper government would need to alter existing legislation and previously agreed upon treaty agreements made with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. For example in recognition of the Crown's obligation in terms of its legal relationship with Aboriginal people the existing Canadian government inherited the legal requirement to fulfill the "S.11 – Common Law Duty to Consult clause"<sup>4</sup>. The Duty to Consult clause specifically stipulates that whenever the actions of the government has the potential to impact First Nations peoples and their traditional lands there is a duty to consult with the Indigenous people who would be affected. The foundation of the common law duty to consult is based on established and future Aboriginal Treaty rights and is recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Since the duty to consult clause involves a lengthy, cumbersome and time consuming procedure that impedes capitalistic progress it became necessary for the government to eliminate it. Furthermore, in order to mask the altering of this legal obligation, the conservative government quietly altered the duty to consult clause by lumping it together pushed through bill C-45, an omnibus bill that addresses multiple unrelated issues including the altering of the duty to consult clause.

Out of concern for the impact that the passing of Bill C-45 would have on the environment and First Nations' sovereignty and jurisdiction, the 'Idle No More' movement was initiated by four women: Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam and Jessica Gordon. These four women decided to work collaboratively in an attempt to educate both Native and non-Native Canadians about the negative effects of the Harper Government's Bill C-45. With unity as the focus the primary incentive of the movement

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<sup>4</sup> For full details regarding this clause See [http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014664/1100100014675#chp1\\_2](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014664/1100100014675#chp1_2)

was to help people understand the negative consequences that this piece of legislation would have for the environmental future of all Canadian citizens. To accomplish this, the women began to hold rallies and teach ins<sup>5</sup> that provided information and generated heated discussion regarding the Harper government's latest neoliberal tactics.

Shortly after creating a Facebook page entitled 'Idle No More' the actions of these women culminated into an emerging Indigenous rights movement that highlighted the Indigenous rights negotiated and identified in The Royal Proclamation of 1736, and reaffirmed in Sec. 35(1) of the Canadian Constitution: which states that "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed" (Canadian Constitution, 1985). First Nations peoples were insisting that the rights that had been previously agreed upon between the Crown and the First Nations people of Turtle Island/Canada be upheld and complied with.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 established British sovereignty across many territories throughout North America, and further set out a formal policy concerning its relationship with First Nations people in North America. Of main concern for the British was a formal recognition of the land that First Nations people had reserved for themselves as their Hunting Grounds, to "conciliate the Indian Nations, by every act of strict justice, and to protect them [Native peoples] from encroachments on the lands they have reserved to themselves, for their hunting grounds"<sup>6</sup>. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 confirms that First Nations people had and continue to have an interest in the land that the British Crown was attempting to govern. For the purpose of controlling ownership of the land this piece of legislation created the British Crown and later

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<sup>5</sup> A session intended for education and discussion the issues surrounding Bill C-45.

<sup>6</sup> Royal Proclamation 1763 as cited in Armitage, 1997, p. 73.

inherited by the Canadian government, further entrenches a formal procedure that specifically forbids the direct transfer of land between native and non-Native people and also lays out formal procedures that dictate how the direct transfer of lands between First Nations people and the Crown/Federal government could transpire. Further support for these rights is further entrenched as part of international law within the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (2007). International law is a system of law that sets forth a set of rules that govern state interactions between other states, individuals and also corporations (Currie et al. (2007).

Prior to the passing of Bill C-45, First Nations communities wishing to lease land were required to hold a community referendum with at least 50 percent of the community members in attendance. Consequently, in order to achieve quorum, at least 50 percent of the First Nations community voting members would need to attend the meeting and a consensual vote of at least 50 percent plus one member would need to be obtained in order to proceed with the leasing of the land in question. Bill C-45 has come under protest by many First Nations people because the omnibus bill seeks to alter this stipulation. Many First Nations members assert that lowering the threshold of consent amongst First Nations community members paves the way for the elimination of reserves because it eases the transfer of reserve lands from the First Nations people so that it can be sold to private commercial enterprise. Some have highlighted that Bill C-45 picks up where both the failed “White Paper” and the Meech Lake Accord (1987) left off.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples became part of international law on September 13, 2007. On the day of the General Assembly vote, “an overwhelming majority of States (144) voted in favour of the UN Declaration, while four

States: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States voted against it” (Indigenous Bar Associations, 2011, p. 6). In order to fully realize the rights of Indigenous peoples the right to self-determination is a foundational necessity. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that, Indigenous peoples are entitled to participate equally in the constitution and development of the governing institutional order under which they live (Indigenous Bar Associations, 2011). The passing of Bill C-45 is problematic because it denies Indigenous people’s rights to sovereignty. A close examination of the terms of the Bill reveals a Federal transfer of power and obligation to the province thereby allowing individual provinces the right to decide the fate of individual First Nations in treaty territories without benefit of First Nations free, prior, and informed consent. Moreover, when the bill was brought to the House of Commons for a vote First Nations leaders were refused entry and therefore the right to free and informed consent. Dr. Pam Palmater, a vocal advocate for the Idle No More movement, views all of the recent legislative changes made by the conservative Harper government as an uncompromising directive to assimilate First Nations people into mainstream society: in sum, as a “2013 White Paper” (as cited in Anishinabek News, 2013).

On June 11, 2008 the Harper government publicly apologized to First Nations people for the role the Canadian government played in contributing to the legacy of abuse and mistreatment committed against over “150,000” Aboriginal children in its enforced care. Contained within the apology Harper issued a resolution to:

Forge a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong

communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us (Stephen Harper, 2008).

According to Gordon (2013), “the passage of Bill C-45 and Idle No More has come to symbolize and be the platform to voice the refusal of the First Nations people to be ignored any further by any other Canadian government”. Up until recently under the Navigable Waters Protection Act, Canadians have received the benefits of having one of the most unique models in place worldwide, for the practice of environmental stewardship. This is mainly due to the historical treaties that our First Nations ancestors negotiated with the early governments of Canada in exchange for their lands. According to the Constitution Act, 1982 S.35(1) the government of Canada has a duty to invite representatives of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to participate in the discussion of items relating to previously negotiated treaty or other rights that would directly affect them. First Nations people view water to be the universal source of life. As such, they never gave up their rights to the waterways. In fact, most First Nations consider women to be the keepers of the water and our traditional knowledge surrounding its preservation, conservancy and stewardship has resulted in much collaboration across various First Nations communities (Anishinabek News, April 2013).

Water related issues continue to be an ongoing concern in many First Nations communities. For example, at the end of 2010 as many as 110 First Nations communities were under a boil water advisory, while five had a “do not consume” warning (First Nation Water Advisory, 2010). Bill C-45 when combined with the Free Trade Agreement (FIPPA) negotiated with China, paves the way for private enterprise to destroy Canadian lands and waterways without accountability or recourse and the power of the people to resist this destruction. Hence some limited forms of due process



surrounding First Nations consultation have been replaced with the ideology of jobs and growth. During a recent session in Parliament Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, expressed concern that the recent changes made would allow the Chinese government the opportunity to sue the Canadian people for damages stemming from any actions that prevent their enactment of free enterprise on Canadian lands. The time has come for Canadians to stand together and work towards safeguarding the environment before the damage is irreversible.

With the intention of establishing unity First Nations people across Canada began to assemble to participate in traditionally peaceful demonstrative activities such as flash round dances in malls, peaceful assemblies in schools and universities, and demonstrations in the streets, Idle No More protesters have taken the lead in challenging Bill C- 45. With the aid of the web these tactics went viral within a matter of days and solidarity ‘Idle No More’ protests have now expanded as far away as the Middle East.

As Paulo Freire (1998, p. 27) contends, neoliberalism erases our place in history and further “humiliates and denies our humanity”. According to Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) neoliberalism as an ideological practice, has a vested interested in maintaining a cynical vantage point that gives people the idea that they are powerless to change the current state of the world. However, “cynicism is a potent mechanism of control that can be employed as a weapon for dismissing entire worldviews, knowledge systems, and practices as unworthy of serious consideration – as primitive, archaic, simplistic, and gullible” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 4).

Informed and motivated by this activism and Freire and Kuokkanen’s insights, I formulated my own position. My fellow Canadians, this agreement will have an adverse

effect on you too. The individualist ideology that allows for an ‘if it is not in my back yard, it is not my concern’ dismissal has come and passed. It has been communicated to me from birth that it is our role as Indigenous people to protect mother earth and preserve her for generations to come. My fellow inhabitants of Canadian territory, you live here too. If you sit ‘idly by’ in complacent abdication, I suggest you will be compelled to reconsider when your lives or the life of someone you love becomes affected by this incessant capitalistic mentality that dehumanizes all that stands in its way. If you enjoy the air you breathe, the water you drink, the trees your children climb. I suggest that, rather than conceptualizing the Natives in Canada with scorn and disparagement, try questioning the long term benefits of signing an agreement that will contribute to extended levels of mass environmental destruction for generations to come. If we are not our sisters and brother’s keeper, then what are we here for? When it comes to Mother Earth, united we stand, divided we dissolve! Let it be known that we say NO to the corporate colonization of all Canadians. The non-egalitarian and asymmetrical nature of neoliberalism is masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian parliamentary regime that makes it possible through the fundamental authority of sovereignty to expand the submission of forces and bodies across multiple sites simultaneously. FIPA is a manifestation of such.

The term ‘Indian’ is a foreign concept imposed upon the First Nations people of Turtle Island<sup>7</sup> by their colonizers so that they could use race as a social category to enact societal practices of racism that in turn fluctuate in accordance with political policies that are becoming implicitly rooted in the acquisition of vast amounts of financial and social capital into the hands of fewer and fewer corporations. It is arguable that race is not a

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<sup>7</sup> Original Native term for North America

biological determinate for Indigenous people rather, it is a socially constructed category designed to support a whole system of ideological and structural practices that are intended to both justify and maintain the superiority of a capitalistic economy that values capital acquisition over all other life forms.

Indigenous knowledge is collective knowledge that is derived from both the individual and collective experiences of First Nations people. Furthermore, this knowledge is often shared through the practice of storytelling for the intended benefit and survival of the entire community. As such, I view the 'Idle No More' movement as a practice of counter-storytelling<sup>8</sup> collaboratively employed by First Nations people on behalf of all Canadians in ways that are intended to liberate as well as resist both the explicit and implicit efforts of big corporations to destroy the environment to benefit the few at the expense of many. I further assert that in order to accomplish this end, the government and the global corporations that support them, have a vested interest in the marginalization, silencing and eventual eradication of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. In view of the fact that many First Nations elder's assert that our Indigenous languages are ancient ancestral artifacts that communicate ancestral states of environmental consciousness, rather than working towards eradication, society as a whole

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<sup>8</sup> For an In depth discussion see the Counter Story-Telling section

has a vested interest in working towards the revitalization of its Indigenous languages.

The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of socioaffective equilibrium, it is responsible for an important change in the native. Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not merely satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of an oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.

Frantz Fanon, 1963

## **1. 0 – Introduction**

The recognition that Indigenous languages are in danger of disappearing all across Canada has resulted in an emerging movement towards First Nations language revitalization (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005). As Eli Taylor, a Sioux Valley First Nations Elder, reported “embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, [all of] our attitudes, beliefs, values and fundamental notions of what is truth is shared and transmitted from generation to generation through our traditional language” (Assembly of First Nations, 2005:21). Elders in First Nations communities have explained that residential schools were a key contributing factor in the loss of traditional languages and culture and further argue that Indigenous people have a responsibility to work together towards the restoration of traditional First Nations languages and culture (Barman & Battiste, 1995;AFN, 2007).

Several scholars have argued that the historical influences of colonialist oppression committed by the Government and early Churches of Canada is directly related to the declining state of Aboriginal people’s ancestral languages (Barman & Battiste, 1995; Kirkness, 1998; Norris, 2004; AFN, 2007; McIvor, 2009). As an Indigenous researcher, I believe it is my responsibility to work toward the recovery of our Indigenous languages and culture. Furthermore, I view my efforts to recover my ancestral language as an act of resistance, a righting of a past wrong, as vindication for my Grandmother, my ancestors, my father and my children. I view my efforts to be an undertaking that is intended to be restorative in nature.

Recent research on Indigenous languages indicates that “both community and family are significant factors in the transmission [of traditional languages] from parent to

child” (Pitawanakwat, 2009). In response to the endangered state of many Indigenous languages Pitawanakwat (2009) reports that many Indigenous people after reaching adulthood, are beginning to acquire their ancestral voices as second language learners. Consequently, as the level of adult Indigenous people second language learners increases, so does the likelihood that their children may become through intergenerational transmission, the future carriers of Canada’s Indigenous languages.

Despite the enormity of this task, I believe that it is our responsibility as Indigenous language learners, to become fundamental agents in the restoration and maintenance of our ancestral languages. According to Anton Treuer (2010) who learned Ojibwe as an adult, the key to gaining a significant level of fluency in Anishinaabemowin is dedication and commitment. With this principle in mind, I have recently set out on my own journey to recover my ancestral language. My initial reclamation efforts began rather simply, each week my sister, brother-in-law and I gathered around the kitchen table for the purpose of learning how to interact in Ojibwe. In order to reinforce our oral practice, we sent each other emails in the words and sentences that we had learned and further greeted each other on the telephone in the words that we had each acquired from our own independent language practices. Hence, as I embark on my own ancestral language reclamation journey, this research gained its initial grounding and origin from my own lived experiences. Thus, it is the context of my own experiences as an Indigenous language learner that lays the groundwork for the interview component of this research explores and illuminates the meanings Indigenous language learners attach to their own ancestral language recovery efforts.

The endangered state of Canada's Indigenous languages has resulted in an emergent body of literature that approaches Indigenous languages from the perspectives and needs of the instructors who are engaged in the important work surrounding Indigenous language recovery. Accordingly, there are few, if any studies that give voice to the learner's experiential vantage point as s/he sets out on their own language recovery journey. The purpose of this study is to provide meaningful insights that will motivate, encourage and provide support to Indigenous people who either are already actively engaged in their own ancestral language reclamation efforts or considering doing so. What is more, given that Indigenous language learners are the end users of Indigenous language teaching programs, the results of this study will lay the important groundwork necessary for future in-depth studies that address Indigenous second language (ISL) learner experiences.

### **1.1 – Research Questions**

I explore the link between learning an Indigenous language and the meanings Indigenous second language learners attach to their experiences in terms of increased sense of cultural identity and self-esteem. In doing so, this research investigates the learning experiences of people as they undergo the process of reclaiming their individual ancestral languages that are native to Turtle Island<sup>9</sup>. The research questions include: What are the factors that motivate people to reclaim their Indigenous languages; What are the benefits and contradictions of participating in the process of Indigenous language recovery at the individual and the community level and What are the barriers to fluency?

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<sup>9</sup> Indigenous name for North America

## **12.0 – Theoretical Framework**

According to Indigenous traditions in Canada it is important for the story-teller to convey to the listener the story-teller's own life experiences in the telling of the story. Thus, much like the telling of a story, the theoretical framework for this research is presented as a road map that traces the origin and subsequent conceptual development of the project's theoretical destination. Furthermore, in recognition of the rich and diverse cultures of Indigenous people, the theoretical structure developed within this research is intended to respect the multiple identities, geographical locations and the political realities of Indigenous people's everyday lives. The multiple/collective theoretical perspectives and forms of shared knowledge employed expose as well as illustrate, the experiential complexities encountered while recovering our ancestral voices as second language learners.

As a researcher I have adapted a theoretical vantage point that places societal processes of racialization and colonization at the forefront of my investigation into Indigenous language recovery. As such, this research employs the use of Critical Race theory as a foundational starting point from which to investigate the complex experiences Indigenous people have encountered as they migrate through their own individual ancestral language recovery journeys. I build upon critical race theory's basic framework, by employing Yasso's (2002, p. 24) conception of "counter-storytelling" to assess how storytelling forms an essential component for survival, liberation and resistance and to resist both the explicit as well as ongoing implicit efforts of mainstream society to marginalize, silence and eventually eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. I make use of Marie Battiste's (1998, 2000, 2004) notion of "cognitive



imperialism” to illuminate how the systemic power of a dominant group continues to be active within the social world.

Cognitive imperialism provides an excellent framework from which to expose how the early government and missionaries of Canada disrupted and in some cases destroyed Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world. The theory also provides an insightful lens for uncovering the insidious and taken for granted ways in which white settler epistemologies continue to impact Indigenous people’s language recovery efforts. I further utilize the works of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who emphasizes that Western epistemological practices are not objective, rather, they are rooted in imperialistic notions of whiteness that are implicitly intended to maintain an existing dominant status quo. As such, Smith’s theorizing provides insight into how mainstream theorists have expropriated traditional knowledge from Indigenous people for the purposes of Western intellectual ownership and subsequent commodification.

With the goal of decolonizing Indigenous knowledge, I build upon the existing works of Indigenous theorists (Battiste, 1998, 2002, 2004; Kirkness, 1998; Lawrence, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008, Yosso 2002) in order to demonstrate how the use of Indigenous people’s experiential knowledge, systems of thought and ontology lend themselves well to the critical understanding necessary to enhance the recovery our endangered languages. In practice, I utilize the medicine wheel as a tool of analysis, and further make use of its teachings to provide a methodological roadmap for conducting ethical research with and for Indigenous people.

## **2.1.a – Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Critical race theory was developed by legal scholars of colour who argued that the discourse of critical legal studies (CLS) was still deeply rooted in liberalist traditions. Consequently, according to CRT practitioners CLS did not adequately account for the social role that race and racism played in both the subordination and marginalization of individuals of colour within the American legal structure (Stovall 2010).

Since the concept of “Indian” is a foreign concept imposed upon the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island<sup>10</sup> by their colonizers, my own work is strongly influenced by the claim made by CRT theorists that race and racism must be viewed “as the central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences” within the social world (Russell 1992, p. 763). The use of CRT is not intended to weaken Turtle Island’s Indigenous peoples claim for sovereignty rather, through the alignment of a common experience, CRT supports and strengthens them. CRT challenges the notion that race is a fixed biological concept and further asserts that race and racism are a shared socially constructed phenomena with political implications that continue to maintain the dominate power structures that exist within society (Stovall, 2010). Thus, I contend that race is a social category that is conducive to societal practices of racism that in turn fluctuate in accordance with political policies that are implicitly rooted in maintaining mainstream White settler advantage. The proposal for a Bill on First Nation Education drafted by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (Oct. 2013), is a recent example of how race as a social category is rooted in societal practices and policies that become biological determinants used to support a whole system of ideological and structural practices that are intended to both justify and maintain the

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<sup>10</sup> Original Native term for North America

superiority of one group over all others. To solidify this point it is necessary to understand the situated and contingent nature of racism. Yosso, (2002, p. 24) illuminates:

“There are at least three main points embedded in any definition of racism (a) One group deems itself the superior to all others;(b) the group that is superior has the power to carry out the racist behaviour; (c) racism benefits the superior group while negatively affecting other racial and / other ethnic groups.”

The epistemological profile of education as a practice is linked with a whole range of institutions, economic requirements, and political issues of social regulation (Foucault, 1982). As such, CRT practices of racialization and colonization need to be placed at the forefront of any discussion pertaining to Indigenous language recovery within mainstream educational institutions. Furthermore, it is arguable that CRT provides a basis to form an effective framework from which to explore, expose and transform structural and cultural practices that have led to oppressive and subordinate racial positions that both deny and disempower ongoing Indigenous claims for sovereignty both within and outside of the educational system. This is evidenced by the fact that 38% of Aboriginal youth are reported to have not completed high school compared to 15% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 2012). In this context, critical race theory can be a starting point for investigating systemic barriers to Indigenous student success within the educational system.

CRT theory challenges the notion that class is the primary focus of subordination and marginalization when discussing individual and group experiences within the education system. In an attempt to broaden the scope of inquiry, Yosso (2002, p. 25) contends that there is an “intercentricity of race and racism” that not only intersects with other categories of oppression, its tools of analysis also seek to expose a layering of

subordination that, although based on the intercentricity of race and racism, also takes into consideration its intersection with other socially created categories such as: gender, class, immigration status, surname, language, accent and sexuality. Hence, I argue that the tools stemming from CRT can be used to explore and illuminate how “Indigenous culture” as a socially constructed category has, and continues to be employed as a mechanism of marginalization and mainstream domination.

Practitioners who employ the use of CRT, reject traditionalist claims of objectivity. They argue that the guise of objectivity has been used to justify the subordination, silencing and distortion of alternative epistemologies (Battiste, 1998, 2002, 2004; Kirkness, 1998; Lawrence, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Instead critical race theorists embrace the “centrality of experiential knowledge” claiming that objective notions of social science have actively constructed master narratives that uphold deficit, racialized notions about people of colour for the purposes of maintaining superiority over non-white peoples (Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Deficit narratives are problematic because they are not just about racism, rather, they are rooted in “majoritarian stories that privilege certain social locations such as Whites, men, the middle and or/upper class, and heterosexuality as normative points of reference” these categories are in turn are taken for granted and regarded as ‘natural’ (Yosso, 2002, p. 28). What is interesting as well as equally disturbing, is that the authenticity of these majoritarian, monovocals, master narratives, or standard stories, are so insidious they become internalized and at times, disseminated by those who are oppressed by them (Yosso, 2002). This outcome contributes to the perpetuation and maintenance of the existing micro-power structures that operate on multiple levels within a given society.

As an institution the very structure of academic disciplines are sites of struggle for Indigenous scholars. For example, Indigenous theorist, Bonita Lawrence (2002) addresses how the demand placed on Native scholars to conform to standard protocol for academic discourses when writing about their histories, unwittingly contributes to the silencing of the Indigenous voice. Thus, it is essential to critically engage with master narratives for the purposes of exposing how these stories contribute to the privileging of one group's worldview over others.

Given the insidious invisibility of white privilege it is imperative for Indigenous people to challenge these privileges in a manner that values Indigenous experiential knowledge paradigms. This notion is further supported by Yosso, (2002, p. 32), who emphasizes that the practice of "counter-storytelling" not only values the experiential knowledge of people of colour, she also asserts that counter-storytelling is an effective means from which to "strengthen traditions of social, political and cultural survival and resistance" to the hegemonic influences of mainstream dominance. In light of the rich storytelling history amongst Native American people, it is arguable that Indigenous people have intuitively understood that stories contribute an essential component for the survival, liberation and transmission of Indigenous cultures (Delgado, 1989).

### **2.1.b – Counter Story-Telling as Resistance**

Contrary to western ideological notions of individualism, Indigenous knowledge is communal knowledge that is derived from both individual and collective experiences of Indigenous peoples' link to the land (Lawrence and Dau, 2005). According to Armstrong, (as cited in Lawrence and Dau, 2005, p. 127) Indigenous knowledge is transmitted and shared through Indigenous people's languages which "are generated by a

precise geography” therefore, to not learn its language is to die”. Additionally, Indigenous scholar Bonita Lawrence (2005, p. 126) claims that “Indigenous lands carry more than the imprint of an ancient and contemporary Indigenous presence... the land reveals important gaps between Western and Traditional knowledges”.

To further underline the ontological and epistemic differences between mainstream thought and Indigenous worldviews, Sami scholar Ruana Kuokkanen (2007) demonstrates how Indigenous people make pedagogical use of the natural environmental spaces that they occupy. Moreover, to symbolically illustrate the pedagogical potential of natural phenomena found in one’s immediate location, Kuokkanen employs the visual cue of the river to demonstrate the instructive potential of what Vizenor (1999, p. 182) refers to as “Native transmotion”. Kuokkanen (2007, p. viii) calls attention to the fact that much like the rivers and winds, human beings are also natural forces of the earth”. However, although these forces are in constant motion the active presence of the river never loses its basic features. There is a growing body of Indigenous scholars such as Cajete & Little Bear (1999), Brant-Castellano (2000), Battiste (2000), and Simpson (2011) among others, who embrace the notion that Indigenous knowledge arises from a set of mutually held characteristics which include, the belief that Indigenous knowledge comes as a result of a long, intimate relationship with a particular environment, is based on careful, long-term observation and the regular and practical testing of hypotheses, that are modified according to changing environmental conditions and rooted in Indigenous peoples understandings of the nature of the universe (Newhouse 2008, p. 190). Intrinsically, Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island have historically used and developed over generations Indigenous knowledge stemming from natural phenomena as

a means to situate themselves within their own environments. Haudenosaunee scholar David Newhouse (2008, pp. 187-8), highlights that as human beings “we are the last created and the most dependent on other forces for our survival” consequently, Native people have historically used transmotion as a form of natural reason, and native creation with other creatures (Vizenor, 1999).

Similarly, Kuokkanen asserts that Native transmotion provides a “natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creatures” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. xiii). To illustrate this point, the shifting nature of the river and its inherent blurring of clear and fixed boundaries demands that we look beneath the river’s surface in order to garner an understanding of its variant context and circumstances. And, so it is for Indigenous people, for the purposes of language survival Native transmotion allows us to understand that we must learn to adapt to the environments in which we occupy.

Given that Indigenous people share a unique relationship with the lands they inhabit, Kuokkanen utilizes the natural environment to provide a teaching that reminds researchers to look under the surface in order to expose the holistic complexities of any given situation. By drawing upon the river, Kuokkanen points out that the intrinsic nature of the river sustains Indigenous people on multiple levels by providing physical sustenance, as well as unification both spiritually and emotionally as such, the river symbolizes a linkage to one’s location as well as our ancestors who lived along the river before us. Similar to Indigenous Scholars such as Newhouse (2008), Vizenor (1999) White Shield (2009), and Lavellee (2009) among others, Kuokkanen’s epistemological approach represents an Indigenous specific vantage point that is holistically inclusive.

The mental image of the river provides a powerful, concrete example of how the tools necessary for survival are available in the immediate space that one occupies.

Additionally, both Kuokkanen and Kovach (2012) stress the interdependent foundation common to Indigenous knowledge development. Hence, the information that is acquired by the individual is often collectively developed with the people who inhabit the area and then mutually shared for the intended benefit of the entire community. According to Kuokkanen, Indigenous peoples have always traded and shared cosmologies and oral narratives, and like the rivers and winds, these stories are like natural forces of the earth. Given the social nature of language, my intention for this research was to provide insight into the ways in which information relating to second language acquisition is intended to be collectively developed and shared in ways that benefit Indigenous communities.

To build upon an Indigenous theoretical vantage point I employ Marie Battiste's (1998, 2000, 2004) notion of "cognitive imperialism" to critically engage with the existing body of literature surrounding the early government and missionaries' responsibility for the endangered state of Indigenous languages today. The objective for this research was to explicate the meanings Indigenous second language learners (ISL) attach to their learning process. Therefore, through use of an Indigenous system of thought I explored how the reclamation of one's ancestral language may contribute to restorative social justice initiatives that focus on a decolonization agenda both conceptually and linguistically. To expand on this notion of Indigenous language reclamation as a method of decolonization, I make use of the Ojibwe medicine wheel and the teachings therein to formulate a culturally specific means to both theorize and



methodologically share both the individual and collective knowledges (experiences) of Indigenous second language learners.

### **2.1.c – Cognitive Imperialism**

According to Battiste, (1998, 2000, 2004) cognitive imperialism is an instrument of cognitive control that is used to support the development of knowledge based on the values of dominant mainstream society while at the same time denying the existence of whole groups of people. Empowered by the educational system, cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural identity because it serves as an apparatus from which to achieve and maintain the “legitimacy of only one language, one culture and one form of reference” (Battiste, 2004, p. 11). Thus, the education system as a mechanism of socialization, supports the hegemonic practice that assumes the delivery of not only academic and professional skills, but also the imposition of the dominant culture’s mores, and social values. This method of cognitive manipulation is not easily recognized, because the education system is viewed as the trusted authority in the training of the next generation. As such, people readily buy into, and further endorse the notion that the education system is by far, the most superior means from which to liberate individual potentialities (Battiste, 2000). This taken for granted conception contributes to the commonly held belief that the education system equally benefits all members within Canada’s modern, knowledge based economy.

Not so claims Battiste! Instead, she argues that the education system has been used as an apparatus to distribute “cognitive imperialistic policies and practices” that have resulted in the destruction, distortion, and marginalization and out right silencing of Indigenous systems of thought, ways of life, histories, identities, cultures, and languages

(Battiste, 2000, p. 194). What's more, once these hegemonic practices of cultural imperialism have succeeded in devaluing Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing and being in the world, privileged members of mainstream society have taken up elements of traditional Aboriginal knowledge and re – present this knowledge out of context and without reference to the Indigenous people the knowledge comes from. This notion is further supported by Dr. Erica-Irene Daes (1993, p. 28) who maintains that the re presentation of appropriated knowledge “is the final stage of colonization” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, Battiste, 2000, p. 194-5).

#### **2.1.d – Knowledge Research and Imperialism**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 60) asserts that “when discussing the scientific foundations of Western research, the indigenous contribution to these foundations is rarely mentioned”. Instead, “Indigenous forms of knowledge, systems of classification, technologies, and codes of social life” become appropriated by the West as newly discovered phenomena that are in turn, commodified and subsequently re-presented as intellectual property belonging to the dominant social order.

According to Kuokkanen, (2007, p. 5) “Systemic indifference is built into the very structures of the academy, just as it is into the discourse of (sometimes) well-meaning academics”. The scholarly activity of Iris Marion Young (2007), a non-Native academic, illuminates how Indigenous knowledge, after being suppressed and delegitimized by mainstream epistemological practices, gets reintroduced in a manner that not only obfuscates its origin, but also uses it as a means to control the people who the knowledge was stolen from. According to Young (2007), when it comes to social injustice it is important to recognize that everybody plays a part in its production and maintenance, both in the nation state in which they live as well as globally. Young claims

that there are two opposing concepts of self-determination, one involves the more sovereign notion of independence and non-interference while the other, views self-determination as more relationally interdependent.

The concept of interdependence is not a new concept for Indigenous people, rather Indigenous scholars such as Kuokkanen (2007), Tuhiwai Smith, (1999), Lawrence, (2002), and Wilson (2008) to name a few, have long maintained that the ontological and epistemic foundation of Indigenous knowledge is based on relational interdependence. Evidence of this philosophy is supported by, the Ojibwe Great Law of Seven Generations, which states that when contemplating a given course of action the Great Law of Seven Generations requires that members of the community muse upon the possible consequences of their actions for the next seven generations<sup>11</sup>.

The Seven Grandfathers are the traditional teachings that focus on Love, Humility, Honesty, Courage, Wisdom, Generosity and Respect. These concepts are considered central in guiding how Ojibwe people should live their lives (Pitawanakwat, 2006). I will go into a more in depth discussion of these teachings later in this essay. However, they are named at this point for identity purposes as it is important to emphasize that each of these teachings are given to the people<sup>12</sup> for the pedagogical purpose of internalizing values that are necessary for community survival.

Central to this philosophy is the emphasis on the larger perspective, the effects on others, the family the community, the region and the universe, as the Ojibwe (and other Aboriginal peoples) believe that all beings are connected, like [the] links in a chain. A belief in the interdependence of all living things frames Aboriginal value systems. Animals are no less important than

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<sup>11</sup> This is a teaching that has been handed down to me from my Elders through-out my entire life. In the writing of this thesis I have considered this law.

<sup>12</sup> Indigenous followers of the medicine wheel

humans, and plants are no less important than Animals. Water and wind, sun and moon and the changing of the seasons are all related to each other and to humans. We are all of one great whole. As this awareness dictates a vision of the world as a whole, traditional Aboriginal thinking concludes that life forms maintain their health and balance through the focus on harmony as opposed to individual wants or needs. The Seven Grandfathers were designed to achieve harmony – Pitawanakwat, 2006.

Similarly, Haudenosaunee philosophical thought embodies the “Good Mind” as the ideal for all Iroquoian people (Newhouse, 2008, p. 188). To have a good mind is to be “ever thinking of how to foster peace between peoples, the world, and all its inhabitants” (Newhouse 2008, p. 188). The purpose of both the Ojibwe Law of Seven Generations and the Good Mind philosophy of the Haudenosaunee is to remind Indigenous people that we are all connected therefore ignoring this interconnection has consequences for all of creation. Young’s idea of “relational interdependence” is not a new concept, in fact, it is a traditional ontological and epistemological approach for both the Ojibwe and Haudenosaunee peoples who are the First Nations to Turtle Island.

The above Indigenous teachings provide insight into how previously marginalized elements of Indigenous spirituality get taken up by mainstream scholars such as Young (2007) who in turn co-opt and employ Indigenous knowledge as newly formed ideas. Interestingly enough, Indigenous people continue to find themselves responsible for the education of non-Native people. Perhaps this is a direct result of a “History/prehistory dichotomy that represents Aboriginal historical identity to be contingent on a European presence” (Yellowhorn, 2008, p. 198). I am not arguing that non-Native people be excluded from employing Native spirituality as an approach in mainstream society. However, I highlight these phenomena in order to illustrate the ways in which the

intelligencia as a matter of course extrapolate knowledge from the marginalized, in this case indigenous people.

Recently Aboriginal scholars and researchers have begun to call attention to the issues of intellectual property rights for Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world (Battiste, 2008, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Often research on Indigenous people has resulted in the commodification of indigenous knowledge which in turn does not benefit the communities in which the research has been conducted (Battiste, 2008). Leading scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 59), argue that the Western mentality of collecting has resulted in the detachment of Indigenous concepts from their grounding and origin, which are in turn re-presented as new discoveries. Furthermore, academic disciplines which have been developed by colonial elites have resulted in a practice of conceptual imperialism because Native intellectuals are forced to follow the protocol of the discipline in order to achieve any sort of success within academia. Consequently, in order to contribute to the decolonization of our people I believe that the teachings of the medicine wheel as a system of knowledge that has been kept for us by our Elders, needs to be applied to Indigenous research methods.

