

ē kakwē nēhiyaw pimātisiyān ōta nīkihk:

THE LIFELONG JOURNEY HOME

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By

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FOREWORD

This doctoral dissertation is a continuous narrative piece that I drew from captive moments in my time of learning and teaching within mainstream education. I am a *nēhiyaw*, an Indigenous woman who is reclaiming the Cree language, which is attached to identity and land. I am not a fluent speaker of Cree, but I have worked hard in this lifelong endeavour in my career. In doing so, I also create a space for others and myself through the *nēhiyawak Language Experience (nLE)*, a nonprofit organization that I founded. In the manuscripts of this dissertation, I discuss how I reclaim a sense of my identity through language reclamation in Cree language camps. My journey to go deeper into theory and practice began in 2014 when I enrolled in doctoral studies in the Interdisciplinary Studies department at the University of Saskatchewan. In this dissertation, my chapters unfold the way that my life does: Each manuscript shows an opportunity, project, or event to which I contributed within the field of language revitalization and education. In my writing, I show my thinking through “lived experiences.” These chapters also illustrate my growth as a language teacher and revitalizer of the Cree language—some would even say a leader within my profession.

In this dissertation, I have included five previously published manuscripts, which is why it is a manuscript-style dissertation. Three of these manuscripts are co-authored and included here with permission: Chapters 5, 7, and 8. Chapter 6 is a co-authored and complete manuscript yet to be published. In that chapter, my co-author and I illustrate how our work complements one another’s in the field of language revitalization. I have received permission from all co-authors and all publishers to include these manuscripts in this dissertation (see Appendices A through D).

It is important to note that in this dissertation I use Standard Roman Orthography (SRO) from Saskatchewan Cree. Standardization of the Cree writing system in the Y dialect is ongoing. I utilize Arok Wolvengrey’s Cree dictionary along with Jean Okimāsis and Arok Wolvengrey’s (2008) *How to Spell it in Cree: The Standard Roman Orthography* because I am situated in Saskatchewan, and this is the predominantly accepted standardized spelling of the Cree language in this province. It should be pointed out that all chapters and articles were edited to provincial standardized orthography after publication, to create continuity in the Cree spelling standard within my dissertation. I also follow typical rules such as no capitalization in the Cree language, macrons on longer vowel sounds, and the letter ē with a macron.

This work represents my lifelong journey, captured in personal journals kept over many years. I used my journals to inquire into my own learning, awakening, and realization of who I am—*nēhiyaw*. nLE is about my personal journey of place-making and reclaiming language. I teach in and through stories. I share some of my dreams and visions and tap into *mamāhtāwisowin* (Ermine, 1995). Not all of my ‘knowings’ come from a book or classes, but from dreams and visions, which I know come from my ancestors and past loved ones as a form of guidance. The understanding of dreams is also a recognized research method in Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2010). An autobiographical narrative and Indigenous approach to knowledge making is the entire foundation of this work; it emits from this space, intertwined with my lifelong learning, experiential learning, and education. Each chapter is a story, a relationship of experience.

I invite you to read my dissertation with certain understandings about its origin and underpinnings.

1. What is a manuscript-style dissertation?

Please refer to the guidelines on manuscript-style dissertations, outlined by the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies guidelines, found at <https://students.usask.ca/graduate/manuscript-style.php#Beforeyoubegin>.

What you will immediately note is that each of the five manuscripts, while contributing to my larger body of work, also read as a stand-alone piece, thus references are included at the end of every manuscript/chapter. Given the independence of each piece, there are times that quotations or references are used in more than one of these manuscripts. For overall consistency throughout the dissertation, all chapters have been edited to adhere to the guidelines presented in the APA manual, 7th edition, although many original publications used APA, 6th edition guidelines.

2. Why Interdisciplinary Studies?

To be perfectly transparent, my choice of Interdisciplinary Studies happened out of necessity rather than opportunity. I entered my PhD as an educator with Bachelor of Education and Master of Education degrees. At the time of my enrolment, the College of Education did not yet have its Cross-Departmental PhD program and the Department of Curriculum Studies, with the opportunity to admit only four special case PhD students at any one time, did not have an opening. Ready to begin doctoral work, I chose an Interdisciplinary route as a viable option. As I

am sure will become quickly evident as you engage with my work, education is my home discipline. For this reason, not all disciplines are equally foregrounded. I have drawn on teachings, coursework, and literature in the fields of anthropology and history to enrich and extend my knowledge and understanding. It is evident to me that my reclamation journey has been enriched by my learning in the disciplines of linguistic anthropology and history.

I wove in history, sometimes formally and sometimes from within my own life story. I used history to timeline the story of the decline and then the revitalization of the Cree language in Saskatchewan within the boundaries of the Y dialect territory. I also captured the difference between formal Western academic history and my own oral history and knowledge from a *nēhiyaw* perspective. Experience is knowledge, and my ancestors had knowledge about this territory in which I now live that has deepened my connection to this place, this land, and my language. I have been fascinated by this historiography, as it relates to the Cree language, and how it revealed the innovation and dynamics of the will of a people to not to let go of language, despite assimilation through Crown policy.

Anthropological research, through my readings and in discovering travellers' records, ethnographic accounts, and trader journals, has helped me to understand connection/disconnection to land. I have come to understand the behaviours, practices, and impact of colonization on my relatives, including ancestors. Furthermore, I learned how our culture has changed over time as a result of colonization and marginalization and, through no fault of our own, the loss of language. I have learned on this incredible lifelong journey that language is symbolic, deep, and meaningful to those of us who are *nēhiyaw*.

Throughout my doctoral studies, I continued to teach in education, mainly in Indigenous schools and I refined my abilities as an educator to more clearly and naturally connect my students with land-based education and language teaching. I began to marvel at and appreciate my students' desire to know about themselves, about our shared history, and about our people's stand to remain *nēhiyawak*. These experiences enabled me to illustrate throughout my dissertation the spirit of the Cree language, thought, and ways of being, all of which have given me a deeper understanding of identity. This lifelong journey home has been an educative one for me, and I hope it will be educative to you as the reader as well in understanding more deeply what is at play in reclaiming, revitalizing and teaching the Cree language.

3. What have been my ethical considerations throughout this process?

My ethical approach to my doctoral work has been situated in *nēhiyaw* protocol, ceremony, and sacrifice. It is important to follow rules and guidelines in a sacred manner among the *nēhiyawak*. Throughout my language-reclamation journey, I have prayed and sacrificed; I have laid or given tobacco, a sacred plant, with regard to what I was doing with language, because *nēhiyawēwin* holds all that is sacred, including honouring others who have helped me to get here. I acquired permission through intentions and actions for desires or wishes to be granted. Prayers, songs, and smudges, all sacred ways of doing and being, have been a part of my processes for acquiring and sharing knowledge.

In sharing my lifelong journey home, I am sharing an Indigenous communal experience, with permission from my family, community, and the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience. My actions affect my family, my children, grandchildren, my great-grand children, and those yet to be born, so it is vital I act in a way that is respectful. In this way of being, I operate in regard to our ethics, in a good way and in a sacred way.

The knowledge that I have acquired, which has moved my body to different locations, has come from the lands, the ancestors, the rocks, the trees, and the animals. In the statement of ‘all my relations,’ it is a declaration, a creed, an oath, of spiritual commitment in the belief that I will put my life on the line to ensure my dedicated relational responsibility and accountability for *nēhiyaw* ethics.

I do have formal permission from the University of Regina (Certificate of Formal Ethics Approval) for Chapters 7 and 9, which are included in Appendix A and B. I received permission to use research circles of narratives and have included participant-learner signatures. Our ethics also included building relationships, visiting, and praying together, an on-going ethical commitment that never stops, even after a completed academic ‘study.’ In the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience, I also presented my relative Joseph Naytowhow with tobacco and a gift to help us to teach and learn language in a good way.

Lastly, in duty to ethics, protocol, and guidance, I presented Dr. Kevin Lewis with tobacco, cloth, and a gift when I asked him to sit on my committee and asked for his guidance and direction to work in a good way. On different occasions, I also sat in sweat-lodge ceremonies over the duration of my doctoral study. This work has been seeped in communal sacred knowledge because prayer is ethics too. In the end, these prayers said during my doctoral studies

are the sacred bundles and commitments to my people, my community, and my ancestors, these bundles are always on my conscience, forever within my spirit, and always present.

ABSTRACT

nēhiyaw ōma niya, nēhiyawak ōma kiyānaw, pakitwāhkan sāhkihikan ohci niya, māka mīna kihci tipahamātowin nikotwāsikh askiy. niya ohkomimāw, niya okāwīmāw, niya okāwīsimāw, ēkwa niya omīsimāw māka mīna onīkānēw wīci atoskēwin ta pimācihtāhk nēhiyawēwin pēkiskwēwin.

In this manuscript-style dissertation, I explore my lifelong journey of language reclamation in a de-colonial approach. In nine papers I share my narrative beginnings, research, and renderings and delve into *nēhiyaw* epistemology, the main source of ancestral knowledge continuity in *nēhiyaw* people. I explore the value of dreams, visions, and intuition and how I use them to inform my teaching practice. I also inquire into experiences of ethical space and explore its potential for the field of language revitalization. In gathering, collecting, and interpreting my stories and the stories of others through the medium of talking circles, I rekindle my relationship with the *nēhiyaw* spirit. My inquiry into my lifelong journey as a practitioner grounded in *nēhiyaw* intelligence has emerged from these papers. In examining my experiences as a helper, a conduit, and, most important, a language sharer, I attend to the questions, What are the learning processes for new adult speakers of Cree that lead to a reclamation of both language and inherent identity? What is the role of land as curriculum with regard to enhancing Cree identity? What are the conceptual and Indigenous language pedagogical ways that lead learners inward to gain knowledge, and how do they differ from mainstream educational practices?

Many Indigenous Peoples are affected by long-term Canadian policies such as the Gradual Civilization Act, Indian Act 1876, residential schools, and forced assimilation and relocation (Johnson, 1998; McCarty, 2003; McIvor, 2012; Simpson, 2017; Sioui, 1992). As a result of the enactment of such policies, many Cree people lack continuity and opportunity in relation to access to land, ancestral knowledge funds, and language transmission or transfer. This lack of continuity and opportunity is a problem because it disconnects Cree people from the critical things we need in terms of our cultural continuity, which is key to our health and wellness. Using narrative inquiry with a blending of Indigenous methodology, I investigate how, through language reclamation, it is possible to find “home.”

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To my ancestors, family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me all the way home, *kinanāskomitināwāw*. I would also like to acknowledge several individuals who held me up, pushed, and encouraged me when I needed it the most.

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I am also grateful for my committee members. Dr. Kevin Lewis, College of Education, was also one of the co-authors in Chapter 8. He steered me in the direction of Blue Quills College, where Indigenous research methodologies became significant to my work. Dr. Clint Westman, College of Archeology and Anthropology: Thank you for your insight and thoughtful suggestions of land and place. Dr. Keith Carlson, College of History at the beginning who has since become Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Indigenous and Community-Engaged History: Thank you for making me look deeper into the history of the Cree language. Thank you also to Paul Hackett, Committee Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies: I appreciate your kindness and diligent support. I also want to extend a special thank you to the external examiner, Dr. Sheilah Nicholas of the University of Arizona: Your contributions and thoughts were heartfelt and solidified my work in language revitalization; I will forever carry your words in my heart. I also want to say *kinanāskomitin niwīcēwākan* Andrea Sterzuk, who helped me navigate this Western process in a ‘grassroots’ kind of way.

To my immediate family: my husband, Quin, who is my light and was always willing to listen to my thoughts and give me a hug when I did not know I needed one; my children, Samantha, Patrick, Ryan, Lily and *nōsisim* Isaiah: Thank you for your patience and understanding when I needed to write and finish this project. Your consideration and love have helped to create this dissertation. Thank you to my father, John Ermine, and my uncle, Velmer Ermine. Whenever I was in search of an answer to family history and protocol, I could always depend on both of you to finish a sentence or help with language camps. Thank you to my sisters and brothers, in the *nēhiyaw* way: Your memory of kinship systems was always intact. Thank you, Sturgeon Lake First Nation Community, my home.

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To my circle of friends and colleagues too numerous to mention: I appreciate all of you. I also want to thank the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI), where my passion for language revitalization was lit ablaze.

Last, in memory my late grandparents, Vital and Mary Daniels and my mother, *nikāwiyyan*, Eunice Daniels.

nēhiyaw ōma niya, nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE

Please see Appendices A-E for permission from co-authors and rights-holders to include the following manuscripts in my dissertation:

Daniels, B. A (2014). A whisper of true learning. *Inclusive education: Socially Just Perspectives and Practices*, 7(2), 101-114. <http://www.leringlandscapes.ca/images/documents/11-no14-daniels.pdf>

Daniels, B. (2018). Onikanew: ‘She who leads’: Learning to lead in education (279-290). In P. Whitinue, M. Del Carmen Rodreiguez de France, & O. McIvor (Eds.), *Promising practices in Indigenous teacher education* (pp. 279-289). Springer Nature Singapore Pte.

Herman, C., Daniels, B., Lewis, K., & Koole, M. (2020). Awakening sleeping languages in Saskatchewan with culturally appropriate curricula and technology. In J. Traxler & H. Crompton (Eds.), *Critical mobile pedagogy: Cases of digital technologies and learners at the margins* (pp. 123-135). Routledge.

Blair, H., Daniels, B., Buffalo, N., & Georges, V. (2021). At the convergence of theory and practice: Nourishing the learning spirits of Indigenous language teachers in schools. In L. Crowshoe, I. Genee, M. Peddle, J. Smith, & C. Snoek (Eds.), *Sustaining Indigenous languages: Connecting communities, teachers, and scholars* (pp. 63-79). Northern Arizona University. <https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/SILL/SILL6.pdf>

Daniels, B., Sterzuk, A., Turner, P., Cook, W., R, Thunder, D., & Morin, R. (in press). *ē ka-pimohtēyāhk nīkānēhk ōte nīkān: nēhiyawēwin* (Cree language) revitalization and Indigenous Knowledge (re)generation. In K. Heugh, C. Stroud, K. Taylor-Keech, & P. De Costa (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics of the South* (forthcoming). Routledge.

DEDICATION

For the *nēhiyaw* children who attended the ‘Indian Residential Schools.’

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CHAPTER 1:

nakiskamohtahiwēwin

nēhiyawēwin (The Cree Language) is the vibration of my parents, grandparents, and ancestors. When the sun rises, I hear the songs of my people. During moments of solitude, prayer, and quietness, I hear the language of my people. Even in my dreams and search for purpose, I feel the love of my people. Their presence are strongest when I am physically and spiritually connected to the land. I breathe, and language fills me with the knowledge of who I am. I am empowered, and I am nourished. Language ties me to the past as I live in the present.

kī-ati-atoskēw: She Who Began the Work

I am currently an Indigenous/*nēhiyaw* second-language adult learner. I am a Cree woman from Sturgeon Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan. Although not a first-language speaker, it is also important to note that I was never a fluent speaker of the Cree language/*nēhiyawēwin*.¹

I have devoted most of my career and my adult life to reclaiming my language; it has been a lifelong journey. Over the past decade, I have been actively engaged as a language teacher in Indigenous language land-based summer camps in my home community, as well as within other Cree communities in Saskatchewan. I have also taught other language teachers during summer institutes for the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) at the University of Alberta. As a doctoral candidate who is conducting research in the emerging field of Indigenous language revitalization with the help of interdisciplinary studies—Indigenous studies, education, history, and anthropology—I have been continuously engaged in publishing, presenting and sharing my findings, such as my thinking of ‘lived’ experiences along the way.

My community language work has been the most compelling work for me because it addresses the discontinuity in identity that I have felt, seen, and experienced within myself and within Cree people in both urban and reserve arenas. Cree language and identity have been under

¹ Also known as the Cree language. Because in this article I explore Indigenous identity, I uses Indigenous terms for naming language, places, and people. In the *nēhiyaw* language, the Roman Standard Orthography uses only lower-case letters for all Cree words, regardless of the convention in English to capitalize names, places, and proper nouns. For further reference, see the work of Jean L. Okimāsis and Arok Wolvengrey (2008), *How to Spell it in Cree*.

assault because of colonialism. What I mean is that, as Cree people, we have been disconnected from our whole way of life, including our beliefs, behaviours, and material culture. I recognize that other people like me also feel this loss. As a result of this realization, I began a journey into *nēhiyaw* ways of knowing and being and turned my attention to the heart of nationhood, *nēhiyawēwin*, and the benefits of reclamation.

My story with language began when I was in my early 20s. I was introduced to *nēhiyawēwin* as a subject in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Saskatchewan, and I marvelled at the language. I then took grammar classes in Cree, but they did not help me to speak, probably because “it is well documented that this approach has not generally created new speakers” (McIvor, 2012, p. 46). These grammar-translation approaches to language teaching and learning actually made me feel lesser as a *nēhiyaw* person. Learning from a book, a chalkboard, and a grammar-based approach felt foreign to me; and I did not like all of the memorizing that we had to do. With this kind of approach, I failed every time when it came to learning. Then, in my second year of university, I took a drama class in which the instructor was a fluent Cree-speaking person who was dynamic and funny when he used the Cree language. He never wrote anything down for me to memorize but used humour and repetition in a natural way, and I responded. I learned vocabulary because of his passion and genuine feelings about passing on the language.

This positive experience perked up my motivation, and I started asking my grandparents questions about the Cree language. I was puzzled to learn that they had little to no interest in passing on any knowledge about the language to me. Even as a child, I had been deeply and intrinsically motivated to speak but was always “hushed” and told to speak English. My grandparents whispered Cree to each other, which only amplified my curiosity to learn what they were saying. They did not want me to face the same prejudices, discrimination, and punishment that they had as a result of Canadian and church laws and policies about speaking Cree. Subconsciously, I defied their wishes. I did not speak, but I learned to listen to the language and developed an ear for it. I learned the tone, intonation, and rhythm of it, which now, looking back, has proven beneficial in my reclamation of my heritage language.

My language-learning journey persisted beyond my Bachelor of Education degree. In my Master of Education program in 2003, I decided to delve deeper into the *nēhiyaw* Cree language paradigm. I began to take language learning seriously and enrolled in language classes offered at

the University of Saskatchewan, First Nations University, and the University of Alberta. These experiences, in turn, evolved into my master's project entitled "My Journey of Learning the Cree Language" (2005). At that time I was raising three young children and trying my best to share what I was learning in class by bringing *nēhiyawēwin* home to them. My attempts were only frustrating me more because there was no continuity or support after the class to keep me in the language. My youngest child was about three years old, and that pushed me to learn. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to say that this motivated me to the extreme. I knew that I was the last person who was within reach of the Cree-speaking members of my family. I was the last one who could hear the language still being spoken and who had an opportunity to transmit it to my children. It is hard to describe the sense of urgency and pressure that this creates in a Cree mother. Looking for ways to reconnect my own children to their language and culture is a large part of why I became involved in the academic field of Indigenous language revitalization.

In 2003, I planned and executed a summer language camp to get away from life's distractions and literally be out on the land. I went back to Sturgeon Lake, my home community, *nimosôm's* home community. This place and this experience were the beginnings of the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience. Although it was home, the specifics of actual language teaching and learning required a great deal of trial and error and the retention of the language. I was very new to and unfamiliar with this type of language revitalization discourse and program planning. I was reading, researching, and figuring out what an effective language approach looked like. In this first summer I thought, Why not create a Cree language learning experience and have the practice and real experience of a *nēhiyaw* being?

The following summer a relative, Joe Naytowhow, went out with me again, along with a couple of new teachers who were fluent in the language. Although Cree teachers in the formal education system had education degrees and their attempts were genuine, there was a lack of repetition, patience, and scaffolding of language. These disadvantages of formal instruction directed me towards language learning theory and the development of communicative approaches. This interest brought me back to the university to complete my master's degree in 2005. I have since kept my language-learning journey in journals and, awake to its importance, in one of my past recommendations I spoke to the importance of teachers' receiving ongoing second-language training and theory in language development.

Leanne Simpson (2017), a land and language activist, stated, “If you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it, get a practice” (p. 165). This is what I am doing: Not only am I learning language, but I also teach the language and share how it works for me, as I am becoming a language educational specialist. To this day I continue to offer the language camps during the summer months of July and August, mainly in my home community of Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan. At the same time, I am pursuing my doctoral studies, always observing and learning. I have expanded the summer camps into yearly programming and offer language workshops, mini camps, night classes, and, most recently, online learning. I work with a team of five other teachers, and I actively research the language and disseminate this knowledge to others. As a language instructor, I have become strategic in spreading useful information about a variety of language methods, such as Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (Greymorning, 2019), Total Physical Response (Asher, 2009), the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1988), Task-Based Communication and the Direct Method (no translation, games, songs, or stories in Cree). I draw the approach that I use from the community language-learning method that Charles A. Curran developed; it selects its “principles from the more general counselling learning approach” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 85). With this platform, I recreate the “old ways”—like my ancestors used—of being out on the land and learning to speak and understand Cree through listening and practice.

As I have worked to improve the learning and underpinnings of *nēhiyaw* knowing and doing, the overall language learning experience has changed frequently. Working in language development throughout my doctoral studies, I have moved further into processes of protocol, prayer, ceremony, and sacrifice. I have learned to adopt, adapt, and adhere to what my ancestors have always done with regard to relearning, reclaiming, and re-searching the *nēhiyaw* spirit. The nine papers that comprise this manuscript style dissertation align with this development in my thinking and knowing. These nine papers speak to epistemology, ontology, Indigenous methods, and language reclamation. These concepts involve being *nēhiyaw*, speaking *nēhiyawēwin*, and practicing *nēhiyawiwīn* (Greeness). This research is, centrally, about cultural connectedness and the continuation of *nēhiyaw pimātisiwin* (the Cree life).

kā itāpatahk ēkwa kā-iteyihcikātēk ōma nitawāpēnikēwin:

Purpose and Significance of the Research

Through my community language revitalization activities and my academic research, I have learned that language is the depth and breadth of who we are as a people, as a Nation. From experience, research, and direct communication with other language activists, I have learned that language reclamation is a form of Nation-Building. This research is personal, as I have come to understand that meaningful language maintenance is guided by research, theory, and practice and achieved through this triad, as a whole, and without exception.

From a practical point of significance, this research is further justified. Because the field of Indigenous language revitalization is relatively recent and has developed in a “continuous grassroots focus on approaches to strengthen and revive our languages” (McIvor, 2012, p. 35), further scholarship on Indigenous language education for learners is greatly needed and requires prioritization. There is a strong momentum building, a growing interest especially in language recovery; and these currents are finally shifting into the Indigenous consciousness of valuing one’s language within family and community:

For those concerned with the shift, with what Dell Hymes (1980:152) has called, “working to create more space within the hive,” this means that we must constantly attend to how our programs effect the transmission of language and culture within the family. (McLaughlin, 1995, p. 177)

It is important that we focus not only on the learner, but also on the family if we are ever going to be successful in intergenerational learning. Referring to the engagement of parents in schools, Pushor reminded us that “parent knowledge is overlooked” (Pushor, 2010, p. 14). The same can be said of the role of family or kin involvement in the transmission of language and cultural understandings in informal settings. Family needs to be involved in language reclamation.

This research also has social significance in that it will provide a direction forward in the teaching and learning of Indigenous pedagogy, particularly for Indigenous language (adult) learners. While many people assume that children are the best learners of second languages because of their ability to rapidly develop target-like phonological systems, with the right input and exposure, adults can be better language learners due to their superior meta-cognitive understandings of language (Ortega, 2008). Adults with the necessary means, and the will to pass on the language to their children will work harder in this case when it comes to language

reclamation. In most cases the adults left standing are the last link to the possibility of languages being reclaimed and passed on to the next generation. It is critical that Indigenous Peoples and our languages and identities occupy our rightful place and space. Canadian society is failing First Nations students in schools. This dissertation, based on my current and practical research on language reclamation, Indigenous methods, ethical space, and *nēhiyaw* praxis, has the potential to provide knowledge on how to push back against such institutional failure, to provide insight into ways to respond to these deep and urgent challenges, and to move us forward as a Canadian society in different and better ways. An outcome of my research, then, is the sharing and dissemination of the knowledge I have acquired so that my future writing on *nēhiyaw* epistemology, ontology, and language reclamation will be connected to educational systems through culturally appropriate methods.

ni nohtē kakwēcim: My Research Puzzle

In this chapter I introduce the nine articles that comprise the body of this manuscript style dissertation. Using a narrative inquiry approach situated in Indigenous methodologies in this work, I examine language reclamation through a variety of lenses: methodological, empirical, conceptual, and practical. Narrative inquiry is situated in a foundational belief in human experience in which humans, individually and socially, are understood to lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives (Clandinin & Connelly 2006). Through inquiry into these stories, they will become educative for self and others, because such inquiry leads to opportunities to retell the stories and to relive them in new ways. My research puzzle for this autobiographical study therefore reflects my lifelong journey with language reclamation. In the second paper, *The Saskatchewan Plains Cree: The Land, the Language, and the History*, I present a brief history of Saskatchewan and the Cree people prior to and during colonization, noting the changes to names, locations, and the identity of the people. I lay out this chapter as a backdrop to my inquiry into Cree language reclamation.

In the third paper, *A Whisper of True Learning*, I unravel the white Eurocentric nature of the school system, making visible that school is not a neutral place but one that makes it hard to honour the identities and ways of knowing and being of Indigenous Peoples. I describe my journey to develop my *nēhiyaw* identity without internal conflict or compromise as I awaken to the depths of my being. I became the teacher I was meant to be.

onīkānēw: She Who Leads is the fourth paper. It is an epistemological paper that focuses on my journey of “becoming” a *nēhiyaw* educator. In this paper I share my realization that I cannot teach the way in which I believe within mainstream education and its colonial structure. I discuss how I began to take my teachings into new, but old, places. As I explore my work in language recovery, I foreground the importance of dreams, visions, and intuition. I make visible these guiding principles in Indigenous knowing. I honour Indigenous epistemology, ways of knowing that are currently not valued, accepted, or understood in Eurocentric education systems.

At the Convergence of Theory and Practice: Nourishing the Learning Spirits of Indigenous Language Teachers in Schools is the fifth paper. As a co-author of this paper, alongside other language teachers from the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute, I step into the realm of Cree ontology in my discussion of how the language spirit of Cree is alive. I explore the importance of dreams, visions, and intuition in language teaching in classrooms through a personal narrative of my own experience.

Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics: Conceptualizing an Ethical Space of Engagement Between Academic Fields is a co-authored conceptual paper. The focus of this sixth paper is on creating an ethical space in which to value and teach Indigenous languages and allowing Indigenous peoples to lead in the field of language revitalization. Indigenous peoples are the key knowledge holders with regard to language and land and are thus researchers in their own way and in their own right. Writing as a language revitalizer alongside an applied linguist, Andrea Sterzuk, we inquire into how our research fields, bodies of knowledge, and ways of knowing can complement one another and intersect to create richer interdisciplinary knowledge.

nēhiyawēwin Language Revitalization and Indigenous Knowledge (Re)generation—An Ethics of Southern Research is a methodological paper that features ongoing Indigenous research methods of gathering and interpreting the experiences of learners at a Cree language- and land-based camp. Together with Sterzuk, Turner, Cook, Thunder, and Morin, five *nēhiyawak* and one settler, we collect information through talking circles and follow Indigenous protocol throughout the whole process of meaning making, including prayer, smudging, and offering tobacco and cloth to a knowledge keeper. We talk about our relationships with and among the six of us, our relationship with the language, and our relationship with Creator’s helpers: the land, the water, the sun, the rocks, and the wind. We ask those spiritual helpers to assist us with the data analysis

and interpretation. This paper offers the field a deeper understanding of Indigenous epistemological underpinnings and approaches. We explore how we ground ourselves by rekindling the ways of our ancestors and by sitting on the ground where my ancestors sat. This seventh paper puts forward the notion that language is kin.

Awakening Sleeping Languages in Saskatchewan with Culturally Appropriate Curricula and Technology is a practitioner paper, a co-authored submission with Herman, Lewis, and Koole, targeted to language revitalizers who are teaching Indigenous languages. This eighth paper features strength-based practical language-revival initiatives that are changing the landscape of language learning. By providing practical examples of appropriate and effective methods, we demonstrate that technology, such as apps, can assist with language revitalization.

In the concluding chapter of my manuscript-style dissertation, I summarize my work to interrupt colonial spaces and the hegemony of mainstream institutional education by engaging with and rigorously navigating Indigenous lifelong learning founded in Indigenous community, language, and land. I foreground how ontology, epistemology, and relationality are the guiding “grandfathers” and “grandmothers” to, and for, Indigenous education and its connection to *nēhiyaw* spirit. I discuss how Indigenous and Western knowledge can co-exist ethically in higher learning through the use of protocol, respect, and the assurance that Indigenous scholars will lead within the field of language revitalization. Through a thorough collection of stories that honour my ancestors, my relatives in the present and those who will arrive in the future, I conclude with how writing in this way regenerates *nēhiyaw* knowledge within a *nēhiyaw* paradigm. Last, I call for change in the way that we teach and the need to look at language through a gaze from the land. Language comes from land, and, like language, it is alive; it is “kin.” Reproducing this idea is possible and can become a strength-based approach, a success story, a love story, a *nēhiyaw* story within education.

Research Questions

Three research questions are central throughout the eight papers that comprise the body of this doctoral work:

1. What are the learning processes for new adult speakers of Cree that lead to both a reclamation of language and inherent identity?
2. What is the role of land as curriculum with regard to enhancing Cree identity?