Young's (2007) scholarly writing demonstrates how traditional Indigenous teachings are expropriated from Indigenous people's ontology and in turn "re – presented" without recognition of that knowledge's grounding and origin. Young's theorizing provides an example of how elements of traditional Aboriginal knowledge get taken up in ways that are intended to serve the interests of those who are in positions of power. Thus, these appropriative practices stemming from members of settler society

continue to reinforce a hegemonic system of thought that though possibly well intended, is an illustration of Dr. Daes theory of the final stage of colonization.

In closing, contrary to the Indigenous concept of collective experience and native transmotion, the degree of interdependence in which humans live within a capitalistic system of knowing is cloaked under a veil of ideological individualism that is not conducive to social and moral responsibility for the collective actions of its elites, including the intelligentsia. This contention is further supported by arguments put forth by the critical race theorists who allege that race and racism are social constructs that evolve within the context of the socioeconomic policies that are intended to implicitly preserve the interests of the members who adhere to the dominant social order.

As an Indigenous scholar I am concerned that Western epistemological practices are being used to disenfranchise Indigenous people from their own collectively shared knowledges. Thus, I view this research as an act of resistance that is intended to further serve as a mechanism for the decolonization and liberation of Indigenous people. Moreover, with reclamation at the forefront, I find it necessary to employ an Indigenous epistemological approach for the purposes of advancing an understanding of the associated meanings Indigenous people attach to reclaiming their ancestral languages.

I have been told by my Elders that the teachings from the eping' gishmok nekeyaa eyaayek (Western direction) of the medicine wheel,<sup>13</sup> instructs that those who occupy positions of power and privilege in the community have a responsibility to work towards a balancing of justice for everyone (the benefit of the community"). Furthermore, not only do individuals who are in socially structured positions of power and privilege have an obligation to work towards change, those who find themselves in positions of lack

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<sup>13</sup> A detailed discussion of the medicine wheel appears later in this section.

must use their courage and wisdom to take actions that are directed at changing their own unequal circumstances.

In light of the historical influence of colonialism<sup>14</sup> and oppression that was inflicted by both the government and the early churches of Canada, I recognize that the idea of marginalized people taking responsibility for contributing to changes in their circumstances calls for a conceptual shift. However, I believe that rather than fighting against a past that cannot be changed I intend to make use of the traditional teachings of the medicine wheel, for they too cannot be changed. In doing so it is hoped that those who wish to embark on their own Indigenous language reclamation journeys will be able to view their efforts from an Indigenous standpoint of revitalization, growth, development and evolution.

### **2.1.e –Utilizing an Indigenous Epistemology**

The goal of this research is to reassert an Indigenous worldview that is useful for Indigenous people as they pursue their own language reclamation journeys. Thus, I have written this paper in a manner that is intended to communicate with Indigenous people in ways that are meaningful, respectful and culturally sensitive to them. Hart, (2011) cautions that a discussion of worldviews needs to include more than elements of individual cognitive processes; rather, the conversation needs to include the experiences of the collective. Consequently, the interview portion of this research was developed with the intention of capturing the common elements that Indigenous people collectively share as they go about reclaiming their ancestral languages. Similar to other Indigenous scholars who have used the medicine wheel as a guide for their research, I argue that the

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion regarding the effects of colonization as it relates to the condition of Indigenous languages see review of the literature section.

discussion needs to include the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual components of the individual. With the goal of decolonization in mind, I further allege that the effect of discourse, discursive structures and practices pertaining to Indigenous languages also needs to be explored. It is not my intention to claim that my Indigenous worldview is superior, I do NOT allege an essentialist Indigenous standpoint. The object of this work is to give back. Thus, it is my sincerest desire to bolster the learning process through the sharing of our collective experiences as we navigate down the river of language recovery.

Battiste (2000, p. 198) claims that the “gift of modern knowledge has been the ideology of oppression towards those whose languages and cultures were different from mainstream immigrant expectations”. Thus, the education system functioned as a form of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2000, p. 193). I strongly believe that an important step to reconciliation and healing would be to reclaim our heritage through the use of our own Indigenous knowledge systems which have concepts of epistemology, philosophy, language and scientific logical validity that are specific to Indigenous ways of being in the world. This is an important step to protecting Indigenous knowledge from Eurocentric exploitation; as Indigenous people, it is important for us to work from the strength of our own worldviews not the views of another culture. Critical race theorists such as Solorzano & Yosso (2002, p. 26) emphasize that “the experiential knowledge of people of colour is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination”. Thus, I argue that the use of Indigenous people’s experiential knowledge, systems of thought and ontology lend themselves well to the critical understanding necessary for the development of effective tools and strategies that are aimed at enhancing the recovery of our endangered languages.



Similar to the vantage point of critical race theorists such as Solorzano & Yosso (2002), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) addresses how the centrality of race and racism intersects with other forms of subordination. Smith (1999) claims that because Indigenous people experience the social and material world differently than the colonizer society, it is important for Aboriginal scholars to develop theories that are separate from the theories that have been developed by settler societies. In contrast, Green (2007) argues that since the groundwork for critically investigating societal conditions has already been laid, Indigenous researchers need not dismiss mainstream theories outright. Instead, Green (2007) asserts that it makes sense for Indigenous scholars to utilize existing tools of analysis in order to build theories that are unique to the Indigenous perspective. Early Native American educator Dr. Gregory Cajete underscores the fact that “the purpose of all education is to instruct the next generation about what is valued and important to a society” (2000, p. 182). Therefore, as Indigenous researchers, we need to be mindful of the ways in which “Western research paradigms have suppressed the sacred aspects of Indigenous people’s epistemologies” as well as find ways to educate the next generation (Walker, 2001, p. 18).

According to McKenzie and Morrissette, (2003) despite the fact that Indigenous concepts and practices are being considered, the pedagogical practices of mainstream education continues to perpetuate a dominant White worldview. This is evidenced by the fact that mainstream education curriculums do not require White students to examine themselves or their people as cross cultural. Mainstream curriculum embeds ‘Whiteness’ as the norm while Indigenous students continue to be required to perceive themselves and their people as the ‘other’ than mainstream culture. Therefore, demonstrating how the

dominate group that possess the systemic power to implicitly embed a racist majoritarian story, ultimately maintains White superiority as the norm. As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to provide a pathway towards self-understanding and self-knowledge for ISL (Indigenous second language) learners. In order to accomplish this, I view the teachings of the medicine wheel as a conceptual life map that will lead to self-understanding and knowledge within the context of our relationships with self, community, spirit and environment.

### **2.1.f – Medicine Wheel an Indigenous Methodology**

Given that within Indigenous communities, traditional knowledge is often only shared with certain people at certain times, not all Indigenous scholars believe that spiritual experience should be integrated into academic research processes (Rheault, 2001). Furthermore, Archaeologist Eldon Yellowhorn (2006, p. 1999) in an essay entitled an “Internalist Archaeology in the Aboriginal world”, questions the use of the Plains Medicine Wheel, claiming it is little more than a feel-good message contrived by contemporary shamans catering to a New Age sensibility”. To support this argument, Yellowhorn (2006) asserts that Hyemeyohsts Storm (1972) an Oglala Sioux writer, ascribed traditional native philosophical significance into a circle of stones through use of a combination of pastoral illustrations and ostentatious prose. Yellowhorn (2006, p. 199) argues that contemporary uses of the medicine wheel follow two trajectories, one that embraces the Medicine wheel as a secular archaeological occurrence without a ceremonial function, while the other reveres a “putative aboriginal utopia” that does not hold up to a systematic method of scientific inquiry. Despite these claims by Yellowhorn, there is a growing mass of Native American scholars such as Begay and Marboy (2006), Bopp et.al. (1989), Graveline (1998), Polly Walker (2001), White Shield

(2009), Lynn Lavallee (2009) and Hookimaw-Witt (2010), who have based the design and writing of their academic research around their own cultural interpretation of the medicine wheel.

For example, Metis scholar Fyre Jean Graveline (1998) draws upon the medicine wheel as a tool to both organize and discuss the cross cultural lived experiences of self and the students who were enrolled in a cross-cultural course that she was teaching. With the intention of challenging Eurocentric consciousness across disciplines Graveline (1998) uses the medicine wheel as a symbolic frame from which to organize her pedagogical approach to introducing tribal traditions into a Western classroom. Through use of a Plains tribal medicine wheel, Graveline (1998) metaphorically and practically illustrates a holistic interconnected method of analysis that challenges the “linear, mechanistic cause and effect [Western] models of thinking” that continues to be privileged in mainstream educational settings. With a focus on holism Graveline (1998, p. 75) evokes a self-conception of “teacher as healer”, as she journeys around the Medicine Wheel to describe her findings in relation to all four of the cardinal directions represented in the Medicine wheel. Graveline’s (1998, p. 75) coined “Model-In-Use” uses the Eastern quadrant to discuss what she calls consciousness-raising through use of “First Voice<sup>15</sup>”. The origin of first voices in Gravelines’ model emanates from the guided personal reflections of the students enrolled in a cross cultural course she was teaching at the time her research was being completed. The southern direction is utilized by Graveline (1998) to discuss the process and methods that she used to bring traditional knowledge into a Western classroom context. Moving the focus to the West, Graveline

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<sup>15</sup> A process of reflective learning

explores methods for community building beyond the classroom setting. And finally, the Northern quadrant is used to emphasize a social activist standpoint.

Similar to Graveline, Indigenous Scholar Rosemary White Shield (2009) employs the medicine wheel as a framework to develop her research model. However, White Shield's practical application of medicine wheel differs in accordance with her understanding of the tribal teachings contained within. For example, with the intention of exploring "Native realities, worldviews, traditional value systems and spiritual experiences" White Shield (2009, p. 49) includes in her "Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model" the incorporation of traditional spiritual practices such as the offering of tobacco, consultation with traditional knowledge keepers and ceremonial practices. Furthermore, White Shield's application of the quadrants varies from those used by Graveline (1998); for instance, White Shield (2009) associates the eastern quadrant with the acquisition of knowledge while connecting the southern direction with community. The west according to White Shield, represents people's cross cultural experiences while the north is linked with participant expression. When comparing how Graveline & White Shield use the medicine wheel the emphasis on leveraging experiential knowledge as a transformational mechanism from which to connect with the spiritual aspects of individual and community knowledge is remarkably similar for both researchers.

On the other hand, Lavallee (2009) uses the medicine wheel as a framework from which to bridge Western practices and Indigenous knowledges in ways that explicate the inherent challenges of bringing together the two worldviews. Similar to other Indigenous scholars who have employed the medicine wheel to guide their research methodology, Lavellee (2009) argues that an Indigenous specific conceptual approach to research with

Indigenous people involves the integration of traditional values and beliefs. However, rather than utilizing the four directions symbolized in the Medicine Wheel, Lavellee references the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects that are symbolized within the four quadrants. Lavellee places considerable emphasis on the spiritual dynamics of knowledge gained through revelation. Revelation, according to Lavellee (2009), is knowledge that is obtained from the spirit world and one's ancestors through dreams, visions, and intuition.

As evidenced by the aforementioned discussion, the practical application of the traditional medicine wheel varies in accordance with the specific tribal epistemologies and individual interpretation of the researchers. However, the epistemic positioning of direct experience and interconnectedness as an Indigenous approach to methodology is a common interpretative application of the medicine wheel amongst those reviewed. According to Kovach (2011) Indigenous people share a common understanding about the world and our interconnected place within it. This link between a relational perspective and tribal worldviews is further enhanced by "honouring the primacy of direct experience, interconnectedness, relationship, holism, quality and value" (Gregory Cajete, 2004, p. 66). Although the practical application of the Medicine wheel as an Indigenous research framework varies there are enduring beliefs about its use that are held in common.

Indigenous scholar Dr. Margaret Kovach argues that "cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledges" across multiple sites (Kovach, 2011, p. 12). As such, the development of Indigenous research frameworks as conceptual tools facilitates a cultural understanding within Indigenous-settler relations and has the

potential to decolonize the institution. In short the dissemination of traditional knowledge across various locations counteracts methodological homogeneity thereby potentially creating space for the construction of “new and mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory and action” amongst those who are interested in exploring alternative forms of knowledge production (Kovach, 2011, p. 12).

Since we live in an ever changing society, universities are the societal mechanisms that lead to the certification of our doctors, nurses, counselors and other professionals, these professions in turn directly affect Indigenous people. Thus, the academic mechanism that informs societal vocations needs to be provided with a valid understanding of the sacred nature of Indigenous epistemologies. Walker, (2001, p. 18) asserts that in order to accurately reflect the true nature of Indigenous knowledge, “the interconnections between Indigenous people’s experiences of the sacred needs to inform the practical, analytical academic research process”. According to Kovach the level of young Indigenous scholars seeking tribal based methods for doing research within the academy is increasing therefore, experienced Indigenous scholars have an educative responsibility to both communicate and model respectful Indigenous research methodologies. In practice I utilize the medicine wheel as a tool of analysis, and also make use of its teachings to provide a methodological roadmap for conducting ethical research with and for the benefit of Indigenous people. Furthermore, in an attempt to make meaning from the knowledge shared by the participants in the study, the presentation of my research findings contains a strong narrative element.

According to Bopp, et. al., (1984, p. 9) “The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of both Northern and Southern America”.

The intended use of the Medicine Wheel for Indigenous people is to help the people “see or understand things we can’t quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects” (Bopp, et. al: 1984, p.9). The circular shape of the Medicine Wheel symbolizes many things, one of which is the symbol of the universe and the interconnection with all living things (Bopp, et. al., 1984). I have been told by my Elders that when one seeks out the teachings of the Medicine Wheel with a sincere and open heart, the multilayered symbols and teachings within will lead to the many hidden and wonderful gifts that the Creator has placed within us (Bopp, et. al., 1984). These gifts though not yet developed within the individual, are given for the purpose of sharing with one’s community. Contrary to the western notion that an individual is born imperfect and in need of correction, the medicine wheel reminds us that in order to fully develop we must engage in humble reflexivity so that we can discover and nurture our well-being in ways that benefit both self and community. Many great spiritual leaders have taught, “all gifts a person potentially possesses are like the fruits hidden within the tree”, therefore, we must nurture and expose them so that we can develop and use them for the betterment of our communities (Bopp, et. al., 1984, p. 33). I have heard it stated that we are spiritual beings who are currently engaged in various stages of the human experience if we fail to be self-reflective many of our hidden potentialities might never be developed.

Given that prior to contact, Indigenous people did not record their history in a way that could be understood by the early settlers to Turtle Island, I contend that the Traditional Medicine Wheel used by many Indigenous peoples in North America<sup>16</sup> can be viewed as an interrelated system of knowledge that provides a road map for me as I move towards the direction of discovering the meanings Indigenous second language learners

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<sup>16</sup> The Medicine Wheel also is used by Indigenous people outside of Canada

negotiate in terms of cultural identity, self-esteem and the barriers encountered during their ancestral language learning experiences. Since the intended purpose of the Ojibwe medicine wheel<sup>17</sup> is to provide direction and healing in a way that is in balance with all that exists in the universe, I also believe that the Medicine Wheel will provide meaningful insight into both how to investigate as well as explain the extent that learning a First Nation language influences individual esteem and cultural identity.

In view of the fact that the Medicine Wheel contains definite teachings which are passed down from generation to generation, I propose that for the purposes of determining one's role and responsibilities in the area of ancestral language revitalization, the Ojibwe Medicine Wheel provides direction and insight in ways that are meaningful to First Nations people. The Medicine Wheel teaches us that human beings have four aspects to their nature: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The interconnected nature of these four aspects necessitates that all must be developed equally so that we can have a balanced and healthy personal and community life (Bopp, et. al., 1984). As an Indigenous person I believe that I must strive to develop my capacities through the four aspects of my nature (the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual). With the intention of providing a shared understanding amongst Indigenous peoples, I used the four aspects of my human nature to formulate a system of Native transmotion.

Native transmotion is Native epistemology – a Native reasoning that will contribute to laying the important groundwork for additional strategies to enhance the effective leadership necessary for language revitalization. Up until recently, positivism was viewed as the most dominant system of inquiry. This method of inquiry claims that “the physical and the social world are in all essentials the same” (Kirby and McKenna,

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<sup>17</sup> A more in depth discussion of the Ojibwe Medicine Wheel appears later in this section.



1989, p. 34). Therefore, the only means to discover social reality is through the “objective study” of observable facts which necessitate the removal of oneself from the research process (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). To Indigenous scholars, knowledge is unique to given cultures, localities and societies; consequently, the information obtained during the research process cannot be explained in isolation from the system in which the knowledge is created (Wilson, 2008). Thus, for Indigenous people, knowledge is an interconnected system of thought that is collectively developed and constituted within the context of relationships with all living creatures (Battiste, 2008). Contrary to the nature of Western positivistic ways of seeing the world, there is no single unified answer regarding the meaning associated with the Medicine Wheel because “all tribes do not have the same interpretation of the medicine wheel however, the intended purpose of the medicine wheel is unified across nations (Hookima-Witt, 2010). Given that the purpose of this research is to bolster the learning process through the sharing of our mutual language recovery journeys, it is the commonalities of our experiences that we as Indigenous people can use to build the bridges that will lead us to the recovery of our First Nations languages.

To further expand on how I use the concept of the Medicine Wheel to guide my methodological approach, I will give a brief though not extensive<sup>18</sup> explanation of the teachings of the medicine wheel as it relates to the framework of my investigation into Indigenous language reclamation for First Nations people. The Elders in my community have taught me that the medicine wheel represents an Indian’s<sup>19</sup> connection to the land

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<sup>18</sup> The teachings of the medicine wheel are multilayered and far too complex to detail.

<sup>19</sup> I recognize that the word “Indian” may be offensive to some Indigenous people because it is a name that was given to Canada’s Indigenous people by the colonizer. However, this is the name that my Elder used

which is also referred to as “our Mother Earth”. To satisfy the quotation referencing criteria of academia this information is further supported by (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010; Pitawanakwat, 2006).

My methodological approach is strongly influenced by Hookima-Witt (2010) who uses her Cree worldview as a framework for her medicine wheel model of analysis in her recent research on women’s roles of sacred responsibility to the land. I am Ojibwe – Anishinaawbe<sup>20</sup> therefore, my worldview will be strikingly similar yet it will vary somewhat from Hookimaw-Witt’s (2010).

Fundamentally, the Medicine Wheel is circular in shape and divided into four areas which are intended to counterbalance each other and form a whole (Pitawanakwat, 2006). “As a whole the Medicine Wheel represents the relationships between various elements of the world, both seen and unseen, and emphasizes how all parts of the world and all levels of being are interrelated and connected through a life force originating in the creation of the universe” (Pitawanakwat, 2006). Lillian Pitawanakwat an Ojibwe/Potawotami Elder offers this overview:

“Each quadrant of the Medicine wheel represents one of the four cardinal directions. The Ojibwe believe that the East represents the springtime and the beginning of all life, changing from spirit to human; the journey starts (in the East which is on the right top end of the Medicine Wheel). The journey continues to the South, the summer stage, to the West, the death stage, and then to the North, the rebirth stage. The cycle continues in a clockwise motion around the Medicine Wheel, following the rising and setting of the sun, with the Four Directions serving as primary directional, or guiding, forces (Pitawanakwat, 2006:www. thefourdirection.com).”

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when he spoke to me. I have therefore chosen to maintain this authentic accounting for the purposes of accountability.

<sup>20</sup> Anishinaawbe – Ojibwe meaning one of the people or Indian person

Consequently, I view using the Medicine Wheel as a means to holistically transmit information in a culturally relevant manner that will be beneficial to Indigenous people. Since Indigenous people continue to value the oral tradition of storytelling as a means to transmit our collective Indigenous knowledge, I intend to present this paper in a way that more resembles a presentation by a storyteller rather than a researcher/author. In keeping with the teachings of the medicine wheel, I highly value the concept of interconnection and the co-creation of experiential knowledge. I therefore present this research with the expectation that you the reader/my co traveler in this research journey, will reflectively interact and draw upon the stories told by both myself and co-language recovery travelers, in ways that are meaningful and encouraging to you my intellectual travel companion.

Given that I view my research as a journey in which I will encounter and interact with others, there is no denying that all those whom I encounter during this journey will be co-participants in the creation of this story I am about to tell. In keeping with Indigenous tradition Aboriginal teachers and storytellers often begin by providing some background on themselves (Anderson, 2006, Battiste, 2004, Wilson, 2008). This disclosing of the storytellers own life experiences into the telling of the story allows for the listener to engage in their own personal process of critical evaluation. Thus, the listener/reader is given the storyteller's information so that they can filter their perceptions of the story and adapt and apply the story's message through their own personal lens (Wilson, 2008). This measure of transparency fulfills the seven Grandfather teachings of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth (Benton-Banai, 1988). Hence, not only will I begin this research by imparting some of my personal

experiences in order for you to gain an understanding of how my background has motivated my interest in Indigenous language recovery. I will also include an auto ethnographic accounting of my own personal Indigenous language recovery journey.

## **2.2 – Researcher/Storyteller Background**

My father is of intertribal heritage – Mohawk and Ojibwe and my mother is a mix of European and distant Métis decent. I was raised in an urban setting where I was made to feel ashamed of my Aboriginality by those in mainstream society. My Great-Grandmother spoke five Indigenous languages, which were lost when the government at that time removed niiNookimis (my Grandmother) and her four siblings from their home and placed them in the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario, where they were separated from their siblings and forbidden to speak their ancestral languages. As a direct result of this colonizing effort, niiNookimis did not have Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe language) to offer to niiBaapaa (my father), myself or my siblings while growing up. The pain and sense of demoralization experienced by my ancestors continues because I am still unable to offer my ancestral language to my offspring. Therefore, my motivation is very clear. My journey towards language recovery is an act of love, honour, humility and respect for my ancestors, those who have journeyed before me. Furthermore, as my daughter and I bravely embark on our ancestral language recovery journey we honestly and humbly ask those in the community who carry the wisdom of our language to share with us the teachings embodied within. And to you my co-journeymen as we move through the research process I have endeavored to remain authentic and truthful in the recording of my language revitalization experiences as I navigate all four of the directions in the telling of this, our language recovery journey.

## **Chapter 3 – Review of the Literature**

This literature review provides a synopsis of the major issues surrounding the state of Indigenous languages in early Canada both shortly after contact and today. To further support the claim that Indigenous people have a constitutional right to have their languages restored, a historical investigation into the practices of conceptual imperialism used by the government, and early churches will be outlined in order to illustrate how this practice was employed as a powerful tool in achieving not only the colonization of Canada's First Nations people, but also as a medium to justify the practices of cultural genocide that were inflicted upon First Nations people by the early settlers of North America.

### **3.1 – Historical Circumstances & the State of Indigenous Languages**

As a direct result of the genocidal and assimilative practices that were initiated and substantiated through conceptual practices of Western epistemology, Aboriginal people became, at the hands of British colonizers, minorities in their own countries (Armitage 1994). What's more, Western epistemological representations of Indigenous people were in turn used to justify systemic social policies that imposed Christianity and legislatively mandated residential school attendance.

#### **3.1.a – The Colonization of Canada's First Nations**

At first contact the relations between Aboriginal people in Canada and the British were founded on fur trade and Christian missionary objectives that were intent on "saving the heathen souls of the savages" who inhabited North America (Fisher, 1992). However, during this time period Britain was in competition with both France and Spain for land. Therefore, in order to combat the expansionist efforts of both France and Spain, the British immediately recognized the utility in establishing Canada's First Nations people

as allies. Thus, instead of the British government leaving it up to the early colonists to clear the land of Aboriginal people much like what occurred during early contact in Australia, early traders and settlers frequently built alliances with First Nations people and these relationships were eventually inherited by the Canadian government in 1867 (Armitage, 1995).

Prior to the creation of the Royal Proclamation there were many inconsistencies in the relationship of First Nations people in the various British colonies. It was during this time that “the idea that [an] Indian policy should be unified and conducted through a superintendent” was formed (Armitage, 1995, p. 74). Therefore, in 1755 the British government established a unified Indian department as a means to standardize relations with First Nations people in political relations, protection from settlers and to deal with the enlistment of First Nations people during various wars. Despite the British government’s attempt at amalgamation, the superintendents appointed by Britain were not unable to maintain a unified level of administration for Aboriginal people, nor were they successful in protecting Aboriginal people from further encroachment upon First Nations’ land by the early settlers to Canada (Armitage, 1995).

These actions did accomplish the establishment of imperialistic conceptual practices that continue to form an ontological and epistemological legal basis for dealing with Indigenous people in Canada today. Power, knowledge and institutions work together to operate on bodies that in turn discipline the minds of both the settlers and Indigenous people to think in certain ways (Foucault, 1980). What's more, these imperialistic practices continue to serve as mechanisms from which to divide human reality in ways that polarize differences resulting in anything associated with the term

“Indian”<sup>21</sup> being conceptualized as inferior and in need of external control and guidance. These interdependent systems of thought are the starting point from which the West has been able to maintain superiority over First Nations people. By controlling the knowledge about First Nations people settlers have been able to represent “Indians” in the North American sense, depicting them as objects in need of study, judgment, discipline, or government. All of this, says Foucault (1980), is taken for granted.

According to Smith (1987), we live in a text based society where it is the work of the intelligentsia to detach ideas from their grounding and origin in real people and their lived activities. These ideological practices are then used by those in positions of power to shape the lives of subordinate groups while systematically excluding their perspectives and experiences from mainstream knowledge. Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste, (2004) maintains that these imperialistic systems of constraint become exposed through an analysis of the text mediated institutional and conceptual practices employed to govern First Nations people. For example, the Royal Proclamation in 1763 has its origin in military policy; the original intention for its signing was to acknowledge the key role that First Nations people played in Britain’s military victory over France (Olthuis, et. al., 2009). However, as the use value of Canada’s First Nations people changed there has been an ideological shift in the application of the Royal Proclamation from one of co-existence and mutual dependence, to legal subordination, marginalization and assimilation. An analysis of historical documents exposes how settler society, having reached a state of dominance, began to put into practice multiple systems of control that resulted in the centralization of Indian policies which allowed the government to impose even stricter measures of control over First Nations people without benefit of their input.

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<sup>21</sup> A term given to the First Inhabitants of what is not referred to as North America.

The end result was the centralization of racist policies that further entrenched and expanded mechanisms of disempowerment for Canada's Aboriginal people. This assertion is evident when investigating the monovocal conceptual practices of the British government between 1755 and 1837.

According to Stuart Hall (1992, p. 62) "it is power, rather than the facts about reality, which make things true". Support for these claims is substantiated through an examination of historical documents which indicate that the government's earliest intention in the signing of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was to "conciliate the Indian Nations, by every act of strict justice, and to protect them [Native peoples] from encroachments on the lands they have reserved to themselves, for their hunting grounds". However, by 1837, the discourse between the Canadian Governor of the time, Lord Gosford and colonial powers in London, demonstrates a change in this viewpoint as there is a marked conceptual shift in the overall opinion with regard to the social position that Aboriginal people should occupy. When viewed historically, this transition provides insight into the origin of the racialization of First Nations peoples that in turn becomes manifested through the telling of the First Nations' story by non-First Nations peoples.

Having established themselves as the dominant ruling force within North America, the ideological content of master narratives created by the British settlers was beginning to shift in accordance with a new definition of Indigenous people based on their race. Critical race theorist David Stovall (2010), asserts that race and racism are not fixed concepts, they are socially constructed notions that shift according to historical and social circumstance. The "ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a master narrative in storytelling" (Montecinos, 1995). As such, these definitions of race



are intended to include and exclude groups depending on the ever changing agendas of the dominant group. Therefore, this shift in the master narrative as it relates to First Nations peoples resulted in practices and policies that altered the treatment of Canada's Indigenous people.

According to Potts and Brown (2005), knowledge is not rooted in the positivistic notions of empirical discovery rather, it is "embedded in people and the power relations between us"(p. 261). A historical examination of colonial correspondence between the Indian Department in Upper and Lower Canada indicates that the previously held view of First Nations people as military allies was beginning to shift from ideological notions of tolerance and appeasement, to a discourse that was intended towards assimilation and extinguishment of Aboriginal peoples, their languages and their cultures. Moreover, when combined with increased social pressures for land settlements and Britain's, entrenched worldview of themselves as playing a major imperial and civilizing role throughout the world, new sets of social policies were beginning to develop in Canada (Armitage, 1995; RCAP, 1996).

An in-depth examination of the conceptual practices of the early settlers, reveal that the concept of Aboriginal people as the 'other' – in other words, sub-human people in need of study, judgment, discipline and government became more concrete during the early process of nation formation. Hence, it was the dissemination of this master narrative that led to an entrenched belief in the inherent superiority of the white race over all others. This relates to Indigenous language revitalization efforts because a wide range of imperialistic practices by the settler state made it increasingly difficult for Indigenous people to maintain and transfer their ancestral language from parent to child.

In 1836, Lord Gosford wrote to London that it was up to the state to prepare the younger generation of Indians for “a more useful Mode of Life”. In order to accomplish this recommendation, Gosford believed that Indian families needed to be forced to send their children to residential schools. Gosford’s communication to England was as follows, “because they do not yield to any Race of Men...a considerable time must probably elapse before ancient habits and prepossessions can be so far broken through that they become sensible to the benefits of such training for their children” (cited in Armitage, 1995:75-6). Gosford’s textual practice provides important insight into the imposition of majoritarian stories that rely upon notions of biological and cultural deficit to justify the imposition of power over Indigenous people.

According to Battiste, (1998, 2000) the education system is the primary delivery apparatus through which the cognitive imperialistic values of mainstream society are incorporated and reaffirmed. This is important to note because according to Valencia and Solorzano (1997) biological deficiency models have been used to explain differences in cognitive performance within the educational system. However, with the passage of time majoritarian stories shift and “what some scholars originally attributed to the biology and genetics of students of colour were reclassified and described as cultural deficits” (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 30). Armed with the conception that “a successful student of colour is an assimilated student of colour” the intended goal of assimilation and further extinguishment of all traces of Aboriginality is clearly visible in the conceptual practices of the majoritarian storyteller (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 31).

Returning to the textual practices of the colonizing government, Lord Gosford (1836) indicated that it was imperative to assimilate the children into mainstream society

as soon as possible by whatever measures available and since the missionaries already had an established relationship with First Nations people the accepted wisdom was that Christian teaching by the missionaries would be the most effective method to be used in order to accomplish the assimilation of Aboriginal youth into mainstream Canada (as cited in Armitage, 1995).

As many aspects of life for Indigenous people were beginning to be carefully regulated through the education system, social policies that endorsed the majoritarian stories of the dominate group contributed to the idea that the white government should be responsible for the discipline of Indigenous children thereby leading to a new era of industrial style residential mission schools located away from reserves. This involuntary removal of young Aboriginal children from their culture, their language and their relatives was enacted for the purposes of the eradication of the First Nations people as distinct societies. Therefore, the actions and discursive practices of the early government and churches of Canada resulted in a form of social suffering which in turn negatively impacted existing Aboriginal people and their beliefs and practices, all of which were fundamental to the state of Indigenous languages and future outcomes in terms of cultural survival.

“Social suffering” is influenced by the unbalanced use of political, economic and institutional power of one group over another, in the case of Aboriginal people and the colonizing activities of the state, the unbalanced use of political, economic and institutional control, produced negative social, cultural as well as linguistic outcomes amongst First Nations people (Kleinman et al. 1997). It is a well-documented fact that initial contact between First Nations people and the French revolved around fur trade and

missionary activities that focused on “saving the heathen souls of the savage” inhabitants of North America (Armitage, 1995; Bombay et al. 2009, p. 13). However, despite the initial ideology of mutual tolerance and respect, as time progressed the European immigrants increased their colonizing efforts through community massacres and warfare as well as assimilative and racist policies that undermined the previously effective social, political, economic and linguistic structures that existed within First Nations communities prior to contact (Bombay et al., 2009, Lawrence, 2002).

### **3.2 –Motivates toward Recovery**

At one time there were “more than 50 Aboriginal languages belonging to 11 Aboriginal language families” spoken in what is now Canada; most of which have become extinct (Armitage, 1994: 83, Norris, 2008: 19). Furthermore, out of the sixteen remaining languages “it is projected that at the current rate of decline only four (Cree, Ojibwa, Inuktitut, and Dakota) have a reasonable chance of surviving over the next century” (Kirkness, 1998:95). To further illustrate the endangered state of Indigenous languages, Freeman & Fox (2005) report that 51% of American Indian and Alaska Native eighth graders reported in 2003 that they do not speak their ancestral language at home. Clearly these facts speak to the urgency that is motivating some Indigenous people to work collectively towards the recovery of their ancestral languages. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will help set in motion collaborative efforts that are aimed at developing strategies for recovering ancestral languages.

Potts and Brown (2005, p. 260) claim that “research needs to challenge the status quo in its processes as well as its outcomes”. Hence, anti-oppressive researchers need to expose as well as challenge the mechanisms of social injustice that continue to

reperpetuate social inequality. I hope to use the medicine wheel to assert that, despite the historical influences of colonialism and oppression, this specifically Indigenous conceptual framework contains the teachings that will enable the original peoples of Turtle Island to design a necessary plan of action that will lead to the restoration of their Indigenous languages.

Research projects such as this do not excuse the atrocities committed by the Government and the early churches of Canada, nor does it deny that there are social justice implications which call for these entities to enact legal, financial and strategic corrective action that is directly aimed at restoring Indigenous languages in Canada (Kirkness, 1998). Nevertheless one of the key factors motivating Indigenous people to study their ancestral language is the stark realization that they cannot sit idle and wait for non-Natives to address the historical injustices that have contributed to the endangered state of Indigenous languages (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). On the contrary, many people who are engaged in Indigenous language recovery report that one of the fundamental motivating factors that led them to work toward language revitalization was realizing that their ancestral language was in “a state of decline [and] nothing was being done to revive it” (Pitawanakwat, 2009, p. 101). According to Pitawanakwat (2009, p. 31) “failing to take responsibility to protect and pass on our ancestral languages, is a derogation of responsibility to our ancestors”. Pitawanakwat’s assertion supports and honours the ancient teachings contained within the Ojibwe medicine wheel.

Many of the language teachers in Pitawanakwat’s (2009) study indicated that they regarded their motivation to work towards the restoration of their Native language as a spiritual endeavor - “in terms of [a sense of] responsibility to creation, the ancestors and

future generations”. They also viewed language restoration as a “mechanism to strengthen identities, families, communities, and also as a method to heal the historical traumas suffered in residential schools” (Pitawanakwat, 2009, p. 101). Similarly, many of the language teachers in Gresczyk’s (2011, p. 248) study reported that because the Ojibwe language offered them an entry point to their “spiritual essence”, they believed that “teaching others the language would help Ojibwe people to heal” and get the most out of traditional ceremonies. Some of the teachers in Pitawanakwat’s study relayed that their students told them that they were motivated to learn Anishinaabemowin so they could understand what other fluent speakers were saying and laughing about all the time when they got together and spoke in their ancestral languages.

### **3.2.a – Language Revitalization as a Social Movement**

The Seven Fire prophecy predicted that an Osh-ki-bima-di-zeeg’ (New People) would come forward and begin to retrace their steps in order to recover what had been left by the trail of their peoples (Benton-Banai, 1988). Many Native people today believe that the youth of the Nation today are the Oshi-ki-bima-di-zeeg’ in-so-far as they are beginning to learn their Native languages, seeking out wisdom keepers, returning to ceremonies, solidifying their connection to Mother Earth and “discovering the common thread that is interwoven among the traditional teachings of all natural people” (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 112). The revitalization of our Native languages was predicted in the Ojibwe Seventh Fire prophecy therefore it is not surprising to discover in the literature that when Indigenous language learners and activists are asked about their participation in language revitalization they conceptualize their contribution to be an act of resistance to cultural and linguistic assimilation. This phenomena was evident in both Pitawanakwat

(2009) and Gresczyk's (2011) studies. For example, according to the language activists involved in Pitawanakwat's (2009) study, many conveyed that learning Ojibwe was an important tool for learning how to reorganize and reframe Ojibwe people's existence in the world. What is more, many language activists conveyed that they had a "love for the language" therefore, they viewed their involvement in the recovery process as a social movement toward the decolonization of their Nations (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011, p. 186).

Within the literature I have discovered that most of the research is written from an Indigenous language teacher's perspective rather than the experiences of the learner. The perspective of an Ekinoomaaget (one who teaches) makes a valid contribution to my research because many language activists start out as Indigenous second learners (ISL<sup>22</sup>). However, the participants in Pitawanakwat's study reported that as the level of proficiency in Anishinaabemowin progressed they recognized that there was a need for immediate action and it was this realization that predicated their journey to become an Ekinoomaaget (one who teaches). Pitawanakwat's findings suggest that becoming an Ekinoomaaget may form a natural part of the ancestral language learning journey.

These actions fulfill the teachings of the medicine wheel as will be discussed in further detail in the methods chapter. I have heard it stated by my elders that the pathway to true proficiency in a given skill is to teach; when you teach something you gain a solid understanding of those skills. Furthermore, from an evolutionary standpoint, the teacher having once been a student has had the opportunity to acquire a level of compassion and understanding of the experience of being a student. In my opinion this is a form of Native transmotion because the line between teacher and student becomes blurred in that the

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<sup>22</sup> Indigenous second language learners

teacher becomes the student and the student the teacher. They are conjoined and interdependent.

### **3.3 –Potential Outcomes of reclaiming a First Nations language?**

Research indicates that learning one's traditional language contributes to the development and establishment of an enhanced indigenous identity at both the individual and community level (Midgette, 1997; Littlebear, 1999; McIvor, 2009; Reyhner, 2010; Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). The link between learning an ancestral language and the ability to revitalize intergenerational relationships within First Nations communities emerged as a common benefit for people who are learning and teaching Ojibwe as a second language. Richard Gresczyk (2011) reports after identifying twenty-one individuals who were reputed to be language leaders within the Minnesota and Wisconsin region he discovered that one of the common outcomes emerging from his research was the opportunity to build relationships with the older generation. For example, Waawaakeyaash, one of the participants in the study indicated that learning the language gave him the opportunity to "personally connect with the older generation" with whom the learners felt that because they had "a different upbringing" they would not have had the opportunity to otherwise connect (cited in Gresczyk, 2011, p. 148). Similarly, other participants in Gresczyk's (2011) study indicated that learning Ojibwe gave them the opportunity to connect spiritually, participate in ceremonies more fully as well as enhance their understanding of life and the world more fully. As such, active engagement in the process of learning the Ojibwe language was a key contributing factor in the establishment of extended relationships within a wide variety of language learning communities both within the immediate location of Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as



abroad. Interestingly, one of the participants in Gresczyk's (2011) study expressed a deep sense of gratitude for the privileges bestowed upon him as a direct result of his involvement with Ojibwe language revitalization.

According to Ambler, (2004) when people spoke Dakota his native tongue, they understood the need to be in balance with other people as well as the natural and spiritual world that surrounded them. As such Ambler (2004) believes that there is a direct link between the use of Dakota the knowledge of how to "truly knew how to treat one another" ( p. 8). It is arguable that knowing how to treat one another also involves knowing how to treat the self. According to Midgette (1997) knowing one's ancestral language contributes to an overall sense of healing and wellness because learning one's ancestral language "presents one with a strong self-identity, a culture with which to identify, and a sense of wellness" (p. 3). The assertions made by these author's when combined, highlight the restorative potential that the reclamation of one's ancestral language has for First Nations people.

There are social costs to unresolved historical trauma and many of our First Nations residential school survivors have expressed great grief at having lost their languages at the hands of the Canadian Government. An important step in the reconciliation process would be for the Canadian government to listen to the voice of residential school survivors, who highlight the healing potential that ancestral language revitalization has for First Nations people. In fact during legal negotiations 90% of the survivors interviewed expressed that it was important to them that the government formally recognize that there was harm done and then follow through with committed

compensation that is directed specifically toward language and cultural revitalization (Lorena Fontaine interview, cited in Pitawanakwat, 2009).

A recent study conducted among First Nations in British Columbia provides convincing evidence that there is an inverse relationship between the statistical levels of Aboriginal language usage and the statistical incidence of Aboriginal youth suicide rates (Hallet et al., 2007). For example research results indicate that in First Nations communities where at least fifty percent of the community members had “high levels of language knowledge [they] experienced low to absent youth suicide rate. By contrast, those bands in which less than half of the members reported conversational knowledge suicide rates were six times greater” Hallet, et al. (2007, p. 389) It is important to note that in communities that have a vibrant First Nations language base, the suicide rate amongst First Nations youth was well below the broader provincial average. These findings support the claim that many Anishinabek believe that the protective quality of our ancestral languages is “embedded in the values and wisdom that the language carries” (Pitawanakwat, 2009, p. 96). As such, its intergenerational transmission supplies young people the strong cultural roots that will sustain them (Pitawanakwat, 2009).

The Canadian Press (March 2010) reports that criminal organizations seeking to exploit the intense poverty and squalid conditions in First Nations communities have resulted in heightened concerns regarding the growing membership of Aboriginal gangs. In response to the growing incidence of Aboriginal gang activity, Little Bear (1999) an Indigenous educator, states that “the characteristic that really makes a gang distinctive is the language they speak.” As such, he suggests that Indigenous cultural beliefs are structured to fashion the sense of identity, significance and belonging that Aboriginal

youth need to resist gang membership. This notion is further support by Spielmann (1998), who highlights that the interconnection of ancestral languages with Indigenous philosophies and worldviews may help restore the sense of identity and belongingness that Aboriginal youth need to resist gang membership.

In addressing the reclamation of an Indigenous identity, McIvor (2009:11) states that immigrant families view their languages as a form of cultural capital, they “argue that language is one of the most important practices for cultural production and reproduction”. Hence, “learning the language at the most basic level can provide a form of cultural immersion that accelerates and enhances the enculturation process and allows for more direct and meaningful insights of [the] core values, traditions and beliefs” that First Nations need to heal and maintain themselves within society (McIvor, 2009, p. 17).

Furthermore, Hallet, et al., (2007, p 392) asserts that any threat to personal or cultural identity poses a counter threat to individual or community wellbeing”. According to McIvor (2006, p. 19) “there continues to be many modern-day social, economic, political and even technological pressures to give up our Indigenous languages”. However, since “the vitality of language indicates how well a group is maintaining itself in society” (McIvor, 2006, p. 19), Indigenous people need to be diligent in their efforts to protect and restore their ancestral languages. Perhaps as Indigenous people rather than rejecting the influx of modernity, we need to focus on harnessing the technological advances for the purposes of supporting language restoration efforts. For example recent Indigenous language applications for mobile devices, video games that enhance Indigenous language learning, as well as online learning and chat groups. These important considerations raised by McIvor (2009) contributed to the

argument that in order to successfully revitalize Canada's endangered languages, further research that is directed at discovering the barriers people encounter as they set out to reclaim their Indigenous languages is necessary.

The literature indicates that Aboriginal language and culture are inherent to an Indigenous identity. Therefore, further research that examines the relationship between cultural capital and its influence on the urban Aboriginal identity perspective is needed. This research is aimed at examining how the reclaiming of a First Nations language relates to esteem, cultural identity and the decolonization process. It is my hope that the findings stemming from this study will contribute towards encouraging Indigenous people to reclaim their Indigenous languages and cultures and identities.

### **3.3.a – Social Responsibility**

The church along with the government jointly share a social responsibility to work towards restoring First Nations languages first by recognizing the long term traumatic effects that have resulted from social policies designed to eliminate First Nations languages and cultures and then dedicating the resources to advance a restorative agenda. In this context, there are two policies<sup>23</sup> that have had long term traumatic effects on the well-being of many Aboriginal people. One was the Residential school policy (mid 1800's to 1996) that mandated the forced removal of Aboriginal children to attend government and church run residential schools, and the second was the 'sixties scoop' which involved the removal of large numbers of Aboriginal children from their families and reserves, where they were often placed with non-Aboriginal families who did not speak their native tongue (Bombay et al., 2009). These policies and actions have resulted

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<sup>23</sup> The two governmental policies discussed are not intended to support the notion that the only governmental policies that had traumatic effects on First Nations people.

in a shared collective experience of trauma for Aboriginal people. Bombay, et al., alleges that, when historical trauma is coupled with ongoing and persistent sociocultural disadvantages the likelihood of past traumas being retransmitted intergenerationally becomes markedly increased in ways that manifest as a form of social suffering. I argue that the collectively shared experience of cultural disruption and language loss amongst First Nations people both on and off reserve has resulted in a historical form of trauma that is shared by Aboriginal people as a social group.

According to Bombay et. al, “the years of colonization and traumatic events endured by Aboriginal peoples amounts to a history of ethnic and cultural genocide” (2009,p. 14). Although the government has maintained that Residential Schools were established to save and protect Aboriginal people, rates of morbidity and mortality were recorded to be approximately 50% amongst those attending Church and Government controlled residential schools (Thorner 2010, Kelm, 1998). What's more, those who did survive this imposed method of “wholesale ethnic cleansing [operating] under the guise of education” have struggled to regain their Indigenous identity (Thorner, 2010, p. 384). Residential school survivor Gilbert Oskaboos provides the following insight:

We were removed at age five (sometimes earlier) from our parents and community, dumped into an alien hostile environment of residential schools and left to survive by any means we could.

We were removed from our parents, our grandparents, our siblings, our relatives, our Elders, our communities, our religion, our languages, our teachings and our customs to be brought up by childless nuns and white men in black dresses. We were beaten for speaking our languages. We were ridiculed when we spoke of our customs and teachings. We were introduced to spiritual confusion, we were taught European ways and European values and European mindsets and when we returned to our own communities we had become strangers – little brown white men who couldn't speak their

language, or make a simple fire or track an animal through the woods. We were ridiculed and rejected by our own people. And that is what the policy of assimilation did to Indian Country. (As cited in Kirkness, 1998, p. 135)

The above documented account from residential school survivor Oskaboos further exhibits how the government mandated schools inflicted atrocities upon Aboriginal people by “taking the Indian out of the child<sup>24</sup>” – a practice that had profound impacts on Indigenous languages and culture (1998, p. 100). Given that the Church and the state engaged in partnership towards the deliberate and persistent eradication of Aboriginal culture “a small step towards redress” would be that both the citizens of Canada<sup>25</sup> and the churches accept legal and moral responsibility for “enacting legislation for the protection, revitalization, maintenance, and use of Aboriginal languages” (Kirkness, 1998, p. 102). Both Kirkness & McIvor (2009) set forth a valid argument to support the notion that the recovery of Indigenous languages is a constitutional right that should be honored by the Canadian government. In addition, the claim that “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” is laid out in Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UNESCO 1996) also provides important support for the maintenance and recovery of Indigenous languages.

The fact that varying degrees of privilege are allotted to certain individuals and institutions by virtue of their social positions within a given society means that those who benefit from positions of power and privilege have a responsibility to contribute to the

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<sup>24</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, says his role and those serving in that capacity.

<sup>25</sup> The Government of Canada is intended to represent the voice of all Canadians

organization of efforts directed at correcting areas of structural injustice within society (Young 2007). Thus, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous forms of government need to work together for the purpose of identifying the possible roles that each may play in redressing the social injustice constituted by Indigenous language loss. Furthermore, since various institutions within a given society grant some individuals more power and privilege than others, individuals of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups who are in higher positions of power have a responsibility to use those positions in order to work toward developing strategies aimed at long-term Indigenous language recovery. It is clear that Indigenous people will need to actively search for allies with whom they may join forces towards collective action aimed at developing strategies for recovering their ancestral languages.

### **3.4 –Processes in place to recover an Indigenous language**

Several strategies have been developed to aid in the revitalization of Indigenous languages. These approaches include teaching methods that employ the adaption and innovation of Anishinaabemowin as a second language (ASL) as well as the development of AR institutions, programs and resources (Pitawanakwat, 2009). Total immersion programs are often argued to be the surest route to language revitalization and maintenance (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, Pitawanakwat, 2009, Gresczyk, 2011). Immersion types of programs are delivered under several types of medium such as language nests and immersion camps (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, Pitawanakwat, 2009), while the partial immersion or bilingual model is another method used to recover Indigenous languages. Both Rock Point and Window Rock Navajo nations offer a method that involves total immersion in Navajo for children at the kindergarten stage

with English being gradually introduced once the children develop an established level of proficiency in Navajo, usually around second grade (Reyhner, 2009). Adult immersion is another method for reviving the Indigenous voice as a second language. These programs while often centered around the classroom setting can also take the form of a master apprentice style that seeks to pair language learners with ‘master’ speakers who in turn offer the Indigenous language to them as a team (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Although it is argued that the immersion method is the quickest way to get people speaking an Indigenous language these types of program are “often under resourced and improperly implemented” thereby making progress difficult to maintain (Pitawanakwat, 2009, p. 111).

More recently, those involved in language revitalization have begun to utilize the internet as well as other forms of technology to disseminate the language. The University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire offers a virtual classroom in which participants can join in the class online and also access archived lectures that can be viewed at their leisure. Other recent internet dependent ancestral language opportunities include online virtual type classrooms that utilize instant message type technology to interact with the instructors of such programs and the establishment of email lists that allow for the dissemination of Ojibwe words and phrases that are sent both straight to the subscribers email box and also posted on the subscriber’s Face book wall. These language sharing forums developing though the newly emerging social media offer additional space for textual interaction between interested members of established Indigenous language learning groups and provide opportunities for networking beyond one’s immediate location.



With the technological development of various methods of digital and social media the ability to transcend the geographical barriers for learning an Indigenous language is becoming more of a possibility. Moreover, since many Indigenous youth are interested in technology and mass media, it is hoped that the development and expansion of these types of resources will help entice and engage them in the recovery of their ancestral languages (Pitawanakwat, 2009). As a participant in these types of programs this research provides meaningful insight into the learner's experience when they access these types of language learning systems.

### **3.5 – Barriers to Indigenous Language Recovery**

The endangered state of Canada's Indigenous languages and urgency in working toward their preservation and recovery cannot be overstated. Verna Kirkness (1998:94) contends that our ancestral languages do not merely represent a loss of a lexicon of words, rather, when a First Nation's language disappears, it represents a loss of our culture and the essence of who we are as a distinct people. She further reasons that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada have an inherent right to the protection of their languages because it is "a treaty right, a constitutional right, and an Aboriginal right" that was violated by both the churches and the early governments of Canada (Kirkness, 1998, p. 96). Another point to consider is that despite the apology issue by the Canadian Government in June 2008, for the atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples and the fact that there have been numerous studies that support the claim that Aboriginal people have a right to the protection, preservation, promotion and practice of their ancestral languages, the gross disparity between the billions in funding that Canada commits to the strengthening and sustainment of Francophone linguistic policies versus

the inadequate funding committed to Indigenous language reclamation, speaks volumes in terms of the government's sincere and authentic desire to reconcile (Pitawanakwat, 2009).

Richard Gresczyk (2011) carried out a recent qualitative investigation into the activities and experiences of Indigenous second language learners who have moved into the realm of Ojibwe language leadership (teaching) in the Minnesota and Wisconsin area. The participants who were selected for inclusion in the study were language revitalization leaders within their own communities and highlighted several barriers to learning Anishinaabemowin (Gresczyk, 2011). These "language warriors"<sup>26</sup> cited several barriers which included: too few speakers of the Ojibwe language, financial constraints, too few places where the Ojibwe language was spoken, lack of team work in the community, and the amount of personal sacrifices in terms of time commitments, work load, and feelings of isolation that comes with working in the area of language revitalization (Gresczyk, 2011).

The value that fluent Native speakers bring to the Indigenous language revitalization movement cannot be overstated. One of the participants involved in Gresczyk's study revealed that Native speakers of Ojibwe were the most useful to his learning. Furthermore, one language warrior relayed that while all of the other resources he used to reclaim his language were beneficial, he stated that "you can't beat a real flesh and blood native speaker who doesn't mind answering a million questions" (Awanigaabaw, cited. in Gresczyk, 2011, p. 139). Many of the 'language warriors' in the study recounted that not having enough fluent speakers within their own communities

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<sup>26</sup> A term defined by Gresczyk (2011:284) as "those who dedicate their lives to leading efforts to maintain and revitalize their tribal language".

made the need to travel beyond their immediate location to converse with someone in the language is a significant impediment to their language recovery efforts (Gresczyk, 2011).

Many of the Ojibwe language leaders in Gresczyk's study indicated that the scarcity of Ojibwe language learning resources is an added impediment to ancestral language learning recovery efforts. Not having adequate resources that are fully developed requires language teachers to put in extended hours in order to develop language learning curriculum as they go. In view of these findings Gresczyk (2011) suggests that there is a need to work toward the development of an extensive array of Ojibwe language learning materials that could be housed in a centralized resource centre and staffed by knowledgeable and fluent speakers of the Ojibwe language.

Barriers to language revitalization are not limited to systemic considerations. According to Gresczyk (2011, p. 151), there are personal barriers to Ojibwe language learning which include, the fear of making a mistake, being too shy to ask for help and the fact that some communities do not view Indigenous language learning as a necessity. These personal barriers when combined with the day to day demands of work and family life, undermine progress, contribute to increased levels of burn out and result in an overall lack of self-confidence.

The issue of inadequate financial support for Indigenous language recovery efforts continues to be a recurring theme within the literature (McIvor, 2009). Thus, even though there has been meaningful work started in the area of Aboriginal language recovery, inadequate funding for the "type of repair work needed to meaningfully revitalize Aboriginal languages" is a major stumbling block to its recovery (McIvor, 2009, p. 11). In support of this notion Gresczyk (2011, p. 236) found that "tribal councils

support language politically but are not willing to commit the necessary resources toward language revitalization”. As such, “all levels of government from First Nation to federal, need to start recognizing the state of Indigenous languages are in crisis and take action on the work that has already been started, both physical and financial (McIvor, 2009, p.19).

Being surrounded by English, the language of the colonizer, was reported to be a challenge for ancestral language learners and those who teach them (Gresczyk, 2011). Consequently, increasing the domains where Ojibwe is used would significantly impact the revitalization movement (Gresczyk, 2011, Pitawanakwat, 2009). In order to cope with the many barriers to fluency experienced by First Nations second language learners an expanded and collaborative approach to language revitalization leadership beyond the local area is necessary. Pitawanakwat (2009) claims that effective language leadership strategies would enhance the development of communication amongst language activists, facilitate the compilation of effective resources and decrease the “negativity and divisiveness” that has a tendency to destroy programs and discourage Indigenous language teachers and learners alike (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011, p. 220). McIvor (2009) alleges that all levels of government, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, need to make a concerted effort to work together for the purposes of setting up maintenance of a national language revitalization organization that is monitored and controlled by Aboriginal people.

This review of the literature highlights the motivations, perceptions, activities and struggles that ancestral second language teachers and learners have encountered as they continue to engage in a struggle to revitalize Turtle Island’s First Nation languages.

## **Chapter 4 – Research Design – Methodology**

### **4.1 – Indigenous Methodology**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) is a key Indigenous scholar informing my work, her research was foundational for articulating an Indigenous critique of dominant Western research paradigms and the questioning of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform Western research practices. Smith (2008) asserts that the very nature of Western research process contributes to the production of knowledge that is colonized. Hence, these practices continue to produce knowledge about Indigenous people that categorizes Indigenous people as ‘other’ and incapable of their own self-determined practices of knowledge production. According to Smith (2008, p. 3), “it is time to dismantle, deconstruct and decolonize Western epistemologies” in order to further lay the groundwork for critical Indigenous inquiry.

Marie Battiste (2008) contends that Indigenous knowledge is an interconnected system of thought that is developed within the context of relationships. As such, Indigenous knowledge is “collectively developed and constituted” through relationships with all the living creatures in the universe, therefore knowledge as it relates to Indigenous people, needs to be acquired the same way it has always been gained, by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people and within their communities (Battiste, 2008, p. 500). Moving beyond the physical realm of being, Wilson (2008, p. 176) further reasons that Indigenous knowledge systems are also “based on our relationship with the cosmos and also with ideas and concepts”. Therefore, researchers need to take all of these concepts into consideration when engaging in research with, on and for Indigenous people.

According to Wilson (2001, p. 176), “relational accountability” must be included when using an Indigenous methodological approach to research with Indigenous peoples. The consideration of “relational accountability” to the knowledge gained through our relations with others has the potential to produce results that are meaningful to the people involved in the study. Moreover, in terms of ethics relational accountability can be utilized in order to bridge Western notions of validity and reliability with a researcher’s responsibility to answer to ‘all their relations’ in the research process not just those that are realized through the process of Western academia. In keeping with traditional Indigenous protocol, Wilson argues that individual researchers must consider how the fulfillment of their roles and obligations within the research relationship can be achieved within the context of both their research practice and community connection.

The Ojibwe people of North America have a strong tradition of teaching through the practice of storytelling. I would like to share with you an Ojibwe story shared by Anishinaawbe spiritual leader Edward Benton-Benai (1988). The story itself is an accounting of how the use of fire became wide spread amongst the Ojibwe people. According to Benton-Benai (1988) in early times Anishinaawbe (Original man) was instructed by his Grandmother to go and find ‘the one who guards the fire’ and ask the Firekeeper for some fire so that he could help make life easier for others. When Anishinaawbe found the Firekeeper’s lodge the Firekeeper sternly warned Anishinaawbe that many others had tried to trick him into giving the fire to them (17). However, fearing they would use the fire in a bad way the Firekeeper would not give any fire to them. The Firekeeper provides this illumination:

You see, fire is a very special gift from the Creator. If you respect it and take care of it, it will take care of you and bring you warmth.

But locked up in this goodness is also evil. If you neglect fire or use it in the wrong way, it could destroy the entire Creation (Ojibwe teaching as cited by Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 17).

I have been told by my elders that the truth is available at all times for those who wish to see it. This story relates to my research because the knowledge I receive in relationship with my participants is a special gift given to me by the people and if I respect and honour what is given to me and use it in a good way, it will empower others to do the same. On the other hand, the neglect of my obligations or failure to reflect upon my practice has the potential to impact people in ways that are harmful. For this reason, the inclusion of relational accountability has the capacity to give powerful, reliable, valid and meaningful outcomes that are respectful in ways that extend beyond the confines of Western epistemological practice. With this in mind I have taken the steps necessary to develop relationships with the participants in my study as well as their Elders. Copies of this research will be made available to them upon its completion.

#### **4.2 – Principles in Conducting Indigenous Research**

According to Battiste (2008), it is the responsibility of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to not only uphold ethical research principles, it is also Indigenous peoples' responsibility to educate others regarding minimum standards in approaching respectful inquiry within Indigenous communities. Battiste (2008) further advocates for the protection of Indigenous culture and intellectual property by establishing principles and guidelines that are designed to address the extraction of Indigenous people's cultural heritage.

One of the main guiding principles for conducting research in Indigenous communities is that research should be carried out, if at all possible, by Indigenous

researchers for the benefit of Indigenous people. Furthermore, research conducted on Indigenous people “should empower and benefit Indigenous communities and cultures, not just researchers, their educational institutions, or Canadian society (Battiste, 2008, p. 501). Battiste (2005) encourages a collaborative approach to the research process. As such, projects that are jointly carried out with Indigenous peoples, and the First Nations communities studied would provide benefits such as “training, and employment opportunities” (Battiste, 2008, p. 503).

Kirkness (1998) asserts that the loss of an Indigenous language represents more than a loss of a lexicon of words, it represents a loss of an Indigenous culture and the essence of who we are as a people. Therefore, not only are there linguistic implications that apply to the loss of an Indigenous language there are cultural implications as well. Correspondingly, Battiste (2008, p. 504) claims that research with Indigenous people should be carried forth in their own Indigenous languages because Indigenous researchers could gain a lot by seeking the soul of their peoples in their ancestral languages (2008, p. 504). While I agree that a lot can be discovered when one engages in their own ancestral language, I find the criticism that Battiste leverages upon First Nations scholars who write in English to be somewhat hypocritical and harsh! Firstly, Battiste’s own scholarly writing is in fact in the language of the colonizer and secondly, the condemnation of Indigenous scholars for not knowing their own ancestral languages denies the historical reasons why they are not fluent speakers in the first place. And lastly, the goal of scholarly writing is to communicate therefore, one must do so in the language that the decision makers can understand. The ability to use a person’s lack of fluency in their First Nations language as a means to shame them is widely recognized within First



Nations communities (Pitawanakwat 2009). Some have used their knowledge of the language as a political weapon to ridicule opponents who are less secure in their identity (Pitawanakwat, 2009).

Historically Indigenous people have been the most studied people on earth (Smith, 1999) even though they have largely not realized the benefits stemming from this type of knowledge extrapolation. Therefore, it is imperative that Indigenous people work toward protecting their Indigenous intellectual heritage from the commodification of Indigenous knowledge by outside agents. It is argued that the information stemming from Aboriginal knowledge and heritage needs to be given the same respect and protective intellectual and cultural property rights as those enjoyed in mainstream society (Battiste, 2008). First Nations knowledge is collaboratively developed and transferred orally for the benefit of community and cultural survival. However, the literary nature of Western research practices allow for leaves space for the exploitation of First Nations knowledge systems. As such Battiste, (2008) argues that there is a need for legislation to be put in place for the purposes of protecting the cultural heritage of Indigenous people.

### **Summary**

The groundwork for critical Indigenous inquiry has been well articulated through the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999; 2008), who argues for the decolonization of existing Western epistemologies. Both Wilson (2001; 2008) and Battiste (2008) argue that Indigenous knowledge is an interconnected system of understanding that is collectively developed and constituted through relationships with all of ones relations. Therefore, Indigenous knowledge needs to be acquired the same way it has always been gained, by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people and within their communities.

Hence, Indigenous systems of knowledge and heritage cannot or should not be isolated and objectified for the purposes of Western capitalistic cognition, control and or exploitation for the purposes of capital gain.

In order to understand ethical research practices as they relate to Indigenous people Wilson (2001; 2008) has developed the notion of 'relational accountability'. This concept requires individual researchers to consider how the fulfillment of their roles and obligations within the research relationship are being achieved within the context of their research practices on and for Indigenous people. To complement Wilson's (2001; 2008) work, Battiste (2008) further addresses the ethical issues surrounding research within Indigenous communities by arguing that it is important to address mainstream biases and the ensuing cultural misrepresentations that have resulted in the denial of any benefits for Indigenous peoples. Thus, existing institutional ethics processes do not protect Indigenous interests, rather, they operate in a manner that continues to assert the interests of mainstream society (Battiste, 2008).

Since Indigenous beliefs vary according to tribe and location an Indigenous methodology is not a universal concept that can be used to categorize Indigenous ways of seeing and generating knowledge in the scholarly world. Rather, an Indigenous methodology is as varied as the particular Indigenous peoples where the knowledge is collectively developed and created. I view the parallel that Wilson (2001) draws between Western research concepts of validity and reliability and his conception of 'relational accountability' as relating to ethical issues in approaching Indigenous research. I argue that by borrowing Western concepts of validity and reliability and associating them with relational accountability, complements Indigenous notions of interconnected knowledge

systems. Thus, since Indigenous knowledge is based on interconnection with the entire universe I believe that Wilson's notion of relational accountability serves as an excellent conduit for the development of a knowledge ecosystem that is intended to have built-in checks and balances that are in turn, tailored to the individual Indigenous community in which the knowledge is generated. This process of accountability is much like the Medicine wheel as it gestures towards multiple layers of responsibility that serve to guide and balance Aboriginal people so they may journey through the life cycle in a harmonious and respectful way. It logically follows that as an Indigenous researcher, I could make use of these teachings to guide me through the research process.

### **4.3 – The Medicine Wheel as a Methodological Approach**

As indicated previously, the Medicine wheel is circular in shape with four quadrants, each quadrant representing multiple layers that serve to guide and balance Aboriginal people so they may journey through the life cycle in a harmonious and respectful way. As I began my research I quickly discovered that there was a lack of academic material that might provide culturally meaningful ways for me to approach my project. With the goal of reasserting an existing Indigenous ontology, I combined the traditional teachings of the Ojibwe medicine wheel with the lessons of the seven Grandfathers in order to access an ancient system of knowledge that I could use to guide my research practice in ways that would honour and respect the people who would be involved in my study. I place myself in the centre of the medicine wheel with the four quadrants branching out from the centre. The East side is the gateway to life on earth and also represents the “emotional realm” as it relates to a person’s definition of self and culture (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010). Since the intention of my research is to transmit and clarify Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, I will attempt to impart some of the teachings of the Eastern door as they relate to my project.

#### **4.3.a – Waabanong (Eastern) Door – Planning the Project**

The Eastern door of the Medicine Wheel is the door in which a spirit enters the world. It is the direction of a new day and a place of renewal (Bopp, et. al.,1984). Since the Eastern direction of the Medicine Wheel is a place for all beginnings, I conceptualized the Eastern door to be the starting point of my research. With this in mind, I also viewed the east to be the place where my ideas, thoughts and visions transformed into action. Further, given that the Eastern door of the medicine wheel is

conceived of as the place of birth and emotional development, it is understood that as human beings, we will return to this place many times during our life cycle and each time “there will be new things to learn and new levels of understanding” achieved Bopp, et. al.,1984, p. 42). With these teachings in mind, I approached my research project from the emotional realm of sensitivity and reflexivity in ways that relate to self as well as the cultural beliefs of the First Nations people involved in this project.

#### **4.3.b – Beginning the Process**

In order to conduct my research in a respectful and harmonious fashion I placed myself in the centre of my research journey. Informed with the vantage point that Indigenous knowledge is collective knowledge my research journey began experientially by documenting my own language reclamation journey in the form of an autoethnographic accounting.

Autoethnography as a practice stems from an ethnographical research paradigm. However, Autoethnography brings together “a [form of] self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with other in social contexts” (Tami Spry, 2001, p. 706). By reflectively journaling my own contemplations to the research questions, I was able to understand how I am positioned, along with my co-travelers in the research process and in the data collection phase of the project. As I moved through the process of recovering my ancestral language, I turned my ethnographic gaze inward in order to make sense of the social world in which I and my language co-travelers engaged. The utilization of autoethnography in the research process allowed me to be present in written form, both as researcher and participant (Denzin,1997).