3. What conceptual and Indigenous language pedagogical ways lead learning inward for knowledge gains, and how do they differ from mainstream educational practices?

Dewey's (1938) belief that "life is education" parallels an Indigenous belief that learning is a lifelong journey. From a Cree perspective, I am interested in "lives and how they are lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii) in regard to Cree language reclamation. Ermine's concept of *mamāhtāwisiwin*, tapping into the mystery, is important in articulating a Cree concept of land as curriculum in language learning. It denotes that the *nēhiyawak* can tap into powers around them as a fundamental way of understanding things, of articulating a place in the world (McLeod, 2007, p. 30).

Paralleling Indigenous ways of knowing through the oral sharing of history, in these papers I make visible my personal experiences, insights, sacred knowings, and growth within language reclamation and identity. Land has been a major impetus. The papers that comprise this manuscript-style dissertation are my survivance stories. Gerald Vizenor (2009) defined "survivance" as "active native presence" (p. 1). Simpson (2017) further explained that survivance "stories throughout time have always been a renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (p. 196). Through language reclamation, I am surviving as a *nēhiyaw* woman. I am still here.

Literature Review

As I reflect on my research puzzle, my contribution in education has been my focus on Cree language reclamation. This has been the recurring theme throughout my lifelong journey. To make sense of Cree identity and language learning and teaching, I must begin with the land. A great deal of literature, both academic and from the oral tradition is useful to understand the relationship between Cree people and land. In choosing to return to the lands of our ancestors, our original homes, in re-creating an old idea of informal learning situated in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, I have, in fact, engaged in a "new" practice in the field of mainstream education, sometimes known as "decolonizing education" (Battiste, 2013). Decolonizing is about restoring what was for Indigenous Nations, looking at the history of Canada through an Indigenous lens, and creating space for all Indigenous voices to be heard, seen, and understood. Tuck and Yang (2012) asserted, "Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one"

(p. 36). Decolonization offers new hope for the land and the Indigenous identity (Kovach, 2010; McCarty, 2003; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 1999; Tuck et al., 2014).

Decolonizing education involves changing the system, not just for Indigenous students, but also for everyone. It will be uncomfortable because “it seems clear that ‘required Indigenous content’ is aimed at non Indigenous learners” (Rodriguez de France et al., 2018, p. 91).

Acknowledging the inequities and privileges within the educational system is something that allies can dismantle with Indigenous peoples because “the modern educational system was created to maintain the identity, language, and culture of a colonial society, while ignoring the need to decolonize” (Battiste, 2013, p. 30).

To make sense of my research questions and the nine papers that make up this dissertation, I situate my work within the literature in three key and interconnected areas: 1) land, 2) language and identity, and 3) Indigenous language teaching.

***askīy*: Land**

The Plains Cree were my ancestors; I am a part of them as they were a part of this land: “Land is often more taken as more iconic of identity than language and many communities are in fact named after places found within their territory” (Schreyer, 2016, p. 4). The meaning of the word *nēhiyawak* is a pluralisation of the term *nēhiyaw*. This is a Plains Cree reference to the identity of a Cree person from the prairie region. In the book of *Ahtahkakoop*, written by Christensen (2000) and the community of Sandy Lake, Saskatchewan, the authors translated the meaning to “*nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw*. We are the *nēhiyaw*. The *nēhiyawak*. Exact body. Exact body of people. . . . Many people today know us as prairie Cree. We are part of the great plains Cree nation” (p. 3). The Plains Cree made their home annually where Saskatoon is now, stretching into the far wooded north, east, and west. This is where they lived, loved, and learned since the beginning. “Saskatoon,” the term itself, is a Cree word used similarly to many other places and provinces in Canada. For example, Saskatoon in Cree is spelled *sāskwatōn*, which refers to the Saskatoon berry (Wolvengrey, 2001, p. 518) that grows here. My relative Joseph Naytowhow once shared with me the phrase *sāskwatōn minatohk askiy*, which translates to the land of this type of berry that grows here. Like the Saskatoon berry, the Cree were “the exact body of people,” which is one translation of the Cree people who grew here. Our ties are deep and longstanding.

As the Plains Cree, we have many land-based creation stories about the beginning of life and the places that still exist today that connect us to this land. Both linguistic anthropology (Davis, 2017; Perley, 2017; Schreyer, 2016) and “earlier traveler and explorer accounts in describing the writer’s discovery of unknown people and places” (Kottak, 2015, p. 698) help us remember what life was like and we now have many recorded stories:

Ethnohistorians have produced numerous collections of primary documents, including documents in Indigenous languages, as well as cultural histories of particular Indigenous peoples. These are important for providing fine-grained diachronic perspectives on Indigenous experiences. (Strong, 2017, p. 32)

Linguistic anthropology, earlier travellers’ records and ethnography, although all different, help tell a story about the past in the way Plains Cree people lived.

Many sites of evidence have suggested that the inhabitants, my ancestors, have been here for a long, long, long time. Items of significance that my ancestors left behind include the thousands upon thousands of tipi rings found all over the plains region of southern Canada and into the United States. What is interesting and what I have heard from Old Ones, in stark contrast to the patterns of home and cabin owners, is that when Indigenous people settled for a time being or camped out on the land it was never directly by water. Think of the insects and mosquitos. Tipis were always set up high to keep a watchful eye on who might be coming and the welcoming breeze that kept bugs away. Tipi rings are most often found on higher levels of ground, never by rivers or lakes, which is why farmers most often find the rocks of tipi rings in their fields.

Other substantial evidence of the inhabitation of the land by the Great Plains Cree is reflected in artifacts from bison hunting:

Communal hunts brought more people together into large camps at favoured locations for longer periods of time. The procurement of bison required a larger workforce, especially women, who faced the onerous task of butchering and preparing several thousand pounds of meat. Women were also responsible for putting up and taking down and transporting teepees, the conical-shaped, hide-and-pole dwellings that were developed around this time. (Waiser, 2016, p. 68)

With bison hunting as the livelihood of the Plains Cree, evidence attests to their skillful perseverance and flourishing upon the land despite its harsh climate. “Bison” in Cree is

paskwāwimostos; the Cree are known for the connection of *paskwāwi-pīkiskwēwin*, language of the plains Cree. For instance, Cree place names are named after places like the Buffalo Jump or the city of Regina, which was formerly known as *oskana kā-asastēk*. Bison were the economy, they were the entire way the Cree lived on the plains and they organized around the bison. This is an example of connection and relationship to the environment and the animals, reflected in the deep respect and language of the Cree people. Schreyer (2016) shared this concept in her work: “Land is iconic of identity” (p. 6).

Furthermore, celestial stone formations and rock paintings are other land markers of significance that carve out and define a history, a practice, and, most important, a story. These significant markers are “places [that] are important to the *nēhiyawak* and for identity formation” (McLeod, 2007, p. 26). They all answer something deep and meaningful.

These examples, or at least the majority of them, come from diary accounts of early traders who kept journal notes about their experiences. Early explorers, fur traders, and missionaries documented, recorded, and wrote field notes, some more descriptive than others, on the Cree people and their geographical regions: “The amount of historical documentation of the Pegogamaw is, therefore, somewhat limited since it is largely restricted to the accounts of Anthony Henday, William Pink, Joseph Smith and Matthew Cocking” (Meyer & Russell, 2004, p. 217). The Pegogamaw were one of the several Cree groups within boundaries of Saskatchewan. Early accounts of the Cree people in this dissertation stem from these types of writings. For this information, I draw upon anthropologists’ work, in which Canada has had a long-time practice.

From these writings of early explorers, fur traders and missionaries, we can see that the Cree language figured heavily into their observations and notes: “Since the first attempts in the mid-nineteenth century to construct Cree dictionaries and grammars, the Western Cree have been subdivided according to dialect differences” (Russell, 1990, p. 5) based primarily on geographical regions. These historical accounts, in the form of journals and descriptive notes of the early explorers and traders, explain where the Cree lived and the lands that they inhabited. By looking back at these accounts, knowledge on the Cree language is regenerated.

Cree language reclamation offers opportunities for reconnecting to Cree knowledge. To understand the role of land as curriculum with regard to enhancing Cree identity, it is important that I turn to literature in which researchers examined the prairie Cree’s traditional land use. The

waters of this land are equally important to the prairies. Water is a grand spirit, a life-sustaining element, sacred and worthy of prayers. Water in Cree is *nip̄iy* and related to the term, *s̄ip̄iy*, which means river. A water-flow access point, *s̄ip̄iy*, is an important aspect of the livelihood of the Cree and integral to their survival. Cree reliance on the natural features of land for survival is apparent in many different aspects of Cree life. “This connection is manifested through such things as the knowledge of plants, sacred sites, and songs. Indigenous people remain attached to specific pieces of land, shown through songs, ceremonies, and language” (McLeod, 2007, p. 19). Although the river systems were the main highways of North America, Cree people often travelled by foot to favoured places:

The names they gave geographical features had special significance or served as important reference points. Birch Hills (*waskway waciy*), for example, provided a source of building materials for their canoes, while the Eagle Hills (*mikisew waciy*) were favored wintering grounds. These landforms were connected by a network of trails that did more than get people from one site to another or facilitate communications with other bands. The pathways also served to reinforce Cree identity, to provide a sense of place and a sense of history. (Waiser, 2016, p. 76)

Because these were well-known locations that generation after generation travelled, a sentimental connection seeped into the spiritual dimension. The expression “My people have travelled here before” gives a notion of such connection: “Places, which are spatial localities given meaning by human experiences in them, are integral to the knowledge systems and cultural identities of traditional American Indian and Alaska Native peoples” (Semken, 2005, p. 149), just as they are integral to the Cree.

As a promoter of Cree identity and Cree language, I deliberately practice “radical resurgence,” which means that I am doing what my ancestors have always done. When I organize language classes and land camps, we engage in ecologies, accommodate the weather, re-imagine the past, and live for the day. We develop wisdom from and with land and truly learn to deeply appreciate nature. As Simpson (2017) stated:

This is what coming into wisdom within a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg epistemology looks like. It takes place in the context of family, community, and relation. It lacks overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream, Western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, Aki, is both context and process. (p. 151)

The language and land camps are about practicing past ways as we work to understand who we are in this modern world:

If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine. (Basso, 1996, p. 7)

For a time being, we are truly being *nēhiyaw* by coming together in our ancestral territories, we are engaging in the context of the language, we are learning words and phrases for what it is we are doing, we are learning words and how to use them for the weather, activities, and ceremonies. We are facing storms together, literally and metaphorically, in the reclamation of language. We are facing un-known dangers together, like bears circling our camp, paddling out in canoes on lakes that are huge, we are out on the land also looking after each other's children, and taking care of each other by feeding ourselves communally in the places we camp for days. We are working together in the places we live.

nēhiyawēwin ēkwa miyo-mahcihowin: Language and Identity

In this dissertation, I explore the relationship between language reclamation and Cree identity, as well as the role of land in connection to that relationship. The term and construct of “identity” is a contested term in research related to language learning. For those who work in the area of psycholinguistics, the term may represent affiliation with a particular group (Tajfel, 1974, 2010). For those influenced by feminist theory and the social turn in applied linguistics, the term represents the multi-faceted and dynamic facets of a person (Norton Peirce, 1995, 2013). In this dissertation, I use the term “identity” to refer to being a *nēhiyaw*. I also recognize the connections between a strong sense of Cree identity and Indigenous wellness. The journey upon which I have embarked has been lifelong; the reclamation of my language has been one of well-being in reaffirming identity and Nationhood. Speaking my ancestral language has led to connectedness, inner strength, wholeness, and pride. Onawa McIvor (2009) wrote of the benefits of health and wellness that researchers have typically linked to traditional activities with Indigenous languages. She concluded that “the evidence is mounting for the argument that Indigenous cultures and languages contribute positively to health and wellness and therefore are protective factors against risk” (p. 127). For a long time, I have envied others who can speak their language or who understand the epistemology and pedagogy of being Cree. It has been, and is, a lifelong journey. A “full-blown language revival is a long and arduous journey” (Walsh,

2018, p. 8), one that I have wanted to walk away from on numerous occasions. Nonetheless, I persisted because I believe that Indigenous languages are a remedy to confront social ills in Indigenous communities. I know that a strong sense of identity contributes to wellness, confidence, wholeness, an exact body, a *nēhiyaw*.

Because the *nēhiyawēwin* language contains the accrued knowledge of our ancestors, it is important that we examine the rooted ideas in our vocabulary to develop an understanding of ourselves. Ermine (1995) explained that “*mamāhtāwisowin*” helps the individual “to be and do anything creative” (p. 104). This creativity is for the benefit of the individual, a faith in oneself and in all of creation, also the understanding that the history of ourselves is also locked within the language. Furthermore, “Our languages reveal a very high level of rationality that can only come from an earlier insight into power. Our languages suggest inwardness, where real power lies” (p. 108). This belief is the center of all of our ceremonies pertaining to quietness, solitude, and prayer, all that brings a certain calmness and knowing in a person. It is also important to state that learning about languages from an Indigenous paradigm is not secondary or inferior to Western ways of thinking.

Indigenous language reclamation is connected to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. “Indigenous knowledge can be understood as knowledge that is not simply ‘old’ and irrelevant but knowledge and its applications that have had meaning for generations, that have evolved over generations and that are still applied and adapted to contemporary conditions and have meaning for communities (Smith et al., 2016, p. 137). As a concept or term, then, “Indigenous knowledge” represents beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of non-Western people that developed through long-term association with a specific place. Through this long-term association, strong relationships have formed among the people, the environment, and the more-than-human entities (other living things and spiritual forces) that share their land (McGinnis et al., 2019). From most Indigenous perspectives, both animate and inanimate objects have a life spirit; language then, as an element, has its own life force. However, when specifically looking at the writing structure of the language itself in a grammatical form, such as in speech, there are features of inanimate terms, but I am not critiquing this aspect of literacy in my dissertation. The acknowledgement of these spirits is essential to harmony and balance, well-being, and interrelationships; we are pitiful human beings without their help, guidance, and love. Indigenous language revitalization work often includes a belief in the unseen powers in the world

and the notion that, as Indigenous people, we could not exist without this spiritual belief in what the language holds. Sioui (1992) confirmed the meaning of “‘all my relations,’ thus acknowledging the relationships between all beings in the universe and their common vision of peace” (p. 10).

The idea of language having a Spirit became very real to me as an adult and second-language learner of Cree. After much journal writing and participating, observing, and researching in the field of language revitalization for almost 20 years, it became clear to me that languages have spirit and are therefore part of spiritual communication. This ontological perspective (Hauck & Heurick, 2018) I share with many Indigenous Peoples.

My love for my ancestral lands cannot be separated from language. As Cruikshank (2005) explained:

In Athapaskan languages, you know something is animate if the verb signals that it has the power to act on other things or to move, and actions are often attributed to entities, such as glaciers, that English speakers would define as inanimate. (p. 4).

The Cree language is similar in this ideology; rocks, trees, plants, snow and the sun are alive, like the language itself too. Special ceremonies also honour these sentient beings. Cruikshank’s informants were three elderly women from the Yukon who shared their beliefs about glaciers: “Glaciers are conscious and responsive to humans. Glaciers . . . are wilful, sometimes capricious, easily excited by human intemperance but equally placated by quick-witted human responses” (p. 8). Land and its environment, or what lives within or on them, requires the utmost reverence.

Both language and land are alive and filled with Spirit—Spirits that require the greatest respect and protocol. Ferguson (2016) drew on familiar ideals:

Sakha language is thought by many speakers to possess its own guardian spirit or *ichchi*. This spiritedness, noted in the 19th and early 20th century by both early foreign ethnographers and some of the first Sakha-language authors, is linked to the mobility of words as well as their possession of sound. (p. 98)

Because of the understanding of respect and that all things are dependent upon one another, land-based language teaching is an important area of language reclamation and balance within one’s life:

First Nations peoples know that health is about balance. Interconnected of all living matter—the land, animals, the air, the water, our way of being—is what makes us

healthy, but our philosophy of health and well-being has been shackled, reshaped by colonialism. (Adam, 2015, p. 167)

We are suffering from this; and starting at the beginning, relearning *nēhiyawēwin* can move us all forward in a wholesome, better way; we can learn language on the land as we engage in what our Ancestors have always done. In the process of moving forward, “It is not enough to challenge colonial concepts: there has to be a solution” (Perley, 2017, p. 204). This work is one solution.

***kiskinwahamākēwin ēkwa kiskinwahamākosiwīn*: Indigenous Language Teaching**

Finally, the third body of literature that has informed this dissertation is writing in the area of Indigenous language teaching and learning. This body of literature is valuable in understanding my narrative inquiry, situated in Indigenous methodologies, into the kind of conceptual and pedagogical ways that lead me inward for knowledge gains. This literature is also valuable in understanding how Cree pedagogy and mainstream educational practices differ.

Heritage, identity, and culture were values that Indigenous children did not want to give up. In my experience as an educator for 21 years, and having been in the mainstream educational system myself, I have found that students of Indigenous ancestry do better when cultural understanding and Indigenous knowledge are incorporated to the fullest measure when they are open.

When schools and teaching staff are appreciative to a child’s life of customs and practices of home, the benefits of biculturalism and bilingualism are and can be endless. “Language is important in culturally responsive teaching” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 17). Although non-Indigenous people might not understand Indigenous customs, the acceptance and inclusion of such customs are integral to teaching language. Blending Indigenous methods and Western knowledge is vital to language reclamation. Arapaho language activist Neyoozet Greymorning (2019) explained, “The reality is that to revitalize a language requires a lot of work to be done beyond what one might be paid to do” (p. 230). What is needed, he stated, “are effective language teaching methodologies and a shift in consciousness, especially when it comes to measures of support. . . . What is needed is people’s involvement” (p. 230).

Institutions such as the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI), a program similar to the American Indian Language Institute in the United States, celebrated its 20th year in the summer of 2019. It hosts a summer institute at the

University of Alberta that offers a variety of classes for certification in language teaching. Students can use completed classes for credit toward a degree in a variety of disciplines, including education, Indigenous Studies, and linguistics. Language methods classes are offered for second-language acquisition. Summer institute presentations by researchers such as Jim Cummins, Joshua Fishman, Stephen Krashen, James Asher, Leanne Hinton, and Neyoozet (Stephen) Greymorning have been major contributors to theory, models, and approaches to second languages. These researchers have taught that it is important to learn language through listening and observing, that it has to be meaningful, and that it is constructed socially.

Throughout my journey I have come to learn a number of practical methods of teaching language acquisition. The Accelerated Second Language Acquisition method (Greymorning, 2019) uses images to draw on memory in a short span of time. Total Physical Response (Asher, 2009) uses body and hand gestures, not quite like sign language, for “action” commands that the speaker/teacher demonstrates. It is a practical method of direct communication to convey meaning. The Natural Method (Krashen & Terrell, 1988) focuses on small and achievable communication goals, such as introducing oneself or telling a short story. These language acquisition methods, which land-based camps use, offer “intensive exposure and practice to connected speech and real conversation” (Hinton & Hale, 2001, p. 180).

As a language user, learner, and teacher, I have come to realize that we need to think about how we teach language as a second language for Indigenous peoples and we need to do something different. Simpson (2017) stated:

If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence and create different futurities. If we want to live in a different present, we have to center Indigeneity and allow it to change us. (p. 20)

In the nine papers that comprise the body of this dissertation, I imagine and tell a new story, create a new present, and inspire new language carriers for the future. I explore land in all of its uses, from creation stories to stone wheels, and the significance of ceremony. I illustrate the connection between language and identity and the connection to wellness. I foreground the need for utmost respect as integral to Indigenous language teaching.

Research Methodologies

The methodologies that I used in this study are a blending of both Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2010; Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003; Simpson, 2017; Tuck & McKenzie,

2015; Wilson, 2008) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich et al., 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988; Squire, 2008). I chose Indigenous methodologies because I am *nēhiyaw*, an Indigenous being who lives of and from this land. I am situated here. I was raised here, along with my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and many more endless generations. It was, and still is, a rich environment of *nēhiyaw* intelligence. “An Indigenous research methodology involves a paradigm grounded in Indigenous intelligence” (Steinhauer-Hill, 2008, p. 39). This Indigenous, *nēhiyaw* intelligence resides in me. I chose narrative inquiry because this is research into my own stories, my quest to generate understandings and insights into language reclamation, identity, and land education from my lived experiences. Storying or storytelling has always come easily to me as a teacher; I teach through my telling of past experiences from which I hope others will learn and grow just a little more. By using narrative inquiry within an Indigenous framework, I am honouring my ancestors, while at the same time serving my collective people and inquiring into their story too.

Johnson (2012) explained, “In Indigenous research it is important to define our own terms, to state our research goals from within our own cultural framework, and to stand our ground (p. 80). This is what I am doing and declaring. My use of narrative inquiry is about inquiring in in-depth ways into stories as a form of research. In these stories I illustrate common threads that we can weave together to create a new picture. Narrative inquiry has an inherent duality. Story is both the phenomenon and the method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is a qualitative method of research that draws upon written works and field texts that include stories, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, and useful artifacts combined with the researcher’s life experience to address the research questions. The result of such methods is the painting of an intimate understanding of the puzzle that the research question poses.

My story of land and language acquisition experiences has been unfolding over most of my entire life; indeed, it is a lifelong journey. Dewey (1938) wrote about “continuity of experience” in reference to his understanding that each experience that an individual has will change that person in some way (p. 27). The focus of narrative inquiry, then, is on lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This type of inquiry enables the researcher to examine experiences, situated in place, over time, and in personal and social contexts. This collection of my nine chapters is a rendering of my overall narrative (Clandinin, 1986) of language and identity reclamation. This narrative inquiry offers reflections on past experiences to propose a

life in the future with new possibilities for language reclamation embraced through an Indigenous paradigm of language teaching and learning.

***nēhiyāwiwin*: Indigenous Research Paradigm (The Core, the Mind, the Soul)**

niya ōma nēhiyaw. This is what I am. *pakitahwākan sākahikan ohci niya*. This is where I am from. *kakiyosēw nitisiyihkāson*. This is what I am called. To understand what this means is to understand the word “Indigenous”:

In Latin it means “born of the land” or “springs from the land,” which is a context. We can take that to mean “born of its context,” born of that environment. When you create something from an Indigenous perspective, therefore you create it from that environment, from that land in which it sits. Indigenous peoples, with their traditions and customs, are shaped by the environment, by the land. They have a spiritual, emotional, physical relation to that land. It speaks to them; it gives them their responsibility for stewardship; and it sets out a relationship. (Cardinal, 2001, p. 180)

My identity is thus relational, a collective identity, reflective of a Nation and land. My other roles and responsibilities come from being a mother, grandmother, sister, wife, and teacher. I have been blessed with intrinsic will and drive for knowingness of *nēhiyawin* (Cree ways), living them, gathering knowledge, sharing, and reproducing and regenerating *nēhiyaw* theory.

I will situate myself—a protocol of *nēhiyaw* ways. My parents are Eunice Daniels and John Ermine. My mother’s parents were Vital Daniels from Sturgeon Lake, SK, and Mary (Halkett) Daniels from Little Red River, SK. My grandfather’s parents were Roger Daniels and Mary Anne (Lavallee) of Lake Lavallee, SK. My grandmother’s parents were George Halkett and Caroline Ballyntyne of Montreal Lake, SK. My father’s parents were Gilbert Ermine and Martha (Daniels) Moosehunter. Martha’s parents were Selina Daniels and Colin Moosehunter (Selina passed away at an early age; Colin then married his second wife, Louisa). Colin’s parents were John Moosehunter and Elizabeth (maiden name unknown) Moosehunter. “In providing these details I am claiming and declaring my genealogy, my ancestry, and my position as researcher and author” (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 3). I am all of this.

The traditional lands where my family resided extend from beyond my home community of Sturgeon Lake into areas within Prince Albert, Big River, Waskesiu, Montreal Lake, and La Ronge, Saskatchewan, and The Pas, Manitoba. Naming my lands and territories also exerts and exercises our Nationhood prior to Treaty making with the Crown.

I have always functioned in a way that represents who I am, where I am from, and what I am about; my thoughts, behaviours, actions, and beliefs as a *nēhiyaw* are based on a foundation of respect and moral ethics that is much more than can be understood, it is not only about me, but:

For the Cree, the phenomenon of *mamatāwan* refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower; it is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge.

(Ermine, 1995, p. 104)

I am from a space and place of truth of the *nēhiyawak* people known since time immemorial, as well as from the lands and lakes where we have conducted our “truths” in the form of ceremony and ritual in our language of *nēhiyawēwin*. This body of knowing has never left me, nor was it taken from me, because I remember, because I am related, because I am a part of a much larger collection of Peoples and lands. This knowing resides within me like breath.

It has taken me a while to physically map out an Indigenous research paradigm and understand its discourse fully. What I know and understand to be an Indigenous paradigm is how we operate in relation to everything. Shawn Wilson (2008) elaborated:

A paradigm is a set of underlying beliefs that guide our actions. So a research paradigm is the beliefs that guide our actions as researchers. These beliefs include the way we view reality (ontology), how we think about our knowledge of this reality (epistemology), our ethics and morals (axiology), and how we go about gaining more knowledge about reality (methodology). (p. 13)

I am a body of knowledge, but only a minuscule piece of the overall collective of knowledge and energy. What I wish the reader will gain from this research is more knowledge about language acquisition through an Indigenous methodology.

Ethics

Please see a detailed recounting of ethical processes in the foreword to this dissertation. What continued to be central in my practice was implementing and utilizing *nēhiyaw* protocols, rules and guidelines that had to be followed in a sacred manner. Throughout my language reclamation journey, I have laid or given tobacco, a sacred plant, in regard to what I was doing with language, because *nēhiyawēwin* holds all that is sacred, including honouring others who

have helped me to get here. I acquired permission through intentions and actions for desires or wishes to be granted. Prayers, songs, and smudges, all sacred ways of doing and being, have been a part of my processes for acquiring and sharing knowledge.

I personally and deliberately go home every summer, not only to take part in language learning, but for other occasions as well, such as family feasts; sweat lodges; the harvesting of sage, berries, sweetgrass, and medicines; and community festivities, and to listen to the stories that these occasions evoke. For many of these occurrences, fire is always there, always burning. This physical but natural element indicates a doorway for the metaphysical world and an invitation to past loved ones and ancestors to join us. Fire is about connection. Metaphorically, going home for me is tending to my own fire.

***ēkosi ēkwāni*: Concluding Thoughts**

Looking back upon my lifelong journey, I am moved with tears of gratitude, joy and empowered to look forward with a fresh perspective to the futurities of new language learners. The word for “life,” broken down by using folk etymology from what I learned over the years, means “*pimātisiwin*,” “*pim*,” the motion to move and go forward; this is what life is about. “*ma*” refers to the relationship to Creator that I strive to have; “*tisi*” comes from the word “*mitisiy*,” which means belly button—my life connection to my mother, grandmother, ancestors. Last, “*win*” makes this word a noun. *pimātisiwin* is then the process to live with life with relationships and ancestors in mind. The purpose is for others as well to glean insights from the nine manuscripts proposed.

These next eight papers, after my introduction are symbolic of the “eight fires” and are filled with truth, experience, regenerative knowledge, and practice. I examine my lifelong journey of language reclamation in a de-colonial way. I share my narrative beginnings, research, and renderings that delve into *nehiyaw* epistemology, the main source of the “ancestral” knowledge within *nēhiyaw* people. I explain the value of dreams, visions, and intuition and implement them as tools in my teaching practice. I inquire into experiences of ethical space and explore the potential for the field of language revitalization. Through gathering, collecting, and interpreting stories of others and with others, through the medium of talking circles, I connect with the *nēhiyaw* spirit. The land as well as language reclamation ground me in *nehiyaw* intelligence. These renderings of my research will help to meet the urgent need for language development for learners and educators alike because, more often than not, fluent first-language

speakers do not always know the language rules that are helpful to second-language learners. “The most important qualification for a teaching position is training and experience in teaching languages. . . . Teachers who have actually gone through the process of learning [Cree] possess distinct advantages over native speakers” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 165). I believe that this work has the potential to create “space” within academia for new understandings of Indigenous language reclamation and the urgent need to take a different route, one that is appropriate to and complementary of land, identity, and sovereignty.

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CHAPTER 2

nēhiyawak: askiy, nēhiyawēwin ēkwa tānitē-kī-ohci-ohctohtē THE SASKATCHEWAN CREE: THE LAND, THE LANGUAGE, AND THE HISTORY²

According to Russell (1990), in the mid-1700s six major Cree groups inhabited the western parklands, plains, and boreal forest: the Susuhana, Sturgeon, Pegogamaw, Keskatchewan/Beaver, Athabasca, and Missinipi (p. 3). In addition, Waiser (2016) stated that other Indigenous populations who lived around the 1700s in what is now Saskatchewan were the Denesuline, the Cree (*nēhiyawak*), Nakota (sometimes referred to as the Assiniboine), Blackfoot, Gros Ventre, and Hidatsa. “The Cree resided in the parklands of the lower Saskatchewan River valley, perhaps as far west as the forks, and the east central boreal forest. They were already allied and trading with the northern Assiniboine” (p. 85). This view is not uncontested. According to Dickason and Newbigging (2019), living in Saskatchewan at the time of contact were the Denesuline, Plains Cree, and Lakoda (p. 49).

Despite the three differing accounts of who lived in Saskatchewan prior to contact, historians have consistently named and recorded the Crees. The Cree themselves claim that they have always been here: Many of the place names are still noted in language, such as Saskatchewan, or *kisiskāciwan* in Cree.