There are plenty of studies available that address Indigenous language recovery from the perspective of the teacher however, there is little, if any studies that speak directly to the learner's experiences as he or she sets out on their own ancestral language recovery journey. The objective of this phase of the research was to investigate as well as document through reflexivity, what it is like to participate in my own ancestral language recovery process. Moreover, since I am on a language recovery journey my journal entries provide a foundation for the storytelling (research findings) portion of my language recovery journey. To strengthen this foundation, six Indigenous second language learners generously agreed to share their language recovery stories with me. I view our language learning process as being on a journey complete with co-travelers who in the sharing of their stories became co-participants in the creation of this research project. Our stories asserts Brayboy, (2006) are "real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being" therefore, the presentation of my research findings blend the telling of our language recovery journeys with the broader theoretical and political implications of ancestral language migration (Brayboy, 2006, p. 430).

#### **4.4 – Phase I**

##### **4.4.a– Personal language recovery strategies**

The data collection process consisted of two phases; as stated previously phase one involved the act of reflectively journaling my own personal journey as I move through the language recovery process. In doing so, I registered as a distance learner in a beginner Ojibwe course at the University of Wisconsin, (UW) and also attended an introductory in-class Ojibwe course at McMaster University (Mac) in Hamilton, Ontario.

During the beginner Ojibwe (AIS 111), I virtually attended three to four online sessions per week for the purposes of learning Ojibwe.

The online class at UW ran for a seventeen week period beginning on September 2, 2011 and finishing on December 22, 2011. Each day the instructor would call me on the telephone at 3 o' clock Eastern Standard Time so that I could verbally participate in the online beginner Ojibwe (AIS 1) class as a distance learner. To gain visual access to the online class I went to this web address:

<http://www.uwec.edu/Flang/academics/ojibwe/index.htm> . This process was repeated three to four times per week, for seventeen weeks. Following each language learning session I set aside a thirty minute period in order to engage in a self-reflective writing practice for the purposes of answering my research questions. In January 2012, the in-classroom segment of my language recovery journey took place on Tuesday evenings for a three hour period at McMaster University (MAC) in Ontario, Canada.

Since Aboriginal systems of knowledge are interconnected and inseparable, I understood that my relationship with the people in my study forms a vital part of the entire research process. Therefore I contacted Dr. Makoons, the instructor for beginner Ojibwe at UW in order to explain my motivation and intentions for the proposed research journey. I then respectfully invited her to take part in this research journey with me and she agreed to be involved in the project. In that she shared her institutional knowledge in ways that facilitated my registration as an International student in the beginner Ojibwe class and also informed my fellow students that I was a graduate student who was completing a thesis on Indigenous language recovery. This process was repeated again at MAC University prior to the commencement of the Ojibwe 2012 winter session. As I

migrated through this journey of language recovery I continued to reflectively journal my own contemplations with regard to the research questions, which included; a) What are the factors that motivate people to reclaim their Indigenous languages? b) What are the outcomes of participating in the process of Indigenous language recovery at the individual and the community level? c) What are the barriers to fluency?

Given that the medicine wheel marks the developmental stage of a spirit which has entered in the physical form of a child, it is in this portion of the medicine wheel that my research project developed in collaboration with my experiential self and later my participants. It is important to clarify that I viewed the participants in the study not as subjects of this research but rather as co-travelers migrating together down the research river with language reclamation being our destination. By utilizing my own experiential ways of knowing and thinking as a methodological base from which I then formulated the interview questions, the research gained entrance through the eastern door of the medicine wheel. The questions that that developed from my own meaning making were intended to explicate the issues and meanings people make as they go about recovering their own Indigenous language recovery journey, I conceptualized this process as a form of Native transmotion that draws explicitly on the lived experiences of Indigenous people's knowledge through the inclusion of their personal narratives.

## **4. 5 – Phase II**

### **4.5. a – The interviewing Stage**

The intention of this research was to provide insight into the meanings people assign to their Indigenous language recovery efforts. The findings stemming for this study are intended to encourage further development in the area of Indigenous language



revitalization. Hence, I viewed this research as a collaborative effort between both myself and the participants in the study. Furthermore, given that Indigenous knowledge is intended to be derived from both the individual and collective experiences of Indigenous peoples, I used my experiential vantage point to inform the design of a semi-structured interview schedule which contained open-ended questions that were intended to encourage the participants in this study to shape and discover their own motivational narratives in relation to their personal language learning efforts. The motivational and experiential storytelling that emerged from this research represents a natural union within the environment as well as the spiritual and political spaces that the participants occupy throughout their ancestral language migration.

#### **4.5.b – Ninaabiiianong (Western) Door – Relations & Relational Accountability**

My interest in recovering Ojibwe, over the past year motivated me to attend a number of Indigenous language conferences. Throughout the course of this project I shared my passion for this research topic with the First Nations members that I encountered in my environment. Some of these members included the Aboriginal student body at both Brock University as well as McMaster University. These actions are in keeping with the Indigenous cultural practice of building healthy relationships prior to conducting research in Indigenous communities. I have made contacts with potential participants who, upon learning about this research expressed an interest in being interviewed. Wilson (2008) views the practice of using family, relations and friends as an important Indigenous research tool. He maintains that this practice places the researcher in a circle of relations which further ensures relational accountability. Consequently, not only are researchers accountable to themselves, this technique also positions the research

in ways that are intended to broaden the circle of accountability to all of one's Indigenous relations (Wilson, 2008). My involvement within the Indigenous language learning communities abroad facilitated the opportunity for ancestral language learners to gain an understanding about the nature of study and the motivation behind it, prior to making a decision to become involved in this research journey. I viewed my relational involvement within the community as a necessary step in the establishment of traditional Indigenous research protocol amongst those I interviewed.

#### **4.5 c – Waabiianong Western Door – Ethics**

The Western quadrant is referred to as the mental stage of the medicine wheel and also represents the mental realm of adulthood (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010). This stage is characterized by emotional growth and self-knowledge as it relates to oneself and our relationship with other people (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010:9). I considered the mental stage to be the conceptual stage of my research project. Thus, it was during this stage that I completed my literature review and after contemplating the vantage points of several indigenous theorists, I developed the theoretical component of the research project. The quadrant of the West also represents Indigenous people's responsibility for the management of land and self-determination (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010:9). The Western door also carries the political aspects of Indigenous people because those in this quadrant are considered the keepers of the future generation.

The Western quadrant is the direction that represents the coming of darkness and the encountering of the unknown, of going within, of dreams, of prayer and of meditation (Bopp, et al., 1984). To communicate with the creator and show gratitude for the knowledge that I have been given I offered sacred Asemaa (tobacco). When I was

wrestling with a concept I would get on my hands and knees in the scared garden of Mother Earth where I could ponder in her peaceful presence. Sometimes I would run barefoot in the park reflecting upon the political space that this work has the potential to occupy. It is important for you to know that not only is the West a place for dreams, prayer and meditative practice, it symbolically becomes a space for testing, a location from which the will is stretched to its outer limits so that the gift of perseverance may be won. Allegorically, the western direction represents the power to heal, the power to protect and defend, the power to see and to know (Bopp, et al. 1984). Since, the Western quadrant speaks to the ability to manage power in ways that honour our interconnection with all living beings within the universe I viewed the Western quadrant to be the area of my Indigenous research model that contained the teachings of Indigenous research ethics.

Battiste (2008) argues that existing institutional ethics processes do not protect Indigenous interests from the extraction of their cultural heritage. Hence, it is the responsibility of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to both uphold, and also educate others regarding the minimum standards from which to approach respectful inquiry within Indigenous communities. She further argues that one of the main guiding principles for conducting research in Indigenous communities is that the research should be carried out if at all possible by Indigenous researchers in ways that “empower and benefit Indigenous communities and cultures, not just researchers, their educational institutions, or Canadian society” (Battiste, 2008, p. 501). As an Indigenous researcher, I recognize the power dynamics involved in the research process and believe that it is my responsibility to strive to work toward ethical indigenous research methodologies. Respectively, I assert that reflecting upon and utilizing the traditional teachings of the

Medicine Wheel as a methodological framework, allowed me to approach my research journey with a degree of sensitivity and reflexivity that recognizes and maintains an accurate and meaningful Indigenous perspective. Given that Sun Bear & Wabun (1980) stresses that the Medicine wheel represents a circular worldview for Ojibwe people, the above measures respect and honour the power dynamics inherent in the teachings of the Western quadrant. It was my hope that the methodological framework presented in this study will provide an additional tool that to aid in the decolonization of the research process.

#### **4.5 d – Obtaining Informed Consent**

After receiving the necessary ethics approval from both the academic academy as well as from Six Nations Research Ethics Council, I prepared and distributed an introductory letter outlining who I am, along with the nature and details of the study. The invitation to participate in the study was distributed through the Aboriginal Students Centre at Brock University and also provided to personal contacts who had expressed an interest in sharing their language recovery stories. After identifying six interviewees who were willing to share their language recovery stories, I contacted them and offered them a choice between being interviewed on a face to face basis or over the telephone. After determining the interviewee's preferred method of being interviewed, a mutually agreed upon time and location was established for the interview. Four of the participants were interviewed face to face while two chose to be co-interviewed over the telephone. Please see Appendix A for the semi –structured interview schedule which contains open-ended questions designed to encourage the participants in this study to shape and discover their own motivational narratives regarding their personal language learning efforts.

According to the Ojibwe teachings that I have received when asking someone for knowledge it is important to offer them an asemaa<sup>27</sup> tie. This act honours all of our relations and recognizes the place that I occupy within the web of life. Furthermore, I believe that by offering the asemaa that was picked from the scared garden where I spent many hours contemplating this project allowed for the bringing together of one mind, one heart and one spirit during the interview stage of the research project. For these reasons each individual interviewee was offered an asemaa tie prior to the commencement of the sharing session. Individual sharing sessions lasted approximately 1 – 2 hours in duration, the interviews were recorded electronically with a digital recorder and then transcribed by me, the principal researcher. Although the majority of the participants agreed to be identified, not all of them agreed. Therefore, due to the sensitive nature of the material I chose to maintain confidentiality for all of the participants by assigning them a pseudonym to protect their personal identities. As such the following pseudonyms were used: Daisy, Sunflower, Rose, Tulip, Orchid and Violet so that no personal identifiers would be attached to the written and oral research findings. All research materials were kept secure by storing them in a locked file cabinet that only I had the key for.

At the beginning of the scheduled interview and following introductions, participants were asked to sign a consent form which explained the purpose of the study, the procedures for the interview, including permission to electronically record, transcribe and later include the data collected as findings in this study. Furthermore, the consent form also included an in-depth section surrounding issues of confidentiality and the legal obligations to report any disclosure of sensitive illegal activities by the participant. I also

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<sup>27</sup> Asemaa ties contain a small amount of scared tobacco that is wrapped up in a square of usually red cloth and ties together with material of ribbon. Scared tobacco ties are then offered when a person is asking for something and to show appreciated for what the entity is giving to you.

included a section in the consent form regarding the rights of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time and the procedure involved in doing so.

Interlayered within the medicine wheel is an ancient system of knowledge that I found useful for guiding the participants in the study through the different stages of the interview process. I conceptualized the early part of the interview to begin in the eastern quadrant of the medicine wheel. The eastern direction on the Medicine Wheel is a time when a person will “learn warmth of spirit, purity, trust, hope and the uncritical acceptance of others” (Bopp et al, 1984, p. 42). The East is the quadrant where the development of “courage is born and truthfulness begins”, these qualities were essential for establishing a comfortable rapport with the participants in the study (Bopp et al, 1984, p. 42). The Ojibwe believe that our journey around the medicine wheel is different for everyone. I therefore, recognized that although the participants began this research journey in the eastern direction, I was traveling in the western portion of the medicine wheel. I therefore, reflected upon the traditional teachings that are represented in the Western quadrant of the medicine wheel and turned to the mental realm of the west and used the tools of the West to help me guide the co-travelers through the interview process. These tools included the use of the verbal and non-verbal skills such as eye contact, tone of voice and body placement<sup>28</sup>, all of which I have acquired throughout my life journey.

#### **4.6 – Zhaawanong (Southern) Door – Data Collection**

The South quadrant is summer and also represents the “physical realm” of the Medicine Wheel (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010, p. 8). Given that summer is a time of growth, the youth and young adults of the nation are represented in this quadrant because they use

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<sup>28</sup> These are skills that I have acquired over the years as a professional Mediator.

their physical strength, energy and idealism to shape the economy which, in traditional times was “based on harvesting, sustainability and conservation”, I viewed the southern quadrant to be the location that contained the teachings for the data collection portion of my research project (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010, p. 8). The symbolic representation in this area of the medicine wheel relates to the goal of decolonization because the summer quadrant is a time of “preparing for the future, of getting ready for the days ahead” Bopp, et. al., 1986, p. 48).

Idealism is a response to the circumstances of the world around us, a place where the development of love, loyalty, generosity, compassion and kindness collide with the injustice and senseless violence we see around us (Bopp, et. al, 1986). I have been told that the southern traveler learns that idealism makes all great things possible and it was in this quadrant that I reflected upon these tenants’ and made use of the guiding principles to map out the research journey, create the interview schedule and collect the data for the project.

Since Indigenous knowledge is an interconnected system of thought that is developed within the context of relationships, I interviewed six people who agreed to be co-journeymers in the collaborative construction of Indigenous knowledge. Due to the critical state of Canada’s Indigenous languages this research is intended to contribute to the revitalization efforts of all Indigenous languages. Thus, the interviewees included in this research were selected because they were actively engaged in the recovery of any one of Turtle Islands’ First Nations languages. In addition, I used my own Indigenous language learning reflections to formulate additional open-ended questions for the purposes of gathering rich interview data. Given that I view myself as a storyteller, an

accurate and concise accounting of the background of my language recovery journey is also in keeping with Indigenous research methods (Anderson, 1996; Wilson, 2008, Hookimaw-Whitt, 2010).

#### **4.6 a – The Medicine Wheel and the Stages of the Interview**

As stated previously, the interview having passed through the Eastern door, moved beyond introducing the research topic and familiarizing the interviewee with the flow of interview process and the progression of the interview, the focus then shifted to the Southern direction of the Medicine Wheel where lessons of the heart are learned and tested. The most difficult and valuable gift to be sought in the South of the medicine wheel is the capacity to “express feelings openly and freely in ways that do not hurt other beings” (Bopp, et al., 1984, p. 51). These lessons were important because they allowed for both parties in the interview to release feelings of anger, hurt or grief over the loss of their ancestral languages in ways that allowed for both healing and the sharing of information so that others can learn from our experiences. The telling of our stories honours the teachings in the northern<sup>29</sup> quadrant and also displays the hard-won ability acquired in the south to set aside our feelings of anger, hurt or grief so that we can assist others in their language recovery journey (Bopp, et al., 1984).

During our co-research journey, key themes, both those anticipated by myself as outlined in the interview schedule (A-1)<sup>30</sup>, and those that emerged out of the interview process were explored through use of Native transmotion. Native Transmotion is an epistemological approach that permits a natural union in the emergence of our language migration stories in ways that allowed the participants to relate their language recovery

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<sup>29</sup> For a more in-depth discussion see the section that contains the teachings of the northern direction later in this paper.

<sup>30</sup> See appendix 1 for copy of the Interview schedule



narratives to the environment as well as the spiritual and political significance of their journey with other creations. For the purposes of facilitating the flow of collective knowledge derived from both the individual and collective experiences of the language learners, open ended follow-up questions were employed. The collaborative exploration research questions were: a) What are the factors that motivate people to reclaim their Indigenous languages? b) What are the outcomes of participating in the process of Indigenous language recovery at the individual and the community level? c) What are the barriers to fluency?

Since the teachings of the Medicine Wheel inform us that we are all connected to one another, the ability to set aside our feelings in order to counsel and assist other people through the interview process is also one of the valuable skills that I recognized as being in the Southern direction of the interview process (Bopp, et al., 1984). Consequently, I used sensitivity and reflexivity as tools to gauge when it would be appropriate to begin introducing questions that would both indicate and prepare the interviewee for its impending closure.

#### **4.6 .b – Giiwedining (Northern) Direction of the Interview**

One of the teachings in the Northern quadrant indicates that “all things end and the capacity to finish what we have started are of tremendous importance to our well-being” (Bopp, et al., 1984, p. 65). Therefore, as the interview draws to a close and the digital recording device is turned off the interview having reached its completion, transcends from what had once been a seemingly far off vision has now progressed around the medicine wheel to the quadrant that Anishinaawbe people view to be “the dawning place of true wisdom” (Bopp, et al., 1984, p. 62). As such, I employed the

wisdom I had gained in life to determine if the interviewee had suffered any negative results stemming from the interview process and if necessary, I gave the co-travelers a prepared a list of healing and restorative support services that could be used if the need arose. All of the participants indicated at the end of the interview that they found the use of the medicine as a model to explain the direction of the interview was helpful and healing for them<sup>31</sup>. This action respects the great law of seven generations.

This study explored the link between learning an Indigenous language and the meanings Indigenous second language learners attach to their experiences in terms of an increased sense of cultural identity and self-esteem. In doing so, my project investigated the learning experiences of people as they worked toward reclaiming their individual ancestral languages. The research questions included a) What are the factors that motivate people to reclaim their Indigenous languages? b) What are the benefits and contradictions of participating in the process of Indigenous language recovery at the individual and the community level? c) What are the barriers to fluency?

The Northern quadrant symbolizes winter and is dominated by the “spiritual realm” of elder life and death (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010, p. 9). This quadrant is dominated by philosophy and wisdom and also symbolizes our connection to the spirit world (Hookimaw-Witt, 2010, p. 9). I have been told by my Elders that both infant and elder share a special bond because the stages of their life paths overlap. Because it is a commonly held conviction among some Indigenous tribes, that human forms (Elders) transition back into spirit, and spirits transition into human forms on an evolutionary basis, it is believed that babies and Elders are the closest to the spirit world (Elders, personal communication, while growing up). In support of this notion I have frequently

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<sup>31</sup> See page 157 for further elaboration.

noted that there is a special bond between Elder and baby perhaps this is because the baby can see the spirit within the body and not the body that contains the spirit. In view of these teachings I believe that babies bring the gift of unconditional love and because they are the most pronounced receivers of such, I imagine they represent the most pure form of love, the keepers of the space the spirit seeks to return to.

Indigenous Elders are the wisdom keepers of the nation and it is their wisdom and connection with the spirit world that gives them their inherent rights within Indigenous communities (Hookimaw-Whitt, 2010). Taking into consideration that the Northern door of the Medicine Wheel contains the laws of the land and the purpose of life, I sought out the advice of many Indigenous Elders from several different communities. Because it was important to me that I did what I could to ensure my relational accountability in the analysis and subsequent storytelling of this research journey, I sought out their counsel throughout this project.

According to Bopp et. al, (1984, p. 62), there are many intellectual gifts awaiting the traveler that enters the Northern quadrant of the medicine wheel, these include the capacity to “think, synthesize, speculate, predict, discriminate, solve problems, imagine, analyze, understand, calculate, organize, criticize, remember and interpret hidden meanings”. I therefore view the Northern door of the Medicine Wheel to be the quadrant of my research model that represented the telling of the story. It is my hope that I have done so in a way that humbly, honours and respects the reader’s wisdom. I therefore wish to remind you to reflect upon the material presented in ways that will allow you to find your own personal truth.

Marie Wilson (1989) views the flight of an eagle to be a strong metaphorical representation of how gender relations are intended to balance and support each other. According to her the earth is represented by the body of the eagle and one of the wings symbolizes the female, while the other signifies the male gender. Although they are separated by the body (separate physically), they are joined together by one spirit. Therefore, in order for that spirit to take flight both the male and female must work together. If there is too much power in one wing or the other the flight of the earth/bird will not be in balance and the spirit will not be able to go where it needs to go. Hence, if the imbalance is too great the bird will be destroyed because its survival is dependent upon the wings working together toward a common and shared goal (Wilson, 1989). This concept is so simple yet so powerful, Indigenous people are story tellers and in doing so we must respect and maintain balance with all. Native storytellers designed their narratives with the intention to engage the listener and take them on a reflective journey of self-discovery in ways that engage the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of the listener. As such, I attempted to maintain a level of balance as I embarked upon this research journey I used the teachings of the medicine wheel to reflect upon my actions in ways that respect and value the experiential knowledge of my co-travelers.

## **Chapter 5**

### **5.1 a – Giiwedimong (Northern) Quadrant – Telling of the Story**

In most research relations the degree of interdependence in which humans live is cloaked under a veil of ideological individualism that is not conducive to social and moral responsibility for the collective actions of social actors. With this in mind, I recognize that there is a power imbalance between travel guide (researcher) and co-travelers (interviewees) in this study. Therefore it is my responsibility to reflect upon and develop the intellectual gifts that are symbolized in the Northern quadrant of the medicine wheel. The results of this study are intended to embrace the practice of counter-storytelling in ways that both value the experiential knowledge of the co-travelers and also provide an important mechanism from which to strengthen Indigenous traditions in ways that promote social, political and cultural survival and resistance.

### **5.1 b – Motivation – Spiritual/Ceremonies/Worldview**

If you listen to the drum you will hear those who surround it responding to the beat in a call and answer format. The lead singer is the person who calls out the first verse while the others repeat back in unison the sound of the leader. This call and answer format continues throughout the entire song. This manner of delivery is not intended to indicate that the one who leads is any more critical than the others, on the contrary, all voices are of equal importance and when joined together the interconnected outcome cannot be duplicated in absence of the contribution of others. The leaders and singers are brothers and sisters moving in unison within a moment in time and so too are the co-travelers during this research journey. Therefore, the methodology stemming from this research could not be possible without the participants in this study who shared their

ancestral language recovery narratives for the benefit and encouragement of others who have yet to embark on their own language recovery voyage.

When considering what motivated me to commence my language reclamation expedition, I could easily have confined my focus to the social justice aspects of language loss, but then again, since there is so much more to consider, this would be akin to catching a glimpse of a shadow and thinking you understand the nature of its being. I've heard it stated that it is better to be mad than sad. While I concede that anger certainly has its place especially when faced with the historical adversity and lived consequences of intergenerational trauma, at the end of the day you still have to acknowledge the pain, pick up the pieces and begin to embark upon your own healing journey. I therefore, offer the following experiential story.

My ancestors were taken from their homes and placed in an institution that had been touted as a measure to enhance the lives of First Nations people. In reality, their incarceration in residential school did not advance their everyday lived experiences<sup>32</sup>. Residential school survivor Gilbert Oskaboos, (cited in Kirkness, 1998) shared that the violent erasure of First Nations ways of being when combined with the forced imposition of Christian values resulted in a sense of spiritual confusion. To further complicate the matter, when they returned to their communities many survivors were “ridiculed and rejected by their own people”, many relayed that they felt like strangers amongst their own people. Perhaps this is why my ancestors left their traditional communities? Since the trauma experienced by many residential school survivors was so pronounced that many to this day cannot speak of it, even amongst themselves, many First Nations

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<sup>32</sup> The complexity of trauma experienced by residential school survivors is beyond the scope of this research.

people, including myself, do not know why their ancestors left their reserves (Blackbird, 2013). This is a gap that remains unfilled.

What I do know is that I was raised in an urban setting where from a very young age I was made to feel ashamed of my Aboriginality by both non-native adults and children alike. In retrospect, I reason that the acts of the child, more than likely stemmed from the racist attitudes of their non-Native parents. There are consequences for being on the receiving end of racialization, this becomes even further complicated and complex when racialization intersects with the politicization of identity. If you stop for a moment and reflect upon the political term for a First Nations person you would soon realize that there are multiple terms available to make reference to the first peoples in what is now known as Canadian territory. These terms include: Indian, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native and First Nations. What does one call themselves and how does this ever changing definition impact the conceptualization of the self? When considering the historical trauma that was inflicted upon the First peoples of Turtle Island and the fact that our identity is constantly being redefined to suit the latest political agenda, it is not surprising that I had such a sense of identity confusion surrounding my Aboriginality.

Although my parents and extended family modeled traditional Native values such as having a connection to the land and showing respect for all living things, including preserving the environment, they did not overtly promote a pride in being Indian. I suspect that this stems from the trauma that my Grandparents experienced at the hands of their residential school captors. For this reason I did not feel a sense of belonging, and because we were the only Native family living amongst the descendants of settler society, we were taught for the sake of survival, to tolerate settler intolerance and educate when

asked<sup>33</sup>. As time progressed, I gradually acquired as a method of survival, the ability to negotiate my identity in multiple ways. This has not been without spiritual consequence, some of which I continue to discover as I migrate along the ancestral language reclamation river.

## **5.2 – My Motivation to Learn Ojibwe**

My motivation to learn Ojibwe is simple. I wanted to discover who I was as a First Nations person, and I also wanted to feel a sense of connection to both my ancestors and other First Nations people. I envisioned learning my language as a way to discover more about my heritage. However, the availability of courses was limited and the personal barriers for attendance were far too extensive to facilitate my attendance. For example, when I was going to university in the early 90's there was a Mohawk language course being offered. Nonetheless, I could not attend because the course was always offered in the evenings. This time slot made it financially prohibitive to participate in the class because my children were still very young and childcare when available was beyond my student budget. As the years passed and my children became more independent the opportunity to learn Ojibwe with my sister and brother in-law arose again, and I jumped at the chance.

Not having anyone to converse with in the language continues to be a barrier to ancestral language retention (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). Mainly, because the social nature of language requires that you have somebody to share it with so when the opportunity arose to share that learning experience with my sister and brother in law, I gratefully embraced it in a whole hearted way. Many of my language and or cultural

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<sup>33</sup> The 'Idle No More' movement discussed at the beginning of this research highlights the educator role that First Nations people continue to fulfill for those willing to hear the message.



teachers have indicated that it is our responsibility to share the gift of language with all who desire to learn it. They further advise that gifts are meant to be shared and the true meaning of a gift reaches its fullest potential only when it is shared with others. I have been told that you cannot keep a gift for yourself, you must pass it on and like the casting of a stone into the water, the waves of that action grow, expanding its gentle reach with each cascading ripple.

The internalization of this teaching was shared by many of the participants in the study as several indicated that wanting to recover something that was taken away from them was a primary motivating factor for embarking on their individual ancestral language recovery journeys. Most viewed learning the language as a way to further embed themselves within their own First Nations' culture. As such, the further I got into my Ojibwe language learning voyage the more I began to experience a huge sense of urgency, a sense of not wanting the language to be lost, a growing need to preserve this beautiful way of thinking and being in the world. Learning the language helped ground me within my own culture and has also facilitated a healing process I was not aware existed.

As an urban Native I experienced a sense of wanting to regain membership in a group where intellectually I knew I was a member – yet, my history in an off-reserve setting had produced a physical, emotional and spiritual disconnect. Given that First Nations people living in urban areas continue to face ongoing pressure to negotiate their identities in multiple ways, regaining our ancestral languages is a definitive means through which we can maintain our separate identity and resist assimilation. The gift of our language is a constant link to our ancestral heritage and ancient ways of being.

Reclaiming our ancestral language ensures that these things cannot be taken away from us.

### **5.3 – Historical Contribution to Participant Language Loss**

In order to place this study in the proper context participants were asked to share what they knew about their ancestral language history. All of the participants in the study could trace the loss of their ancestral languages to the forced removal and incarceration of their ancestors in residential school where they were isolated from their families and communities and forbidden to use their individual ancestral languages. Similar to my own experience, a few reported that as a result of this invasion, their families had become fragmented and torn apart thus making it difficult to trace the origin of their ancestral language loss. One participant traced his language loss to the Indian Act and the imposition of compulsory enfranchisement, a method used to enhance the government's efforts to assimilate First Nations people into Canadian society.

As mentioned previously, my Great-Grandmother spoke five Indigenous languages, which were lost when the government at that time removed nii Nokomis (my Grandmother) and her four siblings from their home and placed them in the care of the Anglican Church. While in residential school they were held captive, separated from their siblings and forbidden to speak their ancestral language. As a direct result of this colonizing effort nii Nokomis did not have her language to offer to nii Baapaa (my father), myself or my siblings while growing up. Nor did nii Miishomis (my Ojibwe Grandfather), whose trauma was so great that he would not speak of it. I view my efforts to recover Ojibwe as a means from which I can reverse the pain and sense of demoralization that both I and my ancestors have endured at knowing that we are not fluent enough in their ancestral language to transfer it to our offspring.

There is a collective sense of grief, an intergenerational disconnect that stems from the loss of one's ancestral language. During a sharing session an elder dropped by for a visit. He wished to remain during the interview and agreed to become part of the study. Below is a dialogue between the two in which my interviewee, Daisy, recounts her own ancestral language history:

There wasn't really a history of the language for us because of residential school, assimilation and colonization right? Our relatives, our relations were probably afraid to speak and if they did know how to speak they were probably afraid to pass that on because they didn't want their kin to experience the same kind of problems. I don't ever remember a time [pauses] my Grandma told a lot of stories she was a big story teller but she never, ever, shared any kind of language with me all the time I spent with her.....

Daisy's Elder, wishing to participate comments "my grandmother spoke five of the six languages up at Six Nations. Daisy responds:

She spoke five languages and that's only two grandmas ago and I can't really speak anything without a dictionary or a book in front of me. That's two generations! (Daisy, 2012)

Elder – [referring to Daisy]

She, you could have learned an awful lot from my Grandfather's brother and he was living in Jordan and he was around a long time when I was a kid.

Daisy comments:

So if you think about the language it was alive and well only two generations ago yet we can hardly speak anything other than a basic conversation.

The conversation between Daisy and her Elder provides an example of how stigma about Indigenous languages as 'savage' and deficient, resulted in the forced elimination of many of First Nation language practices. Thereby illustrating how quickly dominant settler institutions did the work of assimilation and within just two generations language traditions that had lived for centuries had been eradicated.

These quotes highlight how the assimilative actions of the early government and churches of Canada have negatively impacted the state of First Nations languages. Furthermore, the collectively shared experiences of trauma that Aboriginal people have experienced as a social group has resulted in a form of social suffering that in turn has been transferred intergenerationally amongst First Nations people both on and off reserve.

Rose comments:

My mother didn't know it, my Grandmother and Grandfather were the last fluent speakers of Cree and Ojibwe too. They lived in Manitoba and my mother was purposely not taught her language. In those days if you loved your kids you made sure they did not acquire Indian language so they would not be discriminated against. And I know that it was a great grief to my mother all of her life. Especially as her parents got older because that was their principal language together and it bothered my mother that she could not speak to them and so this was something I grew up feeling. This want, this empty need too.

Although Rose does not indicate that her language loss history was a direct result of having a parent or grandparent who spent time in residential school, she does describe the shame and fear of mistreatment that First Nations people faced while she was growing up. Similar to Daisy's narrative, Rose states that she was not taught her language because the previous generation was influenced by racism against language speakers in a context of white majoritarian privilege. Therefore, Native people didn't want their children to suffer the negative consequences they had, at the hands of a white society. The intergenerational consequences has resulted in a collective experience of social suffering which in turn motivated Rose to dedicate many years toward the recovery of her ancestral language.

Stimulated by a desire to pass the language along to her offspring, Rose began taking her daughter to Ojibwe language classes when Tulip was very young. When I interviewed Tulip and asked about her ancestral language history she had the following comments:

Well I guess it is the same thing because my mom didn't have a fluent speaker in her home, although I did grow up with the language. I guess it is a little different though, we just did not use the language for everyday conversations. I did grow up knowing how to speak because I could pray and sing. But I'm not fluent you know. When I was a kid I could say things in Ojibwe but I couldn't have a conversation with anybody because I could only pray and sing and I didn't totally understand everything I was saying. I knew the gist of what it was but I couldn't really understand everything I was saying because I didn't have fluent people around me speaking Ojibwe on a daily basis.

Similar to Rose's parents, Sunflower relates that her Grandmother spoke Mohawk but did not make an attempt to teach it to her. Sunflower states:

Thinking back my Grandmother did speak Mohawk so I was around her quite a bit but in terms of fluently speaking it, she wasn't speaking it just the odd word here and there with respect to food or something.

The process of colonization and historic trauma stripped First Nations people of their pride in 'being'. Not only did the historical mistreatment of Native people have immediate consequences, these actions have had a rippling effect on future generations. Some of the participants in the study do not have knowledge of their family's history, while a few describe how their families were fragmented. Violet explains:

I have two fathers, my native father – my biological father. But, I also have a Native father who actually raised me. So, ...[pauses] both of them are from the same First Nation but neither one of them were language speakers. I suspect that my biological father was a residential school survivor. And then my father..the father the one who raised me, I believe his grandmother was in residential school, but his mother died when he was really young. So he was raised by his father who had no interest in learning native languages. And actually his father, my step father's father was not Native but his mother was Native. [Pauses] So,

I didn't really have anyone who was speaking the language and then growing up there wasn't...[pauses] I remember back in the 70's there wasn't there was no one out there that I recall even speaking the languages. So even now there was a pride coming up, I don't think that really started to really grow much until I would say maybe in the 90's. That's when they started having language classes, but there were only a few elders on the reserves that would even speak the language. But now, there is a big difference. So that's kind of a long answer to your question [laughs].

Violet indicates that over the course of twenty years she noticed a change in the way people viewed their ancestral languages. Her narrative suggests that there is a link between the evolution of Indigenous pride and the emergent desire that has influenced her people to begin rekindling its use in their community.

Similar to my own experience of being ridiculed and shamed for being an Indian while growing up, Violet explains that when she was growing up, being Indian was not something people bragged about. She recalls:

That's where my father was from and I ... I am...[pauses] ...what do you call it? I am an official registered member of [laughs] Rama First Nations. And [pauses]...by virtue of who my biological father is I'm probably related to half of [laughs] the people on the reserve and then ironically enough, the father who raised me, my...ah... step father, is related to [laughs] the other half of the people on the reserve. So... yeah but I never...ah... we didn't grow up there. We always lived in town. My dad grew up on the reserve but I didn't. I mean yeah my dad [pauses]. My Dad's family... the natives that I was around on his side of the family [pauses] like there wasn't... like where I started to go first there wasn't that sense of Native Pride.

Violet's narrative allows for the understanding of how the intergenerational consequences of historical trauma make it difficult and awkward for First Nations people to talk about their experiences of racialization while growing up.

An in-depth examination of the legal and conceptual practices of the early settlers to Canada provides insight into the origin and often taken for granted systemic cognitive imperialistic practices that contributed to the endangered state of First Nations languages. For example, with the goal of assimilation, the "*Gradual Voluntary Enfranchisement Act*

*of 1869*” was used as a tool by the early settlers of Turtle Island to deliberately eliminate and erase all traces of First Nations people from their ancestral territories. This piece of text has its origin in the *Civilization Act of 1865* and was initiated by the Crown to encourage the gradual civilization of the “Indian tribes of the Province and to amend the laws respecting Indians” (Statutes of the Province of Canada, 1857, cap. 25,26). The colonial government of the day arrogantly assumed that First Nations people would be quick to abandon their ancestral cultures and surrender their legal identities in exchange for what they believed was the privilege of full Canadian citizenship (Crey, 2009). However, contrary to this notion, a great many First Nations people were unwilling to surrender their ancestral rights and identities thereby making it necessary to further enforce legal erasure by legally stipulating enfranchisement within the *Indian Act of 1876*.

The ideology behind the *Indian Act of 1876* was to consolidate the multiplicity of existing legislation that addressed the legal conceptualization of the numerous distinct First Nations tribes across Canada. In essence, race was used as a basis from which to establish a mono vocal grand narrative that would justify the seizure of First Nations’ territories and the eradication of their cultures and languages. In many First Nations cultures; women are considered to be the traditional keepers of tribal resources, language and culture as such they became the primary targets for assimilation. This is indicated in the compulsory practice of enfranchisement that was enforced upon First Nations women who married non-First Nations men. In addition if a Native person received a university degree or professional designation, served in the military or left the reserve for an

extended period of time to work, they too were stripped of their Native rights and ancestral identities (Crey, 2009).

Orchid traces the loss of his ancestral language to the racist ideology of the Indian Act. As Orchid indicates:

Well, I was born in Grimsby, my family migrated from the reserve back in the 30's because my Grandfather sold his rights. He did that so he could move the family here to work on the farms at the time. And so my family never went to long house, it is been a long time since my family's been in long house. Plus both my Grandparents were in residential school on my Dad's side and same as my mother's side too. So they were even removed from long house and even living on the reserve.

To clarify I responded: "so you view not being part of long house as the reason you do not fluently speak your language and you view the European stipulation of enfranchisement to be the cause of that disruption. Orchid restates:

Yeah, I definitely see that as one of the major causes that the language was lost. Also, not participating in Longhouse made it so we were not exposed to being in the community of speakers of our own language anymore. Well not participating openly with the Longhouse people and because of colonization but then also because we disenfranchised and our family moved away from the reserve. You know that's another obstacle for the future generation of our family. And then the ill effects of residential schools you know grandparents on both sides being in the Mush Hole. So there was that psychological effect, it is multi-generational.

Orchid's narrative regarding his family's ancestral language history supports the notion that the systemic regulations such as enfranchisement negatively impacted the state of Indigenous languages in ways that are ongoing and not easily discoverable. He shared that his family was socially ostracized and denied participation in the Longhouse by some tribal members because his ancestors found it necessary to leave the reserve to find work.



Orchid's experience supports the notion that when First Nations people were forced to leave the reserve this dislocation has the potential to fulfill the original intention of the *Gradual Civilization Act* of 1865. To clarify, when a First Nation member is refused the opportunity to fully participate in their First Nations communities, the likelihood that they will marry other First Nations people becomes reduced. These feelings of rejection and disconnect are further passed on to their offspring because the occasions for the offspring to be nurtured within their First Nations culture are severely restricted. Urban Natives can experience a form of social suffering stemming from their own people in ways that unknowingly have the potential to fulfill the assimilative agenda of the colonizer. As indicated by residential school survivor Oskaboos (cited in Kirkness, 1998), the imposition of mainstream values contributes to an overall sense of spiritual disconnect that intersects with being ridiculed and rejected by one's own people. Leaving the reserve does not mitigate being on the receiving end of mainstream practices of racialization. The urban Native experience becomes further complicated when racialization intersects with both tribal and mainstream boundaries that deny the maintenance of ancestral languages.

Thus for Indigenous people, as for other people of colour, racism is embedded in a whole system of ideological and structural practices that are intended to both justify and maintain the superiority of one group over all others. According to Yosso, (2002, p. 24) the major element of racism is the pairing of ideology and power in ways that "benefit the superior group while negatively affecting other racial and ethnic groups". My interviews with Aboriginal language learners indicate that their common experiences provide important insight into the ways in which race and racism as a shared socially constructed

phenomena, negatively impacted First Nations language loss. Furthermore, by exposing the ripple effect of government- imposed regulations on successive generations, I hope to set in motion possibilities for the healing process to begin.

#### **5.4 – Motivation to Reclaim Our Voices**

With the intention to pass on my knowledge to the next generation, my language recovery journey is motivated by the love, honour, humility and respect I have for my ancestors. I view the realignment of my present with my past as an effective means from which to restore my sense of cultural identity and also as an important mechanism to heal from the intergenerational trauma that was unknowingly transferred to me by those who continue to be affected by it. This motivation to learn more about one’s cultural identity is shared by Daisy who, when asked to share what motivated her to recover her ancestral language explains:

I think mine more was because I always had this sense that from the time that I was probably old enough..hmm.. to even figure out I was Indian actually. I figured that out even though people told me that, my quest to learn the language was probably to be able to have a better understanding of the ancestors and the relations because if I didn't have any kind of language I guess somewhere in the middle of it I started to realize that I would be able to understand them if I could speak the language (09/29/2012).

Daisy conveys that her desire to understand what her elders were saying was an important motivating influence for her to work toward the recovery of her ancestral language. Daisy’s inspiration is similar the narratives shared by the teachers in Pitawanakwat’s (2009) study who relayed that their students told them that wanting to understand what other fluent speakers were communicating gave them the incentive to learn Anishinaabemowin.

In addition to wanting to understand and converse with other fluent speakers Daisy spoke about her desire to learn more about her culture. She viewed learning her language as an effective mechanism that would allow her to recover her birth right:

So my own quest to find my language began when I went to university and got a degree in English. One of the requirements was a language credit, and I could have gotten it in anything. I could have got it in teaching how to read and write, or anything relating to language. When I saw that course it was the first year it was being introduced in say 2004 and I decided to take that. So that's why I ended up taking it because I wanted to get something that was lost along the way. I guess I must have had a desire to learn it because we'd been denied it really. So ...I saw it as a good opportunity not only to fulfill the requirements in my degree for my BA but also an opportunity to learn a little bit more about our culture. And you know, part of that culture primarily is learning. You should know how to speak your own language. It was kind of taken away so yeah that's it really...deep down in the core that was the reason because I could have taken anything. And it would have been easier, because it wasn't easy.

Daisy's language learning journey began when she was given the opportunity to take advantage of learning Mohawk for a credit while attending university. As her studies progressed she soon discovered that she was even more motivated by her desire to discover more about her Native heritage. Rose describes a family based motivation for embarking on her own ancestral language recovery journey.

She noted that although both of her Grandparents where fluent speakers they did not pass the language on to her mother because they did not want their offspring to experience the trauma that they had. Similar to the findings in the literature, Rose's mother found that not being able to communicate with her parents in their First Nations language was part of the reason for working toward its recovery. Rose elucidated that "this was something I grew up feeling, this want...this empty need (05/24/2012). Rose's narrative provides important insight into the great sense of anguish many First Nations

people experience as a direct result of having their ancestral languages stripped from them through no fault of their own. While this feeling is unconsciously transferred intergenerationally from mother to child, Rose explains that when the opportunity to reclaim her ancestral language arose she took advantage:

So first of all it was my own family experience and then when I was apprenticed to a medicine woman the songs, the prayers and the ceremonies were all in Ojibwe. That was when I started formally studying it, before that I only had the words that came down in the family. These were phrases and words for sayings and some of which, you know because... this is funny, all of my life I didn't realize. I'm sixty two and there were some words that I didn't realize weren't English. [breaks into peals of laughter] I have a Master's in Education and yet I myself did not realize that these phrases that I had used my whole life weren't English. [Rose continues to laugh and the interviewer joins in] (05/24/2012).

Rose identified two motivational incentives to learn Ojibwe, with the first being the despair that her mother experienced and the second was being apprenticed to a medicine women who prayed, sang and performed ceremonies in Ojibwe. With the drive to learn motivating her, Rose discovered that some of the words and phrases that she had listened to all of her life and thought were English turned out to be Ojibwe. We both shared in the laughter because after gaining some knowledge of the Ojibwe language, I too have discovered that these figures of speech that I had learned as a child were in fact Ojibwe terms for body parts and different character traits. Daisy also makes reference to these different ancestral terms and phrases that were passed down the family but never identified as the family's ancestral language. In fact during our sharing session Daisy questions her Elderly relative, who was present during our sharing session:

We didn't have that history because it had been wiped out primarily because my Grandmother was placed in residential school. And from what I understand she did know how to speak at one time. Her mother knew how to speak and she knew how to speak but when she spoke the language in residential school she would get into trouble and they

would throw her in the closet in the dark. That's my understanding of what she told me. So she probably lost that language somewhere along the way. By the time my father came along well, nobody spoke that language so it was lost along the way. So of course we weren't taught that in the home. I do seem to recall though, relatives when they use to come over there was one relative who use to come over and he would start to mumble and speak right, I remember I was only a little kid and he would sit there and speak in some kind of language but he never taught it to us.

Daisy explains that her Grandmother at one time knew how to speak her Mohawk language however, after a stay in residential school, her Grandma no longer spoke Mohawk. Rose does recall hearing the language spoken by other relatives though they did not share the language with her. She then takes the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the Elder who was present during our sharing session.

Daisy: And as far as I know Grandpa, he didn't know it [looks at elder and asks] did he know the language?

Elder - some

Daisy: He knew some of the language but he didn't share that with you? [Speaking to the elder in the room]

Elder - He never even told me anything, any of his relatives or mother or father or anybody.

Daisy- well he knew but it was probably lost, right?

Elder - Oh he knew but didn't share.

Daisy - So part of that history was lost not even just with the knowledge of the language but the knowledge of anything past, even family relations and what not as well. Right? What does aanii kaawahnii nitahguy<sup>34</sup> mean???

Elder - it is like a greeting like hello aaah how are ya!

Daisy - [recalling] you know stuff and you would say things when we were kids like we would ask you something and you would be like

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<sup>34</sup> This is a phonetic translation and does not represent its true spelling.

[with emphasis] Petohen<sup>35</sup>. And we would be like.... guess that means no!!! [laughs] right? So then to a degree there was some type of language introduced but it was fragmented. That's probably the best way I can say it. So it was still alive and beating but it wasn't aah.... fluent.

Elder - [interrupts] you know you can't swear in Indian

Daisy - and no explanation either

Elder - there's no swearing in Indian at all

Daisy - I just always thought peetohen meant "beat it" get going right? [Pauses, looks at elder, laughs] he's still not saying what it is.

Daisy - I mean anyways I went around the long way for your answer but I think that's basically it. There wasn't really a history of the language for us because of residential school and [the process of] assimilation and colonization. Our relatives, our relations were probably afraid to speak and if they did know how to speak they were probably afraid to pass that on because they didn't want their kin to experience the same kind of problems. I don't ever remember a time, my Grandma told a lot of stories she was a big story teller but she never ever shared any kind of language with me all the time I spent with her. And I spent a lot of time with her.

During the conversation between Daisy and her Father, Daisy was able to discover that although it was never fully identified as such, her ancestral language was passed down from one generation to the next through use of various ancestral words and phrases.

Rose casts light on the fact that perhaps this may be a way to keep us linked to our

Aboriginality:

It is a weird feeling, it kind of makes you think about you know, your roots. Did you ever see that television series? The black family retains a couple of words of things like river and that is enough to take the Great, Great Grandson back to his own tribe in Africa. [laughs again] this is a very similar kind of feeling (05/24/2012).

Others in the study commented that they were motivated to begin their language recovery efforts because they were looking for a connection to

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<sup>35</sup> The spelling is phonetic and not an accurate reflection of the ancestral language.

their Native ancestry. After some careful consideration Violet provides this illustration:

I had sort of .. that sense of .. I don't know [ laughs] .. that growing sense of starting to think about.. what it meant to be a native person. And that developing of Native pride, there was that sense of wanting to know something more. Its hard to explain ... it's that sense of wanting to be connected and almost like well, I know it sounds kind of cliché, almost like a longing or a desire that something that you never had but you want. You know? That sense of connection to people? I wanted to know. I wanted to be connected. I wanted to feel that sense of connection to people. The older I've gotten and as I've went on in my education, I also have a sense of not only that personal sense of pride but that political sense of awareness is also important to me as well. So there is also that sense of restoring you know, the restoration of that cultural heritage not just for me individually but for what it means for other First Nations people. For other people to speak their languages too, so definitely that sense of connection with my heritage (09/26/2012).

Violet concludes that as time progressed she became aware of a deep need arising within, one that motivated her to take up her language learning journey. She recollects that she had a desire to connect up with others like her. As her pride in being Native grew she began to realize the importance of being able to pass on her ancestral languages to the next generation. In fact almost all of the language learners I spoke with related that their language learning efforts were motivated by a desire to recover their sense of personal identity and reconnect with something that had been taken away for them. Some also commented that wanting to pass the language on to their children was also a motivating factor. Orchid explains what motivated him to work toward language recovery:

It is something I always wanted to do since I was a child because I have always, well there are people in the area who can speak and I have always been fascinated by their ability to speak. And I know that our level of understanding of the world is different because of the way that traditions have been carried on for eternity. So I think

the biggest motivation was to pass it on to my children. I know some and I understand some of the ceremonies through talking with people and asking questions but I know my understanding would be totally different if I understood the meaning of the language as its being spoken during the ceremonies. (09/2012)

Orchid recalls when he was a child he was captivated by those who could converse in the Mohawk language. He also explains that since ceremonies in the language influence a Native person's worldview, wanting to be able to pass on the language to his children is a key motivating influence for him.

According to Sunflower, ancestral language reclamation is a good way to resist being assimilated into Canadian society:

There are things that you can do to make a difference and I always think about that. I don't know where I learned this or I heard it but there is this whole government idea that they see us, you know they see us as Onkwehonwe people or aboriginal people because we have our ceremonies, we have our language and they look at us and believe that eventually we are not going to have our language and if we don't have that than who or what are we right? You're just... you are not who you say you are anymore. So then why are you different then us, why are you ... you know what I mean. So I think one day that's going to happen possibly if we just let all of this go. Now we are just at the same level as everyone else. A citizen of Canada, and so I think that part is in my mind to, I don't want to see that happen. Just making a small difference you know what I mean? Just knowing that too, that plays on my mind. You just don't know what they are up to. You know the government right (11/12/2012)?

Sunflower views her language learning efforts as a way to maintain her distinction as an Onkwehonwe person (people of the land). She voices a concern that if Onkwehonwe people do not strive to revitalize their languages then they will soon become part of the melting pot commonly referred to as a citizen of Canada.



## Summary of Motivations

My initial motivation to learn my ancestral language was similar to the participants in the study. All of the language learners I spoke with communicated that their language learning efforts were influenced by a desire to recover something that, through no fault of their own, had been taken away from them long before they were born. All of the participants interviewed relayed that they were compelled to learn their ancestral languages because they viewed the language to be a key mechanism that they could utilize to recover their own sense of personal Indigenous identity and cultural knowledge. These findings provide additional support to the narratives offered by the teachers who participated in Pitawanakwat's (2009) study. Some indicated that they viewed language restoration as a mechanism to strengthen Ojibwe peoples' identities, families, communities, and also as a method to heal the historical trauma suffered while in residential schools.

Many of the participants in this study shared that they were moved to learn their ancestral languages because they wanted to preserve their ancestral heritage so that they could pass it on to their children. The recovery motivations shared by the participants in this study enhance and support the teacher narratives highlighted within Pitawanakwat's (2009) research. Several of the teachers interviewed indicated that their motivation to work towards the restoration of their Native language stems from a sense of responsibility to creation, the ancestors and future generations. Since the Northern door of the Medicine Wheel contains the laws of the land and the purpose of life, these research findings when paired with the literature, strengthen the argument that the

rekindling of First Nations languages honours the teachings in the Western direction of the medicine wheel.

Furthermore, according to Bopp, et al., (1984, p. 71), justice is the greatest gift of the North”.

As such, when considering the social justice implications that inspired people to embark on their ancestral learning journey Sunflower highlighted the importance that First Nations languages and cultural practices play in maintaining an identity that is separate from mainstream notions of Canadian identity. Her narrative supports the concerns highlighted by Gresczyk (2011<sup>36</sup>). The teachers in his study disclosed the concern that if Ojibwe people do not take up the language strand that ties Ojibwe people to their ancestral history they will lose the gift that our creator gave to us when we were placed here on this continent. We become spiritually displaced, mere descendants of a distant past that no longer exists.

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<sup>36</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on this topic see Gresczyk, 2011:120.

## Chapter 6 – Learner Outcomes

The Western quadrant of the medicine wheel represents the mental realm of adulthood and symbolically represents the power to heal, the power to protect and defend, the power to see and the ability to know. Our Elders have maintained that learning the language is key to the survival of our First Nations culture. These research findings indicate that reclaiming an ancestral language is an effective tool that can be used to resist and or reverse the effects of mainstream hegemonic practices that have imposed settler society's cultural mores, and social values upon First Nations people.

During the sharing sessions all of the research co-travelers indicated that their ancestral language reclamation efforts directly contributed to an enhanced sense of identity both personally and culturally. Many reported that as their language learning journey advanced they reported that they experienced an enriched overall sense of healing and wellness along with an increased sense of belonging and cultural connectedness. As previously highlighted, the historical mistreatment of Canada's First Nations people has resulted in a disjointed sense of identity that has manifested in a form of social suffering that has negatively impacted the existing Aboriginal beliefs and practices that were fundamental to the state of Indigenous languages and cultural survival. These research findings indicate that there is a definite link between ancestral language reclamation and a grounded sense of identity. As one participant puts it:

I think I had a good sense of wow, I'm learning this and I understand it and it just makes me feel better about who I am. You know what I mean? Like not knowing it but then learning it and thinking yeah this is me, this is who I am and I realized that's part of me and that's part of who I am. The language piece just kind of brings out who you are as an Onkwehonwe person. Well I guess from Six Nations you know, Mohawk, and that sort of thing. Onkwehonwe is just being who you are and the language kind of

closes up that, who am I. Because you see a lot of people, well I meet people who are not there or in between the two worlds and I think that language and learning the ceremonies are learning that piece about you. It could probably help to bring that together and help with that understanding of who you are (Sunflower, 11/12/2012).

Up until recently the history of Turtle Island's First Nations people had been omitted from the history books. This omission left an opening for the media as well as Hollywood to portray First Nations people in ways that benefited them. This silencing of history has contributed to both a lack of understanding as well as a misunderstanding of the depth and diversity amongst the First Nations peoples of North America. One language recovery traveler commented on the impact of popular culture. She mentioned that being a member of a First Nation goes well beyond the Hollywood version of what it means to be a Native person. Daisy comments:

You become more respected as an Indian if you know your language rather than just showing up with the feather, beads, buck skin and braids. Do you understand what I mean? You got to wear all of that still but if you know how to speak the language you must really be who you say you are. So anybody who says that it doesn't connect to identity or it doesn't give you a sense of belonging is full of it. It is everything.... the French and Italian community has a very good grasp of how important it is and how language connects to who they are as a people and as a community.

Daisy believes that learning her ancestral language has the potential to decolonize her mind. She believes that reclaiming one's ancestral language provides an important link to a Native person's sense of cultural identity and belonging in ways that are separate from those created by popular culture. She observed that there is much to be gained by paying attention to the French and Italian communities because they appreciate the link between knowing their ancestral languages and developing a sense of cultural

connectedness. However, it is also important to illuminate that in light of the fact that the ancestral languages that were spoken in Canada were purposefully disrupted by the Canadian state so that, unlike other cultures, First Nations people do not have the taken for granted privilege of being able to return to a homeland that speaks their mother tongue. Tulip's narration highlights the potential resiliency that learning an ancestral language provides. She comments:

Well I had a friend who... we were both very upset. We went to a prep school and we just didn't fit in with these very, very wealthy people who sent their kids there. And so she decided to get over being depressed by learning Hebrew because she was Jewish. And so it was really neat to see her do that so I kind of got more into Ojibwe as she was doing that you know.

I could see that she was just a stronger and happier person and she was going to Israel and she had these friends you know. And whenever things got really bad at school she would go further and further into the Hebrew thing. And she was over at this other high school learning it so she just spent all this time over there and she was hardly at school at one point. So I just started to focus on Ojibwe and I got the school to let me do an independent in my last semester there because I need more credits. So they let me do an Ojibwe independent study and I did that with Roger Thomas<sup>37</sup>. And then I was getting credit for it so I had to do it too.

Tulip explains that when she observed the positive changes in her friend who began learning Hebrew while away at school, she concluded that ancestral language reclamation could be an effective tool to help her cope with the feelings of isolation she was experiencing while away at boarding school. Tulip's narrative lends support to the notion that reclaiming one's ancestral language contributes to an enhanced sense of self-esteem and cultural identity in ways that boost emotional resiliency. As a means to situate herself within her own environment Tulip employs a form of Native transmotion that

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<sup>37</sup> Roger Thomas is an anthropologist who teaches American Indian Studies and the Ojibwe language. He was a member of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and was awarded the Wallace Pyawasit Community Leadership Award in April 2012.

provided a mechanism of resistance and healing for her. Her ancestral language learning efforts arose organically out of the immediate space that she occupied.

### **6.1 – Language recovery and its link healing**

The research findings suggest that many of the participants in the study share a collective sense that they have lost much more than their First Nations languages. They communicated that after having embarked on their language recovery journey this sense of loss was replaced with increased levels of self-esteem and cultural identity. To further highlight the healing potential that learning one's ancestral language has for those involved in the study most of the participants linked their ancestral language recovery efforts with an overall sense of re-connection to both self and their individual ancestral communities. Violet provides insight into how the sound of the languages calls to her spirit:

I was visiting my Dad last month and they were having a Pow wow on reserve and of course one of the speakers, to open our Pow wow was speaking Ojibwe ah Anishinaabemowin and when I hear the language now it does something to me spiritually like I just feel a sense of elation, a sense of ...I don't even know how to explain it [laughs] but I feel incredibly emotional. Like the first time I first heard people drumming and singing in the language. I'm like, I drove home and I'm bawling all the way home because it just touched me so profoundly.

According to Violet, being surrounded by her ancestral language and hearing it spoken has powerful and positive effects for her both emotionally and spiritually. She recalls having the same reaction when she heard her ancestral language being sung around the drum. Similar to Violet's experience I have also realized a profound spiritual dimension to learning Ojibwemowin. Early on in my own language reclamation journey I discovered that our ancestral words are a combination of action and process which in turn

involves much more than the incorporation of words and letters to make meaning. The following journal entry indicates how in learning the language there is this illuminating sense of spiritual engagement:

The further I get in my studies the more I experience this deep sense of peace. I think it is easier to convey that my spirit seems to lift. There is so much more to learn than just words and phrases. For example, the process involved in saying something as common place as thank you in Anishinaabemowin conveys so much more than when I say it in English “it is very difficult to translate the multiplicity of it, the word and the act of saying it, the subject of the word indicates a profound, reverent, respectful momentum of gratitude, there is this exchange of spiritual energy that is independent of verbal exchange (Field notes: Sherry-Kirk, 2010).

There continues to be a colonial need to sweep us all up into one grand category known as Indian peoples and this tends to wipe away the distinctiveness of the multiple Indigenous cultures. This homogenizing impulse paves the way for the construction of grand narratives that mitigate the continued responsibility of the government to dedicate resources aimed at truth and restoration. According to Rose Indigenous language is lifesaving:

I don't think I would have lived otherwise, I think it improved everything and it made me want to stay. I had little children so I wasn't going to kill myself but I don't think that I would have been nearly as happy. I desperately needed it, I got it when I needed it and now I feel that I owe it to anybody I can help in the same situation. The need and the gap in people's lives that destroying Indigenous languages creates in living people. When you see a group of Indians, like at Roger's funeral so many different tribes, so many different bands and all of them crediting him with having helped their self-image by teaching them their language. You know, all of these various people who some of them non Ojibwe were very happy to have had at least that Indian language. The need is just palpable when you get into a group of Indian people (Rose, 5/14/2012).

Rose highlights the protective potential that learning an ancestral language has for her.

She also shares how she witnessed first-hand the overwhelming sense of gratitude that

people felt for having had the opportunity to enhance their self-image by learning a First Nations language. Similarly, in support of Rose's insight, Daisy remarks:

I was really excited. I was beginning to understand a part of myself that I didn't have any understanding of. I guess it was kind of tucked away. I was ignorant and didn't know that it was there. I don't even know how to explain it. It helped bring me back to my culture.

Daisy explains that when she started to learn her ancestral language she discovered things about herself that she had not realized previously. She further indicates that her language reclamation efforts helped her feel an enhanced sense of cultural connectedness.

Sunflower elaborates further:

I guess it would be healing, I think there is another word for it but I just can't think of it right now. I think it is healing and there is that peacefulness to it because it is not a harsh language when you speak our language. It is not a harsh language at all, it is totally different and like you say it is descriptive. I mean it is to me it is how you exist basically. And it goes back to that connectivity, to the creator to your environment, family yourself. Everything right, that whole connectedness of it. I think that's where it comes down to understanding who you are and your place in the world, the language part of it, and of course knowing the ceremonies and all that.

My own observation lends support to Sunflower's observations. As indicated previously I discovered very early in my studies that learning Ojibwemowin allows for a totally different train of thought. In support of this notion, I attended a Saving Indigenous Languages Symposium in May of 2011 at the University of New Mexico and one of the guest speakers, Jon Reyhner (2011) reported that while teaching Indian kids whose first language was ancestral he discovered that the students under his charge had far more respect for their elders than their non-Indian cohorts. According to him these native students knew their place in the world and how to address others with dignity and respect (Reyhner, 2011). In contrast, he observed that there was a change in behaviour once



these Indian students started to learn English. Reyhner (2011) relayed that he felt their ability to relate to others in respectful ways was negatively impacted. Consequently, Reyhner's (2011), concluded that when Native children were taught English it disrupted the relational balance<sup>38</sup> that is an integral part of many native languages. In terms of my own language recovery experiences, I discovered that the further I progress in my own language recovery journey, the more this enhances my systems of thought (Field Notes: Sherry-Kirk, 2011).

Similar to Sunflower's vantage point, Orchid reflects on the meaning and the sense of pride he encountered during his language recovery travels.

I discovered a softer side definitely; it has that effect on your whole being. Like when I shared that word *genyo hunyo*, being able to understand what people are saying and being able to understand where we are in the order of things. Being able to understand what that person is talking about, it makes me feel really good to know that now. There's some level of understanding of what's happening here especially because it makes me feel whole and part of the community because I can relate to what is being spoken (Orchid, 2012).

Comparably, Tulip shares how learning Ojibwe impacted her worldview:

I understanding things differently now because of it, when you hear a teaching in English you can get the jist of it but when you hear it in Ojibwe there is just so much more that you understand. I think from a cultural standpoint it is just amazing, there's just so much more there. And if you make an effort to learn the language, Elders are more receptive to teaching you too. I think because they know you are serious. Even this individual word like how do we use it to describe something. You have to understand what the word means and how to use it. It really helps.

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<sup>38</sup> Relational balance refers to the ability to internalize traditional values and ways of relating to each other.

Laurie:

I am inclined to agree, I find the difference is very much in the realm of description. One is more well ... Anishinaabemowin is more descriptive of things. Learning the language helped me make sense of why I view the world the way I do (Sherry-Kirk, 5/14/2012).

## **6.2 – Change in Worldview**

Our Indigenous languages are more than a lexicon of words. Our culture and connection to who we are and what we stand for as a people is embodied within the Indigenous languages of Turtle Island. All of the participants relayed that once they started learning their ancestral languages, the ways in which they viewed the world in their everyday life changed in multiple ways. The conversation between Sunflower and myself supports the notion set forth by Marie Battiste (2008) who views ancestral language learning as a way to understand the soul of their peoples. Furthermore, the conversation below supports the view that Indigenous languages are inextricably connected to their philosophies and worldviews (Spielmann, 1998). As such when an Indigenous language is lost, there are both linguistic as well as cultural implications.

During a sharing session with Daisy we had the following conversation:

Interviewer:

Speaking from an Ojibwe perspective, when you look at the emotional and social benefits, I can see that our attitudes and beliefs are embodied in our language and I also see a parallel with the Mohawk thanksgiving address. When I reflect upon that, I can clearly see that there are beliefs, values and attitudes that are shared and transmitted in the Mohawk language. So in a broader sense, when you began learning your ancestral language did your view of things change? (Sherry-Kirk, 2012)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I have included this question so that the reader can gain a semblance of the context of the response

Sunflower responds:

Hmmm never really thought about it that way, let me think back. I recall when I learned the word for spring [says the word in Mohawk] when I learned that word the teacher was telling me that it is kind of like the description of what a robin says. So that sort of thing changes your perspective on how the words connect to what it is. Seeing that connectedness, but I never really thought about that until you asked, you just take it in. I think that's what we were trying to discover when we were learning you know, trying to get to that root word. And what does this part of the sentence mean. For example I'm going to the bank so there is "we staah" (incorrect spelling) that's the money part and then the other parts are (pauses to think)

Wanting to share my own ancestral language learning experience I state: "Where the money is"

Sunflower responds: Yeah that's right, I'm glad you said that because now I'm going to start thinking that way now.

Laurie:

I discovered that it is like a conceptual shift for example, in order to communicate the idea of a school *gikinoo'amaadii-wigamig*, it actually translates into learning house. Verses school or teacher is like *giikinoo'aamaagit* which translates into "one who teaches" while bank is "*zhooniyaa wigamig*" meaning the money house, things are described. I think this stretches our way of thinking and there is nothing wrong with learning how to exist in both worlds. Last year while at a conference one of the keynote speakers Dr. Theresa Schenck (2011), stated that our ancestors knew that when the newcomers arrived things were going to change. They anticipated that this was going to happen and that's why they bargained for our education. They had the foresight to see that things were going to change so they negotiated in good faith for the survival of our people. They were very wise, they knew it was not all about having to be this or that it was an acceptance that this is where we exist now and you can be a stronger person by being more flexible. I have been told that if you look at the willow it moves back and forth bending with the wind however, when a stick stops growing it dries out become inflexible so when met with resistance the stick breaks dissolves.

Sunflower:

Right, right, it is good that you said this because it gets me thinking again that way. I think I probably did at one point and I just needed

a push to get back to it. Yeah...it is not a harsh language it is totally different and like you say it is descriptive it is how you exist basically. And it goes back to that connectivity, to the creator to your environment, family, yourself everything right, that whole connectedness of it. I think that's where it comes to understanding who you are, your place in the world, the language part of it, and of course knowing the ceremonies and all that.<sup>40</sup>

Indigenous languages provide an important mechanism from which to both share and transmit a people's cultural attitudes, beliefs, values and fundamental notions of what is truth.

The ability to relate to others with dignity and respect is encoded and transmitted through use of traditional languages. Similar to Sunflower, Orchid's narrative lends support to the notion that Indigenous languages are more than a lexicon of words - they represent a whole system of thought that is diametrically different from mainstream cognition.

Orchid provides his account:

I could communicate and relate better with my own people because of the level of understanding that I gain through learning the language. One of biggest things I realized is that this is one of the reasons that the older ones talk the way they do. It is because when you translate the sentence from Mohawk that's how it reads with the subject in front. So I thought it was funny to listen to what I thought no that's not how you speak. Just a huge understanding of those flash backs of listening to people in my family talk, the ones without formal education use to speak the language at one time but now have passed down from generation to generation interpretations of the English language but it is based on the structure of the Mohawk language so it sounds like they were talking backwards but they were not talking backwards at all. It is just what we have been taught. We put the subject as being the most important thing. They were not goofy old men and women who don't know nuthin (sic) [laughs]. Well because they were raised on the rez and here I am the one who was absolutely well you know.

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<sup>40</sup> This quote appears earlier in this paper however, the intersectional nature of the meanings people make to their language reclamation efforts require its reappearance.

Orchid's narrative supports the notion that Indigenous languages demonstrate the underlying ontological and epistemic differences between mainstream thought and Indigenous worldviews.