According to the teachings of Old Ones—Alex Kennedy, Barry Ahenakew, and the late Simon Kytwayhat—we have stories from even before the great flood (Noah’s Ark, the biblical myth), known as sacred *ātayōhkēwina* stories. However, the story of the creation of these lands comes from *wīsahkēcāhk* after the great flood. With the help of Loon, Otter, Beaver, and Muskrat, *wīsahkēcāhk* helped to create this new island: “It is the earth that we inhabit today. *wīsahkēcāhk* had found a new island and brought our people here, our ancestral ancestors” (Christensen, 2000, p. 13). According to the creation stories that Clark (1960) transcribed, this is where time and creation began; however, Cree people know that time goes back much further than that.

Nelson et al. (1988) quoted from a journal written by a man named George Nelson, who was a veteran of the fur trade in 1823. He worked for the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) in La

² Daniels (2020).

Ronge, Saskatchewan. Nelson also recorded a version of the story that told of the making of the world after the great flood; however, what is unique in his story is that the making of people resulted because *wīsahkēcāhk* grew lonely. This is the story:

Now after some time [*wīsahkēcāhk*] became very lonesome and bethought himself of making Indians, i.e., human beings. He in consequence took up a stone and fashioned it into the form of a man; but whilst at this work it struck him that by forming them of so strong and hard a substance that in time when they would come to know their nature, they would grow insolent and rebellious and be a great annoyance to each other and of course also would never die. ‘This will not do, I must make them of a more weak and fragile substance, so that they may live a reasonable time and behave as becomes human beings.’ Upon this he took up a handful of common Earth and made a form of a man, and blew into his nostrils *the breath of life*. (p. 48)

In his journal, Nelson (1988) expressed the belief that Cree people were made here, that they are made from the very soil of this land that we currently call Canada. I believe this, as so many other Cree people also do. “In the teachings that were passed on to them, First Nations’ histories begin with the creation and the placement of First Nations peoples on the North American continent by the Creator. They were placed in North America as ‘children’ of the Creator” (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 3). Many of our stories, our oral histories, are imprinted on these lands. It has been further validated and is deeply understood that “Indigenous Peoples together with allied scholars have in recent decades produced remarkable collaborations aimed at alerting settler society to the significance of Indigenous Peoples’ historical presence and ongoing special relationships with the lands and waters of their ancestors” (Carlson, 2019, p. 139). Now, more than ever, allied partnerships with Indigenous scholars are crucial in changing the dynamics of higher learning.

***ka misikācik nēhiyawak*: Locating the Cree People**

One particular group of Plains Cree people (a macro band) were the *pīkokimāw* Cree (Meyer & Russell, 2004). The names of the Cree people relate to the lands that my ancestors occupied. Meyer and Russell (2004) noted, “Very important to the socializing of an environment is the naming of places” (p. 218). With Cree place names, Cree people know and believe that they have always been here.

The Cree people are the largest Nation within what we now call Canada. “Cree speakers in Canada historically reside in a broad band stretching from northern Quebec into northern British Columbia and the southern Northwest Territories” (Westman & Schreyer, 2014, p. 115). Our prints of existence, although hidden in the landscape of the land, can still be seen and are told in stories to this day. Our livelihood, such as hunting, trapping, fishing, tanning hide, and harvesting, still exists. In the early 1700s in our local region, the macro band, “the Pegogamaw, occupied lands which were centred on the valleys of the upper Saskatchewan and the lower north and South Saskatchewan Rivers” (Meyer & Russell, 2004, p. 218). Meyer and Russell (2004) then noted “the lands of the Pegogamaw Crees, therefore, straddled the aspen parkland, extending south from the edge of the boreal forest to the open grasslands around Eagle Creek” (p. 220). Waiser (2016) summarised Russell’s thesis from 1990:

Susuhanan Cree occupied the Swan River-Good Spirit Lake Region (along and west of the Manitoba escarpment), while the Sturgeon Cree were found to the north, along the Swan, Red Deer, and upper Assiniboine Rivers. In Central Saskatchewan, and moving westward, they were the Basquia Cree in the forested area of the Saskatchewan River delta, the Pegogamaw Cree west of the forks of the north and south branches, and the Beaver Cree in the Eagle Hills and between the North Saskatchewan and Beaver Rivers. To the north, west of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers, the Missinipi Cree lived along the Churchill River and the Athabasca Cree around the lake of the same name. (p. 131)

These names for Cree people can be found in other academic accounts (Mandelbaum, 1979; Meyer & Russell, 2004; Meyer & Thistle, 1995; Russell, 1990). These academic accounts are often based on the early records kept mainly by traders such as Anthony Henday, Matthew Cocking, and Henry Kelsey from the HBC.

In the past, Cree names were defined by and were specific to identify location (Meyer & Russell, 2004; Meyer & Thistle, 1995; Waiser, 2016). Mandelbaum (1979) recorded that “the Plains Cree were divided into several loosely organized bands” (p. 9). For instance, the name of the Pegogamaw Cree translates into the rough, jagged, rocky shores all along the North Saskatchewan River (Meyer & Thistle, 2004; Waiser, 2016). The Cree word *pīkokamāw* literally means “broken body of water” and refers to the broken shoreline. The name of the Missinipi Cree describes their territory, which was along the large waterways of the Churchill River: *misi-*, which means “large”; and *nipīy*, which means “water.” Last, the Cree term *Basquia* refers, again,

to the location of the Saskatchewan River Delta; *Basquia* is actually spelled *paskwāyāw*, which means “big meadow,” or *paskwāw*, which means a clearing or refers to the prairie.

In all cases, the names of these Cree people tell us something about where they lived. I am particularly interested in the Pegogamaw Cree because their interactions with the land and people are consistent with my grandparents’ local stories of habitation and travels. According to Meyer and Russell (2004), “The lands of the Pegogamaw Crees, therefore, straddled with aspen parkland, extending south from the edge of the boreal forest to the open grasslands around Eagle Creek” (p. 220). Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan, is within the boundaries of the parkland area and in-between the North Saskatchewan River. My home community signed Treaty in 1876.

Cree people and their complex system of language can now be categorized into five dialects that differ phonologically, lexically, and in terms of grammar: Plains Cree, Swampy Cree, Moose Cree, Woods Cree, and East Cree (Westman & Schreyer, 2014, p. 117). Finally, it is also worth mentioning Michif, a contact language that draws on Cree and French. According to Bakker (1997), “The Cree part of Michif, however, is basically the Plains dialect, spoken almost exclusively on the prairies, where the fur trade was less important” (p. 28). I also find it fascinating that the Michif language “is never mentioned in historical sources. This suggests that it was intended only for internal use by the Métis” (p. 26). However, like my grandfather’s parents, who were both Cree speaking and Métis, they spoke both Languages.

The Plains Cree, who speak using a “Y” dialect, inhabited the prairies and areas to the northwest. The “TH” dialect was a distinction of the Woods Cree, sometimes known as the “Rock Cree” by the locals. They lived to the north, past the prairie regions. The Swampy Cree were located in the region of northern Manitoba and Ontario. Further east in Canada, in and around the Hudson Bay area, the dialect drastically changed to the “L” dialect. Last, the “R” dialect represented the Quebec area and is sometimes known as the dialect of the Atikamekw Cree.

My understanding is that dialects changed according to the environment, and noted differences are evident in the dialects across Canada. Those who speak the “Y” and “TH” dialects, for instance, can understand one other, but lexical differences exist. Shaw (2001) noted, “The farther apart communities are, the more distinctive their dialects are likely to be” (p. 50). However, according to Bakker and Matras (2013), “In multilingual communities, languages are known to become structurally similar to one another through the process called convergence”

(p. 3). This is likely because people were utilizing, living, and trading within the same area and borrowing terms from each other's languages. Most Cree-speaking people can determine people's origin from the dialect that they speak within the prairie region. It is interesting that the Cree people from Moose or Atikamekw Cree sound very different from the "Y" and "TH" speakers and are not understandable to many Cree speakers, myself included. In all cases, "dialect was, and continues to be, an important marker of distinct local identity" (Shaw, 2001, p. 50).

My family comes from the Plains Cree territory and speaks the "Y" dialect. I have heard over and over that our lands and travelled lands, attached to story and memory, stretch from Lac La Ronge to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Knowing from where we come is a value that my grandparents instilled in me with regard to my identity and the lands of my home. This value is not particular to my grandparents. "Knowing from where you come, and from whom you come, is a defining way that Indigenous People build identity in themselves and acknowledge it in others" (Carlson, 2019, p. 141). We have many stories, memories, songs, and ceremonies of past storied lives that take place in the hills, valleys, and lakes of these precise tracts of land and water: "Indigenous people have profoundly local, deeply historical ways of remembering, interpreting, and understanding the creation of the places they call home" (p. 140). This large place, all of it, is my home. I continue to visit and revisit these places and sacred spaces with my family now because "places ground our memories in the physical world. Going to places others saw years before us helps frame their stories in the context in which they actually occurred" (Daveluy, 2009, p. 60).

askiy ācimowina: Stories of Place

ninohkōm says that people were not attached to a single area during the year. Her family often travelled all over to hunt, trade, gather, visit and, most important, because of the need to eat. Reminiscing about the old days, *ninohkom* can recall in her language some of the lakes and hills of the area in which she grew up—places where she camped, hunted, and fished as a child. She said that Fish Lake or Fishing Lake was known as *kinosēw sākahikan*, which is near Tweedsmuir, Saskatchewan, along the boundary of Prince Albert National Park. As we drove through *ninohkōm*'s remembered places, she reminisced about having been in these spots.

Palmer (2005) shared the same discourse:

The mere passing of the berry bush, brought to the audience's attention with the wave of Angela's hand, serves as an extralinguistic form of orienting statement, and is followed by a commonly employed phrase, such as 'used to be lots,' indicating both that something (berries) was there before, according to her personal experience, and that a change to the impoverished bush now in view has occurred. Such phrases may be laconic, but the experience of place they indicate is rich indeed. (p. 87)

ninohkōm would say, for example, "You see that spot right there? We would pitch a tent there"; or "There is a natural water spring in this area; if you take a walk through, you will find it." She remembered being able to drink water from the natural springs and/or the lake with her hands or with a bucket back then. She grew up with fishing and knew all of the spots; in a way, that resonates with the book *Maps of Experience: The Anchoring of Land to Story in Secwepemc Discourse* (Palmer, 2005). Palmer wrote about how stories carry and hold knowledge for the People of Alkali Lake Reserve in the interior of British Columbia. Palmer's informants illustrated their maps of experiences as they talked about fishing and hunting, thus creating new lived experiences as they travelled to these unforgotten places.

For *ninohkōm* in this instance, "This was her personal experience of fishing associated with the site" (p. 98) as we passed through them. *ninohkōm* would say, "We always had to work first to fill our bellies before any fun was to be had." Swimming was a treat for her siblings and her. As a child, I often swam in those same locations. *ninohkōm* pointed out that these were the places she swam and fished in as a child as well.

I learned a great deal from my grandparents and the locations they knew well. Berry picking was a seasonal family event. We would all pick berries for a few days not far from our home. I remember plopping myself on the ground as *ninohkōm* would do and picking all around me. She would say, "Do this, so that our knees will not give out." *ninohkōm* then would can all of the berries for winter.

Montreal Lake, a location in Northern Saskatchewan, was known to *ninohkōm* as *mōniyāsis sākahikan*. *wāwāskīsiw*, another location not far from Montreal Lake, was known as the place of elk. Palmer's (2005) informer stated, "Angela George remembers some of the names for the places she travels past and is always sure to mention them on each passing" (p. 88). My grandmother's relations have said that people would carve out faces or silhouettes of people in the trees of this beautiful place to signify that it was a communal spot.

In her biography *They Knew Both Sides of Medicine* (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 2000), Alice Ahenakew also referred to this location:

In the spring we used to move our camp about so much far over there, there was no town at that time, what is now called Waskesiu was nothing at all, only a single little log-house to stand there. We used to move our camp about in the north, all over, there was no well-trodden roads; sometimes we used to be there for three months. (p. 34)

Everyone in these areas at the time visited or camped in these favourite local places. *ninohkōm* also recalls the city of Prince Albert as *kistapinānihk*, because it was a big hill and, more significantly, noted as a meeting place. “Even when the names of places have been forgotten, stories about those places may persist” (Palmer, 2005, p. 88). This area was also known as a gathering site to many other Nations in the area, I remember my grandmother referring to it as a sun-dance location in our storying about land and its memories.

Basso (1996) discussed the importance of Indigenous place names and the memories they hold. Like the Apache place names that Basso described, Cree place names are also connected to past and present landscapes: “The people’s sense of place, their sense of tribal past, and their vibrant sense of themselves are inseparably intertwined” (p. 35). Whenever I drive through Prince Albert, I always remind whoever is with me that this was/is still *kistapinānihk*.

In reclaiming language, we remember and embrace ties to the land and replenish and reaffirm distinct identities. Schreyer addressed not only Tlingit in-depth knowledge of land and its use, but also language ties to land and community identity: “When the Taku River Tlingit use language publicly they are asserting their power as a community who are distinct from “the other” (Schreyer, 2009, p. 159). Settlers do not have the same longstanding interconnectedness to land or the language sentiments attached to place. Schreyer (2009) also explained that Indigenous Peoples have an “us/them distinction based on connection to territories” (p. 8) because of the past ongoing connection, and the shared rituals and memories attached within the language and anchored to lands.

As *nēhiyawak*, it is the land that is attached to language, that gives us a sense of home and identity:

Being home means to be a nation, to have access to land, to be able to raise your own children, and to have political control, it involves having a collective sense of dignity, a collective memory emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally, and

includes such things as relationship to the land, songs, ceremonies, language and stories. (McLeod, 2007, p. 54)

nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw: We are the exact body of people. This is a common expression in our language; it means that we are the Cree people. I cannot be entirely sure of its origin, but I have heard this expression over and over. We use expressions to talk about ourselves. Diane Christensen (2000) in Ahtakakoop worked with an entire community who also say this. This expression acknowledges our history, which is long, complex, and part of the land of the prairies and meadows, deep in the valleys and hills, seeped into the lakes and river systems; our songs, our ceremonies, our collective identity are locked within this expression. Furthermore, “this belief in the symbolic value of a unity between language, place and practices is exemplified by official contemporary efforts of Aboriginal communities to record place names and stories about life on the land” (Westman & Schreyer, 2014, p. 117). This is something that I attempt to do now.

***kitaskiya kā-wanātahk*: Place Interrupted**

The first European explorers began to arrive in the territory of what is currently called Saskatchewan. In 1670, the HBC established itself, and, by this time, a good relationship had developed between HBC English traders and the Cree. “These nations would become more widespread as they prospered through the fur trade. The English, appreciating their hunting capabilities, found those whom they called Cree to be ‘of humane disposition.’ Good relations were essential to the English” (Dickason & Newbigging, 2019, p. 94). The early explorers were investigating the land opportunities but needed the help of the original inhabitants to navigate and survive Saskatchewan’s rugged terrain. What the early settlers had to offer was also of interest to the Indigenous Peoples: a trading practice through which formal exchanges took place.

The fur trade took up much of the period of contact between Indigenous and settlers in what is now known as Canada. The fur trade began in the 1600s (around 1603 for the French network and 1670 for the British). Trade among the Europeans and the Indigenous Peoples, the Cree included, brought many changes. Initially, the commercial aspect involved ensuring peace and friendship for everyone; and although there was competition between the French and British companies, Indigenous Peoples benefitted from the trade. Trading alliances included peace and friendship Treaties between the European settlers and the eastern Indigenous Nations. In western Canada they were trading alliances; in Saskatchewan it was much the same way. Treaties and

alliances were not new to Indigenous Peoples because Indigenous Nations within these lands had Treaties with one another. The Huron Confederacy is another such example: “The Huron traded with the northern tribes, supplying them with corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, as well as twine for fishnets, in return for meat, hides, and furs” (Dickason, 2006, p. 35). Even though there is evidence that Indigenous Nations had conflicts, they were able to overcome their challenges. Indigenous Nations had a shared understanding that it was better to resolve disputes peacefully than to resort to war or murder. Indigenous Nations were familiar with partnerships and lived in co-existence. This history perhaps explains why they entered Peace and Friendship Treaties with European settlers as well.

As the peace and friendship Treaties moved to land-acquisition Treaties, the Crown assumed all responsibility for Indigenous lands and the original inhabitants. The Royal Proclamation (1763) was issued after the Seven Years War, the French and English War. The proclamation restricted any settler movement past the Appalachian Mountains; any land past this boundary was deemed to be Indigenous. The Royal Proclamation was important in a number of ways: It indicated that the land indeed belonged to Indigenous Peoples, and it acknowledged Indigenous sovereignty, but did not follow through in “establishing a process to protect Indian lands and to legally transfer lands for colonial use with the consent of Indian nations. The fact that this process was not upheld, even though the Proclamation was never revoked, reflects the European cultural outlook” (Schouls, 2002, p. 15). Early Europeans believed that they were inherently superior and meant to enlighten Indigenous Peoples (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Blaut, 1993; Schouls, 2002; Sioui, 1992).

The British Royal Proclamation was created for several reasons, one it was passed to control the British colonialists and to acknowledge Indigenous lands and Indigenous rights:

In 1763, three years after the French and British resolved their differences in Canada and recognized Britain as the European power here, the Crown of Great Britain laid down a process in the Royal Proclamation that set forth the Crown’s policy on land negotiations. (Erasmus & Sanders, 2002, p. 6)

This procedure also carved out land boundaries for British settlement. The Royal Proclamation was a significant document and an important aspect of colonial history as it affirmed Indigenous ownership. As Venne (2017) commented, the Royal Proclamation “recognized our nations and tribes as having ownership to our lands and the need for a treaty to access them” (p. 17). The

Royal Proclamation was a declaration by the Crown that the British understood that these newfound lands were in fact inhabited by and provided a livelihood for Indigenous Peoples and was the foundation to implement treaty-making with the British Crown.

In Western Canada, contact between First Nations and Europeans was somewhat limited from 1670 to 1774 because the HBC initially stayed on the James and Hudson Bays and used Cree middlemen to trade with First Nations in the interior. Competition between the French and British networks eventually drove the HBC inland in 1774. In 1821, with the merger of the Northwest Company and the HBC in 1821, the HBC enjoyed great power. It is important to note that that “the interests of the Hudson’s Bay company were those of a commercial nature” (Dickason & Newbigging, 2019, p. 95). Although the HBC originally functioned as a fur-trading company, the commercial goals changed when the last buffalo were killed during the Buffalo Wars of 1850–1870. With the loss of its main resource, the HBC turned to land speculation as its next commercial goal (Galbraith, 1951). Ultimately, this resulted in the HBC’s sale of Rupert’s Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1868.

European Treaties following the sale of Rupert’s Land were created in rapid succession from 1871 to 1921. With these Treaties, European settlers started to arrive on Cree lands in Western Canada and make settlements. Treaties made with the Europeans turned into land transfers. Ermine (2007) stated:

Following [the fur trade] era, land for settlement became a big issue and treaty negotiations and bargaining took on fervor in the face of unfolding political and social realities in the dominion. . . . With the signing of treaties, an agreement to interact now existed that, again, would engage Indigenous peoples and the Canadians in a new frontier. (p. 196)

These early settlers needed some reassurance about their safety and protection while, at the same time, they desired verification of their ownership of the new lands that they occupied.

Eventually, these Treaty land transfers also included setting land aside for First Nations reserves, which was not the original intent of First Nations and “reserves.” Treaties meant something very different to First Nations and were rooted in spiritual beliefs: “First Nations’ first and foremost objective in the Treaty-making process was to have the new peoples arriving in their territories recognize and affirm their continuing right to maintain, as peoples” (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 7). First Nations asserted the right as the original land owners and their

sovereignty by taking part in the Treaty-making process, and the British recognized this as well. Through First Nation meetings and discussions with Crown representatives, land allotments were negotiated—“Indian reserves,” as they would eventually be called. It was a process of colonization that blind-sided First Nations. Such colonization pushed Indigenous populations onto the less desired pieces of land, far from towns or settlements. The Cree word for “reserve” is *iskonikan*; it literally means “scrap pieces of land.”

While the Cree, other First Nations, and the Métis were left living on scraps of land, European settlers began to arrive to claim the best of the Indigenous lands:

The population of western Canada grew significantly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as eleven Post-Confederation treaties with Indigenous peoples were signed (1871-1921), the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed and the Dominion Lands Act, an 1872 law aimed to encourage settlement, came into effect. The Canadian government used promises of 160 acres of free land to recruit European immigrants. (Sterzuk, in press)

The numbered Treaties were intended to increase the early settler population. Settlers were arriving by the thousands from Europe (Gagnon, 2020). It was necessary to quickly construct the Canadian Pacific Railway, because “it became a prerequisite to settlement” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 488). The railway essentially moved early settlers, who were mainly farmers, by the carload into the Prairie Provinces. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway not only marked the beginning of large-scale agrarian settlement but also brought a host of new infectious diseases to the Indigenous population of the northwest. For many Indigenous peoples living on reserves, the railway proved to be a fatal disease vector. (p. 164)

The prairie settlements, over time, proved to be deadly to the land’s original inhabitants and its ecosystems.

As the Canadian Pacific Railway moved across the country with newcomers and their livestock, it disturbed the natural habitat of the prairies and contributed to the slaughter of bison (Daschuk, 2019). Subsequently, Indigenous Peoples’ lives were drastically impacted, and they teetered on the edge of existence. As Daschuk (2019) stated, “The synergy of chronic tuberculosis and other infectious disease, especially measles and influenza, brought the Indigenous population of the Canadian plains to its demographic nadir” (p. 164).

Starvation was another ongoing burden with which the Indigenous Peoples had to contend, because the bison were also on the brink of extinction and creating “widespread hunger throughout 1874. In February, the HBC post at Battle River reported little trade because of the lack of bison” (Daschuk, 2019, p. 96). The land removals and privation that were occurring created hostilities between the Peoples and the settlers despite the Treaty agreements, Indigenous Peoples were being left out of any promising prosperities and through memory of oral histories, in the view of the Elders, the treaty nations—First Nations and the Crown—solemnly promised the Creator that they would conduct their relationships with each other in accordance with the laws, values, and principles given to each of them by the Creator (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 7), and Indigenous Peoples received past assurances from the Crown that promised a peaceful coexistence. This was not happening.

Indigenous Peoples who signed Treaties with the Crown suffered not only physically, but also at every turn of their lives. Legislation created a lack of freedom of movement, and many First Nations were confined to reserves, including my great-grandparents and grandparents of Sturgeon Lake, SK. The 1876 Indian Act,

played a dominant role in the lives of First Nations people and has had an impact upon the present relationship between First Nations and the government of Canada. Indian policy was designed with the objectives of protection, civilization and assimilation of First Nations people. Included in the Indian Act and subsequent amendments were considerable powers allocated to the Superintendent general of Indian Affairs. (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2000, p. 257)

This legislation introduced “consolidated and revamped earlier legislation into a nationwide framework that was still fundamentally in place at the start of the early twenty-first century” (Dickason, 2006, p. 182). “[The] original goal [of The Indian Act] of encouraging assimilation . . . has stayed constant” (p. 182). Although some might argue that the Indian Act protects First Nations’ rights, it was more about controlling First Nations peoples. This legislation included everything from the control of Indigenous lands, language, culture, and people to the control of their sovereignty. Despite the many amendments, Indian policy still impacts them in key ways.

pīskiskwēwin kā wanātahk: Language Interrupted

With the onslaught of newcomers, the creation of settlements (such as towns and cities) promised 160 acres of land for farms and railroad construction. The government was taking more and more land from Indigenous Peoples. Government policies such as the Dominion Lands Act and the Indian Act pushed Indigenous Peoples out of sight and out of the way of the government's vision for the country. The Indian Act (1876) trumped Treaty obligations.

The Indian Act focussed on assimilation through the conscious erasure of Indigenous languages and cultures. "After 1883, federally funded industrial and residential schools were introduced in what is now Saskatchewan. These schools, which were created to educate Treaty First Nations Children, isolated them from their families, communities and Cultures" (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2000, p. 257). Through this act the Canadian government created and implemented a policy that outlined residential schools.

Through the power of the Indian Act, the government removed children from their homes and into federally funded residential schools. "From 1867 to 1945, the Government of Canada continued to root its policies in forced assimilation and relied on missionaries such as the Roman Catholic Oblates and the Anglican Church" (Battiste, 2014, p. 53) to eradicate the Indigenous identity of the children. This eradication often resulted in "the need to make the school residential and to locate it away from the reserves" (Wilson, 1986, p. 77). Furthermore, the "insatiable desire to change the perceived savage lives of Indigenous Peoples was reflected in an immersion in "industrious labour" and "acts of civilized life" (p. 71).

Residential-school policy tore children from their mothers, fathers, and extended families. Children were forced into captivity. They were stripped of their homemade clothes, their bodies were scrubbed, and their hair was cut. They were separated from their siblings and grouped by gender and age with other children. The children were then "forced into religious prayers and church attendance, forced daily into child labour as ongoing responsibilities in the schools" (Battiste, 2014, p. 54). Children were made to speak English (or French) with brutal and physical assault. This "enforcement of English (and French)-only residential schools for most Indigenous children contributed to the loss of Indigenous languages" (McIvor & Anisman, 2018, p. 90). This assimilation tactic, which the Indian Act (1876) made possible, often killed the Indigenous children's love for their identity and culture, including their will to speak their sacred Indigenous languages.

Residential schools nearly obliterated the language Spirit through shame, punishment, and the assimilation manoeuvres of churches and other colonial officials. “It is not so much that language is the soul of the people, but that language has a soul unto itself that affords it agency as well” (p. 99). Residential schools broke this connection through the colonial policies.

The mandate to erase Indigenous identity remained in place for decades. For over a century and a half, residential schooling served to break the land and kinship continuity among Indigenous Peoples. At least 150,000 Indigenous children passed through these schools during the more than 160 years that they were in operation. The last school closed in 1996 (Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, 2020).

By the mid to late 1900s, the federal government had drastically restructured the residential school system. The amendment of the Indian Act in 1951 made it possible for Indigenous children to attend any provincial school. Parents then had the option of deciding whether to send their children to residential schools or not. Many First Nations now had day schools that operated on their reserves. At this time the government made two significant changes to schooling practices:

The control of the schools was taken away from the churches and placed in the education program of the Department of Indian Affairs. This did not mean that religious personnel were taken out of service. The nuns, priests and ministers became employees of the Department of Indian affairs. The department now assumed program control and adapted the principal curriculum and standards of the provinces in which the school was located. Departmental staff took on the task of running of all Indian schools on reserves. These were called federal schools. (Funk & Lobe, 1991, p. 41)

Federal schools continued as colonial structures in which Indigenous children learned Eurocentric curriculum and used Western practices of schooling. Although many Indigenous children were now living with their families, they were still feeling the forces of assimilation and identity loss.

Western practices of schooling designed “for assimilation have been characterized by high failure rates in literacy and educational attainment” (Hampton, 1995, p. 9). The underpinnings of Eurocentrism broke the spirit of many (then) children who are now parents and grandparents. The harsh practices of schooling and its processes of assimilation often severed

children's ties to their families, communities, and the language from which their identity came. Without language and its tie to land, many Indigenous Peoples were lost.

I personally have often felt out of place because of intergenerational residential school trauma:

As a result of the conditioning of residential schools, my parents and grandparents felt that it was unnecessary for me to know *nēhiyawēwin*. I asked my grandparents why they did not speak Cree to us. They said Cree was not important and it would not take me (or us) anywhere. When I remember these sentiments of my grandparents, I am saddened because they must have felt unimportant and not good enough. They must have felt inadequate and not validated because of the language they spoke. I later felt this inherited sense of inadequacy as an adolescent. (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 52)

Language loss contributed to my feelings of inadequacy and sense of not knowing who I was, who I was born to be. Without my inherited language, the foundation of my belief system, my cultural underpinnings, and my connection to my homelands were severed. I wanted to blend into mainstream society and abandon whatever identity sentiments I had left, but that would never happen, no matter how hard I would try. Shaw (2001) stated:

Mainstream society's ignorance, therefore, profoundly impacts on the core of a people's identity, their sense of who they are and where they came from, who their ancestors were and how the continuity of their lives and their ways of being in the world—of interpreting the world—are linked most elementally through their ancestral languages and their ancestral lands. (p. 46)

I found mainstream society and its school system to be inside out, and it turned me inside out. By rejecting everything that I had been brought up to believe, my love for my family and community slowly diminished. I mean that mainstream society and its systems are based on a selfish notion of competitiveness and competition. Elias (2011) described her education experiences, which mirror my own: "I remember how in elementary school social studies classes taught that it was all about 'me, me, me!' Everything in the *qablunaq* world was about 'me,' revolved around 'me.' This completely clashed with my cultural upbringing!" (p. 28). I also felt an anxiety about questionable identity seep in, and I questioned my own existence. I asked myself countless times, "Can I still be Cree even though I don't speak the language?"

Jenny L. Davis (2018) discussed matters of identity: “The identity of any one individual is not monolithic; rather, it is comprised of numerous components including ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and occupation” (p. 18). Considering the numerous components that make up identity, I thought of the turmoil that took place within me: If I were well off, could I still be Cree? Could I still be Cree if I did not live off the land in its entirety? Could I still be Cree if I did not belong to a Cree family or community? Could I still be Cree if a White family adopted me or if I were a two-spirited individual? Then there is the question of speaking one’s language!