Many non-Native academics have not recognized that native oral traditions represent a unique methodological system that demonstrates how Indigenous people make pedagogical use of the natural world to symbolically guide their everyday lives within the spaces that they occupy.

Tulip elaborates:

Yeah, you can see more of what things are connected to and there just, there is this other, even if you talk about the woods, noopaaming is the woods but ah, I knew this word from when I was a kid growing up 'baawaajaaminiis', I heard they were little people that's all I knew, and then just this past year I heard that what the baa waa ji and it has another ending. It is the bush and it is not just the woods it is like in the dictionary it says woods. It is like way out where nobody goes and that these people that live there are actually like you might call them.. like in popular culture, big foot. They are out there and just knowing that, I know this word and they are like spirit people that are out there somewhere but I didn't know the whole thing until I understood it with that word. And just knowing the translation for the word wasn't helpful because it just said woods.

Tulip's narrative supports the notion that embedded in a First Nations language is a unique system of thought that provides a mechanism for second language learners to both reestablish and maintain a connection to their ancestral communities, societies and localities. The Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island have consistently maintained that they have both a physical and spiritual connection to the land. This assertion has been historically affirmed and documented within the text mediated practices of settler society. For example, as indicated earlier, The *Royal Proclamation of 1763* historically recognized and affirmed that Aboriginal people have a special and unique relationship to their lands. This assertion is further validated and upheld in the *Indian Act*, the *Canadian*

*Constitution of 1982*, as well as *the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (AANDC, 1996) as well as the more recent social movement entitled “Idle No More” that has swept across the nation during the writing of this thesis. All of these are physical manifestations of Aboriginal peoples four directional relationship with their land and their immediate localities.

### **6.3 – Responsibility to pass on knowledge**

The Northern quadrant is considered to be the spiritual realm of the medicine wheel and is dominated by philosophy and wisdom. This quadrant is considered to be the place for the passing down of knowledge. Many of the participants in the study commented that after receiving the gift of language they experienced a huge sense of responsibility to pass the gift of language on to others. Daisy speaks with great urgency:

One thing before you turn that off, I did want to share something. I had an Elder tell me that, during your quest in life and your journey not only is it important for us to share but it is one of the most important first steps that you can absolutely do to be able to connect with your ancestors and with the old ones and with the creator was learning your language. Because if you didn't know your language they would not be able to understand you and if they can't understand you then they won't be able to help or guide or find you and you will be lost, and what you know will be lost. So you can think about that, that's what I was told anyway.

Daisy revealed a teaching she received from a Mohawk Elder in her community. She re-counted that the Elder stressed the important role that ancestral language has for connecting and communicating with one's ancestors, the creator and those in the spirit world. Interestingly enough the spirit of this teaching parallels the teaching that Tulip received from one of her community Ojibwe Elders. Tulip clarifies:

The Elders that I am working with at the Mootaabiiidaa program they talk about it as being one of the gifts of the Anishinaawbe. Over and over again our Elders tell us it is our identity ...it is also where our

knowledge is and our ceremony is. Our Aadoizookaanag<sup>i</sup> is there in our language and to reach all of those other beings you need the language.

Our Elders continue to advise that the sacred spiritual essence of who we are is embodied within our language. Those who seek out their languages soon discover its potential for healing and the importance of sharing. Daisy describes the emphasis that her teacher placed on sharing the language.

I remember when I was learning, the speaker [says the teacher's name] he taught in high schools and universities, he wanted to share his language. He shared his language whenever he could. He wanted people to learn it and to teach it. That's what he said, if I teach it to you I want you to share it, not to lock that up, how important that was. So, I remember him speaking, he was a very kind man. He was a very good teacher and I remember feeling like "oh yeah I am Indian" so you want to talk about learning the language and then getting a grasp a feeling that you had a right to that identity because you know you'd lost it somewhere along the way. And that was the main part that was lost... language and identity to me, go hand and hand. So...

All of the language journeyers that I spoke with shared that they feel a sense of cultural responsibility to pass their ancestral languages along to others. Violet expands:

Yeah I do um ... you know we were talking about that earlier, you know that sense of that personal sort of spiritual engagement. But then again, there is that whole political sense you know that understanding of what it means for a language to die out. And what it meant for people to lose their language and their way of being in the world. Yeah, I absolutely so feel a responsibility. So there is that going on and I think that is a way of helping I think us all, you know as Native people to heal by engaging with our languages and getting those connections and those bonds with each other. So I absolutely do feel a sense of responsibility.

During the sharing session Sunflower stresses the need to be forward thinking for the sake of both individual and community. According to her more language learning needs to be practiced within the home so that the community can benefit. Sunflower relates:

I think that maybe it is, that responsibility and then sharing with others what you have learned and what you know both for my own children, I know that if you are not going to speak it and retain it then it will be lost. I'm just thinking about my own small family, my oldest daughter is not speaking it and I'm thinking yes it is my responsibility to try and get her to be involved in learning it because when she has children if they are not in immersion or in a school setting where they are going to learning language, or they don't take it upon themselves to eventually learn it, then it is gone. So yeah I am thinking ahead both individual and with community about the responsibility to learn the language and passing that along. I think this is key, to be aware of that, to be thinking ahead to what's happening.

There is a collective inner historical scream that lies trapped within people which often releases unexpectedly. I found that for some of us our sense of responsibility is embodied through practice. For example, very early in my language recovery journey I began sharing with people my intentions to recover my ancestral language. The more enthusiastic I became about my learning process the more people felt comfortable expressing their own desire to recover their languages. This act of sharing created a safe space so that people felt secure enough to disclose their own hunger to know their individual ancestral languages. During this sharing session I asked Rose what her intention was for the language she is learning. Rose responds, "yes, hmm.... what do I do with it... um ... I have no idea um...." (5/24/2011). Wanting to help her, Rose's daughter who was listening in during the interview comments, "Mom teaches a lot in ethno botany and she uses the language, so she teaches in that a little bit" (Tulip, 2011). Suddenly discovering that she does indeed work toward language preservation, with a sigh, Rose comments reflectively:

Yeah!!!! I throw a word in here and there and it always amazes me how very little it takes to excite young people, old people, people who need their own culture and their own language so desperately. It always amazes me how ... teach them a couple of phrases, teach



them the name for a deer and have such a response from them. It is just amazing to me.

Rose's own insight during this interview provides a mechanism from which to understand the ways in which Indigenous people embody the transfer of their ancestral language to each other in unconscious ways. Others make a conscious effort to share the gift of language with others. One participant shared that after having been gifted with the language her sense of gratitude inspired her to come back and share that knowledge with the people with whom she began her ancestral language reclamation journey. Tulip explains:

And then when I started to go to those classes, those noncredit classes with my mom it was just these people who had been trying for years to learn Ojibwe. So when I went to graduate school when I came back I started teaching pretty quick. Within a few months into it and I was already starting to teach and I did that because I wanted to share the opportunity with them as well. And give them a chance to start speaking because I felt like they had been trying so hard and just couldn't get it.

When asked if learning an ancestral language had an effect on his worldview Orchid provides this elucidation:

Very much, very much, it is like when our children are born it is that same type of feeling, there is something born within us you know, it is absolutely beautiful when our children or our grandchildren are born. You experience that same feeling as when your first child was born in the world, you start understanding your place in the world because of the responsibility that you have towards this being that was brought here. I equate it to being the same as having that responsibility again in the world. For me it is the same feeling.

According to Orchid the changes that occurred within him after beginning to work toward reclaiming Mohawk as a second language was so profound that he parallels his experiences with that of becoming a parent for the first time.

## Chapter Summary

These findings lend support to the existing body of literature that claims Aboriginal language and culture are critical to an Indigenous identity. Previous research on ancestral languages indicate that learning one's traditional language contributes to the development and establishment of an enhanced indigenous identity at both the individual and community level (Midgette, 1997; Littlebear, 1999; McIvor, 2009; Reyhner, 2010; Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). These research findings indicate that there is a definite link between ancestral language reclamation and a grounded sense of Indigenous identity.

There is an emergent theme that supports the notion that there is a relationship between cultural capital and its influence on the urban Aboriginal identity. Tulip's narrative provides support to the notion that reclaiming one's ancestral language imparts itself to an increased sense of cultural esteem and emotional resiliency. Furthermore, there are social costs to unresolved historical trauma, many First Nations residential school survivors have expressed great grief at having lost their languages at the hands of the Canadian Government. Many of the language recovery co-traveler's narratives provide insight into the healing potential that learning one's ancestral language has. All of them linked their ancestral language recovery efforts with an overall sense of re-connection to both self and their individual ancestral communities. One participant in the study highlighted the protective life-saving potential that learning an ancestral language had for her. Rose's narration is further supported by a recent study conducted amongst First Nations in British Columbia which provides convincing evidence supporting the notion that there is a relationship between a high level of Aboriginal language usage and decreased incidences of Aboriginal youth suicide rates (Hallet et al., 2007).

All of the participants relayed that once they started learning their ancestral languages, the ways in which they viewed the world in their everyday life changed in multiple ways. From a Canadian perspective, these findings support the existing literature that relates active engagement in the learning of the Ojibwe language as a key contributing factor in the establishment of extended relationships within a wide variety of language learning communities both within the immediate location of Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as abroad (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). Independent of location, these findings supports the notion that there is a strong relationship between the rekindling of First Nations languages and the development of a positive sense of Indigenous esteem and cultural identity.

Gresczyk, (2011) provides important insight into the link between learning an ancestral language and the ability to revitalize intergenerational relationships within First Nations communities as a common benefit for people who are involved in learning and teaching Ojibwe as a second language. These findings contribute to the notion that First Nations languages contain a unique system of thought that provides a mechanism for second language learners to both reestablish and maintain a connection to their ancestral communities, societies and localities. Many of the participants commented that once they began learning their ancestral language their view of the world changed in ways that allowed them to understand their interconnection with all that surrounds them.

The Northern quadrant is considered to be the spiritual realm of the medicine wheel and is dominated by philosophy and wisdom. Since, this quadrant is considered to be the place for the passing down of knowledge, many of the participants in the study commented that after receiving the gift of language they experienced a huge sense of

responsibility to pass the gift of language on to others. While many stressed the important role that ancestral language has for connecting and communicating with one's ancestors, the creator and those in the spirit world, all of the language journeyers shared that they feel a sense of cultural responsibility to pass their ancestral languages along to others. One participant shared that after having been gifted with the language her sense of gratitude inspired her to return to her community and share that knowledge with the people with whom she began her ancestral language reclamation journey.

## **Chapter 7 – Telling of the Story: Barriers**

In this research project I discovered that the multiple barriers to ancestral language recovery faced by the second language learner forms an invisible interlocking system of linguistic oppression which undermines and obstructs individual Indigenous language recovery efforts. Many of the barriers shared by the language learners appear to interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels suggesting that there is an interrelationship among multiple dimensions and modalities. These include being surrounded by English, the inability to access fluent speakers, geographical locations, time and family commitments, the demands of everyday life, disjointed learning opportunities and limited learning resources. However, despite the fact that the language travelers are constantly challenged by the interaction of their barriers often in multiple ways simultaneously, they maintain a desire to continue on their ancestral language reclamation journey.

### **7.1 – Surrounded by English**

Many of the language learners in the study shared that being surrounded by the English language and the inability to access fluent speakers forms a significant barrier to their ancestral language acquisition efforts. As Rose puts it:

Yes the availability of teachers, we had a very substantial Indian population on the south side of town but almost all of them are totally English speaking people. There were very, very few teachers of culture or language in the early 1980's and actually the one who pioneered that died last Friday. So availability of teachers and the fact that we are surrounded by English, I live with, I dream in it, it is constantly in every media access that I have. When you are surrounded and wrapped in one language it is extremely hard to wrap your brain cells around another no matter how much you want it. It is very difficult (Rose, 2012).

Rose is able to identify the complex ways in which English permeates her everyday lived experiences, which in turn, undermines her efforts to reclaim her ancestral language.

Indigenous languages are more than just a means to communicate, our ancestral languages also include ways of distinguishing and ways of interacting. They are, in essence, ancient ancestral artifacts that communicate ancestral states of consciousness. The emergent movement toward Indigenous language revitalization has resulted in an internalized sense of duty to work towards its recovery so much so that it has become a modality of being that intersects with the everyday lived experiences of being surrounded in the English language on a day to day basis. Sunflower provides the following narration:

Part of it is knowing we need to learn our language and how important it is to keep that alive amongst us, like not only individually but as a community. But the whole English speaking is so overriding I guess, so influential to me that the language part always just seems to be not emphasized. Like when we get into class it takes us a while to orient ourselves to it. So by the time its ending, you know the class, we've all gotten into Mohawk language mode now, like our thinking. So it is just like we are all like that when we get in there. Some days it is like oh my gosh, we can't even say this. I can't even think it. I can see it but I can't even say it. That's how it is for me. I can see it but I can't say it. It just doesn't come out (Sunflower, 2012).

Sunflower relays that knowing how important it is to learn the Mohawk language both for herself and her community motivates her to work toward reclaiming it. However, she also feels that being surrounded by the English language on a constant basis serves as a barrier that impedes and at times blocks her efforts in ways she cannot easily identify.

The demand placed on Indigenous second language learners to conform to standard linguistic methods of pedagogy unwittingly contributes to the silencing of the

Indigenous voice. Speaking from my own social location I provide the following journalized reflection:

Wow, I really have to work hard at this, I feel so confused and frustrated. Our assignment for tomorrow is to give a five day weather forecast using all of the tenses; past, present and future. Learning Ojibwe is like building a puzzle and I am still searching for the missing pieces. I have been told that Ojibwe is an oral language so I really think it should be taught that way, only problem is there are no fluent speakers of Ojibwe to surround myself with. I am really grateful for the written resources that have been developed as learning aids but find them problematic at the same time (Oct. 4, 2011).

Orchid recalls the difficulties he encountered when facing English linguistic forms of pedagogy.

Like I said, it is hard to let go of what we know now and because it is a hell of a lot of hard work to learn how to speak your language and it is easier to just indulge in your other courses at the time. You know, you think to yourself well that's over and done with and I passed that ok, and move on to something else. And in my mind it was something easier if I was to continue on in my language with everything all the dynamics involved it would be a lot of hard work, especially being in the city like this with nothing convenient.

According to Orchid, the demanding pace of a western pedagogical practice that focuses on assembly line learning leaves little space for the extra efforts necessary to reclaim an ancestral language. Furthermore, some learners remarked that even when they did have access to Elders who are fluent in an ancestral language, for some reason the Elders found it easier to communicate their thoughts in English. Tulip recalls:

Another problem is that when you get Elders on their own they tend to speak English even though they can speak to you in Ojibwe. So there is another little thing, English is so easy to communicate when you haven't seen somebody for a while so they want to tell you everything and they want to tell you in English.

Indigenous languages are ancient artifacts that link us to a system of thought that can be passed on to us by our ancestors. In the summer of 2012, I traveled to Manistee,

Michigan to attend an Anishinaabemowin camp. The following journal entry stems from my experiences while there.

One of the things I have discovered since I started to learn Ojibwe was that it seems to be an entirely different system of thought when compared to English. Mainly, the subject doesn't come first it is basically all verbs and is also very descriptive. Today, after going to Helen Roy's workshop at language camp, I felt less frustrated with myself for not being able to pick the language up sooner. After listening to language instructor Helen Roy, who teaches Anishinaabemowin at Michigan State University, things started to make a little more sense. She said that "the Ojibwe language is one hundred percent verbs" and that every sound and every consonant has meaning (Roy, 2012). According to her, Ojibwe words describe what is going on or what a person is doing.

Later on after the workshop I returned to my campsite to discover that my tent had fallen down during that brief wind storm. Thankfully, the neighbour came over to help me put it back up and while we worked together, he decided to share some of his knowledge with me. One of the things he said was that when it comes to Ojibwemowin, word translation is problematic because the Ojibwe people don't think the same way that English people do, the rules and parts of speech are different. He also mentioned that fluent speakers have a lot of difficulty putting words down on paper because there is no universal means to translate. No wonder I get so frustrated at trying to learn by using the grammar and linguistic methodology stemming from western pedagogical practice (Sherry, July 27, 2012).

## **7.2 – Personal Time Constraints/life circumstances**

Most of the Indigenous second language learners in the study relayed that being constantly bombarded by the English language formed a significant barrier for them. They further shared that being surrounded by English thwarted their efforts to learn their ancestral languages because the environment that they live and work in was not conducive to retaining the languages that they had worked so hard to learn. Some indicated that disjointed learning opportunities when combined with the unceasing demands of everyday life made it difficult to keep up with their efforts to work towards the recovery of their ancestral languages.



When I began learning Ojibwe with my sister and brother in-law to advance our reclamation efforts we greeted each other, sent emails to each other using the words we had learned in Ojibwemowin and shared resources. Unfortunately, as time progressed personal time constraints and a significant job change for one of the group's members resulted in scheduling conflicts that could not be overcome. Thus, after a period of time our group lost focus and eventually dissolved.

Despite the fact that all of the participants in the study maintain that they were determined to learn their ancestral languages, their motivation to learn is constantly challenged with time commitments, the demands of everyday life, disjointed learning opportunities and limited learning resources. To navigate these barriers the need for them to look beyond their immediate location often resulted in feelings of exhaustion and consequent burnout for many of the participants in the study. Violet explains:

Well you know, the time issue, as a graduate student a couple of years ago I was actually going to this class one night a week. And then later they were doing the online thing, the learn 'amowin on line', so I was trying to learn like that. Quite honestly, my brain... I was just too tired and I did not, you know... it was like when I had time I wanted to do it but I wanted to sleep or I would be falling asleep during the class or because it was out of town I would have to drive out of town. So really, it was largely what was going on in my life and trying to fit that in. I would say that's the largest barrier for me (Violet, 2012).

Violet's account illustrates the extent that ancestral language learners must go to reclaim their First Nations languages and further reveals that it takes careful planning and a considerable amount of effort to find the time and energy to maintain her commitment to learning the language. Similar to Violet's account, after my first Anishinaabemowin study group dissolved, I turned to the internet and discovered that Ojibwe was being

taught once weekly online. The following journalized reflection provides insight into the large amount of energy needed to overcome the barriers:

It would be so much easier to work on Ojibwe if I wasn't so busy with school, family and work. It is 7:15 pm and after ferociously guarding my time from everybody else just so that I could sit down and attend this class, it was late getting started and the connection sometimes is causing a delay so, I'm always behind. Although I am tired, I am determined to overcome it so that I can carry on with my attempts to learn Ojibwemowin, I am so glad that it is available on line otherwise I wouldn't have had opportunity to study it right now (March 19, 2011).

The ability to access consistent Indigenous language learning programs when layered with time constraints and the demands of day to day living in an English environment has a cumulative effect that results in the formation of substantial roadblocks to ancestral language recovery efforts. Violet elaborates further:

I need to clarify first, I ah started the classes four probably five different times [laughs] now. I started going to them and you know something happened in my personal life so that I didn't finish them. Well recently I just basically stopped doing anything except trying to finish my graduate work. So even now I started way back I don't speak it fluently and I don't recognize a lot of things now either. Each time I go back to it, I recognize it quicker than I did the last time.

The availability of consistent language learning resources is reported within the literature to be one of the most common barriers encountered by both Indigenous language teachers and learners (McIvor, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). Even though there has been meaningful work started in the area of Aboriginal language recovery, inadequate funding for the “type of repair work needed to meaningfully revitalize Aboriginal languages” is a major stumbling block to its recovery (McIvor, 2009, p. 11). I experienced firsthand how limited resources play a key role in disjointed ancestral language learning opportunities.

Having finally grasped a handle of the online learning format, last night I went to the usual online site to study Ojibwemowin. To my dismay there was no class available so I emailed Ekinomaaget (one who teaches) to inquire and he replied “that the classes are finished indefinitely for now”. Up to this point his love for the language had inspired him to finance the class out of his own pocket. However, this was becoming increasingly more difficult so he was working on gaining access to funding and indicated that he would let me know at a later date when he was able to resume the classes (Sherry-Kirk, May 5, 2011).

Further updates:

Interestingly enough, during the summer while at the Anishinaabemowin language and culture camp, I encountered this language teacher. He informed that he would be launching another virtual online Anishinaabemowin classroom later in the year. The class can be accessed by going to <http://www.anishinaabemowin-teg.org/tag/isadore-toulouse/>. I am super excited about being able to take part in this class once again (Oct. 2013).

These journal entries speak to the level of drive and dedication that Indigenous language instructors put into ensuring that Anishinaabemowin is available free of charge to all who wish to learn it. Furthermore, in spite of the lack of material and financial resources that Anishinaabemowin teachers and learners face, their love for the language fuels and motivates people to work toward ancestral language revitalization.

### **7.3 – Disjointed Learning Oportunities and Inadequate Funding**

The recognition that Turtle Island’s ancestral languages are rapidly disappearing has resulted in creative grassroots efforts to both document and work towards recovering them. An interesting point of discovery for me was that very early in my journey I assumed that working on this project would accelerate my language reclamation efforts. However, the demands and deadlines imposed by academia also impeded my revitalization efforts in ways that left me feeling guilty and inadequate.

Perseverance, drive and determination: these are the solutions to the barriers I continue to encounter. Although I feel discouraged, today I decided to seek out another option to my learning methods. Now that the course work component of my Master's program is complete I should have more time to dedicate to learning Ojibwemowin. Armed with this ideology, I called the literacy branch of the Hamilton Native Centre to see if there was an Ojibwemowin course being offered during the summer months. After being told no, I decided to expand my search by spending the next four hours on the telephone trying to find another location that would offer an Ojibwemowin class to participate in. To my surprise and dismay, I was repeatedly told no and therefore was not successful. Maybe this is the lesson? There are plenty of materials available to enable my learning process, thus I need to make the commitment to push beyond my own desire for things to be easy (May 9, 2011).

I spent the entire summer searching for an Ojibwe course that would fit my schedule.

After a year of independent study I recognized that the social nature of language makes it necessary to find a group of people with whom I could converse with if I was to have any hope of advancing my level of fluency beyond mere words and common introductions.

The task proved to be rather frustrating, a journey in and of itself as the following experiential journal entry indicates:

According to Anton Truer (2010) it takes dedication and commitment in order to recover one's ancestral language, my search to find an Ojibwe language class is a living testament to this. The university I now attend does not currently offer Ojibwe so I started to research the Native centers. Unfortunately, Ojibwe was not being offered by any of the Centres in the Niagara area. I telephone McMaster University which incidentally, is 70 Km away. The lady I spoke with informed me that although they had not offered Anishinaabemowin previously, they would like to offer it this coming year. After three weeks of phone calls and a forty-five minute drive up to the university, I finally received an offer of admittance into the school so that I could register for the class only to discover that the course would not be offered until the winter of 2012. Fortunately for me while at a conference earlier that spring I listened in on presentation "entitled we are teaching Ojibwe on the internet" so I emailed the presenter and she helped me register in a beginner Ojibwe course as a distance learner at the University of Wisconsin (September 23, 2011).

My eclectic approach to reclaiming my ancestral language is a common theme that gets repeated amongst some of the other participants who are on this, our language recovery journey. Sunflower provides the following history behind her ancestral language learning journey:

I attended school on the reserve, so in grade one we started having the Mohawk language teacher come in. I don't even know how many days a week, if it was every day or maybe two or three times a week. I think it was an hour so that was where the language was being introduced. The basic number system we learned that at an early age, we learned how to count in Mohawk because we did play bingo. [Laughs] I do remember that, [laughs] that was how it was introduced, we played bingo and probably the colours so just your basic language for food, numbers and probably like the weather how the weather was, your family different words for your family. So right up until grade six but not using it fluently at home, it wasn't [offered] in grade seven and eight, again I still attended school on the reserve. I didn't have language in those grades and I never took it upon myself to learn it. And then by grade nine, I ended up going to high school off the reserve so from grade nine to twelve, I had no language [exposure] there either. I don't think they even had Mohawk language classes in the high school yet, not until later on. They did introduce language to the high school system later on so it wasn't until I started university, I think it was in my last year at McMaster when I did take the Mohawk language class. So that was, I think either a full year or half a semester. So I took the language there and I was able to quickly pick up what I recalled from years back.

Sunflower relayed that her ancestral language learning journey began in early childhood with one hour casual classes being offered a few times a week. This pattern of learning continued on until she reached grade six, at which time the languages classes were no longer available within the school system. Additionally, Sunflower mentions that although she was learning Mohawk at school, her family did not speak their ancestral language in the home. According to Lenora Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley (2006, p. 59), adult learners play a key role in the success of any ancestral language revitalization program because they are the ones who create the “domains for language usage”. These

domains of usage make intergenerational transmission a natural process because when the children learn the local language, they will find the need to use it already built in (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). Sunflower's narrative provides important insight into how existing approaches to ancestral language pedagogy confines the domains of ancestral language learning to the academy. Sunflower comments:

So now graduating from Macmaster and that was in the early 90's, here we are in 2012. Well I think it was either 2005 or 2007 when we thought about having language class both in Mohawk and Cayuga here at our office. With a desire to retain language, we all agreed that yes we wanted a language instructor to come in to meet with us for an hour once a week and there were several of us to start out with but now there's only [stops to count] 1, 2 .. 5 of us who are sitting once a week learning Mohawk language. Then again the learning, I can retain only certain words so now each week we review the words, for example [points ] behind me on the wall there are words on the wall. So each week now we are learning a sentence and then we are expected to be able to speak that when we meet.

These types of disjointed learning patterns are problematic because they operate to condition learners to accept without critical examination, disjointed learning programs as standard pedagogical procedure. When the language travelers were asked about their perceived barriers to language recovery, many shared a common belief that a lack of dedicated government funding that is committed specifically to Indigenous language revitalization continues to be a key contributing factor to the disjointed learning opportunities shared by those involved in the study. Violet shares the following insight:

Something I found frustrating, I know they stopped offering funding you know for the language teachers at the Native Centres which I thought was profoundly unfair and unjust. I mean yes ok I understand we want to learn culturally from one another and some people would make the case that if its important enough, you will do what you need to learn it anyway but I mean people have to live right? And by people, I mean some of these teachers they would have to drive, well the ones I had, and they would have to drive an hour to come to teach at the centers. And I don't think it is reasonable for them not to get paid so we didn't mind funding it but even then it

wasn't like it was treated as part of the services offered at the centre where they would get any funding for that. And even so it wasn't consistent so they would offer Ojibwe the one year and the next year they wouldn't offer it at all and then the next year they would offer Mohawk language or Cayuga. So funding, I would say has been a barrier that limits who is accessible to teach as well.

Violet communicates her sense of frustration with the inadequate funding that is committed towards the development, growth and continuation of ancestral language learning programs. According to her, when it comes to budgetary cuts, language learning programs are the first to go. Her observation is further substantiated within the literature. For example Brock Pitawanakwat (2009) reports that many of the language teachers that he interviewed relayed that, although First Nations leadership verbally supports language learning, limited financial resources relegate it to the back burner.

The scarcity of trained professionals who are both sensitive to the historical trauma experienced by First Nations people and the shortage of materials make it difficult to provide a consistent way of learning. Despite the fact that there have been numerous studies which support the claim that Aboriginal people have a right to the protection, preservation, promotion and practice of their ancestral languages, there continues to be inadequate funding committed to Indigenous language reclamation (Kirkness, 1998; Pitawanakwat, 2009). Violet expresses her sense of social injustice by comparing the funding that is allocated to learning French as a requirement for Grade 12 in Ontario.

The native centre for example the one that I was involved with in Hamilton. There was an education person there and they actually received government funds to assist people to do academic upgrading so they could meet the provincial requirements for grade 12. They would get funds for someone to come in there and be assisted by a qualified person, someone with their B.Ed. who worked in the centre. To get assistance with French but they wouldn't get any additional government funding for someone to teach the Native language class. I don't know exactly how core

funding works for the Native centers, I know that they have pockets of money for particular things. My understanding is that language is not one that's high on the priority list if at all. There are lots of programs, the Head Start program and nutrition and even the healing and wellness program you know that sort of thing, but they are not including language in there. Which is really interesting actually?

Violet's narrative speaks to the continued denial of First Nations people as the original inhabitants of Turtle Island who at the time of contact communicated in their ancestral languages. Her insight raises important questions surrounding the taken for granted rights and privileges that are enjoyed by some and not others. At minimum Canadian's would do well to learn the First Nations languages of the territories that they inhabit.

These findings indicate that a lack of funding for language learning programs both externally as well as internally continues to undermine people's efforts to reclaim their ancestral languages in ways that are not readily visible. As such, the cumulative barriers faced by the language learners interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels therefore, making the interrelationship among multiple dimensions difficult to address because the origin is not easily traceable.

#### **7.4 – Majoritarian Stories & Indigenous Counter Story Telling**

Under the guise of objectivity public opinion polls actively construct master narratives that uphold racialized notions of Native people for the purposes of maintaining existing power structures and taken for granted privileges. Casting a critical gaze upon the findings of a recent Ipsos-Reid public opinion survey provides important insights. For example, Ipsos –Reid reported that a strong majority of the 1,023 Canadians surveyed believed that most Indigenous people are lazy and responsible for their own problems (Mahoney, 2013). Furthermore, the main conclusion from the survey communicated that



two-thirds of those surveyed responded that they “think Native Canadians get too much support from taxpayers” (Mahoney, 2013). These findings are problematic because they are rooted in majoritarian stories that privilege and support certain social locations without providing an adequate understanding of the government sponsored slum conditions that continue to plague many First Nations communities. Sunflower provides the following insight:

I have always thought that the language loss is a result of the historic trauma and colonialism and that every step we take individually or as a community has always been a struggle and it still is. I know that the immersion school that’s in the community right now, I think they have been around for like 25 years they are here and they produce graduates that go on to post-secondary and they have done really well. They are supposed to be building the high school back here (motions to a location) eventually for the language immersion program, the Mohawk language. The Cayuga still struggling like they had a school they were in portables and I think those portables weren’t enough to be able to have children in them. I think that’s what happened to them. Anyways they had to move over to the Iroquois lacrosse arena that’s where their high school is. So they are there now waiting to get this high school built. So I’m thinking that’s ten years. That high school should have been built now. So we are still struggling. There is no high school on the reserve period, neither immersion nor mainstream so getting back to that then there is no high school building per say, the only high school we have is in an arena it had to be set up so that they could go to high school there<sup>41</sup>. My oldest daughter had the language through elementary and getting into high school now there is no language.

Conversely, media reports of proposed school closure in Niagara, a mainstream urban community was met with heavy public outcry in supportive and sympathetic ways. For example on March 23, 2013, approximately two hundred activists staged a protest to voice their concerns surrounding the Niagara District School Board’s recent proposal to close and consolidate four rural schools in their districts. Primary parental concerns

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<sup>41</sup> The community sunflower is referring to is located on the Six Nations reserve which, according to the Six Nations Lands/Membership Department as of September 2005, the total band membership is 22,294, with 11,297 living within the Six Nations First Nation territory. Aboriginal people continue to be the fastest growing demographic, the projected 20 year growth rate for the Six Nations of the Grand River is estimated to be approximately 19,244, while the 50 year population projection indicates that the on-reserve demographic is expected to grow to approximately 41,563 (Six Nations, 2005).

included the opportunity to walk to school, the sustainability of their communities and the financial benefits of revamping the existing schools in their own neighborhoods (Fraser, 2013). Oscar Rogers, one of the students who would be affected by the school closures, voiced that attending a small school where everyone knows each other would satisfy his need to feel connected to his own local community (Fraser, 2013).

The Ispos-Reid (2013) public opinion poll is an example of how truth is formed by those who have the power to produce it. For many First Nations people having to leaving one's close knit community to attend high school is an ongoing issue that dates back to the era of residential schools. On June 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 on behalf of all Canadians, Prime Minister Steven Harper issued a statement of apology to the former students of Indian residential schools. The primary objectives of the apology was to recognize the profound and continued negative and damaging impact that Indian residential schools had on Aboriginal culture, heritage and languages, confirm the that the legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to the social problems that continue to exist in many communities today and offer assurance that although "the burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long, the burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country" (Harper, 2008). After over five hundred years of continued struggle to heal from the ongoing trauma that many First Nations communities continue to experience, Prime Minister Steven Harper pledged on behalf of all Canadians that the Government was "prepared to join you on this journey", (2008). However, the question remains, if the burden is properly "ours" as indicated by the present government, why is it that the true nature of reconciliation continues to fall short of the mark as evidenced by the continued

ongoing struggle for educational funding that is on parity with mainstream educational institutes?

Although the statement of apology made by Prime Minister Steven Harper had the potential to effect change, instead it seems that funding arrangements have continued to reinscribe the status quo. At the time the statement of apology was issued many First Nations people thought that the time had come to move toward reconciliation and healing. However, as time progressed it became clear that while Prime Minister Steven Harper is adept at talking the talk, the Canadian government has not walked the walk of reconciliation beyond establishing more sophisticated measures of social control.

Sunflower explains:

Oh yeah I think that thing when Harper said, well he did the apology about residential schools. Why didn't the funds flow for language loss and language retention? I mean it should have been "hey let's get the language back". I haven't seen any of this, I don't know is there progress out there? My view of it all is that it is still a struggle and I'm still frustrated about it. But learning it individually it is still for my own wellbeing, very positive but overall, community wide it is frustrating.