Davis (2018) also noted, “An ethnolinguistic ideology of identity of the sort evidenced here therefore valorizes language over the means of delineating community membership” (p. 24). I understand this to mean that language speakers are prioritized—favoured—over those who do not speak the language. Nonetheless, Davis drew upon community relationship towards Chickasaw language and concludes that identity of being Chickasaw comes from the language and the community one is from, whether one is fluent or not. Much of Davis’s research, taken from participants and her observations of the community, “demonstrate the geo-spatial prioritization of the Chickasaw language as integral to the constitution of Chickasaw cultural Identity” (p. 127). For non-speakers, in my opinion, even though they might come from a Cree community or background, they are perhaps thought of as ‘less than’ as a Cree person if they do not have language fluency. This is still an unresolved issue that we need to work together on, if we say we are Cree, then we must accept this. I often felt this in my own experience, that I was not Cree enough, in circles of fluent Cree people, which has affected my identity and self-esteem. Let’s encourage and accept each other in the realm of Cree Nationhood and identity.

Education as it was included in the Treaty agreements reflected “a legitimate desire of Indian people to be self-defining, to have their ways of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhance[d] consciousness of being an Indian and a fully participating citizen of Canada” (Hampton, 1995, p. 10). Again, Treaty agreements involved living and co-existing on Indigenous land; each group of peoples had the same opportunities and respect as all others.

Despite the disruptions to intergenerational language transmission that the residential schools and policies caused under the Indian Act, the trends in language shift from Indigenous languages to English are changing. According to the 2016 Canadian Census, the period between 2006 and 2016 marked an increase in the number of speakers of Indigenous languages in Canada

(Statistics Canada, 2018). The total number of people who indicated that they could speak an Indigenous language well enough to hold a conversation rose by 8%. It is also interesting to note that second-language learning of Indigenous languages also increased in that same time period. Of the people who indicated that they could speak an Indigenous language, the proportion who speak an Indigenous language as a second language increased from 18% in 1996 to 26% in 2016. This trend is promising because it demonstrates new speakers' growing interest in language reclamation. In terms of Indigenous language use, the numbers are also promising in that 90% of first-language speakers of Indigenous languages reported that they speak these languages "on at least a regular basis at home" (Statistics Canada, 2018, para 1). Furthermore, of those for whom Indigenous languages were a second language, 73% reported language use in their homes. These numbers also increased between the 2006 and 2016 censuses. Overall, these census results paint a picture of growing and renewed Indigenous language use and Indigenous language learning (Statistics Canada, 2018). These statistics demonstrate that some people are still deeply connected to their ancestral languages and are not willing to give them up. Although it was common for grandparents to be fluent Cree speakers, many parents and most children and youth in the English-speaking provinces are now fluent only in English or French. Statistics have demonstrated that many still desire to learn and use their heritage languages.

kā isi atoskātamihk ōma nēhiyawēwin: Language Reclamation Efforts

It is difficult to pinpoint where and when language reclamation happened. The Old Ones with us now still speak the language and pass it on in ceremonies and in the stories they tell. We have had Cree literacies of various types since the beginning of our existence. In my Master of Education thesis I stated, "Cultural literacy involves knowledge of tribal history, natural laws and spirituality, . . . the ability to read and feel the land" (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 237). Land and language are not separate. This is one type of literacy that encompasses a way of being. Further, other ways of communicating emerged such as sign language, mnemonic systems, and (more recently writing systems). Some of these writing practices include petroglyphs, petrographs, wampum belts, hide paintings and syllabics. In Cree history, the Creator gave a syllabary system known as *cahkipēhikana* in Cree to an Old One in the early 1880s. This syllabary system was said to have come from the spirit world as a gift. (sp. 238)

It is difficult to give a precise date to the syllabary system. Dr. Kevin Lewis (personal communication, October 19, 2019) stated that the syllabic system goes back even further than the 1800s, as I originally stated in my previous research. From stories that I have heard, I understand that the gift of syllabics was given to *omistanaskoyo*, sometimes referred to as Badger-Call or Calling-Badger (Stevenson, 2000). However, other accounts favour a missionary about whom Mandelbaum (1979) wrote: “This system was actually invented in 1841 by James Evans, a missionary” (p. 180).

Anthropologist David Mandelbaum accredits the James Evan’s version of the syllabary system. and while Verne Dusenbury suggests another understanding. Stevenson (2000) wrote:

Dusenbury was doing field work along the plains Cree on the Rocky Boy reservation in Montana. He was told a similar story (of how a man was given the gift of syllabics, like the Calling Badger story) by Raining Bird in December of 1959. (p. 21)

Dusenbury’s account basically explained that Spirits came to a man and taught him how to read and write syllabics; he, in turn, taught them to his community. Stevenson acknowledged that “anthropologist Verne Dunsenbury is one of the few scholars who challenge the missionary Evans version in favour of the Cree” (p. 21). Both versions of the story of syllabics come from the spirit world or from spirits, sometimes referred to as ancestors, or grandmothers and grandfathers. What is unique about the syllabics is that the main symbols point to the four cardinal directions, and the secondary symbols point to the intermediate directions; they are sometimes referred to *mosōmowak* and *kohkōmowak* (K. Lewis, personal communication, October 19, 2019).

In my earlier research, I also stated that “the syllabic system is held as a sacred entity, and a particular protocol is required both for the use of the system and when seeking knowledge through using it” (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 239). The sacredness of *cahkipēhikana* can be only of the *nēhiyaw* world. One of the warnings that Calling Badger received was to be careful, as Mandlebaum (1979) recorded: “Badger-call also taught the writing to the missionaries. When the writing was given to Badger-call he was told ‘they [the missionaries] will change the script and will say that the writing belongs to them’” (p. 180). The missionaries later used the syllabic writing system as a tool to convert First Nations to Catholicism and Christianity.

The 1920s

Dr. Edward Ahenakew is one of the first language activists who promoted literacy and preservation of the Cree language through stories, hymns, and church sermons. He wrote the book *Voices of the Plains Cree* (Ahenakew, 1995). Ahenakew “wrote extensively through the 1920s. He also attempted, repeatedly, to have his work published” (Hodgson, 1995, p. vii). He was born in June 1885 and died in 1961; thus, during his lifetime Ahenakew saw incredible change in Treaty 6 Territory.

Dr. Ahenakew was from Ahtahkakoop (Sandy Lake, SK) but went to Prince Albert residential school “at the age of eleven, . . . to the boarding school into which Emmanuel College had been converted” (Ahenakew, 1995, p. 3). He finished school and then “taught at mission schools on reserves in the area until he was accepted as a candidate for the ministry and entered Wycliffe College in Toronto” (p. 4). When the University of Saskatchewan was established, “Ahenakew transferred from Wycliffe, graduating in 1912 as Licentiate in Theology” (p. 4).

During the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919, and at the age of 35, Ahenakew enrolled in medicine. Because of poverty and illness, he withdrew and recovered for a year at Thunderchild Reserve. Then a fellow reverend, Matheson, encouraged him “to collect Cree legends and stories that were passing even then from memory. To do this would be a true service to his people” (Ahenakew, 1995, p. 4). Ahenakew collected stories from Thunderchild for a year because it was “good medicine” for him, and he slowly regained his health. Ahenakew then paid Chief Thunderchild a dollar a day for his stories. Chief Thunderchild was in his 70s when Ahenakew began to write down and record his stories. He also created a second character, an autobiographical representation of himself, named “Old Kēyam.” Together Chief Thunderchild and Old Kēyam became the voices of Plains Cree.

Ahenakew believed that the voices of his people needed to be heard:

Because Ahenakew did continue to care, his manuscripts survived. They are all in English; and it was into English that he had translated his rapid but clearly legible notes of Thunderchild’s stories, though often he introduced Cree names or resorted to syllabics as a convenient shorthand. (p. 7)

Ahenakew could speak, read, and write in Cree, English, and syllabics: “He was well known in the field of Cree language studies for his part in the Anglican Cree Dictionary” (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 2000, p. 8), which made him unique and extraordinary—a language

preservationist of his time. Ahenakew is also published in *American Folklore*, in which he has shared winter *wīśahkēcāhk* stories that so many Cree people treasure today (Ahenakew, 1929).

The 1950s

After World War II, Indigenous parents began to reclaim their parental rights: “The fact that the recent world war had been fought in part to defeat a racist ideology was making Canadians increasingly conscious of and uneasy about elements in their own public life” (Miller, 1996, p. 378). A political consciousness among Indigenous Peoples was growing, and people were taking action. Indigenous voice began to be heard throughout the country of Canada. A just and proper education for Indigenous Peoples was in demand.

Education in the 1950s did not promote the use of Cree language among children. In fact, it was the school’s role to teach children to speak English well; as a result, it caused them to feel ashamed of their language and identity. Many children suffered traumatically in all kinds of ways that many communities still feel today. The students, who resisted the harsh policies of schooling, including policies about language, are now in their elderly years and can still speak their languages. They were not making an effort to reclaim their language yet, but Treaty Indigenous leaders were organizing the repositioning of education for Indigenous children:

In 1946, discussions began for complete revamping of the Indian Act. For the first time, and only after initial strong resistance by committee members, Native input was actually permitted. Andrew Paull, President of the North American Indian Brotherhood, appeared before the Special joint Committee. He was highly critical of the committee’s lack of Indian representation. (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 32)

Andrew Paull resisted the assimilation policy and attempted to assert First Nations sovereignty and self-determination.

With regard to the growing empowerment of Indian control of Indian education, Blue Quills College in modern-day Alberta is a good example of the taking back of control; although it is not a Saskatchewan example, it is within the boundaries of Treaty 6. First Nations education always focused on sovereignty and self-determination and living in existence in parallel among Settlers. The history of Blue Quills envisions the process of Indians controlling their education and the unfolding events.

In an illustrated timeline Persson (1986) stated:

Three principal phases make up the history of Blue Quills. The first period, from 1931 to 1945, was characterized by the harmony of goals between the Catholic Church, which operated the school, and the state. Both believed that Indians were best civilized by isolation, first in the residential school and then on the reserve. The second phase, from 1945 to 1960, saw a growing separation of goals between church and state. The state sought the education of Indian and non-Indian students should continue to attend separate schools. The third phase, from 1960-1970, was characterized by declining church influence, increased government control, and growing Indian involvement in education. (p. 150)

No government or church official ever thought of asking First Nations what they wanted or what they thought of residential schools; however, First Nations were confident that they could teach their own children and communities.

The 1960s

In the 1960s another practice began in Canada that legally took Indigenous children away from their parents and placed them in foster homes: “15,000 Indigenous children were adopted into Canadian families in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The cultural loss was even more pronounced among these ‘Sixties Scoop’ Children” (Dickason & Newbigging, 2019, p. 266) than it was for those who went to the federal residential schools (incidentally, they were still in place during this period and beyond). This nationwide policy tore families and communities further apart, separated siblings, and removed them from their communities to live mainly with White settler families. Newly created child welfare systems and social workers were new in the long practice of Canada’s assimilation process. Because families were continuing to be torn apart, language was not transmitted to the next generation to the fullest extent.

The political will to advocate for language and culture was a luxury amidst the conditions of oppression that were prevalent in the previous decade. However, anthropologist Harry Hawthorn (1966) was appointed to write a report that was published just before the centennial year of Canada’s Confederation in 1967, and the federal government called for an investigation into the living circumstances in First Nations communities. He listed 155 recommendations to improve Indigenous lives. The *Hawthorn Report* named the injustices that Indigenous Peoples encountered, including their social and economic status, and stated that “Indigenous education [was] also far below the national average” (p. 102).

The *Hawthorn Report* (Hawthorn, 1966, 1967) made clear that Indigenous People need their languages, that “the loss of a people’s language leads almost inevitably to the loss of their own ethnic identity and cultural traditions (Vol. 1, p. 37) and that “language is an integral part of any culture” (Vol. 2, p. 36). Indigenous communities received the *Hawthorn Report* very well, because they were continually considering how to escape from their oppression and their need to speak their languages freely. The *Hawthorn Report* noted the failures of the federal government in regard to education and language.

It is interesting to note with the *Hawthorn Report* (Hawthorn, 1966, 1967), “Sally Weaver’s own 1981 analysis of *Making Canadian Indian Policy* proved to be a landmark study in anthropological engagement with policy” (Waldram, 2010, p. 227). Anthropologists often could not ignore the poverty and deficiency that plagued Indigenous communities. In some cases, the broader public also shared outrage over the conditions that Canada’s treatment of Indigenous Peoples created.

In 1967, during the Centennial Year of Canada’s Confederation, Indigenous Peoples gathered at Expo in Montréal to reveal their treatment by the Canadian government. Many settler Canadians were astonished and “reacted with stunned disbelief that people in Canada were being treated this way. Most Canadians had no way of knowing what was happening on the reserves and in the north” (Dickason & Newbigging, 2019, p. 270).

To address the government’s maltreatment or inequality, a policy known as the “White Paper” was an attempt to extinguish the Indian Act. In the “White Paper,” Canada (1969), Minister of Indian Affairs, wrote about absorbing Indigenous Peoples into White society, privatizing Indigenous reserves, and transferring Treaty federal education to the provinces. It created the fear among First Nations that if they did not speak their languages, they would not be recognized. Because First Nations heeded this as a warning and wanted to defend their rights, they rejected the “White Paper.”

The 1970s: “The Louse that Roared”

The National Indian Brotherhood (1972), a unified Indigenous voice, countered the “White Paper” (Chrétien, 1969) with what is known as the “Indian Control of Indian Education Policy,” which was implemented as policy in 1973. It ignited Indigenous Peoples’ desire for empowerment across Canada and changed the face of education across Indigenous communities forever.

1973 became known as “The Year the Louse Roared.” This term arose from the discrimination against Indigenous children from James Smith First Nation in Kinistino’s provincial school when an outbreak of lice occurred:

Parents and band-leaders of some bands had had enough. They took direct action and withdrew their children from the joint-schools, hired their own teachers and set up school in whatever place they could find—churches, halls and private homes. At first, the Department did not provide any money, help or even encouragement. Lobbying on the part of Indian leaders soon changed this and out of this movement came band-controlled schools. (Funk & Lobe, 1991, p. 42)

Provincial schools began to feel pressure because of the loss of federal funds and quickly tried to undo the damage of discrimination against Indigenous children. Provincial school divisions recognized that their education standards were not meeting the needs of Indigenous students.

A new act implemented in Saskatchewan inadvertently made room for the formal teaching of Indigenous languages in schools. In 1974 the School Act of Saskatchewan was amended to allow other languages to be used as the medium of instruction in schools for a portion of the school day. This amendment did not specifically support Indigenous languages; its primary driver was the desire of Francophones to have their language represented in the education system. Nonetheless, Indigenous Peoples took advantage of this opportunity.

The Cree language was taught in my later elementary school years, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. After the Day School Program closed, my home community of Sturgeon Lake built a new school in 1982. For the first time we saw, as children, our Cree language written on the doors and walls of the school. For the first time we were introduced to the Cree language, we were taught Cree customs such as powwow dances, we heard stories about the Cree way, and we were introduced to basic Cree-language instruction as a subject. We also listened to various Elders from our community talk about their storied lives. The approach was community led, which means that within our home community of Sturgeon Lake, we had an opportunity to learn from various knowledge keepers who taught us about being Cree.

We had no standard written curriculum yet, but only ideas and lesson plans, and the language teaching was divorced from the context. The teachers did not use the language as the medium of instruction but taught it as a subject, which some might call core Cree or a grammar-

translation approach to language teaching. The teaching consisted mostly of vocabulary such as numbers, body parts, and colours. It initially made no sense to me as a student, although I appreciated the effort. Looking back, I believe that teachers used this approach because they lacked professional training in teaching a second language, although they were fluent Cree speakers (Blair et al., 2002; Hinton, 2011; McIvor, 2009).

Founding members of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College John R. McLeod from James Smith First Nation and Smith Atimoyoo from Little Pine First Nation worked together on the reclamation of Cree identity and the art of language teaching (McLeod, 2002). In 1972 they began to implement a Cree language program and recruited teachers:

In Saskatchewan, attempts were made to develop curricula that would help foster the retention of Aboriginal Languages. The Cree language Committee attempted to implement a meaningful curriculum into the schools. Language was stressed because it was seen as a valuable source of cultural preservation. (p. 46)

Along with other school subject matter, they considered it important to teach language to connect Cree children's identity, history and land: "To appreciate the history and mode of living of their peoples depends considerably on their knowledge of our language" (p. 46). Indigenous communities were already aware that immersion was the most ideal to create fluent speakers and a sense of identity.

In the 1970s bands were also considering Cree programming to the fullest extent. Although program development began in some communities, language lessons were created, and attempts to write curricula were underway, the community conflict continued between traditional teachings and mainstream Eurocentric education. Religion continued to be a factor as well. There was a great deal to consider with regard to Cree education, and no one knew all the right answers.

Parents and grandparents were carrying the scars of punishment for speaking their language in residential schools. They had had their own experiences with oppression as speakers of an Indigenous language. Families made language choices in response to the contexts in which they lived. Although some might fault these community leaders for having failed to halt language shift at this critical juncture, the communities were responding to societal conditions and the pressures that surrounded them. As a term, language shift is used to describe the process of a speech community shifting from one language to a different language (Fishman, 2001; Gal,

1979). In the 1970s in Saskatchewan, the Cree language was not a pathway to conditions of success.

It was a time of awakening to Cree language use and revitalization. Ida McLeod was one of the leading pioneers in the promotion and preservation of the Cree language; her husband, John McLeod, was instrumental in the establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. Others soon followed, including the late Dr. Freda Ahenakew of Ahtahkakoop First Nation. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College was created during this surge of Indigenous education, and language teaching was at the heart of it. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, which is now First Nations University, opened. During this period Cree language leaders began to teach Cree at both the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. In the field of Indigenous education,

the college was experimental, independently governed but academically affiliated with the University of Regina, a new cultural phenomenon for First Nations University, formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, which then later in 1994 became a full member of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada. . . as well as innovative in the mainstream. The idea of Indigenous peoples' controlling their own post-secondary education was highly controversial and risky. (Stonechild, 2016, p. 31)

During this time of teaching the Cree language, the Standard Roman Orthography also developed and was implemented in some teaching programs.

Finding exact documentation on Standard Roman Orthography is difficult, but had come out of the work of Bloomfield's (1925) early documentation from the Sweet Grass Reserve. This is where "Two English-speaking Cree, Harry Watney and Norman Standinghorn (māyiskinīkiw), both young men, gave me my foundation in Cree" (Bloomfield, 1930, p. 2).

Ida and John McLeod as previously mentioned were at a meeting that took place in Edmonton, AB in 1973 where SRO was being introduced and adopted based on a paper C. Douglas Ellis published about SRO (A. Wolvengrey, personal communication, April 30, 2020). This paper Douglas Ellis published about SRO cannot be found or accessed as of yet (A. Ogg, personal communication, February 9, 2021). Okimāsis and Wolvengrey (2008) mentioned in their co-authored book that SRO was developed and refined over the last 80 since their publication *How to Spell it in Cree*, which aligns with date of over 80 years ago since 2008.

The 1980s

Dr. Freda Ahenakew (1987a) wrote *Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach*, which was originally her research when she wrote her master's thesis at the University of Manitoba; it then became a book. Ahenakew (1987b) wrote with H. C. Wolfart, beginning with *Stories of the House People* in 1987, and several other books in the next couple of decades. These books are now used as teaching tools; they are pillars of knowledge when it comes to the standardizing Cree language literacy. The significance of Dr. Freda's book (1987a) is that a Cree person analyzed and categorized the language. It showed the difference between speaking and writing in Cree.

Jean Okimāsis of White Bear First Nation joined the Saskatchewan Federated College in 1982 and, with her then-student Solomon Ratt of Stanley Mission, began to teach in the 1980s. Okimāsis (2004) wrote the *Cree Language of the Plains*, a textbook, and Solomon Ratt contributed to the workbook, which in 1989 the First Nations University used, and later the University of Saskatchewan, during the 1980s and 1990s. Universities and high schools throughout the province of Saskatchewan and beyond still use an updated edition of the book. Ratt has since gone on to write his own books in both the 'y' and 'th' dialect.

At the beginning of the 1980s, revitalization efforts were occurring in pockets, locally in Saskatchewan as well as globally. In eastern Canada, Kahnawake, Quebec, and the Six Nations in Ontario were the first to offer "Indigenous language immersion programming based on the successful experiences of English-speaking children in French immersion programs. The current *kaien'keha* program in Kahnawake began in 1979" (Blair & Fredeen, 2009, p. 66). The Kahnawake Mohawk language program, the oldest program in Canada, was a model and a place from which the community of Kahnawake could begin to learn.

Indigenous programming in other places, and learning from Indigenous Peoples such as the Maori and the Hawaiians, became examples for First Nations in Saskatchewan. Those programs created the impetus for what to research and where. They offered promising practices for official language movements and language nests, which involved parents. Language nests are facilities for young children who attend daycare and early learning programs. The Maori and Hawaiians were practicing sovereignty and self-determination through the use of language transmission (McIvor & Parker, 2016). These initiatives were highly successful, beginning with preschool language nests, elementary school immersion programs, high school studies, and

university degree programs in the language (Hinton, 2011). These two international Indigenous Nations have been leading in language reclamation since the 1980s.

By 1987, a Maori language movement was launched and a Language Act was made official in New Zealand (Stephens, 2014). The language movement included over 600 Te Kohanga Reo (language nests) operationalized throughout the country, a movement that mainly grandparents established by teaching their young and that eventually grew to what it is now (King, 2001).

By 1978 in Hawaii, both Hawaiian and English had become official languages, which led to the establishment of Hawaiian language immersion schools. The Punana Leo schools were born (1984), and a new teacher-preparation program proved to be beneficial (Warner, 2001, p. 136). The capability of achieving so much in so little time gave many other Indigenous Peoples around the world a pathway to follow.

In Canada, language programs were in session, teachers were teaching classes, and students were pursuing degrees at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. People were practicing writing systems, and work on language revitalization was well underway as people garnered ideas from the Mohawks, Maori, and Hawaiians. Other leading Cree language scholars were emerging at this time, including Barbara McLeod (Ida and John's daughter); the late Donna Paskemin, a leading founder of the Canadian Indigenous Language and Development Institute over 20 years ago; and Arok Wolvengrey. Wolvengrey is the leading linguist who developed the Cree language dictionary, *nēhiyawēwin: itwēwina, Cree: Words* (Wolvengrey, 2002; Wolvengrey & Ahenakew, 2001), an important resource for speakers and learners of the Cree language.

The 1990s

In 1990, the Assembly of First Nations administered a survey for On-Reserve education that administrators in First Nation On-Reserve Schools completed:

It included reports of community viewpoints such as the wish to have the Aboriginal language taught through secondary school, for the language to have the same standing and accreditation in the school as French, for better and more traditional teaching methods, for integration with other Aboriginal cultural teaching, for the involvement of elders, for the goal to be real fluency. (Burnaby, 2007, p. 25)

It is interesting that “policies for Indigenous groups are largely at the lower levels of . . . development, inadequately funded, and even if bilingual, programs are seen to be transitional to fluency in the majority language” (p. 27). Burnaby concluded that the fact that “there are still speakers of most of the original Aboriginal North American languages is impressive testimony to their ability to survive” (p. 24). The will to remain Indigenous has always been the reality.

The literature is sparse on what happened with language immersion and bilingualism in Saskatchewan. However, language as a subject (rather than as a medium of instruction) was taught in most First Nations Schools and in postsecondary institutions, including First Nations University and the University of Saskatchewan. Despite these efforts, educators were not having an impact in creating fluent speakers. Battiste (2014) argued that schools have caused Indigenous Peoples to distrust our own information systems (p. 24). This distrust has resulted in schools that are places of uncertainty on language use.

Indigenous Peoples in education were still contending with provincial government policies in which it was not recognized that Indigenous languages are an inherent right from the Creator. Provincial governments were not yet assuming responsibility and duty to pass on language. Colonialism was ongoing in First Nations communities. As a result, language work, recovery, and revitalization usually rested on the shoulders of only a few people. This is relevant because it takes a team, a community, and a family to reclaim language.

The 2000s

I became a full-time educator in 2000. In Chapter 3, the next paper, I share my story as a beginning teacher—Indigenous and a *nēhiyaw* educator, about my road to reclaiming the language of Cree and my need to honour who I am in my classroom for my students and my life (Daniels, 2014). By 2000, Indigenous schools had already started practicing language revitalization. Language programming was successful, and bilingual programs were operating in a multitude of places across Saskatchewan and in Western and Eastern provinces.

In Saskatchewan, for instance, Cree was developing as a medium of instruction in schools in First Nations communities and urban areas. In Onion Lake, the Kihew Waciston Cree immersion program opened in 2005, with a focus on language and identity. In Saskatoon, St. Frances School opened their Cree immersion program in 2007. Now, as a result of its popularity and the growing demand for Cree language and education, a new school that will house up to

700 students is scheduled to be completed by 2023. Most recently, this past year, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division opened a Cree school.

In a national context, the James Bay Cree in Northern Quebec might have seemed further ahead in language education because of their negotiations with Quebec and the federal government. The Cree and Inuit languages were required to enable Quebec to build hydroelectric dams. Negotiations resulted in the creation of the Cree Regional Authority, and the Cree School Board began operation in 1978 as a provincial school board, but it was released from provincial regulations and was allowed to use Cree as a medium of instruction (Burnaby, 2007). The Cree school board enabled the protection of language and the maintenance of fluent speakers.

In Saskatchewan the momentum was growing, and a desire to honour Indigenous languages was evident in K to 12 education and beyond. The problem remained that, although the province and country had pockets of successful programming, “it [was] rare to find a program leading to second language fluency for its students” (Hinton, 2011, p. 308). As Hinton argued, “Language teaching and learning of endangered languages is a pioneering process that involves the development of new models of language teaching” (p. 308). In addition to the innovations required, the lack of limited resources and curriculum in the target language is also important to mention. Further, and extremely noteworthy, is the ongoing conformity with mainstream schooling structures of our schools in First Nations communities and Indigenous-populated schools in urban areas. Cree language and culture were taught in Eurocentric school structures that involved Eurocentric teaching methods.

In the papers that follow, I share my learnings from my organic “pioneering process” when I entered the Eurocentric school system as a professional educator who teaches in White ways, through my growth over time in both passion and pedagogy in relation to Cree language teaching and language reclamation. My papers foreground the language work that I and others on the front lines are doing and the reasons for my growing belief in grassroots initiatives that drive Indigenous language reclamation initiatives. In particular, I detail my years of engagement in the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience and what I have learned from my research on it. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I speak to my belief that the leadership and central role of Indigenous Peoples, community leaders, teachers, and researchers are key to language reclamation. These individuals will pick up the pieces of a language and a culture that were ravaged and are reassembling what was, with the help of the Old Ones and their memories of land, ceremony,

and language. I and countless others are working to bring back, restore, and revitalize Cree language by situating the learning in Cree customs, traditions, and teachings.

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CHAPTER 3: A WHISPER OF TRUE LEARNING

Abstract

In this article I describe my journey to develop my Indigenous teacher identity and explore the constructs that either diminished or enhanced my identity development within the experiences of formal and nonformal learning. I narrate a pivotal moment in my teaching career that made me question what kind of teacher I would become. A “whisper of true learning” awakened the depths of my *nēhiyaw* identity and made me realize that *she* had forgotten who I was and, at the same time, that it was my responsibility to remember where I came from for the benefit of my students.

CHAPTER 3 A WHISPER OF TRUE LEARNING³

Beginning as a Teacher

In my second year of teaching at a typical mainstream high school in Western Canada, I taught history, English and the Cree language. The school was large and overcrowded, and trailers in the form of portable classrooms had to be attached to the yellow brick structure. The school had a theatre, two gyms, a cafeteria, a chapel, a large industrial woodworking room, and numerous classrooms—and a population of well over 1,300 students and 100 or so teachers.

My classroom was on the second floor, and I shared it with the science teacher. The lights were bright-white florescent, and the only natural lighting came from the back room through a door if it was open. On the other side of the door was a storage room filled with plants, science chemicals, various-sized glass beakers, and so on. I had four or five rows of desks, too many for the number of students I had, which made the room look empty. I often stood at the front of the room, which had a platform that was a foot higher than the rest of the floor. The floor was white tile, and the walls were either mainly empty cupboards or empty bulletin boards.

As a beginning teacher, I often wrote notes right out of the textbook because I did not know any better when it came to second-language instruction, much less the teaching of an Indigenous language. It is also important to note that I was not a fluent speaker of the Cree language/*nēhiyawēwin*.⁴ I could barely pronounce any of the long Cree words properly, or confidently. The attitude at the time was that, because I was Indigenous and grew up on a Reserve, I should know and speak some Cree. However, although it was a good idea initially, it added pressure to my teaching assignment, not to mention frustration and stress as a beginning teacher.

Students from upper- and middle-class families had enrolled in this school. The student population at the time was mostly Euro-Canadians and a small percentage of new immigrant families. I was the only visible Indigenous *nēhiyaw* teacher on staff, although a couple of other

³ Daniels (2014). Received permission to republish from Copyright Clearance Center's RightsLink Service.

⁴ Also known as the Cree language. Because in this article I explore Indigenous identity, I uses Indigenous terms for naming language, places, and people. In the *nēhiyaw* language, the Roman Standard Orthography uses only lower-case letters for all Cree words, regardless of the convention in English to capitalize names, places, and proper nouns. For further reference, see the work of Jean L. Okimasis and Arok Wolvengrey (2008), *How to Spell it in Cree*.

teachers were of Métis and Dakota heritage but did not grow up on the Reserve. The irony of my teaching assignment was that I had received my secondary education at this high school and had graduated years before. Not much had changed with regard to teaching practices since I left as a student. Some of the same teachers who taught me were still there, teaching the same subjects.

When I think back to being a student, I realize that I still suffer from the emotional scars from discrimination and the feeling of not belonging there. I do not think that these feelings will ever go away, no matter how much time has passed. My urban high school years were not filled with joyful memories—not at all like on television shows such as *Pretty in Pink* or *The Breakfast Club*. They were filled with awkwardness, isolation, and alienation. I realize now that this is not an uncommon way for Indigenous students to feel. As Gebhard (2012) affirmed, “Indigenous students report frequent incidents of overt racism in school and often feel lonely and isolated while attending school” (The School-to-Prison Pipeline section, para. 7). Other factors might also have contributed to my feelings of isolation and alienation, because I did not attend elementary school with the other students from the local feeder schools, and I did not sign up for any of the team sports because of my self-consciousness about my body. Worse perhaps, was it the color of my skin? Was it the fact that mainstream or Eurocentric education in school was not designed initially or intentionally for people like me? “Indigenous people throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a Eurocentric education system that has taught them to distrust their Indigenous knowledge system, their elder’s wisdom and their own learning spirit” (Battiste, 2013, p. 25). In the end, with all of these factors at play, high school was not a pleasant place for me.

Remembering Jake

As I wrote about these past memories of my early teaching experiences and my own high school experience, I was drawn back to a moment with a student, Jake. Within this story is the whisper of true learning and an awakening that I wish to share. Jake was a young man who always arrived late for my morning period 1 class, which started at 8:35 a.m. He would walk into my room loudly and nonchalantly, or sometimes quietly depending on his mood, and slide into his desk, almost without my noticing him, especially if I blinked an eye! He often wore a leather coat with a bunny hug and white runners. I remember that his hair was always wet and combed back. He never had any expression on his face, and rarely did he look happy. I realize now that my thoughts at the time were that his lateness and attitude were not my issues to deal with; I was

not his counselor or his therapist! But I wanted him to be on time, which added to my constant annoyance and need to control.

According to researcher Pedro Noguera (as cited in Gebhard, 2012), “Racial disparities in school discipline and achievement mirror the disproportionate confinement of racialized people, and . . . students most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look like smaller versions of the adults most likely to be targeted for incarceration” (The School-to-Prison Pipeline section, para. 5). As a means of disciplining Jake, I remember saying to him, “Jake, you are always late; and when you’re late, you don’t know what you’re doing, and you’re wasting your time because you never do anything! I sometimes wonder what is even the point!” I said this out loud and used him as an example for the other students. He did not pass my class; nor did he ever take it again. I thought at the time, “That is fine with me.” It was not.

I still remember that event in my life as though it happened yesterday, because it was a life-changing moment for me, one that I continue to regret. It caused me to ask myself what kind of teacher I was going to be. Until then I had forgotten. Jake had given me a “whisper of true teaching and learning.” This beautiful young man was of Indigenous descent, *nēhiyaw*/Cree or Métis. He, like other boys of his age, had a slick and arrogant “I am too cool for you” attitude, which, I have learned with experience, is just the way that many boys are. I also know now that behaviors or ill-intentioned actions are always about something deeper.

Why was I choosing to be indifferent at that time? Why was I not wanting to see the real Jake for who he was? Why was I so focused on the behavior? Now I know better; that was not acceptable. I had pushed that young man out of my class and possibly even out of school because of my attitude, misguided assumptions, judgment, and false sense of superiority. I handled that situation according to what I had learned from my teachers years earlier when I was a student. I recognize now that I was unconsciously being discriminatory and racist to someone of color, someone like me, and that it was normalized to do so. As Ladson-Billings (1991) stated, “Because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (p. 12). The racism that is embedded in Canadian institutions (Laroque, 1991, p. 73) is just as normalized in the school culture.

I remember an English teacher who humiliated me in front of my class of 30 or more students. He ridiculed me for always being five minutes late and told me that, because I was always five minutes late, I would never amount to anything or succeed in anything. I distinctly

remember my feeling of being hurt In that moment. I felt tears swell up, and anguish permeated my body. I was paralyzed wondering what I should do. Should I sit down, or should I leave? I stood there for a moment at the door and then stepped backed and closed the door. I never went back to that class and almost left school that year because of my English teacher. He made me feel inadequate, as though I was not good enough to be in his classroom. His judgment and ignorant behavior emotionally damaged me. This reminds me that what happens in our early adolescent stays with us for a lifetime. I sometimes wonder how many young men and women he had treated in the same way. Now, I find myself standing in the place of the teacher and doing the very same thing. I believe that it is because I did not understand all of the social structures of mainstream education that being a teacher involves and the pedagogies of the profession, that I was going through the motions of something deeper and more subtle in an institution that perpetuates racism and discrimination. Berlak (2004) stated in her research findings:

Most graduates of teacher education programs were not prepared to deal with the realities they would face as teachers of African American, Latino, Asian immigrant, and poor children. She was convinced that many of those entering the profession were more likely to contribute to the destruction of these children than to their academic and personal growth and power. (p. 126)

I have to agree. In the beginning I thought that school was a safe and neutral place, but I learned that it was in fact not. It was not a safe and neutral place for me; nor was it for Jake. I wonder whether it is for any Indigenous students. Gebhard (2012) explained, “By assuming that classrooms are neutral, apolitical spaces, schools risk pushing the same colonial agenda that Aboriginal education was founded on” (The School-to-Prison Pipeline section, para. 1). As an Indigenous *nēhiyaw* woman and educator, I struggled and grappled with many of the practices of mainstream education. I was being pulled into curricula that did not resonate with me.

Over time I learned that the school’s expectations mirrored the Ministry of Education’s mandate, which added a sense of pressure to conform. Furthering this inclination was the classroom’s environment, which was seemingly cold and uninviting. It was unfamiliar to me even as a student. I am sure that it was much the same for Jake.

There was a disconnect between who and what I was and what I was expected to teach. I remember walking into the English department room and looking over the novels, wondering where the literature by Aboriginal authors was, because we were living in Canada, a country

with a strong First Nations presence. We had a great number of literary authors and poets, so surely that was not the problem. When I engaged my students in experiential learning, taking them outside the walls of the school's yellow-brick building, I remember my teacher-colleagues' question: "Where is that in the curriculum?" I thought that after I received my Bachelor of Education degree, I could teach my students what was relevant to my existence as an Indigenous person and to society's existence, but that was not the case. Not only my colleagues, but sometimes also students, questioned my class syllabus, especially if they were White and the context of the lessons was unknown and unrecognizable. I had little to say about where I would teach, what I would teach, and for how long I would teach. I recall my thoughts as a beginning teacher:

My childhood was good. Although I had lost my mother, it was stable. My life in the city as an adolescent was much different, but it did not mean I could teach and counsel these particular "at-risk" children. Because I was First Nations, it was thought that I could teach Aboriginal students better for some reason. But I knew I lacked experience, counseling skills, behavior modification skills and social services procedures. (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 12)

I remember that I was assigned mainly to schools with a high population of Indigenous students. However, I did not question these notions until much later in my teaching career. At the time, as a beginning teacher, I was in survival mode, and I was imitating the teachers around me to try to live out the role of teacher.

As I struggled with my career, trying to stay "above water," I did not have the capacity to understand Jake's situation or conditions. I was also learning to be a White teacher in the midst of chaos; I was racializing my own kind unconsciously, and I was turning into someone who saw colour. What was I doing? Because racism is blended into the school system, I picked up unfavourable teaching practices, and it was only my second year in the profession. "There is racism in school systems which can be traced back to the Euro-Canadian interpretation of history, an interpretation that has been uncritically transmitted in the education system" (Larocque, 1991, p. 73). I knew that I had to do something differently, because past memories of my own education all flooded back to me after my experience with Jake. I knew that this was not who I was; this was not where I began. This was not who I wanted to be.

Moving Backward to My Childhood

I needed to go back to my beginnings as an individual of Indigenous heritage, a *nēhiyaw* from a small Reserve two hours north of the city. In my home community, growing up on the Reserve, we referred to each other as Cousin or Friend when we addressed each other. It was also Brother or Sister if we were first Cousins. Our kinship ties were persistent in our families. The majority of the teachers, assistants, and other employees were also *nēhiyaw* in my Reserve school. The offered a stream of activities that were cultural, language based, and relevant to our existence. This teaching was vastly different than my education in the city.

In my upbringing, during which my grandparents raised me, they role-modeled faith, hard work, and love. I saw integrity and pride in their work, and they instilled this in me. I wanted to emulate them in my life purpose. I saw my grandfather pray daily by meditating, holding sweetgrass,⁵ or kneeling at the foot of his bed—a combination of spirituality and Catholicism known as “syncretism,” or “a blend of two belief systems. I was raised to respect aspects of both these faiths” (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 3).

One evening, as a child, I watched my grandfather for a long time while he prayed. I am sure that he sensed my standing and watching, because his prayer seemed unusually longer than at other times. When he finished, I asked, “Grandpa, what are you doing?” He replied that he was “talking to God.” I asked, “About what? Who is God?” My grandfather replied that God is the all-knowing spirit and that he was asking God to watch over him, to protect and guide him, to allow him to have a good life and our family to be well. He told me that I should pray too, every day, and ask for wisdom, knowledge and guidance, which I did and continue to do to this day. Prayer is an important practice in my life as a *nēhiyaw* because it reminds me to be grateful for who I am and what I have. It is one of the essential teachings of the tipi⁶ or the medicine wheel,⁷ and it makes me pause for a moment and breathe in the present. For *nēhiyaw* people and other traditional Indigenous nations the tipi and medicine wheel teachings symbolize life and how we go about our journey in acceptance. These teachings are always about practicing to be better

⁵ Sweetgrass is a plant that grows throughout the prairies. It has a purple root and a distinct smell. It is harvested during the summer months to be used as incense to purify the *nēhiyaw* mind, body, and spirit through the act of praying.

⁶ “Tipi teachings” refer to family values, such as love, respect, faith, etc. The tipi have 15 common values that also refer to our value of the home in modern times.

⁷ The medicine wheel is the four quadrants of our being—the emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of our nature—and we always practice being aware of them and balanced as human beings.

human beings. For example, I learned to practice being in the moment as a teaching at a young age. It is letting go of control and not worrying about tomorrow or being concerned with the past. It is a fresh start continuously. The Sacred Tree (Lane et al., 2003) illustrates this fresh start:

It is in the east of the medicine wheel that all journeys begin. When a path is new, it totally occupies our attention. Our sights are focused on the next few steps. One of the most important gifts to be acquired in the east is the capacity to focus our attention on the events of the present moment. As young children we knew instinctively how to do this. When as children we watched a beautiful butterfly or examined any interesting new aspect of the world, we were completely absorbed by what we were doing. (p. 45)

Because prayer is one of the most important teachings of our people, I have learned to pass on this teaching to my own children and to my students. Prayer is the center of our *nēhiyaw* and Indigenous ceremonies and our life. Our customs are based on this ceremony because we believe that we are spiritual beings who are having a physical experience. I have heard this time and time again. Ceremonies are a form of acknowledgement and connection to the spirit world, an acknowledgement that we are all one. The custom is to repeat the ceremony, because we know that we are not in control of our lives. “Cree people believe they do not own their lives, so what lies ahead is unpredictable” (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 50).

When I was little, my grandparents took me everywhere. This, too, was a value of my family. We often visited old people. We traveled from our Reserve to my grandmother’s Reserve. I referred to many other grandparents in the *nēhiyaw* way of life, because we have not only one set of grandparents for each parent, but also many. My grandparents’ brothers and sisters are also my grandparents. When we visit, food is an essential item that they have always offered, even when people were doing something else. We stopped everything to visit with one another and to eat. There was always time to engage in this act of relationship and sharing. My grandparents always left with parting gifts; they gave away gifts as well. My grandmother sometimes gave away her handmade quilted blankets as a gesture of good will. My grandparents also gave other gifts such as berries from a summer harvest, plants such as red willow,⁸ rat root,⁹

⁸ Red willow has many purposes. The bark is used as a medicine or is an additive to tobacco or a purification cleanse. It is also used in practical ways such as in red-willow basketry.

⁹ Rat root is a plant that grows in marsh-like areas or lakes, rivers, and streams. It is harvested and used as a medicine that can either be made into a tea or chewed.

sweetgrass, and sometimes bear grease.¹⁰ I saw this act of goodwill firsthand, and it instilled a sense of generosity and sharing deep within me. Although we did not have much, there was always something to give.

Because food was a sacred gift, giving it involved many customary teachings. In our home we always offered it to guests as a sign of respect. Food was never wasted or thrown away or left out on the counter or table overnight. Leftovers were nonexistent because we had a very large family. Food was also the center of ceremonial celebrations such as feasts, which were common in my home community while I was growing up. Having and giving feasts for all kinds of reasons, such as the coming of a new season, the arrival of a new baby, or a memorial, involved protocols. Our lives centered on food.

In the summer we planted a potato garden as a family, and sometimes turnips and carrots as well. It was by no means a little family garden; it was a great deal of hard work. As a result, I have appreciated the Earth's soil and what she can grow; it was fascinating to pull food out of the earth. With regard to meat, sometimes our uncle would hunt for a moose or two throughout the year and share them with us, which was always a treat. We would also pick blueberries, raspberries, and sometimes cranberries during the summer and preserve them by canning, eating them only on special occasions. Gardening and collecting wood and water were all essential teachings that fostered respect, independence, and an appreciation for working together. Prayer and faith went hand in hand with food and celebrations. All of these teachings were sacred and instilled in us as children a strong sense of relationship with each other and the land.

In my Reserve school in my home community, some of the relevant teaching moments included plenty of opportunities to participate in outdoor activities, such as learning to fish or track rabbits with the use of snare wire. As we engaged in such activities, we asked questions such as "Where do rabbits live?" and "Why do they turn white in the winter?" The teacher left room in our school day to go out onto the land. To do this together as a group made it even more memorable; the teacher was coming into our space and validating who we were as *nēhiyawak* children. It also made our existence relevant to the land and to the place where we lived.

"Both my grandparents gave me a foundation of Cree ways. . . . We have our own maps of teachings and meanings" (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 48). Although diminished by cognitive

¹⁰ Bear grease is a balm used as a healing medicine for sore muscles and skin problems and is a remedy for thinning hair and poor health.

imperialism (Battiste, 1986), the knowledge is still there, often revealed to us in the form of stillness, silence, prayers, and dreams when we actively search for our own stories, answers, and pathways (Daniels-Fiss, 2008).

A Youth in the City

As a teen who wanted to experience life in the city, I moved away from my home community and the care and guidance of my grandparents for more of a tumultuous existence. Life was sometimes difficult and unpredictable and exciting. Not only was I living with assignments that were due, but I was also dealing with a great deal more, and the familiarities of home did not exist in the city. During the late 1980s or early 1990s I moved to the city of Saskatoon. When I attended high school, the classrooms were not filled with other Indigenous students; rather, only a few of us were scattered in pockets throughout the school. We took comfort in each other's presence and the fact that we were not alone in a blanket of whiteness.

Jake was dealing with the same issues that I faced, but 10 years later. His mainstream education did not include an understanding of the *nēhiyaw* teachings; not even I understood them in that time and place. In the hierarchical system in which I was teaching, the values of the tipi or medicine wheel were not being lived. In fact, the school system was perpetuating a form of colonization. Gebhard (2012) stated:

The assumption that the education system today is devoid of its oppressive and violent past unfairly lets schools off the hook. Links between education and incarceration for Indigenous people in Canada are rarely made beyond pointing out that many Aboriginal people in custody are under-educated, often without high school diplomas. (The School-to-Prison Pipeline, para. 1)

Jake reminded me that I had forgotten what it was like to grow up in the city, living in borderline-poverty conditions in an unstable home situation. I had forgotten what it was like not to have enough sleep the night before because of was a party in my living room, what it was like to be awakened by loud music or encouraged to join the party. Worse, I had forgotten what it was like to be worried about my safety. I had forgotten what it was like to be peer pressured and coerced into breaking the law or witnessing others break the law. I had forgotten what it was like to grow up with circumstances that are beyond a young person's control. I had forgotten what it was like to be humiliated by a teacher in front of a classroom of students. Given my childhood on the Reserve and the teachings of my grandparents and people, I suffered culture shock

throughout my existence and experience in high school. Was Jake living in a state of culture shock too?

Present Moment

In my present moment a student walks into my class; she “pops in” a half hour late. She has missed over a week of school. My gut reaction is to be disappointed and dismayed, but then I breathe and respond with caring intentions. I casually say “Hi” and make a joke that I don’t recognize her. She reacts shyly and responds that she has been busy. I reply, “Busy, huh? Well, I am glad that’s over, and I am glad you are here. Now let’s catch up!” I am calm and relaxed. I go over past assignments, and I make time for her.

I do not react harshly because of my epiphany after the event with Jake 10 years before during my second year of teaching. My epiphany caused me to go back to my origins, to my childhood upbringing on the Reserve, and to ask myself, What kind of teacher do I want to be? How was I taught? Who were my teachers? How can I incorporate into my identity as a teacher the other roles that I play, such as mother, auntie, sister, and, most important, granddaughter? What do these roles have in common with being a teacher, a great teacher?

Because my grandparents raised me with love, compassion, and respect, they never made me feel that I did not belong. They always showed patience, guided me, and role-modeled what they expected of me. Their love was never conditional. Couldn’t I be and instill all of these values too as an educator? The answer is “Yes.”

My values are no longer conflicted. Who I was as a beginning teacher immediately out of college no longer exists. I am no longer emulating the qualities of the White teachers whom I had as a student; nor am I perpetuating the colonial nature of the educational system. I do not believe that my upbringing was a negative or a deficiency, as I was taught to believe as both a student and a teacher in the education system. I do not believe that Indigenous students should be unsuccessful or should fail because of culture.

The belief in twentieth-century social analysis about the incommensurability of different cultures encourages a trivializing of the impact of colonial oppression by attributing the effects and the conditions of oppression to this very factor of incommensurability. In the example of aboriginal people, effects of oppression are cast as “value conflicts” between white and Indian cultures, suggesting that inequality is inevitable, and merely an effect of different orientations to work, education, and family. (St. Denis, 2009, p. 168)

For me to be comfortable and to find a secure place in my mind and soul as a teacher, I needed to be proud of who I was and what I could offer. A decade ago, with Jake's unwitting help, I changed and unlearned what I had been taught in the Euro-mainstream high school and in my first degree program in college. I went back to the practices and customs of my grandparents and community. I returned to building the relationships that are instrumental to being a good teacher.

There is an urgent need to change the well-rehearsed and scripted story of school (Pushor, 2007). I know that streaming our Indigenous students into categories of race or heritage is discriminatory. I know that the content of lessons has to relate to the students. I know that we need more visible Indigenous educators and other Indigenous personnel involved in our schools. I know that sitting in rows and reading out of textbooks is killing the creative spirit in my students and, just as important, in me. Most important, being in the moment, being spontaneous and fascinated about what students are learning in class, make me realize that teaching must be animated and alive. This parallels the medicine wheel and tipi teachings: being in the moment and fascinated and full of love.

Rejecting the textbooks and the questions at the end of each chapter, I relearned the art of storytelling. I learned this teaching method unknowingly as a child and have come to perfect it as a teacher. I relearned how to teach through experience, through collaboration and demonstration. I created opportunities for engagement and learned to listen to my students. It was not about perfection, but about learning to be better at these skills and not afraid to learn from and to admit mistakes. Teaching involves always learning and always growing.

When I think back to my beginning years as a teacher, I realize that I have learned many lessons. Some of them have been painful, as Jake's was. I think about who I am now, and I see that I have grown from my lessons. I have returned to the teachings of the many *kêhtêyak*, our old people, in my life and, most important, through my grandparents' Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Through all of these lessons I have learned to be actively responsible for my learning and to rethink how we "do education" for all students. I know that we can no longer label Indigenous students as culturally different because of their heritage; this only leads to more inequality.

This objectification of culture also suggests that culture is something to be "lost" and "found." It is as if people are no longer agents; culture happens to them. A notion like

“cultural determinism” then becomes possible. Cultural determinism has been used to justify racism; hence the notion of “cultural racism” that becomes another way to justify discrimination. (St. Denis, 2009, p. 169)

I am truly grateful for Jake. Because of this whisper of true learning, I awoke to the cycle of racism and discrimination and its embedded existence in our schools and decided to do something about it. I wanted to learn how European systems operated. I am grateful that I awoke to who I am and to who I am meant to be, because it has led me to where I am now. We have a great deal of work to do to bring balance and equality and to restore a respectful co-existence in our schools. I am ready to forgive, willing to collaborate, and happy to teach. My *nēhiyaw* values and beliefs are an expression of my Indigenous knowledge and identity. I have something to offer. I have purpose, however small or minuscule, which I encourage and instill in my Indigenous students and my family. It is not about my culture, because I am more than my culture. It is because I am Cree. It is because I am a *nēhiyaw* that I am unique in all ways: historically, politically, educationally, and linguistically.

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CHAPTER 4:
***onīkānēw*: SHE WHO LEADS:**
LEARNING TO LEAD IN EDUCATION

Abstract

Aboriginal students have been silenced in education because of the physical, psychological, and cultural mechanisms in residential and boarding schools and their intergenerational effects or because they have not been adequately represented in educational curriculum and educational systems. Only very recently has the curriculum at all educational levels begun to address Aboriginal peoples and histories (Crey, 2009, para. 31).

CHAPTER 4:
***onīkānēw*: SHE WHO LEADS:**
LEARNING TO LEAD IN EDUCATION¹¹

Purpose

As an Indigenous Cree woman, I became interested in Indigenous education, language revitalization, and curriculum development. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “A narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience” (p. 18). Adopting a narrative approach helps me to remember who I am as a *nēhiyaw*, one who is also a woman, a teacher and, most important, a mother. In this chapter I map the cultural connection to my language *nēhiyawēwin* and explore how the Indian Act (established long before I was born) and formal education deeply affected my schooling experiences and those of my family.

The terms “*onīkānēw*” and “*iskwēw*” are closely tied in the role of taking care of the people and community. I have learned many teachings that coincide within our language, ceremony, and, more significantly, life itself. I will share in narrative my worldview of teaching, lifelong learning, and my passion for leading in various aspects of education. I see language revitalization and preservation as part of the practice in achieving self-government, education, and leadership.

Language as Foundational to Identity

To understand Indigenous people’s distinct worldview and beliefs, I began with the purpose of language, which “represents a knowledge system that holds a depth of knowing that has not yet been tapped for contemporary education” (Battiste, 2013, p. 147). Language is an essential element that sets the foundation for identity: “Identity is socially created and claimed through language, through an intentional negotiation of meanings and understandings. We speak a language or languages and it often identifies our origins, history, membership and culture” (Baker, 2007, p. 407). This notion is completely avoided or overlooked in definitions of the purpose of Aboriginal education. Since the 1600s under colonial rule, the lives of the original inhabitants of North America have been demoralized, decimated, and devastated by early missionaries, church, and government officials. “Having generations of Indian children removed

¹¹ Daniels (2018). Copyright (2018) by LEARN, <http://www.learnquebec.ca>; reproduced with permission from the publisher.

from their parents, denying them a normal childhood and the teachings of their people, resulted in the loss of their cultural traditions including their native languages” (Widdowson & Howard, 2013, p. 9). The key problem with which I continue to grapple concerns whether Aboriginal education can truly (co-)exist in Western education.

Indigenous Teaching and Learning

This question has led me on a quest to explore a range of concepts related to leadership, knowing, and practice and, in particular, how a better understanding of such concepts might benefit and/or better shape the future of Indigenous peoples’ education in Canada. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, such as Gregory Cajete (1994), Marie Battiste (2013), Willie Ermine (1995), Keith Basso (1996), Julie Cruikshank (2005), Linda Smith (1999), Leroy Little Bear (2000), Fixico (2003), and Linda M. Goulet and Keith N. Goulet (2014), to name a few, are writing about and remembering the oral traditional practice of Indigenous teaching and learning. Many of their findings refer to Indigenous ways of knowing, and therefore leading, and how to approach education as it was before Western education. Battiste (2013) stated:

An overwhelming number of authors, international and interdisciplinary, acknowledge and agree on the holistic framework of Indigenous epistemologies that are foundation to Indigenous peoples. Holistic thinking incorporates the unity of spiritual and physical worlds, which may have had a role in some parts of Western Euro-centric thinking as well. (p. 76)

The notion of wholistic thinking is an interaction of all dimensions of being, such as emotional, mental, physical and spiritual. Indigenous learning and teaching encourage and guide all dimensions.

For example, the Cree word *onīkānēw* is not just one word with one meaning, but a multifaceted word with many different meanings that depend on its context and purpose. *onīkānēw*, for example, means “s/he who leads”; and “mother/mom” is *nikā*, short for *nikāwiy*. *nīkān* is another word that means to be “in front of” (a pack or group) to lead, and *nīk* is short for *nīkihk*, which means “my home.” All of these meanings are in the one word: *onīkānēw*. A mother represents all of this. The term for “woman” is *iskwēw*, which is also related to fire and in Cree is *iskotēw*. The two words *iskwēw* and *iskotēw* are closely related, as is evident in the prefixes. Another correlation with *iskwēw* and *iskotēw* is the term “door” way, the Cree word *iskwahtēm*, which refers to woman as she gives life; she is the fire tender. The woman’s role is to keep the

home fires burning and to provide support and warmth for everyone in the home/tipi. Mary Lee, a respected knowledge keeper and Elder in the community, shared the following story with me.

Mother as Teacher

The woman's home, and in particular the doorway, symbolizes life and is the only entry into the home. This is how I know that our women were the original leaders of the home and community, because everyone needs to pass through the entry of the home to gain access. It is in examining the lexicon of Cree that we find that the history and philosophy of who we are as *nēhiyawak* is in the language.

Another term, *okihcihtāw iskwēwak*, “a society of warrior women,” also speaks to the many leadership deeds that our women carried out in more traditional times. Women's Lodges were just as important as the Sweat Lodges, where important discussions were made about the well-being of communities and prayer and womanly teachings took place. Women were, and still are, the original warriors of our communities.

Linda Smith (1999) suggested that to honour the word *onīkānēw* and its meaning requires positioning myself as an Indigenous woman. In doing so, I am (re)claiming a genealogical, cultural, and political set of experiences that links me directly to my unique identity as an Indigenous woman (p. 12). As a consequence, I can now see how aspects of lineage, land, and language enable me to become stronger and more determined in claiming my identity. Similarly, I'm better able to serve the students I teach, as well as to be more confident in my role as a mother and as an Indigenous woman learning to lead in education. I believe that developing a collective narrative situated in a historical perspective helps us to remember, resist, stand up, and voice our teachings with greater purpose and clarity. We as Indigenous peoples no longer have to accept things as they are.

Spiritual and Physical Guides

Through my grandparents' teachings, I found my sense of purpose, whereby I was able to develop the characteristics of the *onīkānēwak*. Battiste's (2013) statement “The knowledge embedded in the language, and the interrelationship formed in the learning from animals, plants, spirit guides, and the ecology” (p. 150) has provided me with a relational and holistic hub to be Cree. At a young age I received a message from the spirit world, and I have held this message sacred ever since. It was shortly after my Grade 12 graduation. I was lying in bed, sleeping, when a presence awakened me in the early morning hours. At the foot of my bed, hovering, was

a tiny flame of light. I was unsure of what to do. I panicked and became frightened. I screamed to jump out of bed, but nothing came out of my mouth, and my body froze. I could not move. The tiny flame began to grow into a full silhouette of a person. It had no wings; it resembled a light being. It spoke to me but not with words; it communicated directly to my mind. I was able to communicate with my thoughts and the light being understood. I was astonished. My fear began to dissipate, and a calmness began to set in my body. The light being communicated that I was not to fear anything and that it had come to give me a message. I asked, “A message from whom?” The message was coming from my mother! I began to cry, but it was with tears of immense joy. While I was crying, I became filled with love from my head to my toes. My body vibrated with a tingling sensation. I then wondered why my mom had not come to visit me. The light being communicated to me that it did not matter and that my mother had always watched over me and guided me at every turn when I felt I needed her the most. The light being continued to communicate that I was to help my siblings (my cousins with whom I was raised) and to guide my brothers and sisters. I said that I would. In that instance the light being began to shrink into a tiny flicker of light, hovering at the foot of my bed until the light went out. I laid there in complete amazement, awe, and joy. To this day I wonder if that was a dream, but it could not have been. I still remember vividly that sacred moment, and I share this story with my children, family, and students when I want to instill in them the notion that there is something more to our lives beyond what we know. Teaching and leading in education have been about guiding my brothers and sisters, something I had not considered until now.

Today, so many have forgotten the art of visioning and dreaming; however, I have not. I share this story with those close to me and, most important, with my students, because I see that some have lost their way. I tell this sacred story because Indigenous knowledge “is still there, often revealed to us in the form of stillness, silence, prayers, and dreams to stir and revive our faith to help students and young people remember who they are” (Daniels, 2014, p. 108). Storytelling is also a part of the practice of regaining who we once were, who we still are.

Learning and Growing

The quest for leadership, knowing, being, and, most important, language revitalization came to me shortly after I graduated with my Bachelor of Education degree in 1998. Since then, my experiences have been filled with wondrous opportunities. I know what I know

because we believe we are spiritual beings having a physical experience. I have heard this phrase said time and time again. Ceremonies are a form of acknowledgment and connection to the spirit world, an acknowledgment that we are all one. (Daniels, 2014, p. 107)

I must give back. I know that education and knowledge are a social responsibility; the expectation is that when students have achieved higher education, they will contribute to the community. Again, this is a cultural practice that enables us to be stronger and smarter, especially when we remember that we are all one.