Sunflower relates that learning her ancestral language is very important for her overall sense of well-being. She also emphasized the potential that language revitalization has to help heal her community from the traumatic effects of residential school syndrome. Sunflower's sense of frustration regarding the ongoing struggles to restore her ancestral language which was taken away from her through no fault of her own and the government's lack of support to restore it is evident.

Although the Ipsos –Reid poll (Jan. 2013) demonstrates that most Canadians have very little idea of the history and contemporary situations facing First Nations people, the voice of the Anishinabek Nation demonstrates an act of counter story-telling. For

instance Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Patrick Madahabee underscores the fact that while the federal government pays lip service to the concept of advancing First Nations educational achievement, its funding policies do not support this result (Crawford & Becking, 2013). Canada agreed to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that First Nations people have a right to establish and control their own educational systems and institutions in their own language and their own culture. Yet, First Nations operated schools such as the one located on Biinjitwaabik Zaagaing Anishinaawbe (Rocky Bay First Nation) received \$4,781 less per student than the provincially run school located in the same geographical area with the same number of students (Crawford & Becking, 2013). While mainstream majoritarian stories contribute to the formation of a public opinion that placates itself with stereotypical notions of lazy Native people who enjoy tax free benefits, few people have an adequate understanding of the government sponsored slum conditions that continue to be prevalent in many First Nations communities. This comparison of 2010 provincial funding allocations for schools emphasises how educational funding gaps perpetuate learning disparities in subtle ways.

### **7.5 – Shortage of Fluent Speakers and Creative Strategies**

There are multiple studies available to support the notion that the best way to learn another language is from a fluent first speaker. Gresczyk (2011, p. 150) reports that many of the “language warriors” in his study recounted that not having access to fluent speakers as teachers was a significant barrier for them. They further commented that because “there is still a lack of use [of] Ojibwe in [their] communities” their language recovery efforts were impeded. All of the language journeyers shared that they struggled

with feelings of exasperation because they did not have anybody to practice with and aside from inconsistent programming this is one of the biggest obstacles to language retention. Tulip recounts:

When I was a kid I could say things in Ojibwe but I couldn't have a conversation with anybody. I could pray and sing but I didn't totally understand everything I was saying. I knew the gist of what it was but I couldn't really understand everything I was saying. I didn't have fluent people around me speaking Ojibwe on a daily basis.

Tulip relays that, although she was exposed to Ojibwemowin at a very young age, she believes that the inability to access fluent speakers to reinforce her language learning formed a significant barrier to her ancestral reclamation progress. This observation is also supported by Daisy (2012) who conveyed that "because a partner is not so easily accessible, not having anyone to talk to is [also] a barrier" to her language acquisition efforts.

In an attempt to deal with being surrounded in the language of the colonizer and not having access to fluent speakers, most of the participants interviewed developed creative ways to reinforce their language acquisition efforts outside of the learning environment. The use of family members as co-learners in the language learning process was another method employed by the Indigenous language learners. The following journal entry models how Indigenous knowledge is acquired through a process of Native transmotion because it emerges organically out of the immediate spaces that we occupy.

I spent the morning playing in the park with my twenty-two month old Grandson. He is bursting with energy and his newly acquired words spill endlessly from his mouth. He constantly mimics me and looks to me for reassurance. I observe that he understands far more than he can speak and it is through this observation that I discern that perhaps I may be in the same language learning boat as he. I too understand far more Ojibwe than I can speak. Suddenly, I am struck with the realization that I am in the infant stage of my language learning journey. I began observing how he acquires language and noted that he spends hours listening

intently before he eventually says the word. There is a lot of learning that takes place simultaneously. For example he must learn the sound, the visual association, and both the emotional and cultural meanings that are encoded in the words he hears. As we walked along I started identifying things in Ojibwemowin, I didn't make a big deal out of it or insist that he repeat the word, I merely pointed to the objects and identified them in Ojibwemowin as we moved along. This was a great way to motivate me to work on learning the Ojibwe words so that I could identify the different things that we encountered on our walk while at the same time giving me the opportunity to transmit our language intergenerationally in a natural manner that will strengthen our bond with one another. Perhaps pairing new adult learners with children will help both carry our language forward (Sherry-Kirk, Feb 27, 2012)?

Daisy also employs a method of language transmotion as she recounts how she brought her daughter along during her ancestral learning journey:

I taught my kid, she was little at the time so that was about eight years ago. ...[pauses to think] oh boy, she was only about five or six at the time. I taught her the Thanksgiving Address and we would speak back and forth. She was a better speaker than I was because she was little and the mind learns better. The younger you are the better the mind is able to grasp language.

Rose too recognized the value of creating her own language learning nest in her own home.

So when I could start taking classes I did with the university outreach program in Milwaukee. Both myself and my daughter when she was 13 we went to those kind of classes because she was always very good at languages when I took her I thought wow she is very good at languages and I thought. Wow if the kids had a tape recorder and I could really use that (Rose, May 24, 2012)!

Native people have historically used transmotion as a form of natural reason, and native creation with other creatures (Vizenor, 1999). The narratives relayed by the participants exemplify forms of 'Native transmotion' as their stories highlight how the acquisition of Indigenous knowledge relates to ancestral language recovery in ways that arise organically through a process of hands-on experiential observation, personal reflection the application of one's conclusions and the sharing of our stories for the benefit of community.

## 7.6 – Hostile Family and Community

The traumatic impact stemming from the atrocities committed against First Nations peoples has had intergenerational ramifications that continue to manifest in surprising ways. One example of this is evident in Rose's narrative when she mentions that there was some disagreement amongst family members regarding the appropriateness of passing on the language to the younger generation. Rose emphasizes how her family tried to block her efforts to share the language:

My own family was hostile, my husband was very supportive and so were my children. My siblings were not, because it was a threat to them, I was ridiculed and they tried to control what I was doing with my own children. They saw it as a threat to the ongoing of the white family and they wanted to move towards that. So they did not want me around their kids because I would tell those stories and things like that. [laughs] That was a dividing factor, they were passing as white and they didn't want anybody to question that.

As I noted earlier, the policy of residential schools was enacted as a central means for eliminating First Nations culture and the languages that supported Indigenous states of being. Anishinaabemowin teacher Kenny Pheasant recalls his Dad telling him a story about his first day at residential school. According to Pheasant, when his Dad spoke in Anishinaabemowin – the only language he knew – the priest, a full grown man, picked up the boy who was eight years old at the time, and punched him in the face (cited in Smith, 2011). Pheasant also shared a story told to him by an elderly woman who, as a direct result of using her ancestral language during her incarceration in residential school, lost her legs. When the teachers heard her speaking the only language she knew they wanted to make an example of her. As such, they placed the girl up on a table during meal time and took turns beating her legs with such force the girl's legs had to be amputated (cited in Smith, 2011). The fighting spirit of the people is evident as Pheasant relays how the woman told him "Kenny, they took my legs, but they didn't take my language" (cited in

Smith, 2011, p. 53). The story shared by Pheasant provides insight into how the colonial policies of assimilation and cultural genocide continue to influence people's attempts to reclaim their ancestral languages. Rose's account underlines how the treatment of First Nations people influenced some members of her family to make the decision to deny their Aboriginality, thereby unwittingly fulfilling the agenda of the colonizer. Rose's daughter Tulip elucidates how with the progression of time these family members became less hostile to her language learning efforts.

Well my mom had already been through all of that, with them getting so pissed, so by the time I came along, I was thirteen in 1990 so there was at least ten years of this already with them. I think I was the kid and their niece and everything so they responded more positively to me. And then it was my career and I was writing books on this and all of a sudden, they were more supportive. They seemed to be very happy I was doing this. And my cousins had all grown up. They already were completely alienated from us anyway and acculturated, so nobody cared at that point. I think they were a lot more supportive of me. They think it is cute and they kind of laugh a little bit they're not hostile to it anymore. We had a cousin that wanted to learn how to fancy shawl dance at one time. Which was weird because he had no interest in this before, every so often someone will call you know (Tulip, May 24, 2012).

Although with the passage of time Tulip's extended family began to view her language reclamation efforts as less of a threat to their social positions, she also encountered hostility within her own neighbourhood. Tulip expounds:

We lived in a Catholic neighbourhood and with the Vatican too and they didn't believe in it so they weren't going to let their kids play with us. We were always damned. There was one Mormon family and they were interested in converting us so they would talk to us about that. . I think that for a long time, they say that hereditary memory. I still really felt shame of speaking Ojibwe in public and even when I was teaching and trying so hard to learn, I couldn't speak in public and I couldn't, I mean my mom likes to say Omba and akobadaa in the grocery store *[Rose is laughing in the background]* it just really bothered me for a long time, it made me really mad at her *[Rose is hysterically laughing by now]* and if I had to go to the grocery store I felt like people were looking at us or something. I also think it was more than them looking at us, there was something about I couldn't speak in public.



Rose's narrative elucidates how the continued efforts of religious neighbours influenced her language reclamation efforts and suggests that she carried a sense of cultural shame about the language in public that took years to overcome.

The question of space, that is, who is sanctioned to speak what language in what space and the residual effects of being historically forbidden to speak languages other than English in public spaces is clearly evident as Daisy shares her experience of linguistic intolerance.

Well I encountered some racism and discrimination. My daughter and I were using the language out in public. I was right in the thick of it at school, so wanting to learn and become fluent was one of the quests, so we would talk and there would be other people around. We used to do it everywhere. My son [*says name*] was in hockey and when people would hear us they would say "what language are you using and ah.... Well, it wasn't all discrimination that's not absolutely true. There were a couple of people who would say that's really an interesting way to talk. That sounds like Chinese or something really foreign, but then I noticed that people who were once friendly before started to ask questions. 'Well why are you learning how to speak your Native language?' ... They were curious so I told them, well that's because it's part of who I am. Well then why? They wanted to know more and once they learned more all of a sudden they became different people. They treated me differently and it wasn't a very nice experience at all. So there was curiosity but when they learned more about it, I don't know why they behaved that way? They became distant and indifferent.

## **7.7 – Mechanisms of Support**

All of the language learners have expressed how difficult it is to reclaim their ancestral languages in and amongst a predominantly English speaking environment. A few of the learners expressed that at times their efforts were met with some hostility by those in mainstream. In order to cope, some of the language learners turned to their immediate family for support while others developed grassroots study networks within their own language learning communities. Rose explains:

I was less exposed to that [societal hostility] because after studying with Roger Thomas for years we created our own Anishinaawbe Biswawa jig Millwalkii

Ojibwemowin club and we met together every Saturday morning for the purpose of studying language together. We created things like calendars, there was a sense of community in that my teacher when she left town it left a group of people too who were studying with her. And so there was that group for me too. When I felt this need, this emptiness, they prayed in Ojibwe and sang in Ojibwe so there was that. I guess I had outlets like that. My daughters apparently because they were little children they had more exposure to the negative reactions in the neighborhood.

The importance of having regular support from the language learning community beyond ones immediate location also allows second language learners the opportunity to establish collaborative language learning networks that they would not otherwise have access to. Tulip's narrative supports this notion because technological advances illustrate that there are a multiplicity of ways in which people can connect up to share and support one another's language learning efforts:

You need to connect with other people. They [Tulip's students] are saying that I am sort of cut off. I should get a cell phone so I could start texting and use Facebook.... I guess I'm out of touch I recognize I need to connect. So, I guess another barrier for me was that I was only teaching and only talking to my students really and you can't advance if you don't have someone higher than you to talk to frankly. So the connection is a big thing too and you can find people that are trying to do the same thing that you are. There's a group of them that are trying to pray and there's a group of them that want to give the lectures, there's a group that want to talk to their kids and there's some that just want to sing. There are pockets out there and with the new media and I realize I am not a big part of it but with the chat rooms and the Facebook and the texting you know there is a whole circle of things going on here. The language tables are out there and they are just waiting for someone to come and visit them.

Recent research on Indigenous language revitalization initiatives indicates that both community and family are significant factors in the transmission of traditional languages (Pitawanakwat, 2009, Norris, 2002, Kirkness, 1998). According to a recent report conducted by Health Nexus (2011) culture is learned through language, ceremonies, gatherings, stories, music, games, arts, and crafts as well as land based

experiences. I view my attendance at camp as a good way to immerse myself in Ojibwe culture. In support of this notion I offer the following journal entry:

Last week I attended the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Anishinaawbe Language and Culture camp in Manistee, Michigan and after spending four days surrounded by the voice of the ancestors I returned with their words echoing in my head. I went to camp for motivation and returned inspired and eager to resume my path toward language reclamation. I began to consider attending other immersion camps across the country however, the cost and time commitments are too prohibitive. One of the workshops that I attended “Ezhi ganoonad gid aabinooyensim Anishinaabemong” motif (Conversing with baby), emphasized how important it was for us to expose our young to Anishinaabemowin early because hearing the language as a young person helps with brain mapping. Guest speaker Leon Vallier (2012) gave us some practical and useful phrases that I can use with my new baby granddaughter when I get home. Furthermore, I began to understand how some of these phrases including ways of giving love to baby while caring for her, support Helen Roy’s assertion that we need to see things around us in order to understand the language (Sherry-Kirk, July 27, 2012).

My observations while at camp provide additional tools and strategies that may facilitate intergenerational language revitalization at the individual, familial and societal level.

### **7.8 – Age of Access**

The experiential narratives provided by the Indigenous language learners lend support to the claims put forth by McGregor and McGregor (2011). These authors assert that the earlier a Native child is exposed to ancestral language learning programs the higher the level of success. Many of the second language learners viewed later in life exposure to Anishinaabemowin and the aging process to be a barrier to their learning efforts. For example Daisy (2012) believed that her daughter was better at grasping the language than she because she theorized that “the younger you are the more your mind is able to grasp language”. Rose reflects:

You know, they talk about how your brain is receptive to different kinds of learning at different times and how the brain I had when I was thirty is not the brain I had when I was three and it is certainly not the brain I have now that I am in my sixties. You know, as you get older it hardens up on you and the language

learning especially. I found it very, very difficult in my later years. If people want their children to have what they do not have themselves they have to start really, really young.

Rose emphasizes the importance of starting children on their language learning journey at a very young age. She believes that as a person gets older it becomes increasingly more difficult to learn an ancestral language. Sunflower's comments also highlight the view that age is a barrier to ancestral language reclamation.

It is just like we are all like this when we get in there. Some days it seems 'oh my gosh we can't even say this, I can't even think it. I can see it but I can't even say it'. That's how it is for me, I can see it but I can't say it *[laughs]* it just doesn't come out. And I think this occurs often for people to ah... speak but like when you get to the younger generation who are speaking, it just flows. So there is a difference I think from learning it at a later age to when you are younger.

Many of the language learners conveyed that being immersed in the English language made it difficult for them to stay motivated. While several felt that their attempts to learn their ancestral tongue was thwarted by their immediate environment, meaning that the programs/resources available were not consistent and the structure of their daily life was not conducive to retaining the language that they had worked so hard to learn. Unfortunately this phenomenon is a consequence of colonialism, our lives are structured and conceptualized in the English language which happens to be the language of white settler capitalism.

### **7.9 – Language Acquisition & Maturation**

While many of the second language learners viewed later in life exposure to Anishinaabemowin and the aging process to be barriers to their learning progress there are multiple studies available that dispute the commonly held belief that there is a critical period for second language acquisition (Birdsong & Morlis, 2001). There is clear evidence available to support the claim that when it comes to second language

acquisition, there are no maturational constraints (Bucavalas, 2002). In fact, some claim that older learners who acquire a second language are much more likely to become bilingual, while younger counterparts have a tendency to lose their first language in order to gain proficiency in the other. Furthermore, adult learners have advantages for reaching the proficiency level of a native speaker because they can utilize existing study strategies, literacy skills and other resources not yet acquired by younger learners (Bucavalas, 2002). These findings suggest that there may be something other than the aging process interfering with second language learner's attempts to reclaim their ancestral language.

Some people have pointed out that improper correcting undermines second language learner confidence and, this in turn, undermines people's willingness to experiment with their newly acquired language skills (Gresczyk, 2011). These findings when coupled with the co-travelers narratives support the notion that fear of making a mistake may be a more significant barrier to everyday practical use than age of exposure. If we are to overcome low levels of self-confidence as a barrier it will be important for both teachers and learners to recall the teachings contained in the Eastern quadrant of the medicine wheel. I have observed my Grandchildren as they go about learning to speak they are not afraid to experiment with "unfamiliar sound and word sequences" even though they do so without understanding the meanings behind them. Perhaps as adult learners we must humbly conceptualize our language learning journey as beginning in the eastern quadrant a place where learning is nurtured in a loving a trusting way, a place where mistakes are part of the learning process.

## **7.10 – English a Casualty of the Economy**

Recent research conducted by Professor Patricia Greenfield<sup>42</sup>, a psychologist at the University of California Los Angeles supports the notion that the evolution of the English language from a once rich and poetic form of communication has evolved to an abbreviated state of efficiency that is in turn, associated with a capitalistic mode of production that values materialistic (physical) gain over the emotional and spiritual aspects of our being. In order to test the theoretical claim that “different value systems, behaviours, and human psychologies are adapted to different types of ecology” [modes of production], Greenfield (2013, pp. 1722-29) indexed certain words as cultural signifiers and proceeded to measure the frequency of word use in over 1.5 million books over a 200 year period. Her findings suggest that historical shifts in language use are reflective of the more individual materialist values that are associated with a capitalist mode of production. For instance, in measuring the degree of self-interest by comparing the frequency of “give” and “get” between 1800 and 2000, Greenfield (2013) discovered that the prevalence of “get” is interconnected with an increased incidence of urbanization, wealth and technological development. On the other hand, there was a historical decline in this pattern of word use during World War II and the civil rights movement, thereby indicating that a decline in self-centeredness is associated with decreased levels of wealth and higher levels of cooperation and social awareness. Although Greenfield does not directly connect her findings to the rise of capitalism it logically follows that this economic system has had an influence on the evolution of the English language. To support this assertion, I referred to prior research conducted by Williams (1977), he paired cultural materialism with literary use in order to measure the evolution of

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<sup>42</sup> In-depth discussion of this study is beyond the scope of this research. Please refer to Greenfield’s (2013) original study for additional details.

materialism. According to Williams (1977, p. 5), cultural materialism is a “theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism”. He theorized that, modern thought and practice are endemic of historical consciousness (Williams, 1958). As an indicator of a society’s culture and societal ideology, Williams examines the historical shift in the meanings associated with society, economy and culture.

‘Society’ originally indicated active fellowship, company, ‘common doing’, before it became the description of a general system of order. ‘Economy’ was the management of a household and the management of a community before it became the description of a perceived system of production, distribution, and exchange. ‘Culture’, before these transitions, was the growth and tending of crops and animals, and by extension the growth and tending of human faculties. (Williams, 1977, p. 11).

According to Williams (1977, p. 11) these concepts as we know them today are “recent historical formulations” that shift to support the development of industrial society and its prolonged social and political conflicts.

Both Greenfield (2013) and Williams (1977) provide important insight into how the English language has evolved in ways that support the dominant mode of production and exchange. The English language continues to be promoted as the “language of communication in a globalized world” therefore, there is a common conception that economic success revolves around mastering the English language (Kuiper, 2007, p. 59).

This argument has been used to support the elimination of Indigenous languages world-wide. However, what has not been reflected upon is how the evolution of the English language and its link to efficiency has in essence bastardized the English language for the sake of realizing surplus value at the cost of human expression.

### **7.11 – Problems with existing Programs**

There is concern that language documentation efforts come from the perspective that Indigenous languages are not living languages therefore, they need to be archived and put in a museum for others to view. Although potentially well-intended, emphasizing the documentation of a cultural and linguistic collapse rather than ensuring its continued transmission undermines the development of effective revitalization strategies (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Shulist, 2013). The following journal entry I completed while at language camp in the summer of 2013 illuminates some of the learning challenges faced by advanced learners:

Yesterday during my break I had a conversation with a couple of people who have been traveling on the language recovery journey for twenty-five years. One of them told me that even though she was a teacher now she felt that she has reached a language learning plateau. Her words echoed Mary Hermes (2013) who mentioned that the language revitalization movement needs to “fill the gap between what the language learners in the community need and what is going on in schools” otherwise we will be missing the boat in terms of addressing the needs of the more advanced learners of Anishinaabemowin. Similar to my own observations, Hermes (2013) supports the notion that in order to consolidate Anishinaabemowin in its proper cultural context, Anishinaabemowin needs to be heard in everyday conversations (Laurie Sherry-Kirk, July 2013).

During a recent keynote address at Northern Arizona University Language learner and educator conference, Mary Hermes (2013) informed her audience that “good research influences policy and public opinion”. Therefore, the time has come to utilize research as an instrument to counter what she called the “extinction narrative”. According to Hermes (2013) this concept conceptualization Native languages as dying languages as opposed to growing. She further advised that in order to keep our languages alive and connected to something old and beautiful. Therefore, our ancestral languages need to be learned by the people of that place. To advance this agenda, Hermes (2013) claims that attention needs to be drawn to the Native place names that are taken for granted as English by non-



Native people<sup>43</sup>. Providing the opportunity for non-Native people to learn about the origin of the Native lands they now occupy including the ancestral words for Native place names, could become an important bridging mechanism for teaching teach people to value Native languages, nurture an appreciation for them and also provide an important decolonization mechanism from which to fuel revitalization.

According to Tulip, careful consideration needs to be given to the resources available, when developing strategies to revitalize the Ojibwe language. Tulip provides the following insight:

You really need exposure and more than on an individual basis. At this point what we really need is families speaking. And we have this problem right now because we are following the Maori's method. Their method was the sandwich generation and it was the baby bird motif. The baby bird analogy is that this little baby is going to be fed language like a bird and the grandparent generation was going to teach the language to the little kids. The parents didn't speak so the babies are going to speak, the grandparents are going to speak and the middle generation, that sandwich generation was going to learn. And it worked for them because they had grandparents that spoke and they had kids that could learn. Over here we're trying to do something that we don't have, we don't have the generation of speakers that they have.

Tulip explains that although the baby bird analogy was an effective strategy used by the Maori to revitalize Te Reo, transplanting this method as a revitalization strategy here is not as effective. Tulip believes that since we do not have the same critical mass of fluent speakers to draw upon as the Maori, the baby bird motif has not proven to be as effective in a North American context. She further highlights some of the additional problems hindering the movement toward Indigenous language revitalization.

We don't have the Grandma's and Grandpa's speaking anymore in most families. We might have a Great Grandma or a great, great or we have nobody. So the family generation thing doesn't really work here. What we have with the kids in the immersion programs and daycares is, we've got fluent elders in there, that's

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<sup>43</sup> Hermes' findings support the argument language posed earlier in this paper that Canadians would do well to learn a First Nations language.

great, really great, we have some dedicated teachers and depending on which program you go to. Some of them are more fluent than others. Some of them really don't speak a lot and that's a problem too because those kids are not going to learn Ojibwe, they are going to learn something else.

Tulip shares her concern that although people have the best intention in terms of wanting to expand the number of Ojibwe speakers, there is a risk that some of the instruction is not really Ojibwe at all. The literature indicates that the immersion experience is one of the most effective and time efficient means to acquire a second language (Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). However, the logistics of the program can become problematic when trying to keep up with the progress of the learners. Tulip relates:

Even if you've got the best case, like this one program I know of where they have really dedicated speakers who are making sure that they're speaking Ojibwe. They've got multiple elders, so each classroom's got elders the kids are learning all the way to I think its 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Although they are trying to make it to 5<sup>th</sup>, I think they are only at the 3<sup>rd</sup> right now. So it is like K to 3<sup>rd</sup> they are learning all that in Ojibwe but when they go home you know there isn't Grandma at home that can speak, there isn't parents at home that can speak and even know the parents are you know going to language camps and trying to do language classes and some of these people went through Minnesota's you know Five credit thing they are not speaking to the kids. So the kids go home and they've got no one to talk to. I think that is going to continue to happen you know in all of these.

She adds that it takes a considerable amount of time, energy and resources to both create and maintain the immersion experience because as the children advance the programs need to be developed to meet their expanding needs. Furthermore, even if existing programs are developed to meet the growing knowledge of Anishinaabemowin learners, this puts a lot of pressure on them to save the current state of their First Nations language.

Tulip speaks:

Now from a native standpoint we are putting the language in the child and if the child has the strength of the language then it can come out later. I believe that, I think it is true but we also are putting a lot of pressure on that kid and when they get older they have to use it. They are going to have to try to relearn and the ones that are coming up now that are teenagers, I don't know that they are speaking on

a daily basis. The people I met haven't so we're not just talking about an individual thing we're talking about the whole family. It might be more realistic that an adult is going to teach the kid more than the [hesitates] kid is going to have to teach the adult.

During our conversation I took the opportunity to share with Tulip the experiential knowledge that I had acquired on this my language learning adventure:

I know with myself with my granddaughter you teach them how to speak and as I do that I think to myself well just like you would label different things in English to teach them to speak I translate them into Ojibwe. In this way we are both learning in tandem.... (Sherry-Kirk, 5/24/2012).

Tulip eagerly reacts by saying:

Oh that would be really wonderful"! Maybe that would be the right combination, I think the next kind of program that we need is one that is focused on the entire family. I've heard you know that some people say that we need to focus on the young moms. Especially the teenage moms that are having the kids and that would be great because their little minds are still ready to learn a language. That would be really interesting but I think we need to focus on the whole group. We need to move them all into the immersion program. And I don't know how that would happen and you know I can't imagine the family that would have the resources to take off work to do that. In short we have to focus on them all because we don't have a sandwich generation.

The need to take the language outside of the classroom is an invisible barrier not readily visible to the language learners. Many expressed that they were perplexed as to why they had difficulty speaking their ancestral languages outside of the classroom.

Sunflower explains:

I think there is a responsibility because I think at times well o k if I don't learn this well I just won't and then I don't have the language. Like I know I have it but I don't have it [laughs]. So the responsibility, plus for my children, I'm thinking we haven't really spoken like I should be speaking at home too, but I haven't. My parents are no longer alive and they didn't speak it. My family members don't speak it. They just say like the greeting like they say She:kon that's it. [laughs] but my family they do speak a little bit but not, you know words. My youngest daughter is at OMSK (Oliver M. Smith Kawenn`i: io – Elementary School, Six Nations) they do have language every day or is it twice a week one or the other. So she knows she can say the opening address, the shorter version, because they do that every day. So it is like repetitive. And that's what we are doing too, we are

learning the Thanksgiving address in my little group. We've learned it, I learned it, I retained it for a short period of time where I could recite it without looking at the page but I had stopped. So now I have to go back now and read it. I don't know if I have my book here...*[looks around]* no it's at home. I can actually read it, I can read it really well *[laughs]* but I can't get myself to the point where I can just say it again. It is all just keeping it repetitive and memorization of it. You know what I mean?

Orchid's elaboration lends merit to the idea that language learning is becoming archived and learned as a history lesson.

I found out that I'm a better reader than I am a writer. For whatever reason that seemed to be the experience of the majority of the class, they were either better at writing or speaking. I tended, well my sister was better at writing it and I was good at speaking it and of understanding it in written form but I couldn't write it for a damn. *[laughs]* I had a hard time writing it. You know just letting go of all of our previous language and their understanding because it is totally backwards. The English language is totally backwards it is a bastardized *[laughs]* version of the many different languages of the world. Basically, because they are looking at the origins of the words and where they come from well, they come from all over the world and they are actually just created for society today.

Both Orchid and Sunflower report that they have difficulty speaking or recalling the language unless they can read it while speaking it. Tulip's reflection echoes the narratives of the second language learners, she indicates that there is too much weight being placed on classroom learning and not enough emphasis is being placed on its practical use.

These findings support the findings of other language activists/researchers (Midgette, 1997; Littlebear, 1999; McIvor, 2009; Reyhner, 2010; Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011; Hermes, 2013) who stress that Native languages need to be embedded in our cultures.

### **7.12 – Native Transmotion**

Self-reflexivity is a traditional approach to pedagogy. This has been one of the important ways that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island have acquired knowledge since time immemorial. Furthermore, language is social and in order to keep the

language vital and alive it needs to be exchanged socially. I noted that as my journey progressed I became frustrated with traditional Western linguistic learning methods complete with its overemphasis on achievement. To cope I used music as a way to keep the language alive and in my head and also as a way to attach meaning to the words and phrases I was being exposed to. My journal reflection is as follows:

I find that learning how to speak Ojibwe through use of linguistic methods to be frustrating and difficult. Mainly because it does not lend itself well to any sort of variance in learning styles. While the use of a dictionary is a valuable tool for reference, I feel that too much emphasis is being placed on the in-class learning process and not enough on the everyday application. This failure to accommodate different learning styles has the potential to leave behind people who learn kinesthetically, or auditorily.

Since I am a musician I already know that I am an auditory and social learner. In order to solidify my language learning I must attach meaning to what I am learning, otherwise I am just memorizing and that fades after a period of disuse. To cope with this I have decided to try learning Anishinaabemowin by learning different songs in the language. This makes sense to me because when I learn a new song I must internalize it. I do this by first listening to the song as a whole, this allows me to become familiar with multiple things: the overall flow, the identification of words and phrases and the rhythm of the song. Eventually, I begin to string these things together verbally. It is only after repeated use of the notes and words the song becomes stuck in my head and thus, it has now become second nature. Since this encoding process is on multiple levels it allows for me to become fully engaged with the material. I am now able to capture the spirit of the song, recall it quite easily, attach meaning in appropriate ways and even apply it abstractly.

I guess you could say that the song has now engaged me in all four of the directions. The physical direction involves listening, pronunciation, mental element is utilized through word identification and overall flow. The emotional realm involves the feel and response to the song while the spiritual essence is captured through an overall understanding, or the interpretation of the meanings that are encoded within the song.

To test out this I decided to learn some nursery rhymes so that I could sing them to my baby grand kids. I was amazed when one of my Granddaughter's toys began playing the song "this old man" in English, with an air of anticipation she looked to me to sing it to her in Ojibwe. What an awesome feeling!! There are multiple ways of arriving at the same destination, if I find myself having difficulty identifying a particular word I can always turn to the dictionary to sort that out. I

am not suggesting that my learning style is superior to anyone else's rather in terms of individuals we are just that, unique beings who employ learning methods that will have the greatest impact. Thus, when too much pressure is placed on the learner to internalize language in a Westernized format there is a danger that people will become frustrated and give up (Sherry-Kirk, 10, Nov. 2012).

Similarly, Tulip also employs a methodology comparable to the experiential approach that I adapted for this research project. Tulip reflects:

I tried many different things, and some things just don't work and now I know what doesn't work. I know that conjugating verbs is a good thing but you have got to do other stuff with it. And I know that language tapes are good but if you don't understand the patterns of what people are saying you know you are just trying to memorize. I know that walking around with note cards is sweet and all but if you are not using those words later or understanding how to conjugate them, that's not going to work. You know I've got a whole list of really crazy things that just don't work you know but I had to go through all of that to figure it out. So when I teach my students they are getting the benefits of all those years now. So this last group the one's that wanted to learn and actually if you wanted to join us in the fall Laurie we have some committed people in 3<sup>rd</sup> year semester now. The ones that want to learn, they learn much more and so much quicker than previous years because they've got this benefit that I think I have figured out how to teach them.

Tulip's makes use of Native Transmotion as a means to bring Ojibwe language leaning into the everyday lives of language learners. Her ability to adapt to the space that she occupies is demonstrated by the very unique and individual way she has taken her own experiences and implemented them as expert knowledge to aid the students who are enrolled in her Anishinaabemowin class. According to Brayboy, (2006, pp. 429-30), our "stories are not separate from theory, they make up theory, and are therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being". Tulip provides further elaboration regarding ways that our ancestral languages can be taken out of the classroom and back into our everyday life.

Well the only thing that's going to really produce any kind of proficiency is to make the language a part of your everyday life. You have to do something with it. That means that if your goal is to pray in the language, great but you are going to

have to pray every day. If your goal is to be able to talk to someone about the weather that's fine too but you're going to have to keep doing it. If you want to be able to give speeches on cultural things that's fine too but I think finding the language that you are going to use every day and starting there is really crucial and then from there if you want to learn more you can use the conjugations and grammatical patterns that you know from that to build and talk about other things. So if your goal is to pray don't just memorize the prayer if you are going to do that, you can do it for a while but then figure out what you are saying and how you said it and how you can use it to say something else so you can learn how to then keep praying in different ways. You know we have the memorized prayer and I think that's great but if they want to speak more and some of them really do, they need to pull the prayer apart and figure out what they said and how they said it. And then they can use those same words to you know talk about the grocery store, what's on television you know something like that. So again you also need to connect up with other people.

Tulip suggested ways that language learners can take what they have learned and use it in an everyday practical manner. Almost like the formation of a knowledge pyramid that becomes stronger with each level of interaction. These actions are further encouraged by Pitawanakwat (2009) who recognizes that non-institutionalized forms of adult language learning are an important way to develop creative approaches to programming when faced with limited financial resources.

### **7.13 – Hegemonic Discipline**

The investigation of how teaching a Native language functions provides important insight into how systemic power operates on behalf of a dominant group in ways that continue to reformulate within a given society. Disciplines then, become socially sanctioned institutions used to control access to Indigenous languages within a given society. Our language is housed in the white house of learning, a place where, despite the rhetoric of correctness, white privilege continues to prevail. Western settler educational systems, with their emphasis on rote learning and production, continue to be problematic. The following journal entry highlights issues regarding the commodification of

Indigenous languages and its contribution to the internalization of the extinction narrative as it relates to Indigenous languages.