This idea of wanting change was apparent to me at a young age. I always knew what I wanted. Growing up in a faith-based family helped me to develop an inner awareness that I was more than what people saw of me on the outside. I was also raised in a family in which work was consistently on my grandfather's mind, and the Indian Act severely impacted his ability to make an adequate living. At one time in my grandfather's life, he owned a farm, but what was the point if he could not do anything with it or make a profit from it? My grandfather eventually sold everything (Daniels-Fiss, 2005).

Although I grew up in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, we lived in conditions similar to those in a third-world country, with no running water and heat from a woodstove. I was also subjected to the harsh effects of unclean drinking water and was never vaccinated or immunized until much later on in life. Although we were poor, my grandparents ensured our security, disciplined us, and treated us compassionately. "They also role-modeled the importance of faith, hard work, and love (Daniels, 2014, p. 106). This is when I learned the value of hard work and to always do my best. In parenting, I use the following example to explain discipline to Indigenous children:

In the old days discipline on children was practiced. However, in maintaining discipline, physical or other methods of force were never used. This was accomplished by communication, talking to the children, and using examples such as experiences, to bring the point across. Children were often taught through their own experiences, on the rights and wrongs under the guidance of the parents. (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, p. 162)

I believe that it takes a significant amount of experience, wisdom, and guidance to raise a family and to be a family. Communication and time are also important factors that contribute to the loving dynamics of parenting.

My Beginnings

I grew up in a small community north of Prince Albert, known as Sturgeon Lake, to which most Cree speaking people refer as *pakitahwākan sākahikan* (Net-Casting Lake). During the time of Treaty making, others knew our band as “The Upstream People—*natimiwiwiniwak*” (Christensen, 2000, p. 75). For those who do not know Sturgeon Lake, it is situated by a river. Language and land, the place I belong, are intertwined as a part of my identity. My maternal grandparents raised me on the Reserve because my mother, *nikāwiy*, was killed in a drinking-and-driving accident when I was only four years old. My father, *nohāwiy*, like so many others from his generation, struggled with alcoholism. Both of my parents and my grandparents had attended residential school, the effects of which still affect my life today in subtle kinds of ways, such as in expressing love. Trust comes hard, but I do. However, continuing to learn more about who I am as an Indigenous Cree woman has led me closer to forgiveness for the past misgivings and, yes, ultimately to happiness.

During my impressionable years, seeing my grandparents practicing faith and hope through intention helped me through life as a teen who was growing up in the city. Before I lived in the city, I had never experienced racism and the other harsh realities of life, such as hopelessness, deprivation, instability, and distress. Although I encountered obstacles, such as insecure housing, drugs, and discouraging teachers, faith in my abilities helped me to survive the most challenging and difficult times in my life. Despite all the odds, I graduated from high school and, in doing so, gave myself a chance to do well in life. Fortunately for me, a couple of teachers had taken a genuine interest in what I thought I might like to do once I finished school and were prepared to listen. “While in school, nothing in the education curricula really supported Aboriginal history and literature, not to mention the diverse Aboriginal languages. These individuals helped me to cope with this enormous deficiency in the high school curriculum” (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 10). As I have come to realize, believing in a student can go a long way.

After high school graduation, however, I was unsure of what I was going to do next. After I had worked for about a year as a clerical bookkeeper for the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division, I found myself enrolling at the University of Saskatchewan. I started my postsecondary studies in a Bachelor of Education program, the Saskatoon Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), and successfully completed my Bachelor of Education degree in 1998. I had learned a great deal in the SUNTEP program and had a support system of very good friends.

I learned how to research history and find my lineage of ancestors; most important, I also found and documented the origins of last name, Daniels, which is not original or Indigenous. Rather, it is closely associated with the word, *pē miyo maskwa*, which means Good “Bear Arriving.” I have since learned that the bear is good medicine; therefore, it is a good name. I am very thankful for my time in the SUNTEP program because I had an opportunity to learn more about who I am and my history and to connect with my spiritual side as an Indigenous Cree woman.

Many of my SUNTEP colleagues are now in various positions within the field of education, working as superintendents, principals, consultants, and, of course, teachers. Among us (yet unspoken) is a silent pledge to abide by the philosophy and principles of First Nations. We also continue to encourage and applaud each others’ achievements for the betterment of our community and our future.

My first-year teaching assignment was in an inner-city Aboriginal elementary school, St. Mary’s. It was no surprise. I think that I am safe in saying that I was assigned to this school because I am First Nations, and the assumption was that I could relate to the students there. “I remember, I was mainly assigned to schools that were highly populated with Indigenous students. However, I did not really question these notions until much later in my teaching career” (Daniels, 2014, p. 105). Yes, we were the same color and race but I had no experience in managing the multiple issues that come with poverty. I had grown up in a secure and loving environment until my mid-teenage years; I could not relate, nor did I know anything about “living life on the edge” (Battiste, 2013, p. 19).

The following fall I taught the Cree language at E. D. (Edward Daniel) Feehan Catholic High School, the school from which I had graduated. To my surprise, I had come full circle; however, at the time, I was conversant in only a few words of Cree. My grandparents had purposely withheld the language from me as I grew up; it “was not seen as essential to be spoken or passed on. It was, in fact, considered a learning deficiency for learning Western education” (Daniels-Fiss, 2005, p. 48). This idea of teaching Cree was an opportunity to connect to my heritage and ancestry. I then began my graduate studies.

Education in Language

The language of Cree/*nēhiyawēwin* became my new-found passion. I took a night course in the language and then enrolled in two more courses. It was then that I decided that I might as well complete what I had started: a master’s degree in education. I enrolled in 10 classes and

obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in Education and then conducted a master's project in the area of language acquisition and methodology. For the last 12 years I have offered summer Cree language-acquisition camps, workshops, mini-programs, and presentations. Ever since, I have also been teaching myself to speak Cree. I believe that learning my language is my connection to pride, heritage, and place.

I believe that the meanings and teachings in our language guides and reveals who we are as *nēhiyawak* (Cree people). It also helps our people to recognize and uphold levels of kinship, not only with each other, but also with all living things. Because we are all related, natural laws are in place to maintain a balance of life, according to McAdam (2015):

Language is critical in understanding the spiritual, verbal, emotional and physical way of *nēhiyaw* being. It is also said language carries a “vibration” that connects it to the Creator's creations; thus, the singing and almost a humming sound while in a prayer state. This vibration is a connection to all spiritual things, including the universe. In order to understand *wahkohtowin*, the kinship terms provide the foundation toward respectful boundaries, a law to prevent inappropriate actions, behaviors, and attitudes. (p. 63)

For us, this is knowing. LaFrance (2000) stated, “First Nations people have long understood that education is a lifelong continuum of experience gleaned from interaction with one another, with all of nature (seen and unseen), as well as with all of the cosmos” (p. 101).

My role in language development, theory, and practice has been diverse. I have been teaching sessionally during the summers for the University of Alberta in the Canadian Indigenous Literacy and Languages Development Institute and entry-level conversational Cree in the evenings at the University of Saskatchewan for eight years. I have also been a language consultant for the core and bilingual programs at St. Frances School in Saskatoon, a program that is still in its infancy stages. I have co-written the *nēhiyawēwin* first-of-its-kind provincial high school core curriculum, 10/20/30, for Grades 10, 11, and 12; and I solely wrote all of the supplementary documents that this course requires. Further, I have published academic articles on language acquisition and identity. I currently teach full time for the Saskatoon Public School Division while I pursue a PhD in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Most important, I am the founder of *nēhiyawak* Language Program/Camp, which has been ongoing for 12 years. Postsecondary education has been my savior and has certainly helped me to better map my career pathway for the future.

With regard to my formal education, my grandparents did the right thing by withholding the language from me; it has made me determined to speak Cree fluently and lead in the way of how I can do this. However, not only am I determined, but I am also passionate about who I am as a *nēhiyaw* woman. Being an Indigenous woman under the Indian Act and an educator has had some challenges. An attitude of racism and discrimination towards me is embedded as I lead and take up the challenges in education such as language revitalization. I, and countless others who look like me, still continuously feel the effects of the Indian Act and its policies. It is not easy for women in the field of education. In both divisions in which I taught in Saskatoon, I see a minimal number of Indigenous principals and senior administrators. I feel and see a sense of superiority and inferiority that, as an Indigenous woman, allows me to work for the system but not along with or on par with the system. Being who I am and working for a public system of education is an ongoing and frustrating challenge. St. Denis (2011), a leading scholar on White privilege and antiracist education, stated that “the national politics of denial, resentment, and dismissal of Indigenous rights and sovereignty is also repeated in public schools and detrimentally impacts the work of Aboriginal Teachers” (p. 312). It is a struggle that involves making a space of my own and creating learning spaces for Indigenous students that are respectful and genuinely authentic with regard to Indigenous learning.

The Indian Act: An Interruption to Indigenous Ways of Knowing

As Indigenous peoples, our Treaty rights were included in how to respect each other as a Nation to a Nation, parallel within the Canadian Constitution, and long before the Canadian numbered Treaties. However, the language inherent within the Indian Act of 1876 consistently undermines our goal as First Nations to achieve sovereignty. The 1876 Indian Act was established under Canadian law, and the policies ruled every aspect of Indigenous life. The detrimental effect is especially obvious in their effects on the role of *nēhiyaw* women (this is not to minimize the impacts of men). The law keepers are the *nēhiyaw* women, but with the advent of the Indian Act, the status of women and the illegalization of *nēhiyaw* ceremonies had terrible consequences for parenting and the transfer of Indigenous knowledge (McAdam, 2015, p. 28).

Part of this knowledge has indeed obliterated the meaning of *onīkānēw*, “she who leads,” along with the warrior-women society. It also reveals “a sense of how initial colonial assumptions resulted in the drastic alteration of women’s influence and social systems in a

relatively short time” (Hanson, 2009, para. 3). As a consequence, the early settlers’ view of their own women has pushed women out of leadership roles:

For instance, many settlers held onto Victorian beliefs that women were delicate and ill-equipped for hard labor, and thus viewed Aboriginal women who worked the land as proof that Aboriginal men treated women as inferior, for they were doing the men’s work. The power and agency of Aboriginal women were invisible to them. (para. 10)

McAdam (2015) stated that, traditionally, women were:

gifted to carry the laws of the *nēhiyaw* nation, jurisdiction resided with the women, as well at the time of Treaty making, it was the *kihci okicitāw iskwēwak* who were stubborn, determined, courageous and so compassionate they could look far into the generations ahead to carry our people forward. (2:10)

From this position, as carriers of our people, Indigenous women are the leaders, responsible for looking after our children’s educational futures. As an Indigenous nation, the *nēhiyawak*, like so many other nations, are at odds with the federal government’s goals for education because women—Indigenous women—do not have a voice or the leverage to lead in Indigenous education. Castellano et al. (2000) stated, “Education is one of the most important issues in the struggle for self-government, and must contribute towards the object of self-government” (p. 15).

I Am Cree

nēhiyaw ōma niya “*nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw*. We are the *nēhiyaw*. The *nēhiyawak*. Exact body. Exact body of people. . . . Many people today know us as prairie Cree. We are part of the great Plains Cree nation. (Christensen, 2000, p. 3)

I am a Cree woman. I come from a great nation that has existed since the beginning of human existence. I am proud, I am strong, and I now remember who I am. I am whole. My eyes are open to the old practices of my grandparents; their brilliance and ingenuity have always helped me to move forward; to never break, to never break down, but to always adapt and persevere. Their strength is what makes me proud of my *nēhiyaw* life and identity. I know that I think differently, I know that I see differently, I know that I feel differently, and I know that I pray differently. Diversity makes me unique; it makes me feel alive and wondrous.

I know my place and sense of self come from the Earth. It is a large encompassing place where language and land meet, and it makes up my identity. I understand that language revitalization is a renewal process of waking up our children, youth, and students. I know that

language revitalization can come only from our people and recreate what was once in Indigenous knowing and being. It is a practice that we must all follow to achieve what our great-grandmothers' and great-grandfathers' visions the time of Treaties. I am *nēhiyaw* woman. I am taking my rightful place. I am learning to lead and that I shall lead.

Now, it is in my prayers and in the challenge that I have currently and for the future taken on, Indigenous children having a school to call their own that resembles language houses and comprises land-based teachings and curriculum infused with Indigenous thought from beginning to end and where Indigenous peoples can self-determine the kind of education that meets their goals and aspirations. It is also in my prayers that these learning spaces are filled with *nēhiyawak* children who are speaking their heritage language. My commitment is to ensure that these students will go on to high school and university with their language intact and never forgotten again. It is also my commitment that they will remember their place to stand tall and proud as *onīkānēwak!*

Hiy hiy.

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CHAPTER 5:
AT THE CONVERGENCE OF THEORY AND PRACTICE:
NOURISHING THE LEARNING SPIRITS OF
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS

Abstract

This chapter illuminates theory and the current practical considerations for Indigenous language teacher preparation within the context of K-12 schools and short-term immersive experiences. Centering Indigenous knowledge within schools and preparing Indigenous language teachers for second-language teaching is complicated. However, understanding this complexity has the potential to fuel passions and sustain teachers through challenging times. We explored methodology, curriculum, and the theory that guides the preparation of Indigenous teachers and the evaluation of student language learning. We also explored their new understandings and describe how they expanded their teaching repertoires as they engaged in teaching and learning with Indigenous language teachers.

CHAPTER 5:
AT THE CONVERGENCE OF THEORY AND PRACTICE:
NOURISHING THE LEARNING SPIRITS OF
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS¹²

Background in the Canadian Context

This is a very important year for Indigenous languages in Canada. Across the country we have seen new initiatives emerge as we prepare for the Official Languages Act. During the summer we all teach at the Canadian Indigenous Literacy and Languages Development Institute (CILLDI). In this article we illuminate theory and practical considerations for Indigenous-language teacher preparation within the context of K-12 schools and short-term immersive experiences. With Indigenous knowledge centered in schools, teacher preparation for second-language learning is complicated. However, understanding this complexity has the potential to fuel passions and sustain teachers through challenging times. In this article we explore methodology, curriculum, and the theory that guides us in the preparation of Indigenous teachers and the evaluation of student language learning. We explore our new understandings and how we have built our teaching repertoires. Although we are located in Alberta, we have had students over the past 20 years from across Western and Northern Canada (Blair et al., 2003; Blair et al., 2018). We are honoured to work in the territories of Treaties 6, 7, and 8.

Our teachers come to us in the summer to become better teachers. They are teaching children who are learning their language as a second language. Some of our teachers are second-language learners themselves and working very hard to reclaim their language. We talk about what is unique about that and what teachers need to do to ensure successful learning. We address some methodological and immersion possibilities and explain how we introduce them to teachers. We also talk about how we might measure student learning. We use the terms “assessment” and “evaluation” interchangeably, but we prefer the term “evaluation” because it contains the word “value.” It is important that we value what these children are learning. All of the authors of this article bring a depth of experience to these topics as teachers, language leaders, graduate students, and community members.

¹² Blair et al. (2021); 25% authorship by Belinda Daniels. Received permission to reuse from co-authors.

In Canada we have had intense discussions and some action on Indigenous languages policies (Blair et al., 2018). We have had the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' (1996) report and the National Task Force of 2005. We have experienced the grassroots Idle No More movement that has raised awareness of many issues and helped people to think about the roles and responsibilities of community in bringing home the language-revitalization efforts. Recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) released 94 "Calls to Action" pertaining to Indigenous language and what they mean for us. Currently in Canada, Indigenous Canadians—First Nations, Inuit, and Métis—are at a very exciting time in consulting with the federal government to design an official Indigenous languages act. We are eager to see what it will look like and what it will mean for all Indigenous languages and communities. Some of you might have attended the regional and national meetings this last spring and summer. It is an important time to reflect on what has transpired in the past, where we are now, and where we need to go in terms of teaching Indigenous languages and the knowledge systems embedded in them.

Some foundational work has been done around the world in this field in the past few decades. This morning our keynote speaker, Stephen Crowchild (2018), reminded us of one of Joshua Fishman's (1991, 1996, 2001) principles: the idea of ideological clarification, that in any language working group we need to agree: Why are we doing this? Why do languages matter? What do you lose when you lose your language? In one of my classes at CILLDI, I ask my students to do an exercise first as a reflective activity: What do you lose if you lose your language? Then they discuss it in groups and think about it, and in each case they come to value their language in new ways. Joshua Fishman's principles are reminders for us about what we need to include when we prepare our language teachers. We need to model good communicative language teaching and make sure that our students have ways to use authentic oral language texts and that they hear as much "talk" as possible. We demonstrate situations in which learners have to use their language as much as possible in each class every day. We also keep the work of Canadian scholar James Cummins (1984, 1990, 2005; Cummins et al., 2015) and his theory in mind, including two terms that he gave us over 20 years ago. The first is Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, which students learn early on. When they begin to introduce themselves, the skills that they learn include simple questions and directions such as, "Where's this and that?" "Sit down," "Stand up," and "Welcome"; and they introduce themselves to others. They need these skills to begin to make themselves understood and to get and give information.

However, we remind our teachers that they cannot stop at BICS; we need to make sure that we go on to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency in our classrooms. If our immersion programs are going to be successful, we need to reach this level of proficiency to enable young learners to learn through their new language in all subjects such as science or math in Cree, Dene, Sauteaux, Blackfoot, and so on. Teachers need to provide opportunities and levels of language to enable youths to learn content through their language and have the academic language to do that. This is what immersion is all about.

As CILLDI instructors, we work to increase awareness of the needs in the field of Indigenous-languages education and revitalization. We work with our students to teach them new teaching techniques, try immersion methods, and find creative evaluation or assessment tools. We ask them to explore what classrooms could be? How can we use immersion methods in all classrooms? We ask them to think about the uniqueness of second-language learners and be sensitive to their emotional well-being. We challenge our students to find new ways to take stock of the language learning in classrooms and assess the youths' language learning. Most important, we try to ensure that we employ Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge systems in a meaningful and authentic way.

kakiyosew's (Belinda's) Journey as a Second-Language Learner and Teacher

I have been teaching and instructing for 18 years. The majority of my work has focused on language revitalization. Immediately after I completed a Bachelor of Education degree, I was assigned to a second-language Cree classroom with no training or theory on language or literacy. The learning has been nonstop as I constantly research these two aspects. I am also learning my own language and becoming involved in issues with others who are thinking about and acting on language reclamation. Distinguishing the differences between language revitalization and reclamation has also been a part of the process.

I conducted my earlier research backwards. I worked through Western ideologies of thinking, but they did not make sense to me. Then I decided to go home—literally, to go home and figure out, Who am I? How do I learn this (as in language and identity), and then how do I teach others? Later, I came to realize that ceremony is critically important in teaching our languages, as is participation in various types of ceremony with regard to Indigenous learning and theorizing. Learning to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and methods is relevant to me because I am a *nēhiyaw*, part of a distinct nation: “We can decide for ourselves what research we

want and how that research will be conducted, analyzed and presented” (Wilson, 2008, p. 14). I now look within the Indigenous paradigm when I research language.

Language reclamation has a very different meaning to the Indigenous collective than it does to those who are not Indigenous. Our languages have a rhythm, a tone, intonation, a spirit that we need to constantly honour. “Language is believed to have a sacred spirit, and this spirit will leave if the language is not utilized. There is a spirituality embedded in the words, songs, prayers, and history” (McAdam, 2015, p. 25). All Indigenous people have this: songs, prayers, and the history of their lands.

Second-language learners, especially adults, deal with a significant amount of trauma, especially because of residential schools, but at the same time they are learning to face the pain:

It is very difficult for me to talk about my life because it was full of pain. Today I accept that pain. That pain has helped me grow mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. I am now learning my language and heritage, learning to love, to look at my family and community as the Great Spirit’s creations. I am learning to understand the pain and suffering of others without saying, “Don’t worry, it will go away.” I listen now. I hear and see.

(Charland, 1993, p. 34)

Regarding language acquisition, because of the DNA, the pain, the blood memory, and the dreams that we carry, because we are a collective people with a collective thinking, we suffer from a similar type of trauma. It is therefore important that education be trauma informed. Although I do not know the specifics of trauma-informed education, I do know that teachers need sensitivity training, they need to learn residential-school facts, and they need to become familiar with the Indian Act. All of the social injustices in relation to the treatment of Indigenous peoples of Canada are still roadblocks for new learners, and teachers need to be aware of them.

Second-Language Learning and Teaching for Indigenous Young Adults and Adults

The question will arise: How does one deal with people who are learning their language, which then can become emotional for them for a variety of reasons? It is important that we acknowledge this, be supportive, and know how to address it when it arises. More often than not, I have seen teachers at a standstill, as in the past when I was relearning who I was and the significance of language learning to me and how it is tied to land. The experience was both joyous and painful. To teach about language or learn language, being supportive has to be part of

the teacher training, because sometimes teachers do not know how to deal with someone who is in emotional pain triggered by language learning.

Meaningful communication is good teacher practice, and scaffolding the language is a remarkable learning tool in teaching a language; these practices result in optimal learning and long-term memory utilization. Because I am a second-language learner and because of my relationships with my teachers, it is evident to them in my face, my expression, my body language what am I missing and what I am struggling with; they can read me well. Effective teachers scaffold learning. Leading students from one concept to another is slow and patient work and requires gentleness. It is important not to jump over or move to swiftly the students' learning, because if they are constantly and consistently learning, they will not want to learn any more. It is therefore teachers' responsibility to be the best that they can as language revitalizationists.

Language learning and vocabulary acquisition will occur in stages and depend on the amount of practice, exposure, and vocabulary exercises. The reason that I say this is that something happened when I had been doing this work for a while. I was accumulating language, accumulating hours with vocabulary and phrases, all the while thinking, when am I going to get this? And then it actually happened! I was in a feast ceremony, and we were preparing for a round dance after we ate. An Elder began to talk to the crowd in the circle. I was standing on the edge of the circle, listening to him, and all of a sudden it happened. The Elder was talking and speaking in Cree and teaching us a lesson about why we do the things that we do and why it is important to listen and to eat food in this manner. I understood what he was saying, not word for word, but I was getting to the heart of the matter. I was focused and intrigued with his voice, the rhythm and intonation. I soon began to receive quick (two- or three-second) video images inside my head, and I thought, Oh, my God! I can understand what he is saying and what he is describing! It was amazing, and I had tears in my eyes. My brain also felt different (I had had an epiphany). I felt the sensation of a click in my brain, like a forward dial on a radio or a heating dial in a car, and I morphed to a Cree worldview. The clicking in my brain had never happened to me before and has not happened since.

My language learning has been remarkable. I began to watch video clips of other people conversing and speaking Cree and to dream in Cree. Small video scenarios played in my mind as

I listened to people speak Cree in public. I was finally learning to speak Cree, and I shivered. Battiste (1988) stated that,

languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and critical to the survival of the culture and political integrity of any people. Aboriginal languages provide a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of tribal knowledge. (p. x)

After a long, arduous journey of reclaiming language, I am connected.

Language learning occurs in stages, and it is important that second-language Indigenous learners document the process to inform others on what to look for and what will happen. Sylvia McAdam (2015) explained:

Language is critical in understanding the spiritual, verbal, emotional, and physical way of *nēhiyaw* being. It is also said language carries a vibration that connects it to the Creator's creations; thus, the singing and almost a humming sound while in prayer state. The vibration is a connection to all spiritual things, including the universe. (p. 63)

I did not understand until I began to work with Elders and felt the rhythm, especially in ceremony. I also want to point out that it is true that if we do not use the language, we lose it. I must constantly practice, converse, and be in the context. This makes a difference in learning to relearn Cree. My language is my lifelong journey.

Language and Land

I am also studying environmental anthropology and exploring lands in my home territory, where I come from, and the names of specific places. It is not possible to learn an Indigenous language thoroughly without recognizing that land is part of the learning process. My (late) grandparents had a connection to such sacred places and space, and because they had that connection, they taught me the significance of place in the original Cree names. This notion is also attached to becoming a land defender, which is another aspect that I have come to experience and understand.

Language is sacred, and I relate it to my research in finding me, defining me as a *nēhiyaw* person. It is a sacred act, a ceremony that connects my original being as a *nēhiyaw* to my mother tongue and simultaneously connects land and sovereignty. In learning with other second-language learners who are learning Cree or Dene, I have found a significant difference between Indigenous peoples who are reclaiming their language and non-Native people who are learning

an Indigenous language as an additional language. They do not have the same spiritual connections that we do, as I have learned from experience and through conversations and surveys. As a founder and coordinator of the annual *nēhiyawak* language camps over the last 14 years, both groups of learners have shared their feelings and experiences.

As *nēhiyawak* people, we believe that our languages are alive with a spirit, like the rivers, the sun, the mountains, and so on. The *nēhiyawak* have the story of syllabics, which explains that the writing system came from the spirit world. Calling Badger went to the Spirit World and brought back the written language. The symbols spoke to him while he was in the Creator's presence. In teaching this sacred story to students, it is important to help them to make an offering: to plan a smudge ceremony, a feast, a two- or three-day Fasting Ceremony, depending on the students' time, commitment, and willingness to sacrifice their time to give the language spirit an offering. This helps in connecting to *nēhiyaw* beliefs and identity.

Helping students to form relationships with the seen and unseen forces within our lives is what we call "Indigenous epistemology":

It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes an entire system of knowledge and relationships. These relationships are with the cosmos around us, as well as with concepts. . . . Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. (Wilson, 2008, p. 74)

Students in mainstream schools do not make these kinds of offerings. It is not part of common practice or embedded in curriculum or our everyday lives. Making these offerings is important in reclaiming and revitalizing language and relearning who we are.

Language: Second-Language Work: Recovery

I am still in recovery, as are so many of us. It is like healing from a traumatic brain injury suffered as a child. It has created emotional and psychological damage that is not evident until we actually participate in various language contexts. Past stories and memories arise, and beginning to form words in my head and making sounds come out of my mouth and off my tongue has been painful. At the beginning of my language-learning journey, I remembered the stories of my parents and (late) grandparents. I was emotional and cried for a long time when I began to speak Cree out loud—easy nuances such as *tānsi ētawiya*, Belinda *nitisiyihkāson*, Sturgeon Lake *ohci niya*. I found it difficult to say them, especially in public. I have carried a

burning tickle in my throat for a long time as a second-language learner. It is still there, and if it is still there after I have spoken Cree for 10-15 years, what is it like for other people? Although the tickle in my throat is still there, it has decreased to feel like a scar. So anyone who wants me to feel better, to feel safer, should offer Cree love: Cree words of love and encouragement. Offer to be a lifeline who makes me feel whole and complete as a *nēhiyaw*. It is important that teachers remember this for their students, for the young people who are learning how to speak their mother tongues.

In my studies, I have come to realize that much more investigation is needed with regard to second-language adult and young-adult Indigenous learners. Hardly any research literature exists in the area, even literature that addresses the fact that “more fundamentally, language loss and revitalization are human rights issues” (McCarty, 2003, p. 148). Wherever I go, I talk about that, and I try to share a fierceness as a collective people. As a nation we were never a conquered people; nor did we relinquish any inherent right to our nationhood. Our languages are part of the Constitution, but nobody talks about that. McCarty explained, “Through our mother tongue, we come to know, represent, name, and act upon the world. Humans do not naturally or easily relinquish this birthright. Rather, the loss of language reflects the exercise of power by the dominant” (p. 148). This is what has happened to us. How do we come out of it? How do we rise above this? We need to investigate further.

Norine Finds Language Teaching Methods That Work

kitatamiskātināwāw kahkiyaw, Norine Buffalo *nitisiyihkāson*, *maskwacisihk ohci niya*. I greet you all. My name is Norine Buffalo, and I am from Bear Hills. I have been working in the education system for 18 years. I have found my passion in teaching Cree, utilizing my basic understanding of Cree language and culture, along with Western-education methodologies. In preparation for my life I knew that I had to embrace education to make my livelihood easier for myself and my children. I also knew that I wanted to increase my knowledge of the Cree language and use it in my education, but I did not know how to start.

During my early years in education, I received certificates and diplomas in areas pertaining to education, but I was not fully certified to teach in a regular classroom. I thought about furthering my education to qualify as a fully certified teacher. I received my Bachelor of Education degree in the spring of 2003 from the University of Alberta. During the winter of 2005, I met Dr. Heather Blair at my place of work in the elementary school on the Ermineskin

Cree Nation. She was there to promote the CILLDI program, and she was convincing enough that I asked a co-worker to attend CILLDI with me that summer. I attended the CILLDI Summer Institute for five summers and received the Community Linguistic Certificate in 2009. I then took the core courses in Indigenous languages teaching and assessment that we have discussed. I graduated in 2017 with my master's degree from the University of Alberta, and for the past two summers I have taught at CILLDI. I will continue to return to the institute because it rejuvenates my spirit each time I attend.

Changing My Teaching

During my teaching career I struggled with utilizing the Western ideals of teaching the Cree language by using a second-language approach. An approach to teaching language that I learned is to use list words. However, the words that I used to teach were not effective unless I used them in context. Making a list of words changed the Cree word when I used it in context, which did not follow my created lesson-plan format. I therefore struggled to teach fluency because my lesson-plan format was not appropriate to the Cree language, and I needed to change my teaching. I stepped back to analyze my teaching style. I envisioned *nohkōmipan*, my late grandmother, Nancy Cabry, talking Cree fluently; and I understood everything that she said. I also remember listening to advice that *nimosōmipan*, my late grandfather, John Cabry, offered me: “*nōsim, ahkamēyimoh, kīsi kiskinwahamākosi, wāhyaw kētohtahikon, māka, kāya waniskisi kinēhiyawēyiwinaw, ēyikoh ka-kīwēhtahikon*” [“My grandchild, don’t give up; keep trying. Go finish school. It’s going to help you here, but don’t forget our language and our culture that’s going to take you home”]. As a child I understood everything, but not to the fullest extent. Not until I became a parent did I fully understand his advice.

I realized that I was so busy trying to cover the Alberta curriculum that I was not utilizing what I knew about the fluency of Cree language and culture, which encompasses the mind and heart and creates spirituality and identity. I therefore created my own resources to use in my Cree language classes, such as stories, nursery rhymes, and songs. It took me a few years to fully formulate my planning to my liking, and I immersed my students in the language from the moment that they entered my room until the moment that they went out the door. This sample lesson demonstrates my style of teaching.

Grade(s): K4 & K5; Time: 30 minutes

Student activities: Singing songs: “*awīna kiya*” *ēkwa nawayoh kāpawihk*”; coloring map

Student materials: Maskwacis map and crayons

Teacher resources: Flashcards, display posters, smartboard

Teacher to students about translations: When new vocabulary is introduced, it is translated for only a couple of classes

Daily vocabulary: *waciyē, tatawāw, pihtikwēk, apihk, nitohtamok, kinistohtēnawāw, ōtē pētāpik kahkiyaw*

- Students had to ask in Cree to get a drink of water and use the washroom.
- Water phrase: *okiskinwahamākēw ē-nohtē āpākweyān nakitaw minikwān cī nipīy*
- Washroom phrase for girls: *okiskinwahamākēw ē-nohtē nahapiyān*
- Washroom phrase for boys: *okiskinwahamākēw ē-nohtē wayawīstamāsoyān*

This week's theme: *maskwaciyiniw*: Person of Bear Hills

Methods: Cree greetings, commands, and oral presentation and flashcards

Greet students at the door with a handshake and say “*waciyē, tatawāw, pihtikwēk, apik.*” Last student told to shut the door: “*kipaha iskwahtēm.*”

Students know that they should sit on the rug in a circle.

Daily routine: 5 minutes

- Take attendance and ask “John, *cī ōta ayāw*”; students to respond “*ōta*” when called upon by name and to respond “*namōya ōta ayāw*” when students are not present
- Sing *kā-kanātahk* (O Canada), say the Child's Prayer, and review the syllabic sound system using the syllabic chart

Identity song: 5 minutes

Singing: *awīna kiya, awīna kiya, tānsi ēsīkāsoyin, awīna kiya*: Who are you? What is your name?

Student response: *niya nēhiyaw awāsis name nitisiyihkkāson*: I am a Cree child. My name is

....

Greetings: 6 minutes

Pairs activity and teacher demonstrates

1 - *tānsi* 2 - *namōya nāntaw, kiya māka*

1- *pēyakwan* 2 - *miywāsin ēsa*

1 - *tāpwē māka*

In pairs, students practice greetings and then find new partners.

Introduce this week's Cree words: 6 minutes

Move to smartboard.

- Show students the maskwacisihk map and ask, “Who knows what this is? What do you know about the map?” Class discussion of the four reserves of maskwacisihk, *nipisihkopahk*—Samson, *nēyaskweyahk*—Ermineskin, *akāmihk*—Montana, *kispatinahk*—Louis Bull. maskwacisihk ochi niya: I am from Bear Hills.
- Practice saying the names of the four reserves and the phrase.
- Ask students in Cree “*tānitē kīwēkin*”: “Where do you live?” Help students respond correctly by demonstrating their answer, “*nipisihkopahk niwīkin*,” or whichever reserve they live on. In pairs students ask each of the questions and then find new partners.

Circle time: 5 minutes

Songs and actions:

- Break down the song for students to understand Cree words for *kiya*—me, *nēhiyaw*—Cree person, *awāsis(ak)*—child(ren), *niyanān*—us, *wiya*—him/her:
nēhiyaw awāsis niya, nēhiyaw awāsis niya, nēhiyaw awāsis niya maskwacis ohci
nēhiyaw awāsis kiya, nēhiyaw awāsis kiya, nēhiyaw awāsis kiya maskwacis ohci
nēhiyaw awāsis wiya, nēhiyaw awāsis wiya, nēhiyaw awāsis wiya maskwacis ohci
nēhiyaw awāsisak niyanān, nēhiyaw awāsisak niyanān, nēhiyaw awāsisak
niyanān
maskwacis ohci

Line up routine: 3 minutes

- Teacher says “*nawayoh kapawihk awāsisak*” to students to all line up and sing the song, “*nawayoh kapawihk, nawayoh kapawihk, nawayoh kapawihitan*,” and exchange of the word *mwēstas*—later between teacher and students.
- Teacher sings and waves as students leave the classroom: “*wāpahki ka wāpamitin, wāpahki ka-wāpamitin, wāpahki ka-wāpamitin, kīwēk!, kīwēk!, kīwēk!*”—“I will see you tomorrow (3), go home (3).”

I found that, with my teaching strategies geared to developing my students’ fluency, they began to comprehend the Cree language easily. With the daily lessons, it became easier to introduce and add activities such as coloring or writing. I was repetitive in teaching the Cree

language and used the same lesson for a week and sometimes for two weeks. I drew on what I was learning in my graduate work. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory gave me ideas and confidence in what I was doing. His well-documented statement "Play creates a zone of proximal development in the child" (p. 102) reminds educators that, through play, children are able to reach past themselves.

I received positive feedback from teachers on my students' singing of Cree songs in class, as well as parents' comments that they were proud of their children at home. The children had no opportunity to be disruptive because the strategies kept them active and engaged throughout the allotted time. Their attendance was exceptional.

Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS®)

In my capacity as a resource and curriculum developer for the nipisihkopahk Education Authority, I attended professional development workshops to enhance my expertise to be able to do my job. In a workshop that I attended at Blue Quills University in January of 2016, I was introduced to Blaine Ray's (TPRS Books, 2018) Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS®) method. Although I was skeptical at first, as the day wore on, I realized that this method, even with its list of words, was actually working. I was surprised and pleased to find that the procedure and format are written simply and are adaptable to any language. The following illustration and explanations are from the TPRS Books website.

TPRS® is a living foreign language teaching method that stands for Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. It began as a teaching strategy created by a Spanish teacher, Blaine Ray, in the late 1980s. It is based on the idea that the brain needs an enormous amount of Comprehensible Input in the language. TPRS® focuses on the use of the most commonly-used words and phrases and uses them in stories, conversations, and other activities so that everything that is talked about in the language is understood by the students. The main goal in classrooms is to utilize comprehensible input in order to help our students become proficient in understanding, reading, writing and eventually speaking their new language. (What Is TPRS®? section, para. 1)

Through the years thousands of teachers have contributed to the evolution of TPRS®. It is based on the idea that the brain needs to hear many things that make sense to teachers in the language. It makes sense because we expect a great deal from our students, and we correct them—"You have to say this word like this. This is how you do it"—but we have not given them

time to become immersed and hear a good deal of language. We are taught in Western society to teach using this kind of correction, but we need to take a step back and examine how we learn. I have adapted this to Cree; the following is an example:

TPRS® has three procedures. The teacher says the following:

1. Procedure 1: “When I make a statement, you will respond with an expression of interest. It sounds like this: “aahhhhhhhh tāpwe.” We give the students a visual cue to remind them to respond with an expression of interest. Teachers can use the visual cue of raising the hands. When something negative happens, we react in a negative way. We might say, “Oh no; oh no; that’s terrible!” and ask the students to do the same. The Cree words for a negative response are *wacistakāc*, *wahwāh*.
2. Procedure 2: “When I ask a question and you know the answer, your job is to answer out loud and in the target language.” This is a key procedure in the TPRS® class. The primary purpose of asking questions is to encourage the students to respond chorally. Their response to our questions is evidence that they understand.
3. Procedure 3: “When I ask a question and you do not know the answer, your job is to guess.” The student rules for guessing are as follows:
 - “You must guess in the target language.”
 - “You can guess, though, with English proper nouns if the question allows for a proper noun.”
 - “When you guess, surprise me. If you don’t surprise me, I will surprise you.”

TPRS® Format:

1. Positive statement
2. Question with a yes answer (verify)
3. Either/or questions (verify)
4. Question with a no answer
5. Restate the negative and restate the positive
6. Who question (verify)
7. What? Where? When? How? Why? How much? etc. (Use the one that fits; verify)
8. Positive statement

Circling is a method of asking repetitive questions when students do not understand the vocabulary that the teacher is teaching. Reviewing the format increases students’ understanding

of oral language and builds their confidence. Students act out the story. For younger children, teachers can use pictures with sentences. Color coding is important so that the students know when to respond. Once students master their understanding of the TPRS® structure, mapping becomes an essential part of the planning. Basic lessons help them to expand their vocabulary and enhances their contextual knowledge of the language.

This also involves characters, names, likes/dislikes, places in the community, and activities in which the students are interested. Teachers can change them to suit their teaching. They can use word lists, but in longer sentences or units of meaning in the language. I have found that this method is very effective and have used it with children, adults, and non-Native teachers. A schoolwide initiative required that our non-Native staff also learn Cree, and I wondered, How will I teach the *mōniyāw*? I used this method, and it worked well. When I left the school they asked me, “Can you come back? We love the way you teach; it is so easy—such an easy method to learn.”

In July 2016 we hosted a TPRS® workshop in maskwacisihk at the nipisihkopahk Education Authority Administration building and invited language teachers from the surrounding areas. Blaine Ray attended the four-day workshop. It was very intense for some, but I enjoyed the opportunity to enhance what I had learned in January. By the end of the fourth day I felt comfortable enough to teach a lesson and demonstrate what I had learned.

In the course EDEL 461/595, Second Language Acquisition: Teaching Indigenous Languages in an Immersion Context, which I teach at the University of Alberta, I use the TPRS® format as one method. I use a template that follows the procedures above and can be easily adapted for any First Nations language. I encourage all Indigenous languages teachers to view the website or attend workshops near them. This format helps teachers to develop lessons over time and expand their vocabulary. The end result is a story in the Cree language. The lessons can last to two weeks and possibly longer, depending upon the vocabulary.

My Work Transitions to Education Administration

In January 2017, I transferred to the nipisihkopahk elementary school as the vice principal, and I was responsible for integrating the cultural component into the school. Within a matter of days I noticed that the students in Grades 4 to 6 were overactive. I knew that something was missing from the Cree language program and implemented a weekly Rites of Passage program on Thursdays. The program taught the students their roles and responsibilities within

our Cree community of maskwacisihk. The teachings of cultural values intertwine our understanding and the purpose of life here on Mother Earth. We must connect our spirits with our identity to preserve the Cree language and culture. The program was a success, partly because of the Elders in the community who are knowledgeable about culture and language. We drew on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) to remind us where we had been and where we were going:

Historically, Aboriginal people throughout North America lived in successful and dynamic societies. These societies had their own languages, history, cultures, spirituality, technologies, and values. The security and survival of these societies depended on passing on this cultural legacy from one generation to the next. Aboriginal peoples did this successfully through seamless mixture of teachings, ceremonies, and daily activities. While differing in specifics from one people to another, traditional Aboriginal teachings described a coherent, interconnected world. Not only did they account for the creation of human beings, animals, and the physical world, they described the role that supernatural beings—often shape-changing tricksters with the power to do good or harm—played in shaping the relationship among humans, animals, and the landscape. There was no rigid separation of daily secular life and spiritual life. For example, in some cultures, animals were said to give themselves as gifts to hunter. To be worthy of receiving the gift, the hunter had to participate in a ceremony prior to and after the hunt. (pp. 7-8)

I acknowledge that, as *nēhiyaw*, I am more connected to the students with whom I engage daily because of my understanding of and belief in my identity and spirituality and where I fit into this complex world. All of my life experiences, whether positive or negative, have contributed to my educational journey.

Velvalee Finds Ways to Help Teachers to Measure and Report Learning Success

Over the last three years I have had an opportunity to teach a course titled Assessment in Indigenous Language Classrooms at the University of Alberta. Some of the main difficulties that Indigenous language teachers express emerge from their past personal experiences with evaluation in schools, as well as the tension between Indigenous ways of being in the community and the expectations of the education system. Indigenous language teachers feel apprehensive

about grading and reporting to parents. They raise issues of validity and reliability, whether the teachers make the assessment instruments themselves or take them from other sources. Furthermore, Indigenous language teachers struggle with assessment because of the focus on developing speakers, whereas written forms of Indigenous language are secondary. Teachers sometimes express discomfort with the writing systems because they have not learned the writing system or because the community in which they are teaching has not accepted a standard form of writing. Moreover, oral assessments in schools are cumbersome because they are constrained by time and the large numbers of students. Finally, some Indigenous language teachers have expressed tension with values: Traditional values teach us to be a certain way in the world, and some communities highly value humility. Elevating themselves above others and imposing grades on students' progress has real implications for teachers when they live in the community.

These expressed concerns drive my desire to help teachers to shift Indigenous language teachers' notions of grading from valuing to indicators that demonstrate growth. Assessment broadly conceived in this context promotes a continuum of ways to describe growth. Encouraging children to take responsibility for describing growth or learning helps them to develop the skills necessary to become lifelong Indigenous language learners. My intention is to try to make this process visible to listeners and readers.

I begin my classes by asking the students, Indigenous language teachers, to explore how they learned or are learning a second language, mainly by considering past personal learning processes against the backdrop of their present practices. Some questions to guide the discussion include, "How will you know as a teacher that your efforts are resulting in Indigenous language acquisition?" "What do you see, hear, feel?" "How do you share this evidence or progress with your students, parents, and administrators?" The purpose of this discussion is to help teachers to understand that they share common concerns and that assessing themselves is integral to what Elder Ken Goodwill (as cited in Goulet & Goulet, 2014) from Standing Buffalo First Nation stated is the purpose of education: "to help students recognize who they are, to see their gifts, talents, and strengths, and recognize the responsibilities that accompanies these gifts, so they can survive, thrive and contribute as they navigate through both the broader world and Indigenous cultures" (p. 5).

Many of the teachers do not think about assessment as a separate aspect of classroom practice. Perhaps this is what I am attempting to make visible, drawing it into focus or even separating it from the whole. What I mean is that teachers are always assessing their students. They are always asking themselves, “What are the students saying? How are they feeling? What am I seeing?” Rarely, however, do they involve students themselves in the process. Thus teachers are doing all of this thinking and observing as they are teaching, which informs their next steps. Yet this process remains invisible to students. Shifting Indigenous language teachers’ gaze inward to enable them to see themselves as Indigenous language learners helps them to understand that they are assessing their own progress and that they need to develop this capacity in their students. Simply guiding learners to question and think about what they learned today compared to what they knew yesterday encourages ongoing learning. Highlighting for teachers the power of self-assessment helps them to become more reflective on progress and aligns more favourably with the value of ongoing learning that is encouraged in Indigenous communities (Canadian Council of Learning, 2007, p. 5).

Another important aspect of our early discussions is the differences in the way that we learn Indigenous languages today compared to in the past. In the past we learned language in small groups, in families, and in smaller contexts with multi-aged peers over extended periods of time. Today we have one teacher; we instruct classes of approximately 20 same-age students in the confines of a school and usually meet periodically for brief periods of time. Contextualizing this learning space and comparing it to expectations for other second-language instruction helps teachers to address the expectations to produce fluent speakers. Moreover, it reinforces for teachers how integral parents and community are in supporting children’s language development.

We also consider how context informs feedback and the purposes of learning. The current teaching context reduces the quality and timing of feedback from students compared to in the past. The type of feedback that teachers provide today is rarely personalized because they are speaking to a large group of students in a classroom, and they often deliver feedback after some time has passed. Context also shifts the purposes of learning an Indigenous language. In the past, learning an Indigenous language was tied to communicating effectively with the people around students, whereas today learning an Indigenous language is tied to grades. These changes have shifted the focus of learning Indigenous languages for a lifetime in community to learning a

language for reasons such as cultural pride and making connections, both abstractions in the minds of elementary school students.

When an Indigenous language teacher makes visible to students the next steps for learning, they are creating targets. As students work toward stated targets, learning behaviours become clear. It is impossible to evaluate everything; however, teachers in classrooms should clearly articulate for their students, “At the end of this lesson [or at the end of this 30 minutes], this is what I would like to see.” Students can talk about their learning, they can help one another, and they can assess how well they did. Not only are the targets clear, but they are also locally determined according to the needs of the students, from within rather than outside the community, which is one of the concerns that researchers have often cited in the literature (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Moreover, clearly established targets have the potential to draw parents, the community, and administrators into learning Indigenous languages as well.

Encouraging individual teachers to become part of a larger Indigenous language teacher group facilitates greater reflection on practice and increases confidence. One teacher is commonly responsible for all Indigenous language programming in a school. Consequently, drawing on the experience of others helps teachers to expand their repertoire of teaching practices while giving them opportunities for comparison. Of course, in these discussions teachers must also consider factors such as how much an Indigenous language is used in the community and how much support is available. However, when common practices exist, learning targets can be articulated over longer ranges of time to facilitate or ground the development of benchmarks.

Using Benchmarks in the Indigenous Language Classroom

Benchmarks can serve as specific indicators for specific communities and used to report progress. Teacher sometimes express a great deal of surprise at how much Indigenous language their students actually know when they join collectives, or they decide to adjust their targets because they feel that something else is worthier of focus. Opportunities to collaborate and clarify process help teachers, like students, to become more confident about their intentions and enable them to obtain the help that they need to get there.

To illustrate this process, I often share an experience I had with a group of Indigenous language teachers. One of the common practices we found that was occurring in most Indigenous language classrooms was based on an adaptation of the game *Simon Says*. Instead of Simon, the

teachers were substituting names of grandparents or relatives, and it certainly was not something new. They were using the game *Simon Says* to teach students to respond to and voice action words such as “stand up,” “sit down,” and so on. This game became a regular part of the class, and the students took on the role of leaders of small groups. As their confidence grew, they began to add two- and three-step commands to their repertoire of actions. Instead of “Simon says, ‘Turn around,’” they would say, “Simon says, ‘Turn around and touch your toes.’” The teacher did not ask the students to do this; they expanded on their own, and that became part of the whole- and small-group classwork. This example also illustrates that language can be taken out into the community and that children can teach and learn from their parents and peers and have fun doing it. Initially, students were given the responsibility to track the commands that they could comprehend and then execute; however, as the commands grew in complexity, this type of tracking became cumbersome.

Another method of using collective means to support the creation of benchmarks is to use the same texts. Whether it is one familiar picture or a sequence of photos of a familiar process, such as picking berries or medicine or a wordless picture book, teachers can collect language samples using audio or video recordings. They can then use these language samples to create a rubric or continuum of stages to demonstrate Indigenous language development over time or across grades. Students and teachers alike can use these benchmarks to assess Indigenous language development, particularly during the middle and senior years.

Making learning targets visible involves negotiating criteria that lend themselves well to building rubrics. When students understand the criteria, they are more likely to focus their learning. Perhaps the teacher is simply trying to move the students beyond one-word utterances. This means developing a rubric in which the criterion, a one-word utterance, is the lowest level of performance. When teachers negotiate these criteria, students help to shape the language that they use to illustrate performance, and they will understand excellence more fully. To make criteria accessible to learners, teachers can illustrate through drawings, photographs, or video. Written rubrics have proven problematic to teachers because they are often overly simplistic or rely too heavily on the English language. Because this process takes a great deal of time and effort, teachers need to engage students in the process and make certain that the criteria are enduring and meaningful. Using pictures and symbols to create one-, two-, three-, and four-level exemplars in different contexts, such as at home, at school, or in the community, or on different

topics, helps to avoid overreliance on English text. Rubrics lend themselves to communication with others, including parents and administrators.

Using Feedback in the Indigenous Language Classroom

Important and necessary in learning an Indigenous language are giving and using feedback and finding opportunities for students to practice and reflect. Unfortunately, this is always the most difficult part of my course, because teachers find themselves swimming against currents of resistance. Using time to practice in private, whether with a mirror or a recorder, and in small, safe groups, and finding ways for students to make the language their own before speaking in public is difficult. Teachers must model gentle and encouraging feedback and acknowledge all efforts to use the language. They must judge the quality of the feedback according to how well the words build a climate of trust and a space in which all children are encouraged to sound their Indigenous language voices. Many of the values that our traditions and Elders have promoted help us to build that climate of trust. However, we are also working against 150 years of colonization, which is often the root of resistance. Assessment can help us to reinforce and expand traditional teachings by helping one another and growing in good relations with one another, with the language, with everything around us. Goulet and Goulet (2014) expanded on this notion in the Cree language:

The idea of individuality within an interactive concept such as the helping relationship is exemplified by weechihisowin (helping oneself/themselves). weechi can be used by itself as a command, but when combined with the medial stem -iso, as in weechihisowin, it becomes a generic term that includes both the individual (helping oneself) and the self-help group who help themselves. (pp. 60-61)

The real strength of assessment lies in developing students who take language learning to heart. They monitor their own progress, help and learn from one another, and set their own goals now and into the future. If we continue to frame assessment in this way, year after year, we will develop the capacity of our students to assess themselves and get closer to the goal of self-determination. Well-known scholar Gregory Cajete (2016) stated:

Indigenous teaching focuses as much on “learning with the heart” as it does on “learning with the mind.” It also facilitates learning to see who one really is rather than the image of self-manufactured by one’s ego or by the ego of another. This real perception of self

helps the student realize that he or she is essentially responsible for any barriers to his or her learning. (p. xiii)

Understanding that we as individuals, teachers, and students have a major role to play in learning Indigenous languages shifts the burden of responsibility from just the teacher to everyone. This approach helps teachers to reach out to others, to realize that they are only one small part of a greater whole and that reporting progress can be a positive and affirming process.

Summary

In this paper we have addressed theory and the practical considerations in examining Indigenous language teacher preparation within the context of K-12 schools and immersive experiences. We have talked about personal experiences with language reclamation and teaching second-language learners. We have included assessment practices that have the potential to inspire and sustain Indigenous language learners for life. We are all convinced that the most promising practices are immersion experiences, whether during outings on the land, in daily lessons, or during whole days. The task ahead in this country is to pay attention to revitalization efforts for all ages and to ensure quality teacher preparation. No one size fits all, and each community and language group will have to assess its own human resources and prioritize. Leadership at the local level is very important as we approach this new federal legislation. Let's join together and support each other in this reclamation movement. *Hiy wee chi!*

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CHAPTER 6:
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND APPLIED
LINGUISTICS: CONCEPTUALIZING AN ETHICAL SPACE
OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC FIELDS

Abstract

The focus in this co-authored conceptualized paper is on creating an ethical space in which to value and teach Indigenous languages and to help Indigenous peoples to lead in this field of language revitalization. Indigenous peoples are the key knowledge holders of language and land and are therefore researchers in their own way and in their own right. Writing as a language revitalizer, I, Belinda Daniels, and an applied linguist, Andrea Sterzuk, inquired into how our research fields, bodies of knowledge, and ways of knowing can complement one another and intersect to create richer interdisciplinary knowledge.

CHAPTER 6:
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND APPLIED
LINGUISTICS: CONCEPTUALIZING AN ETHICAL SPACE
OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC FIELDS¹³

If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence and create different futurities. If we want to live in a different present, we have to center Indigeneity and allow it to change us. (Simpson, 2017, p. 20)

This symposium provides space for critical discussion of the relationship between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics. Our experiences in conducting Indigenous language revitalization research together and listening to a recent University of Victoria podcast that featured Onowa McIvor, *nēhiyaw* scholar and recognized expert in the field of Indigenous language revitalization sparked our interest in this topic. In this podcast, McIvor (2018) explained that Indigenous language revitalization developed largely through the grassroots initiatives of Indigenous language activists and communities. These grassroots initiatives are important because Indigenous language revitalization plays a role “in maintaining Indigenous people’s distinct cultural identity against a long and continuing history of political subjugation” (Greymorning, 2019, p. 13). Indigenous language revitalization comes from community, from people who are still engaged, connected, and practice lifelong learning on homelands.

McIvor (2018) also explained that Indigenous language revitalization has developed mostly in isolation from second or additional language education, areas typically associated with applied linguistics. The boundaries of applied linguistics are fuzzy, even for those who work within this field; but most would probably recognize the following areas as connected to applied linguistics research and teaching: language learning and teaching, bilingual and multilingual education, literacy in schools and other places, language planning and policy, forensic linguistics, translation and interpreting, assessment and testing, technology and language, and language for specific purposes (Chappelle, 2013). In terms of the relationship between

¹³ Daniels and Sterzuk (submitted for publication); 50% authorship by Belinda Daniels. Received permission to reuse from co-author.

Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics, Leanne Hinton (2011) contended that that these connections could be stronger. She explained that researchers from other fields have typically worked more closely with Indigenous language revitalization initiatives but highlighted the reasons that those working in applied linguistics could be of service to Indigenous language revitalization:

In general, outside experts who work with communities on language revitalization are documentary linguists, theoretical linguists, and linguistic anthropologists who do not have an educational background in language teaching and learning. These experts know a great deal about the structure of the languages and are especially helpful in the provision of recorded and written data, and in the development of reference materials—reference dictionaries and grammars, for example. . . . But the guidance of experts in language and teaching methods and models could be of great assistance in language revitalization.
(p. 317)

Indigenous communities, families, and individuals are creating new and unique strategies to reclaim their languages. Because of their expertise in language teaching theory and methodology, Hinton (2011) concluded that applied linguists can contribute to Indigenous language revitalization in meaningful ways by helping with research on the effectiveness of these new models.

Although there is nothing inherently problematic with separately operating academic fields, we begin with the assumption that there is value in examining the possible reasons for this separateness (Sarkar, 2017), the mutually beneficial reasons that these fields are in closer conversation, and the types of changes necessary to create an ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). We also take the position that the two fields are currently disconnected from one another, in part because of the issues of settler dominance. From this perspective, this symposium represents a kind of entering into a dialogue between the two fields and between Indigenous and settler academics. Living a different present, one in which Indigenous languages are once again languages of community interaction, will require great effort and must continue to be led by Indigenous communities and scholars. Yet strategic efforts from Indigenous language revitalization in aligning with allies in all fields of interdisciplinary academia, including applied linguistics, can create new, emerging pathways. We will have to be courageous in trying something different. If the field of applied linguistics is to play an ethical role as an academic

community, we will have to “center Indigeneity and allow it to change” (Simpson, 2017, p. 20) the interactions between the fields of Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics. The primary goal in this paper, then, is to share our experiences and to offer our thinking on the kinds of parameters that we need if we as scholars are going to engage in the ethical space between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics.

Situating Ourselves

We write from distinct positions. Belinda is a *nēhiyaw* woman who works in language resurgence, and Andrea is a White settler woman who researches and teaches about a range of language issues that stem from settler-colonialism. In this section we engage the protocol of introducing and situating “self,” which is key to our research. In providing these details, we are claiming and declaring our genealogy, ancestry, and positions as researchers and authors. Belinda’s purpose is to locate herself first as a *nēhiyaw* person and then as a researcher. In doing so, she is also identifying, defining, and describing the elements of Indigenist research (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 204). Andrea’s purpose is to locate herself as a White settler and consider how that identity positions her in relation to Indigenous languages and Indigenous language revitalization. Here, we necessarily shift from our collective voice to introduce ourselves in our individual voices, beginning with Belinda.

My name is Belinda (*kakiyosēw*) Daniels. I am the oldest daughter of my mother (late) Eunice Daniels and father John Ermine. My father is *nēhiyaw* from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan. My (late) mother was Eunice Daniels, eldest daughter of Vital Daniels and Mary (Halket) Daniels. I was raised by my maternal grandparents. My grandfather’s parents were Roger Daniels (Sturgeon Lake) and Marie Lavallee (Lake Lavallee, Saskatchewan). Roger’s parents were *pē-miyo maskwa* (Old Dan) of Whitefish First Nation and *nay-tow-wan-how* (Alice) of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Marie Lavallee’s parents were Louis Lavallee (1863-1935) of Waskesiu, Saskatchewan, and *mēy-ahimi-wi-shēwē* (Margurite/Maggie) Bird of Montreal Lake, Saskatchewan. All had ties to vast areas of land stretching from Prince Albert to Lac la Ronge.

My maternal grandmother’s parents were George Halket of Little Red First Nations and Caroline Ballyntyne of Montreal Lake. Caroline’s parents were Albert Ballyntyne and Maggie Anderson of Montreal Lake. Maggie’s parents were *ōmasis* and *miyo astēw* from the Montreal Lake area. George’s parents were Isiah Halket and Ruby (original name not known). Isiah Halket came from La Pas, Manitoba. The lands sustained my grandmother’s parents’ lives. My father’s

parents were Marth (Moosehunter) and Gilbert Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Martha's parents were Colin Moosehunter and Selina Daniels (who passed away at a very young age). Colin then married Louisa Daniels (my grandfather Vital's sister).