Since the cost to enroll in the online Ojibwe class as a full member was by far, way beyond my graduate student budget, being able to enroll on audit status was the best that I could hope for. At first I felt privileged and extremely grateful for the opportunity to be able to get access to my ancestral language. How sad is that? What was once my birth right<sup>44</sup> has now become a site of struggle, a commodity reserved for those with the financial means to purchase that entitlement. In the eyes of the United States educational system I am considered a foreign student. Consequently, I am sitting in a virtual classroom unable to participate in the class in the fullest capacity, unless of course I can come up with the required few extra thousand dollars. This two tier system ensures my status (audit) as a second class citizen. A status that affords the opportunity to both participate while at the same time become a spectator in my own marginalization. In the beginning I was excited about finally finding a way to learn my ancestral language. However, with the passage of time, the structure and method of delivery contributed to this overall sense of second class citizenship. Aside from myself, there are no other Indigenous students in this class which is very disconcerting. Will the future of Indigenous language depend on non-Native people to teach it to us? How does this phenomenon contribute to the myth of extinction commonly held by non-Native people?

This journal entry allows for the understanding that as time passed the virtual classroom became a space for my own oppression.

Could technology become the new governor switch that regulates academic achievement? There have been many times when I would become disconnected, so the technological failures have prevented me from obtaining the full benefits of the course and as a result, I am always trying to catch up. I think the most difficult part is dealing with the social oppression especially this past week when a few of the students laughed at my attempts to speak in my language yet they were quick to seize my responses and present them to the instructor as their own. My voice is on speaker phone so when the instructor asks a question and I give the answer it is not acknowledged until a member in the classroom repeats what I just said. In my mind this speaks to the myth of the Indian in the museum. My thoughts are further reinforced by the fact that the language course itself is housed under foreign languages. In my mind what should have been a natural transfer has now become a commodity to be purchased by those who have the financial power to do so.

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<sup>44</sup> Prior to the arrival of the European nations to North America, Native American nations did not recognize borders throughout what is now Canada and the United States of America. In recognition of this the United States and Great Britain entered into The Jay Treaty of 1794 and the Treaty of Ghent 1815. Both solidify and affirm the rights of Native North Americans to freely pass and repass between both countries undisturbed.



This notion is further substantiated by the observation that all of the language learners in both Pitawanakwat and Gresczyk's study have had exposure to post-secondary education. In fact, many Indigenous second language learners shared that they started to study in earnest while attending post-secondary institutions (Sherry-Kirk, Nov. 2011).

The hegemonic nature of the academy and its overly inflated internalization of the principle of discipline unwittingly operate as a mechanism for controlling the infinite conceptual and creative potentialities that exist within a living people. As such we must work to ensure that the disciplines do not become an opiate for the intellectually marginalized. Some of the participant narratives indicate that the classroom structure regardless of its method of delivery operates as an apparatus that ensures the suppression of human capacities.

Today I was denied admittance to the class until the required course evaluation had been completed by the full-fledged members of the class. Since I lacked the financial means that would allow me the privilege to fully participate in a way that would allow my voice to be heard, the session did not broadcast until it was half way through. When I was finally invited to virtually join the class it was in the capacity of a spectator. In doing so I observed the students engaging with the teacher in a question and answer session in preparation for the final exam that they will be taking next week. As a second class student I am not allowed to take the exam so I must sit idle, and bear witness to the commodification of my own culture. It is difficult to be the other than legitimate student replete with the power and privilege that comes with it. In essence, the utilization of advances in technology unleashes the panoptical potential of becoming a spectator to my own marginalization (Sherry-Kirk, Dec. 02, 2011).

Given the insidious invisibility that white privilege occupies, this reflection provides insight into how power operates within mainstream educational settings in subtle, sophisticated and hegemonic ways. Indigenous languages are being collected, commodified and subsequently sold as intellectual property to those who have the capital to pay for them. As an Indigenous people, it is imperative that we challenge the spaces that white privilege occupies in a manner that both values and reclaims Indigenous

experiential knowledge and cultural paradigms. It is hoped that this critical examination lays the groundwork necessary to inspire community members to engage in solutions based dialogue surrounding language revitalization at the community level.

#### **7.14 – Invisible Barriers**

The experiential knowledge shared by the second language journeyers indicate that the demand placed on them to conform to standard western linguistic protocol unwittingly contributes to an invisible language learning barrier. Tulip elaborates:

Another barrier is I have been teaching all along, now I can teach people in front of me and I can teach any student. I can teach my mom and my husband you know when they are sitting in front of me in the classroom but when I leave that environment I can't teach them Ojibwe. I really can't teach my mom and my husband outside the classroom. Now people will come and see me in my office and I can teach them, I just chatter away and teach them something just for the 10 minutes that they are there.

Tulip notes that she finds it difficult to speak or teach beyond the authorized space of the classroom, emphasizing how language learning has been separated from everyday usage in ways that highlight how the classroom, with its emphasis on production, serves as an apparatus for the internalization of one group's method of learning over all others. According to Battiste, (1998, 2000,2004) this privileging of classroom learning can be seen as a form of cognitive imperialism so that education primarily supports the delivery of knowledge based on the values of dominant society. The language learner narratives suggest that privileging the classroom setting as a primary mechanism for Indigenous language delivery forms an invisible language learning barrier that constrains people's Indigenous language use. Critical engagement is necessary to ensure that mainstream pedagogical approaches to Indigenous language learning does not contribute to an

extinction narrative that serves as a mechanism to contained ancestral language use in the white house of learning.

Some of the language learners expressed reticence when it comes to speaking their newly acquired ancestral languages to the elders. Daisy reflects:

Yes not having confidence with the Elders certainly did become a barrier with me. But you have to remember too, that you can't just go up to Elders and expect to take something from them. It doesn't work that way in our world. In the community, you have to earn their respect and it has to be the right time. And it just seemed like yes although it was a barrier. It just seems that like you know it just wasn't the right time. Perhaps maybe the time is better now but it wasn't then. So it is not so easily accessible with individual people rather than the internet or a book. And that's really where you learn when you interact with each other and you respond. So yes that is a barrier for sure. Also, the willingness of another partner to learn the language.

Daisy expressed how self-confidence relates to having the ability to verbalize in her ancestral language while at the same time discussing how adherence to tradition intersects with her language learning efforts in ways that prevented her from using it freely. Daisy further communicated that time and accessibility presented added barriers to her language learning endeavors. In an attempt to navigate these barriers Daisy stated that although the internet and printed materials allow for access to the language for her, mastery only occurs through social interaction. Tulip also relays her experience with speaking in Anishinaabemowin with her Elders:

Another barrier for me is I had access to fluent speaker and I didn't know what to do with them you know. I was recording them and I was transcribing but, well I read all that literature on you know, you can go into the fluent speaker's house and doing their laundry and having them talk to you in Ojibwe. I just wasn't doing those words with them, I was having a lot of trouble knowing what to do with these people. I could record until the cows came home but I didn't know how I was going to learn from that.

Interviewer: It sounds to me like you are hesitant to verbalize?

Tulip: yes!

Not having enough self-confidence to speak what we have learned out of fear of making a mistake undercuts our opportunities to reinforce and advance on our language learning journey. Perhaps if we viewed our language learning process as beginning in the eastern direction of the medicine wheel, a place where the infants of the nation are represented and new beginnings are conceptualized, we would be less harsh with ourselves. Since this direction is considered to be a place where the changing of spirit into human form occurs and emotional development forms, it is understandable that as language learners we have returned to the Eastern quadrant. I believe that in order to overcome the barrier of self-confidence we may need to conceptualize our language learning efforts to be in the eastern direction, the place where we learn to express ourselves freely. Research indicates that an infant listens to at least 6000 hours of language before they utter their first word (Johnson, 1995). During my own language learning journey I have observed how the infants and toddlers in my life spend a considerable time practicing and enunciating the sounds that they hear around them. I also noted that when they did start to speak their first words, the adults around them expected them to make errors and when they did, we lovingly correct them over and over until they get it right. The child does not concern themselves with accomplishment rather, their primary incentive is to learn how to communicate linguistically, socially, culturally and emotionally. Perhaps as second language learners and teachers we should do the same.

#### **7.15 – Collective Sense of Guilt**

Most of the language learners in the study expressed a collective sense of shame and guilt for not being able to achieve what they viewed as an acceptable level of fluency in their ancestral languages. Violet provides the following insight:

Well, I really wish I had stuck to it. It is one of those things as I get older I keep saying to myself well if something is important to you.... (laughs.) You have to make time to do it you know, organize your life so that you can do the thing that brings you joy and has some other sense of meaning beyond. I think that's probably the case, just make the time. It is like my dogs need to be walked and fed, I get that done so I make the time I make sure I can do that. I should be able to do that with the language. I think it is interesting that we are having this conversation I mean just a few weeks ago I ran into another Anishinaawbe woman and she was talking about wanting to learn the language and I was telling her, actually, about your study and I said that I would just love to get together with some people even if we just did it as a casual group. So she said, well if you do then count me in I'd love to do that. So there you go (laughs) if we could start a group like that and just sort of make the time to do that. Well you know I have two sets of tapes here and even if I just worked on one word a day, wow wouldn't that be cool. So, it is making the time to do it!

Although most of the language learners indicated that the academic experience facilitated the opportunity to fulfill their desire to learn an ancestral language, oddly enough, at the same time, the rigorous demands of student life also undermined their attempts to reclaim it. Violet comments:

That's one of the areas I really want to pursue [laughs] once I finish this writing. I want to go back to the language I feel you know.. That's one thing I have a lot of regret about. Not ...sticking with it because I'm thinking wow.. you know if I would have stuck with it all these years I would basically be a fluent speaker right now. I've had the opportunity to learn from different styles of teachers. So here I have all kinds of books, all kinds of tapes, I have power point slides from an online course I took, the whole bit. So, that is one huge goal!

Most of the language journeyers indicated that they experienced a sense of pain at not being able to speak their heritage languages. However, once they began their language reclamation journey this focus was replaced with a collective sense of shame and guilt for not working hard enough to recover it. Many of the language learners, at one time or another during our sharing session spontaneously declared that they were "not fluent" in the language while many of the participants repeatedly beat themselves up because they have had several different opportunities to learn the language but as yet

haven't been able to grasp it. Some people feel like they should have some kind of blood memory. Below is a vignette from the sharing session between myself and Sunflower.

Laurie:

Although many people say that language is easier for children to learn, I often wonder if it just because as adults we place adult expectations on ourselves that are not realistic. We don't expect a child to make sentences and read and do all of these things right away.

Sunflower:

Right I think that's it! I'm thinking if we all went into a class to learn Chinese or something I think you are quicker to pick that up than your own language for some reason. I don't know, I'm just wondering about that. You know like Spanish or French. There is something else preventing me from getting that out. I think it probably just goes back to the whole language spoken at one point was considered wrong. So that whole thought still kind of maybe creeps into people's minds. It is hard to speak [laughs nervously] if that makes sense. I think there is a responsibility because I think at times well if I don't learn this I won't/don't have the language. Like I know I have it but I don't have it [laughs]. So it's responsibility plus for my children, I'm thinking we haven't really spoken well I should be speaking at home too, But I haven't. Again there it is that whole responsibility it is not there and that's part of it not taking the time to do it and that's, I think is the..... oh boy, I don't want to say guilt.

Sunflower communicates that she feels a sense of responsibility to restore the language for both herself and future generations. She used our sharing time as a way to explore the reasons why she does not speak her ancestral language at home. She is able to identify how the trauma that her ancestors suffered while in residential school may potentially continue to have an influence on her use of the language.

After my sharing session with Sunflower I was left with a lingering sense of dis...ease. I wrote this reflective journal entry:

After speaking with Sunflower today I can't help but identify with her feelings of frustration and shame at not achieving the level of fluency I had anticipated when I first began my language learning journey. The problem is, in order to recover our ancestral language as second language learners we face a multitude of barriers that intersect on multiple often simultaneous levels. The language of the economy

is rooted in the English language and this is an entirely different system of thought. Never mind the fact that there is very little opportunity to practice our newly acquired language skills. Fluency comes from practice and if we don't have opportunities in our everyday lives to practice then we are faced with the added pressure to maintain our language by sheer force of will. Everybody gets tired and that's what makes us human, it takes super human willfulness to persevere but it doesn't have to be that way, we can take advantage of our environment to leverage language survival the same way our ancestors used their immediate environments as learning opportunities prior to contact.

### **Barriers Summary**

The dominant mindset is shaped by a white settler capitalistic mentality that in turn promotes English as the chosen method for the communication of its values, attitudes and social norms. As such, the English language serves as a mechanism from which external relations of ruling can operate across multiple social settings simultaneously. These coordinated social processes form a highly sophisticated mechanism that results in an interlocking system of linguistic oppression that continues to marginalize Indigenous languages. The claim that English language is the “language of communication in a globalized world” has been used to justify the elimination of Indigenous languages world-wide (Kuiper, 2007, p. 59). However, both Williams (1977) and later Greenfield (2013) illuminate how the values espoused within the English language have historically evolved in ways that both link and reflect a whole range of institutional, economic and political relations of power. These findings suggest that English in its evolved state demonstrates a highly coordinated social process that continues to impede language revitalization efforts for Indigenous people.

Access to fluent speakers continues to be a significant barrier to the rekindling of our ancestral languages. Similar to Gresczyk's (2011) findings, many of the language learners in this study shared that being surrounded by the English language and the

inability to access fluent speakers, formed a significant barrier to their ancestral language acquisition efforts. Accordingly, Gresczyk, (2011, p. 150) reports that since “there is still a lack of use [of] Ojibwe [within First Nations] communities” many second language learners who wish to advance their fluency levels must travel beyond their immediate location to converse with someone in the language. Several of the language learners interviewed pointed out that disjointed learning opportunities formed a significant barrier for them. The interlaying of the barriers shared by the second language learners when combined with the unceasing demands of everyday life in an English dominated environment was discouraging and made it difficult for the language learners to keep up with language reclamation efforts. As such, their motivation to learn is constantly challenged with time commitments, the demands of everyday life, disjointed learning opportunities and limited learning resources. Despite the fact that there is clear evidence available to support the claim that when it comes to second language acquisition there are no maturational constraints to language learning, many of the participants expressed the belief that exposure to Anishinaabemowin later in life formed a significant barrier to their learning progress. These findings suggest that there is something other than age interfering with ancestral language reclamation.

Similar to what is found in the existing body of literature that addresses Indigenous language reclamation, inadequate levels of funding continue to impede ancestral revitalization efforts. Many language activists assert that in order to significantly impact Indigenous language documentation, preservation and revitalization, all levels of government, to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, need to make a concerted effort to work together for the purposes of setting up a national language



revitalization organization (McIvor, 2009; Pitawanakwat, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011). When the language travelers were asked about their perceived barriers to recovery, many shared a common belief that a lack of committed government funding that is dedicated specifically to Indigenous language revitalization programs is a key contributing factor to the disjointed learning opportunities they encounter. Several language activists report that, although First Nations leadership verbally supports language learning, limited financial resources relegate it to the back burner (Pitawanakwat 2009). While one language journeyer observed that the policy of soft funding paves the way for budgetary constraints to justify cuts to language learning programs. She noted that they are almost always, the first to go.

The scarcity of trained professionals who possess a heightened level of cultural competency would allow educators to be sensitive to the historical trauma experienced by First Nations people as well as the alternative ways that First Nations people learn. A shortage of learning materials contributes to the multiplicity of barriers that make it difficult to provide a consistent way of learning. All of the language journeyers shared that they struggled with feelings of frustration because they did not have anybody to practice with and aside from inconsistent programming this is one of the biggest obstacles to language retention. The use of family members as co-learners in the process was an innovative way for some of the Indigenous language learners to overcome this barrier. However, there is evidence to suggest that the historical effects of intergenerational trauma caused some disagreement amongst family members regarding the appropriateness of passing on the language to the younger generation.

The importance of having regular support from the language learning community beyond one's immediate location allows learners to establish language sharing networks that enable the language journeyers to learn from each other and also provides an apparatus from which to develop innovative ways to transmit Native languages into the future. All of the language learners have expressed how difficult it is to reclaim their ancestral languages in and amongst a predominantly English speaking environment that was at times hostile to their efforts. To cope, some of the language learners turned to their immediate family for support while others developed grassroots study networks within their own language learning groups.

The experiential knowledge shared by the second language journeyers in the study indicates that the demand placed on them to conform to standard western linguistic protocol unwittingly contributes to an invisible language learning barrier that is not easily discoverable. Some of the language learners expressed reticence when it comes to speaking their newly acquired ancestral languages to the elders. While most of the language learners in the study expressed a collective sense of shame and guilt at not being able to achieve what they viewed as an acceptable level of fluency given the amount of years that they have been on their language recovery travels.

## **Chapter 8 – Telling of the Story: Conclusions & Suggestions for Change**

### **8.1 – Language Learner Motivation**

Most of the participants in the study specified that they could trace the loss of their ancestral languages to the forced removal and incarceration of their ancestors in residential schools where they were isolated from their families and communities and forbidden to use their individual ancestral languages. In an attempt to erase First Nations people from the face of North America the colonial move toward biological extinction continues to manifest in a multiplicity of ways which in turn influences people's attempts to reclaim their ancestral languages. Many of the co-travelers narratives lend credence to the important impact that language recovery has for them. The further they advanced on their language journey the more they began to experience an enhanced overall sense of personal and cultural identity.

All of the participants interviewed relayed that they were motivated to learn their ancestral languages because they viewed language to be a key mechanism from which they could recover their own sense of personal identity and cultural awareness. The acknowledgment of this realization provided additional inspiration, they regarded their language learning efforts as a key apparatus from which they could transmit their ancestral heritage to the younger generation.

Many of the participants shared a collective sense that they have lost much more than their First Nations languages. They communicated that after having embarked on their language recovery journeys this sense of loss was replaced with increased levels of self-esteem and cultural identity.

To further highlight the healing potential that learning one's ancestral language has, most of the participants linked their ancestral language recovery efforts with an over-all sense of re-connection to both self and their individual ancestral communities.

## **8.2 – Collective Sense of Grief**

The participant narratives indicate that there is a collective sense of grief, an intergenerational disconnect that stems from the loss of one's ancestral language. One of the language learners imparted a powerful story about the 'great grief' that her own mother suffered knowing that she could not communicate with her Elders in their ancestral language. According to Rose this "empty need" was something that she grew up with. As such, the collectively shared encountering of trauma experienced by First Nations people as a social group has resulted in a form of social suffering that in turn has been unconsciously transferred intergenerationally amongst Native American people both on and off reserve.

A few of the language learners shared that their parents did not teach them the language because they did not want them to suffer the way they had while growing up. One of the participants shared that her own family actively resisted her efforts to share the ancestral language with their children because they wanted to disassociate from their Native heritage. These accounts illustrate how historically, narratives which are rooted in majoritarian stories that privilege certain social locations as normative points of reference, can become unconsciously internalized and disseminated by those who have been oppressed by them. The insidious invisibility of these narratives make critical engagement necessary if we are to expose the privileging role they fulfill.

In terms of social justice, most of the learners indicated that learning their First Nations' language was a way to resist being assimilated into mainstream society. All of the learner's narratives communicated that First Nations languages and cultural practices play an important role in the maintenance of an identity that is separate from mainstream notions of being Canadian.

As previously highlighted, the historical mistreatment of Canada's First Nations people has resulted in a disjointed sense of identity that has manifested in a form of social suffering that has negatively impacted existing Aboriginal beliefs and practices which were fundamental to the state of Indigenous languages and cultural survival. These research findings indicate that there is a definite link between ancestral language reclamation and a more grounded and resilient sense of identity.

### **8.3 – Modality of Indigeneity**

All of the language journeyers in the study confirmed that they felt a sense of cultural responsibility to pass their ancestral languages along to others. This sense of cultural responsibility has become internalized to the point that the second language learners engage in a process of self-invigilation which, in turn becomes linked to what I view to be a 'modality of Indigeneity'. The recovery of one's language is associated with increased levels of self-esteem, a renewed perception of cultural identity as well as an overall enhanced sense of healing.

According to Anton Treuer (2010) who learned Ojibwe as an adult, the key to gaining a significant level of fluency in Anishinaabemowin is both dedication and commitment. What is absent from the conversation is a frank discussion of the working of privilege in the process of language reclamation. The literature indicates that it takes

time and money to commit to a level of dedication that would have the potential to impact individual fluency levels. Interestingly enough all of the language activists involved in Pitawanakwat's, (2009); Gresczyk's, (2011) and this study including myself have achieved advanced levels of education. Has our language become housed in the white house of learning, reserved for those with the financial resources to purchase the privilege to learn? This is a suggestion for future study.

The assertions of Indigenous scholars such as Treuer have become linked to what I call a 'modality of Indigeneity'. Modality is a pattern of behavior or action that is associated with, in this case, Native or Indigenous culture and heritage. There is a pattern of action or circumstance that becomes attached to being conceived of as Native. Furthermore, in order to maintain an Indigenous identity there are duties attached to it that have been created by Indigenous people and disseminated through the discourse by Indigenous scholars. According to Pitawanakwat (2009, p. 28) when it comes to language, it is important to be mindful of the ways in which "trying to stay traditional for the sake of authenticity can work against language revitalization". It is essential that Indigenous scholars recognize that they too are in positions of power and privilege, and therefore the discourse they disseminate can become a mechanism of influence for Native people who in turn internalize the duty to 'live up to' the modality of Indigeneity that has the potential to undermine language reclamation.

The recovery of language is associated with increased levels of self-esteem, a renewed perception of cultural identity and an overall sense of healing. This renewed perception of cultural identity is further influenced by the discourse of Indigenous writers who maintain that it is the duty of all Native people to work towards the recovery of their

ancestral languages and culture. The problem is, in order to recover an ancestral language, Indigenous people face barriers that intersect on multiple often simultaneous levels. The very structure and nature of society makes it difficult to discover the origin of these compounded barriers.

Trying to exist in these two worlds that intersect with each other on numerous levels simultaneously makes it difficult to trace the origin of influence. I suggest that one barrier can be found in a form of ‘traditional fundamentalism’<sup>45</sup> that has emerged from writers such as Marie Batiste who alleges that in order to capture the hearts of Indigenous people we need to communicate in our First Nations languages. Oddly, Batiste makes this argument while communicating in English herself, a contradiction that highlights the unconscious role Indigenous scholars have in certain kinds of moralism that ignore the multiple language learning barriers faced by most learners. All of the second language learners I interviewed had an internalized sense of social responsibility to learn their ancestral languages. However this creates a lot of pressure for second language learners and may possibly act as an invisible learning barrier to the acquisition process because this individualized sense of responsibility often does not take into consideration the multiple barriers that the learners continue to face while trying to recover their ancestral languages. Hence, I argue that rather than ‘fluency’ language activists might focus more on the progress that second learners make on their personal language revitalization journeys.

Thus I argue that learners need to identify how a collective sense of shame associated with an internalized attachment to the modality of Indigeneity may both move

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<sup>45</sup> Fundamentalism is used here to indicate a demand for strict adherence to a doctrine that is a reaction to colonizing efforts of settler society.

people forward in their language recovery journeys, while at the same time under-playing the larger structural barriers that make individual learning so difficult. However, once learners have this awareness and analysis they might feel like they can dump the weight of guilt and shame, so that the language learning journey becomes lighter.

#### **8.4 – Our language recovery journey continues**

Kuokkanen calls attention to the fact that “much like the rivers and winds, human beings are also natural forces of the earth” (2007, p. xiii). Although the natural forces of nature are in constant motion, the active presence of nature never loses its basic features. Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island have historically used Natural phenomena as a means to situate themselves in ways that allow for them to form a sequence of natural reason with others within their own environments (Vizenor, 1999). Several of the language learners shared how they made use of the immediate spaces they occupied to enhance their ancestral language learning efforts. As such, their stories provide an enhanced understand of how Indigenous people make use of the land to enhance their language learning efforts and therefore resist the ongoing colonizing efforts of mainstream.

An important finding arising from this research is that once the language journeyers embarked upon their language recovery travels, they continue to maintain that desire to learn. In essence, their language recovery journey never really ends. As such, despite the multiple barriers that often make it difficult to continue, nobody in this study ever really gives up in the struggle to regain their ancestral voice. In fact, all of the learners expressed a renewed desire to expand their ancestral language learning efforts. Notwithstanding the disjointed learning opportunities and funding cuts encountered, the learners continue to intuitively understand that language is an integral process that



provides a mechanism to decolonize their minds. All of the language learners in the study specified that they felt that through use of their ancestral language, they could express themselves more fully and in ways that they could not in English. Several shared that they had experienced epiphany moments as a direct result of their language reclamation efforts. Speaking from my own position, the further along I got on my language reclamation journey the more in-depth my understanding of self became. Consequently, in spite of the assimilative efforts of mainstream to separate me from my ancestral heritage, my recovery efforts have allowed me to ground myself in a more enhanced sense of cultural identity. The language learning narratives shared by my co-travelers when combined with my own language recovery process speaks volumes regarding the potential that our ancestral language have to heal and restore First Nations people and the lands we all live on. Many of the language learner narratives support the claim that there is a relationship between cultural capital and a positive urban Aboriginal identity perspective. Several of the language recovery co-traveler narratives provide insight into the healing potential that learning one's ancestral language has. All of them linked their ancestral language recovery efforts with an overall sense of re-connection to both self and their individual ancestral communities while one of the participants highlighted the protective life-saving potential that learning an ancestral language had for her. The increased sense of cultural esteem and emotional resiliency experienced by the language learners in this study speaks to the healing potential that Native Americans experience upon learning their ancestral language. These findings support the claims made by Midgette (1997: 3) that "knowing the languages presents one with a strong self-identity, a culture with which to identify, and a sense of wellness".

Recent research conducted amongst First Nations in British Columbia provides convincing evidence that there is a relationship between high levels of Aboriginal language usage and a decreased incidence of Aboriginal youth suicide (Hallet et al., 2007). Given that the incidence of youth suicide falls well below the provincial average, these research findings provide an empirical base from which to question the broader impact that ancestral revitalization movements have for First Nations people.

Accordingly, Pitawanakwat, (2009) asserts that learning an Indigenous language facilitates enhanced learning outcomes, increased employment rates and lower levels of poverty for Indigenous people both on and off reserve (Pitawanakwat, 2009). On June 11, 2008 the Harper government publicly apologized to First Nations people for the role the Canadian government played in contributing to the legacy of abuse and mistreatment committed against over “150,000” Aboriginal children who were mostly forced into its care. Contained within Canadian government’s apology was a resolution to “forge a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us (Stephen Harper, 2008). If the Canadian government is truly interested in raising the level of Aboriginal involvement within Canadian society this study’s findings provide evidence based support for the prioritizing of funding initiatives specifically targeted for Indigenous language revitalization.

### **8.5 – Modeling an Indigenous Ontology**

My goal was to design a culturally meaningful way for approaching an investigation into the meanings people make as they embark upon an Indigenous

language reclamation journey. With this goal in mind, I combined the traditional teachings of the Ojibwe medicine wheel with the lessons of the seven Grandfathers in order to access an ancient system of knowledge that I could use to guide my research practice in ways that would honour and respect the co-travelers who agreed to become involved in my study. I placed myself in the centre of the medicine wheel with the four quadrants branching out from the centre. I therefore, began this journey by first documenting my own language reclamation efforts in the form of an Autoethnography. I used these contemplations to situate myself within the research and also within the social context of those who shared their language recovery narratives with me.

One of the main guiding principles for conducting research in Indigenous communities is that research “should empower and benefit Indigenous communities and cultures, not just researchers, their educational institutions, or Canadian society” (Battiste, 2008, p. 501). As such, I embraced Kovach’s (2010) assertion that Indigenous research should be in line with Indigenous values that espouse some form of community accountability in ways that are respectful and sensitive to community needs. Furthermore, to ensure that the tribal knowledge that I used to inform my research methodology was appropriate for publication, I made use of documented Elder accounts of cultural traditions that they themselves had judged to be appropriate for publication (Kovach, 2010).

The interview schedule was constructed by using an ancient ancestral system of knowledge that is a multi-layered representation of the traditional Anishinaawbe teachings symbolized in medicine wheel. This framework helped me to connect with the participants in a culturally meaningful way. As Indigenous scholar Leroy Little Bear puts

it (2000, p. 77) “there is enough similarity among North American Indian Philosophies to apply concepts generally, even though there may be individual differences”. Hence, the tribal philosophies, and commonly held beliefs and values were familiar enough that the participants could relate to in ways that empowered them to discover deep personal meanings that they had not been aware of prior to participating. Many of the co-travelers thanked me at the end of our sharing session and expressed an enhanced sense of motivation and desire to increase their language reclamation efforts. Daisy shares her insight:

I found this interview very helpful and very motivating; it woke up my desire to go back to something that I had learned a long time ago. And also, to learn more because it's been sleeping, it's been quiet. So it woke that up just to realize what I did do back then. It gives me the inspiration to learn more and maybe even put some of it in my book. Actually start setting it down on paper, or an audio. I have discovered that I have the ability to do that, so thank you! It's been very helpful  
-----Daisy, 2012

For some the interview process provided a beneficial mechanism thereby allowing them to uncover unique ways to overcome learning barriers that they had not been aware of previously.

Sunflower observes:

This interview has really helped me discover my own reasons and I think that was lost there for a bit and now I'm going to start looking at the language in a different way again. It makes me want to go now and get right back into my books. We have to inspire and get people excited about learning again, that gung ho ness (sic) helps people remember why we are doing it. Well good now, thank you, I am glad we talked about this because I am getting all excited about it again and I think we all need that right? There are levels in life too, but this gets that inspiration going again. And now I understand why I am doing this again, basically, you know. ----Sunflower, 2012

Given the ways First Nations people have a sense of distrust for western processes of research I made use of the traditional teachings to inform my interview process. The

design and implementation of a culturally sensitive research method allowed the language travelers to feel comfortable in terms of opening up and speaking freely about the history of their language loss. There is this collective sense of grief arising from the loss of the language, and this gets passed down through the generations. These findings indicate that this shared experience of trauma is a key factor for motivating people to work toward the rekindling of their ancestral languages. During our sharing sessions I employed the use of our teachings to communicate the direction that the interview was taking. This allowed people to feel comfortable sharing something so personal and intimate as language loss and recovery.

Since research influences policy and public opinion it is important to engage more broadly with the mechanisms that impact people's effort to reclaim an Indigenous language. The narratives shared by the language learners indicate that research on the interconnected nature of Indigenous languages and the link between Indigenous thought and the modality of Indigeneity is crucial.

Many of the barriers shared by the language learners appear to interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels suggesting that there is an interrelationship among multiple dimensions and modalities. There is a pattern of action or circumstance that becomes attached to being conceived of as Native. In order to maintain an Indigenous identity there are duties attached which have been created and disseminated through the discourse produced by Indigenous scholars who are in positions of power and influence. However, the multiple barriers to ancestral language recovery faced by the second language learner form an invisible interlocking system of linguistic oppression which undermines individual Indigenous language recovery efforts. As such, the use of

Indigenous people's experiential knowledge, systems of thought and ontology contribute to the critical understanding necessary for the development of effective tools and strategies that are aimed at enhancing the recovery of our endangered ancestral languages.

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Schedule**

Since the traditional Medicine Wheel has four quadrants, the interview schedule I have developed to serve as a research guide identifies these key objectives:

#### **Motivation – Spiritual/ceremonies/worldview**

Why people don't speak their First Nations language in the first place?

What has motivated you to learn your ancestral language?

#### **Processes & Barriers – Physical/sustainable development**

There are several different methods to reclaiming your language, what methods have you tried?

What types of experiences have you encountered while engaging with these types of learning methods?

What types of barriers if any have they encountered?

How did their families respond when they discovered that they were attempting to recover their language?

What types of feedback have they received for people they encounter outside of the learning environment?

How did non-native people respond when you tell them that you are recovering your language?

What do you see as key contributors to a successful learning experience?

#### **Cultural Responsibility – Mental/Political**

How will you maintain the language

What do you intend to do with the language you have learned

#### **Identity/Esteem – Emotional/Social & Other Benefits**

How did you feel when you started to learn the language?

How has that changed since you started

What benefits if any have noticed



Brock University  
Research Ethics Office  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: rsb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

### Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 3/1/2012  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CORMAN, June - Dean's Office Social Sciences  
FILE: 11-176 - CORMAN  
TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Laurie Sherry-Kirk  
SUPERVISOR: June Corran  
TITLE: Indigenous Language Recovery - the Learner's Perspective

#### ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 3/31/2013

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 3/1/2012 to 3/31/2013.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 3/31/2013. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jan Frijters, Chair  
Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.





May 4, 2012

Laurie Sherry-Kick  
86 Royal Oaks Dr.  
St. Catharines, ON  
L2N 6K8


Dear Laurie

The Ethics Committee reviewed your "Indigenous Language Recovery: The Learner's Perspective" Ethics Research application.

This will confirm that full approval is hereby granted by the Six Nations Ethics Committee to conduct the research.

The Committee looks forward to receiving a final report upon completion of your research and is requesting that you send two copies of your final report. All approved researchers are required to make a presentation on their research at the Six Nations Ethics Research Forum, which is held annually in May.

Thank You

  
Teresa Longboat  
Council Secretary

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