I am a *nēhiyaw* woman, carrier of family history, language keeper, and storyteller. My ties to land are vast, from *kistapinānihk* (Prince Albert) to Lac la Ronge, Saskatchewan, and into The Pas, Manitoba. I am a mother, grandmother, auntie, sister, and wife and have many relationships that are tied to responsibilities and duty in maintaining our *nēhiyaw* nationhood. My formal credentials state that I am an educator; I hold a master's degree in education; and, at the time of writing, I am a doctoral candidate in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Saskatchewan. I have extended professional experiences from teaching kindergarten to university-level undergraduate classes, program development, program planning, curriculum writing, academic writing, academic research, and not-for-profit leadership in the area of language reclamation, work that is not governmentally or institutionally controlled or on someone else's agenda. This leadership arose in the not-for-profit sector because I do not see language revitalization supported yet in academia; nor do I see any new and emerging speakers graduating from the school systems. We urgently need to do and address something appropriate and effective.

Now we turn to Andrea. My name is Andrea Sterzuk. I am a White settler Canadian with ancestry in multiple European countries, including Luxemburg, England, Scotland, Ukraine, Germany, and the Netherlands. Three of my grandparents came to Saskatchewan from Europe between 1901 and 1925, a time when immigration policy was designed to encourage Western Canadian settlement by Europeans (Knowles, 2016; Taylor, 1991). On my maternal grandmother's side, my first ancestor landed in New Netherland in 1634. Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 allowed my family to take homesteads in Saskatchewan and for Saskatchewan towns and cities to be built. The promise of 160 acres of free land attracted all of my family members who came to Saskatchewan. My mother, Patricia, grew up on a farm in southern Saskatchewan. Her grandfather and his eldest sons received six homesteads near Peebles, Saskatchewan, when they came to Canada. My father, Donald, grew up on a farm near the Manitoba border. His Ukrainian community was part of the ethnic blocks of settlement that the provincial government of the time encouraged. After high school, in the 1960s, my dad moved to Saskatoon for Teachers' College and became a high school math teacher. During his career, he taught in five different small

towns, and my family moved with him. I grew up in two small towns, one located in Treaty 6 territory and one very close to the line that separates Treaty 4 and 6.

Like my father (and maternal grandmother, aunts, and older sister), I became a teacher. I entered to my teacher-education program in the early 1990s. It was a time when official bilingualism initiatives were heavily resourced. Because of this priority, I was recruited to a French immersion teacher-education program despite my inability to speak or understand French. My professional interest in second-language education, as well as my personal interest in learning languages, began with this intensive language-learning experience. Over the past almost three decades, I have continued to work in second-language education in a range of programs in multiple education jurisdictions. Along the way, I also learned Spanish and completed master's and doctoral programs in second-language education. Since 2007 I have been a professor at the University of Regina, teaching in the area of second-language education as well as multilingualism in schools.

Since 2013, I have also been slowly learning *nēhiyawêwin*. Through this more recent language-learning experience, I have developed professional and personal relationships with Indigenous language activists in the province. I am keenly aware that my family's presence in Saskatchewan has contributed to the reasons behind the need for Indigenous language revitalization. I have a professional and ethical responsibility to support this work when I am asked.

***mâmawi-kiyokêwak*: Our Approach to Knowledge Sharing**

As we began to work on this paper, we engaged in familiar academic activities such as reading related academic literature and examining our relevant research data, but we also recognized that we could be open to knowledge sharing in other ways. In our approach to writing, we too have set our own parameters for working together, including taking time to travel to work together and using humour, visiting, and eating meals together to strengthen our relationship. Our approach to this work is connected to Indigenous ways of understanding the world. To devise an approach that centers Indigeneity, we drew on some recent theoretical work by Métis art scholar Sherry Farrell Racette and the knowledge-sharing practices of Belinda's childhood experiences.

As a child, Belinda accompanied her grandparents everywhere. They took her along when they went visiting, and she listened to the conversations over sandwiches and tea.

Sometimes when the weather was hot, conversations took place outside and on the ground. These visits were times of sharing stories, relationship building, and learning for Belinda. There was never a “rush” to visit; nor was anyone in a hurry. Sherry Farrell Racette (2018) might conceptualize this approach as Kitchen Table Theory. In recent academic and community presentations, Farrell Racette described this practice as an approach to learning “through sharing around a kitchen table while eating, drinking, and making from an Indigenous worldview” (Mattes & Farrell Racette, 2019). She explained that some of the best learning occurs at kitchen tables: “When we gather with friends and family around food and tea, we relax into easy conversation, lending to a safe space for dialogue and knowledge sharing”). As we discussed our method, Belinda suggested that if learning through visiting was good for her grandparents, then it was good for us too. Whether we refer to it as Kitchen Table theory, or *mâmawi-kiyokêwak* (“they visit altogether”), this approach allows us to build relationships, share meals, share stories, share laughter, and learn to listen and take turns; and our shared reflections and discussion enrich us.

From an Indigenous perspective, the Indigenous language revitalization movement is bigger or more significant than a simple turn or paradigm shift in an area of scholarship. For Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada, the push for Indigenous language revitalization comes from Source, or *manito*. When we as co-authors of this paper sit together and think critically about the past, the current moment, and the future, we are creating energy. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson refers to this practice of engagement, learning, and generating knowledge as “grounded normativity” and described this important intervention in the following way: “Grounded normativity isn’t a thing; it is generated structure born and maintained from deep engagement with Indigenous processes that are inherently physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual” (p. 23).

From a *nêhiyaw* perspective, we all have gifts to contribute. This paper is our shared research; it illustrates our experiences and our deep engagement with Indigenous processes. *manito* provides us with a trail to move forward.

We also draw on our experiences in an ongoing team research project in which we examine teacher and learner experiences in a land-based *nêhiyawêwin* language camp. This research project is useful because it illustrates the similarities and differences between the fields in terms of assumptions about knowledge and teaching and research methodologies. Although

our paper draws on the experience of participating in this research and shares some findings from this study, this is not strictly an empirical paper. Instead, we use our individual and shared research experiences to develop and further some arguments about how and why Indigenous language teaching and research methodologies can help to reshape applied linguistics in ways that contribute to ethical relationships among settlers and Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada.

Ethical Space of Engagement

We now turn to an important theoretical concept that informs this paper: the ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). Our thinking is informed by the work of Willie Ermine, *nēhiyaw* scholar, researcher, faculty member at First Nations University, and a member of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. His primary focus is the promotion of ethical practices of research that involves Indigenous peoples and the conceptual development of the “ethical space,” a theoretical space between cultures and worldviews. The ethical space of engagement is the space between two entities, in this case between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians, or between two fields defined primarily along the same lines. This concept is useful for the purpose of thinking about how two fields—applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization—might work together. Ermine (2007) explained the creation of the theoretical space between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians in the following way: “With the calculated disconnection through the contrasting of their identities, and the subsequent creation of two solitudes. With each claiming their own distinct and autonomous view of the world, a theoretical space between them is opened” (p. 194).

What do we mean by this disconnection? Ermine (2007) described Indigenous peoples and Western peoples as “philosophically disengaged” (p. 197). He also explained that ongoing practices of settler dominance continue to rupture relations between the two peoples. This notion of settler dominance is important because the academy is recognized for creating challenging and hostile spaces for Indigenous professors, students, staff, and communities (Ahnungoonhs & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Henry et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019).

The ethical space offers opportunities to engage differently with one another. Dwayne Donald (2012), a descendent of the *amiskwaciwiniwak* and the Papaschase Cree and professor at the University of Alberta, also draws on Ermine’s (2007) writing in his work on Aboriginal-Canadian relations:

Ethical space is a space of possibility. The space offers a venue to slip out of our allegiances, to detach from the circumscriptive limits of colonial frontier logics, and enact a theory of human relationality that does not require assimilation or deny Indigenous subjectivity. (p. 44)

Ethical space theory, then, offers some direction to us as researchers and to the two fields of scholarly inquiry that we discuss in this paper. Ermine explained that learning to meet in this space requires “a protracted effort to create a level playing field” (p. 202) and emphasized the spirit of cooperation that is required. Choosing to meet in this venue, the venue of ethical space, triggers a dialogue between us. This conversation asks us to “set the parameters for an agreement to interact modeled on appropriate, ethical and human principles” (p. 202). From this perspective, our paper is a discussion of the parameters for an agreement between applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization. This move towards interaction between our fields requires a protracted effort and a high level of cooperation. Before shifting to a discussion on how the two fields might interact, we begin with why it might be important to do so.

Accepting the Challenge

Over tea and sandwiches in her home in Saskatoon, Belinda read out loud from books that have informed her thinking, and we talked about our experiences in working in language education, both within and outside formal education settings. Despite having already agreed to contribute a paper to this panel, we were quite advanced in our conversation before we decided that there were, indeed, mutually beneficial reasons for the two fields to work together more closely. At one point we discussed our hopes for the future of Indigenous language education.

Belinda: My hopes for the future are that Indigenous peoples have control of their own Indigenous language programming; their own curriculum, their own land-based learning stations or places.

Andrea: Do you have any hope for Western universities being involved in this?

Belinda: I don't think they want to. I don't think they want to move aside.

Andrea: No.

Belinda: They don't want to move. They like their positions of being comfortable. People don't like change. I never really understood that until I actually got older, until I saw it myself.

Andrea: Do you think they [we] want to maintain control?

Belinda: Universities?

Andrea: Yes.

Belinda: Yes. How old is RCAP [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples]?

Andrea: 1996?

Belinda: Yes. Recommendations were made back then. People don't want to move over. And so I said "Pfft!" Indigenous peoples just need to awaken to their own fact, create their own curriculum, do whatever they want on their own reserves, with their own authority. And they need to practice self-determination.

At this point in the conversation, we seemed to have talked ourselves out of an article. We kept talking and drinking tea, and Belinda read some more out loud. While she was reading from the writing of Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach, she came across an excerpt that ultimately convinced us of the value of the two fields working together.

Belinda: And then the last little quote here: "Vine Deloria reminds me that as Indigenous scholars, researchers and thinkers, we have an obligation to challenge the ideologies that shackle us. The purpose then is to push the edge of that ideological servitude of what counts as knowledge and research in the academy" [Kovach, 2010, p. 93]. So this is a challenge. Even though I talked us out of it, it's still a challenge that we should take.
[shared laughter]

Andrea: Okay, all right.

Belinda: It's a challenge. For those of us that get to this level, we have to continue the push to make space for those coming behind us, with our allies.

Finding ways to engage is and will continue to be a challenge, but it is a challenge that we should accept. Working together will require transformation, but we need to learn to support each other; in doing so, we can challenge the colonial ideologies that continue to harm Indigenous peoples and Indigenous languages and that elevate settlers and settler languages. Learning to engage is about creating space for Indigenous languages and for Indigenous language revitalization initiatives, sharing space, and learning from one another.

Parameters for Agreement to Interact

Earlier in this paper we suggested that the move towards interaction between our fields will require a protracted effort, a high level of cooperation, and the establishment of parameters. For parameters, we recommend some guidelines for this interaction in terms of understanding the

differences between the fields and setting some goals or objectives. These recommendations are based on our respective experiences in working on Indigenous language revitalization, applied linguistics, as well as research together. These recommended parameters, then, are not exhaustive or definitive and likely do not apply to every context or interaction. We offer these as areas of concern or importance and invite others interested in this process to consider their own parameters for the purpose of ethical engagement between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics. In the space that remains, we discuss the following five parameters for an agreement to interact: (a) making assumptions about language and knowledge, (b) making assumptions about knowledge generation, (c) nurturing an Indigenous knowledge base through supporting Indigenous scholars, (d) understanding the central role of community to Indigenous language revitalization, and (e) sharing space. Throughout our discussion of each of these five parameters, our goal is to center Indigeneity and allow it to change the interaction between our two fields (Simpson, 2017).

Assumptions About Language and Knowledge

The first main guideline that we put forward is acknowledging that individuals within the two fields think and talk about language very differently. Western understandings of language learning and teaching make up most of the field of applied linguistics. The grassroots initiatives of Indigenous communities are typically not as prominent in academic literature, though in the NETOLNEW national research project, which Dr. Onowa McIvor and Dr. Peter Jacob lead, they are working hard to raise the profile of these initiatives. The first parameter or guideline that we wish to set is that, if we are to move forward together, both sides must acknowledge and accept these differences, as well as what we can learn from one another. It is important to state that learning from Indigenous knowledge on languages is not a benevolent act of acceptance because Indigenous knowledge on language learning is not secondary or subservient to Western modes of thinking.

Belinda: So with applied linguistics, education, coming together, we need also to do a better job when we teach our teachers about appreciating diversity and what Indigenous peoples come with; they already come with knowledges. And it shouldn't be all just Western ways of thinking and theory.

Working together in ethical ways means that settler scholars need to speak out in support of Indigenous knowledge (Suzack, 2019) and Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages and

Indigenous language revitalization are connected to Indigenous knowledge. As a concept or term, Indigenous knowledge represents the beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of non-Western people that they developed through a long-term association with a specific place. Through this long-term association, strong relationships have formed among people, the environment, and the more-than-human counterparts (other living things and spiritual forces) that share their land (McGinnis et al., 2019). From most Indigenous perspectives, both animate and inanimate objects have a life spirit; every element has its own unique life force, including language. These spirits are essential to harmony and balance, well-being, and interrelationships. Indigenous language revitalization work often includes a belief in the unseen powers in the world and acceptance of the fact that all things are linked and depend on each other.

Because of the understanding that all things are interrelated, land-based language teaching is an important area of Indigenous language revitalization.

***Belinda:** It's about change—and not change in moving over, but change in the way that we even teach, doing the whole land-based pedagogy thing with language. That needs to happen too. This is how we Indigenize. Where Indigenous communities and Indigenous languages thrive, they maintain current traditional knowledge systems and re-generate new knowledge. When Indigenous languages are used and spoken, land and its diverse ecologies are honoured and appreciated, resulting in a healthy environmental space and place. Indigenous communities are fully aware of their relationship to the land, and in this way they lead their communities back to reclamation of land-based pedagogy.*

Indigenous language revitalization helps peoples to reconnect with traditional knowledge, which we do best by teaching on and with the land. Learners of the language and the maintenance of the language help to develop relationships to the land, animals, plants, and other natural occurrences. “We urgently need such place-based knowledge to help guide both species-recovery and habitat-restoration efforts. These efforts may also be essential in supporting the persistence of resources on which livelihoods for Indigenous fisherman, foragers, or hunters are based” (Wilder et al., 2016, p. 500). Indigenous knowledge, embedded within language, is a source of antidotes that can help to slow climate change and lead to some answers. However, global expansion projects put us all in danger. Collaborative efforts with applied linguistics, as well as other fields of academic inquiry, can help to support Indigenous peoples in leading in responses to the global climate crisis.

Another important area of Indigenous language revitalization work is understanding the link between Indigenous languages and health and wellness. The loss of land, language, spiritual ways, and respect for Elders continues to impact the resilience and wellness of Indigenous communities in North America (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Engagement with aspects of traditional First Nations culture, or cultural connectedness, is key to improving Indigenous wellness (Snowshoe, 2015).

Andrea: Yeah, that's another big difference between the fields. You know, applied linguistics, second-language education don't talk about wellness and language learning. They talk about things like identity and motivation and the affects, the feelings, the feelings of fear that you might have. But nobody in applied linguistics ever talks about the emotional. . . .

Belinda: . . . benefits.

Andrea: . . . benefits! And in the field of Indigenous language revitalization, that's a huge area of discussion—the links between wellness and culture, language, traditional knowledge, traditional knowledge keepers; it's this whole big difference between the two fields.

Indigenous languages and Indigenous health and wellness are connected. “Language is one component of culture and therefore may be a means to improve health among Indigenous populations” (Gonzalez et al., 2017, p. 176). Culture may prevent and treat health outcomes such as depression and substance abuse (Rieckmann et al., 2004; Stone et al., 2006; Walters et al., 2002). Increasingly, research has pointed to the therapeutic value of Indigenous languages: “It is my position that language revitalization is a cultural rehabilitation. Indigenous communities have been injured and it is the language teacher’s duty to heal and alleviate the pain in the community through strengthening the language” (Hall, 2019, p, 218). Indigenous languages have a spirit, and the language chooses the speaker to become its helper. Understanding language teachers as having a healing or therapeutic role is an important parameter for both fields. If Indigenous languages have this sort of health benefit, then the urgency to contribute to the field of Indigenous language revitalization in ethical ways becomes even more apparent.

Assumptions About Knowledge Generation

Knowledge generation and knowledge sharing are other areas in which the two fields will have to engage in prolonged cooperation so that we can learn from one another about the

differences in knowledge sharing, production, and regeneration. We understand the goal of research as the production of knowledge or as a deepening of current understandings of an issue. As in most academic fields, applied linguists use a broad range of research methods:

Andrea: So I think a lot of traditional applied linguistics research around language learning is extractive and it's interventionist. So we decide the problem we want to study, we go in and we say we're going to test it on these days, and this is our answer. And it's a really . . .

Belinda: It's very linear?

Andrea: Yes, and it's a controlling way of doing it. And one of the things I've learned from working with our group, our group of six people, and also the research that I've been doing with Keeseekoose, is that there are other ways.

The research project to which Andrea referred in the above excerpt uses sharing circles as a method, respects *nēhiyaw* protocols, and flattens typical researcher-participant hierarchical relationships. Indigenous research methodology (Drawson et al., 2017; Kovach, 2010, 2015; McGregor et al., 2018) has informed this project.

In a recent presentation, Dr. Mela Sarkar (2019) also highlighted some of the differences between traditional approaches to applied linguistics research and research conducted within Indigenous communities. In her talk, Sarkar described research within Listugui, a Mi'gmaq community that is working to revitalize its language. Through her partnership with Listugui, Sarkar explained, she learned to be noninterventionist as a researcher who is working in the area of critical applied linguistics. She described her experiences as a process of learning to listen when communities talk. Similarly, other writing on the topic of ethics in Indigenous research is available. Riddell et al. (2017) identified 13 “key principles for conducting research with different groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada” (p. 7). This list includes ethical research practices such as ensuring benefits to communities, building in opportunities for self-voicing, respecting cultural norms and knowledge systems, using culturally appropriate research methods, understanding interrelationality, and engaging knowledge keepers. This guide is useful in shaping future interactions between applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization. We are not suggesting that Indigenous research methodology should replace other approaches to applied linguistics and communities who choose to use them when they work together.

Nurturing an Indigenous Knowledge Base Through Supporting Indigenous Scholars

Another key way that applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization can work together is through the investment in and support of Indigenous graduate students and scholars who are working on Indigenous language revitalization. We suggest that this nurturing of an Indigenous knowledge base should be another key point in which the two fields engage.

Andrea: The academic home that I live in is applied linguistics, which is really language teachers, language policy writers; it's that kind of practical use of language knowledge, and I think sometimes we think, "Well, we're nice people; we know stuff about language. Why do Indigenous communities not want to engage with us, or be at our conferences or study with us?" But I think until we start to be aware of some of our colonial biases that we carry with us, nothing will shift? We'll continue to have grad students who maybe take a look at our programs or our conference: "Oh, not for me."

Universities need to invest in Indigenous professors who can work on Indigenous language revitalization and create supportive measures for Indigenous graduate students. This might include fellowships with monies and language research-assistant work that includes opportunities for time to read, conduct informal research, and engage in Indigenous communities. Kovach (2010) explained: "Supporting Indigenous research frameworks means supporting Indigenous researchers, and this cannot be achieved without hearing their perspective. . . . Focus on graduate programs is critical because it is here that Indigenous research frameworks are being honed and practiced" (p. 164).

In conducting our collaborative writing and research for this symposium/paper, we created a real-life context and process for Belinda that has been both enlightening and enriching, and possibly one of the most memorable experiences in her doctoral study, Part of what made the process so meaningful for Belinda was that Indigenous method and inquiry were privileged, her story was validated, and the work that we were doing was meaningful. Conducting our work in this conversational way permitted us to share stories. "Story is an Indigenous method for sharing experience, and interpretative, subjective understanding is accepted. That which contextualizes life" (Kovach, 2010, p. 176). Although we did not set out to create this type of experience, Belinda considered it an investment in her knowledge and in her as a scholar. The process has enabled Belinda to add to the ever-growing, changing, multilayering Indigenous research framework.

Understanding the Central Role of Community to Indigenous Language Revitalization

Another guideline that we recommend if the two fields are to engage together is a clear statement about the role of Indigenous communities in Indigenous language revitalization. Community is more than a concept; community is also law. Indigenous scholars want to do right by their communities. Responsibility to the language and to the community is a natural law that is intrinsically a part of our worldview. Years and years of academia have taken Belinda here. It has not assimilated her but has mirrored for her the value of her language, her informal education, and the importance of the *nēhiyaw* academy, which has been inclusive of the land. Indigenous language revitalization is activism and self-determination. Language revitalization reasserts and reconnects the Indigenous learner's "home," whereas Andrea has found a new appreciation for land and its animacy.

Belinda: This is our territory. We still live here. This is our home.

Belinda feels deeply attached to her home. She has a long, long history with these lands, as she stated in her family history of lineage and connection to land. This connection has deepened through the practice of language revitalization. Community and language revitalization work in unison. Language revitalization requires support from people. Through community language revitalization involvement, Belinda's home community of Sturgeon Lake has seen the benefits of love, respect, and trust in each other, along with the land.

Sharing Space

With some exceptions, those of us who work in applied linguistics usually find our academic homes in departments of modern language, faculties of education, and, in some cases, departments of linguistics. For the most part, this field has academic space and access to institutional support. The same cannot be said of Indigenous language revitalization. Universities and scholars who work in applied linguistics can support Indigenous language revitalization by sharing space. We can create flexible academic homes, plan for Indigenous languages in university settings, and create strategic plans that embed Indigenous language revitalization objectives and create academic programs in consultation with people who are already doing the work in the field of language revitalization. For example, some Indigenous communities have land-based programs; they should be the leaders in these programs. In most cases (University of Victoria is an exception), Indigenous language revitalization programs have no formal space or formal programs within the Western academy. Formal space can mean not only physically being

on campus, but also a space and connection to land; however, backing or support from a university with a shared vision in language revitalization is what we most need.

Conclusion

We offer this paper as just one example of our work together to reshape our own experiences of academic writing in a way that centers Indigeneity. Ultimately, we argue that applied linguistics can positively support the work of Indigenous language revitalization, and Indigenous language teaching and research methodologies can reshape applied linguistics in ways that will contribute to ethical relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada.

Andrea: I do think there are things that we can learn from each other. I know that doing research with our group this year has changed how I think about research, so it's benefitted me. And I think it's not just a question of how can applied linguistics help Indigenous communities and peoples. It's how can applied linguists be bettered by learning about different ways of doing research and different ways of thinking about knowledge. There's value in the engagement. There's value in that space between us, in learning how to be there together.

Although Indigenous language revitalization stems mainly from a grassroots movement, it is attached to scholarly theory and connected to the academy. Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics have shared interests and can work together to create an honoured space. Applied linguistics exists to offer real-life solutions to language problems. We see threats to Indigenous languages as the most urgent language problem of our time and therefore understand that applied linguistics is called upon to offer solutions. This call will require cooperation and a reshaping of interactions. Moreover, because Indigenous scholars always, for the most part, want to take the information “home,” Indigenous communities will benefit from this investment too. Through our efforts our interactions will grow, both parties will benefit, and trust and bonds will intensify. When we do the cooperation work and respect the guidelines, we will see real partnerships between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics.

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CHAPTER 7:

ē-ka-pimohtēyāhk nīkānehk ōte nīkān:

***nēhiyawēwin* (CREE LANGUAGE) REVITALIZATION AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE (RE)GENERATION**

Abstract

This chapter is a methodological paper that features the ongoing Indigenous research methods of gathering and interpreting the experiences of learners at a Cree language- and land-based camp. Together, we, five *nēhiyawak* and one settler, collected information from talking circles and followed Indigenous protocol throughout the process of meaning making, including praying, smudging, and offering tobacco and cloth to a knowledge keeper. In this chapter, we draw on southern understandings of language (a) to discuss Indigenous research methodologies as an ethical approach to examining the language practices of Indigenous communities and (b) to share examples from our own experiences of researching Indigenous language revitalization. Our particular camp context began 15 years ago and has since evolved into an annual gathering of language activists, both teachers and learners. This chapter examines the following research question: What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based *nēhiyawēwin* immersion camp? We draw on our research experiences of this camp to address the topic of knowledge production in Indigenous language revitalization.

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ē-ka-pimohtēyāhk nīkānehk ōte nīkān:

nēhiyawēwin (CREE LANGUAGE) REVITALIZATION AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE (RE)GENERATION¹⁴

In the beginning, the manifestation of our world produced multiple languages born out of local environments. People, all people, used and needed languages for societal development, relationships, education, and traditions. The goal of restoring balance to this ecology now requires the reclamation of the world's Indigenous and minority languages. Multifaceted language reclamation projects must be (re)enacted and maintained by speakers of these languages and be of these lands. These initiatives are important because Indigenous languages foster well-being, are identity markers, and carry incommensurable intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual properties. In recognition of the value of their languages, Indigenous peoples have developed revitalization strategies (Hinton et al., 2018; Johnson, 2012; McCarty et al. 2019; McIvor & Anisman, 2018).

In our context, Indigenous language revitalization is a growing area of concern for community members and Indigenous scholars alike. This increasing focus can be seen in several interconnected ways. First, Indigenous graduate students who work in this field are increasingly choosing related areas of language study in Canadian universities, such as second-language education, applied linguistics, and linguistics. In turn, Canadian universities are creating new academic positions and developing new undergraduate and graduate courses and programs in the area of Indigenous language teaching, learning, and revitalization.

Turning to Indigenous language programming in schools, school boards are implementing urban language-immersion programs. Several First Nations communities also have long-running school-based immersion programs, as well as new community- and land-based approaches to language revitalization that emerge each year. Finally, as a reaction to hard work and pressure from Indigenous communities and Indigenous leadership to protect and preserve Indigenous languages, the Canadian government passed the Indigenous Languages Act on

¹⁴ Daniels, B., Sterzuk, A., Turner, P., Cook, W.R., Thunder, D., & Morin, R. (in press). *ē-ka-pimohtēyāhk nīkānehk ōte nīkān: nēhiyawēwin (Cree language) revitalization and Indigenous knowledge (re)generation*. In K. Heugh, C. Stroud, K. Taylor-Keech, & P. De Costa (Eds.), *A sociolinguistics of the South*. Routledge. 50% authorship by Belinda Daniels. Received permission from publisher and co-authors to reuse.

June 21, 2019. All of these initiatives point to the recognition of the urgency of promoting Indigenous languages. In turn, these actions also suggest a need for increased research on Indigenous language revitalization. Drawing on our efforts in *nēhiyawēwin* (Cree language) revitalization, our research group strives to produce and share knowledge in ethical ways that can benefit Indigenous communities who are working to reclaim their languages.

Although linguistic diversity has long been recognized as a feature of Indigenous and marginal communities, contemporary discussions too often focus on elite multilingualisms (De Costa, 2019; Heugh & Stroud, 2019; Ortega, 2019). Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, these hegemonic perspectives are clearly not the only stories. In this chapter we draw on Southern understandings of language (a) to discuss Indigenous research methodologies as an ethical approach to examining the language practices of Indigenous communities and (b) to share examples from our experience of researching Indigenous language revitalization. Our particular camp context began 15 years ago as Belinda Daniels' master's research project and has since evolved into an annual gathering of language activists, both teachers and learners.

Primarily occurring at Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Treaty 6, in the province of Saskatchewan, in what we currently know as Canada, the central aim of this language camp is to revitalize *nēhiyawēwin* through land-based immersion activities such as medicine walks (Figure 1). The camp instructors have graduate degrees, expertise in second-language teaching, and traditional knowledge, and the camp attendees include Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from around the world. Because of the popularity of this camp, the participants re-attend and have formed lasting relationships, including amongst ourselves, the six researcher-participants and authors of this chapter who are all *nēhiyawak* (Cree people), with the exception of Andrea Sterzuk, who is a White settler. Our research team members all function as researchers as well as participants. In our writing, when we exercise our collective voice as *nēhiyawak* researchers and Indigenous Peoples, it is important to understand that Andrea is not included in those statements though she supports them. Through our collective research efforts, we strive to center Indigeneity, *nēhiyawēwin*, and *nēhiyaw* knowledge. In our collective research project, which we discuss in this chapter, we examine the following research question: What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based *nēhiyawēwin* immersion camp? In this chapter we draw on our research experiences of this camp to address the topic of knowledge production in Indigenous language revitalization.

Figure 7.1

Medicine Walk



Southern Multilingualisms

Our approach to this research project aligns with a body of theoretical writing commonly referred to as southern theory (Connell, 2007). In this writing, we do not use the term “southern” in a geopolitical sense; rather, it refers to individuals and communities who have experienced historical oppression. Southern theory challenges assumptions about knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012) and promotes an understanding of the world, including research and higher education (Mignolo, 2002, 2009), as shaped by a history of colonialism and ongoing North-South global inequalities. Southern theory is not so much “an alternative paradigm to be erected in opposition to the hegemonic concepts” (Connell, 2014, p. 218) of the North, or of the Western world. Instead, it is “a challenge, something that needs to be developed. . . . It is a project that is an integral part of campaigns for democracy and social justice though it invites fresh, and possibly iconoclastic, approaches to old problems” (Epstein & Morrell, 2012, p. 472). Connell (2014) called for greater application of Southern theory and postcolonial perspectives in the social sciences. de Sousa Santos (2018) described the purpose of this endeavour as action:

To allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only thus will they be able to change it to allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms. (p. 1)

We recognize this body of writing as a theoretical approach that aligns with our research in the area of Indigenous language revitalization. We also recognize the value of local *nēhiyaw* epistemologies and ontologies. Through our use of southern theory, we signal our goal to explore the practices, theories, and language of peripheral communities (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018); in this case, the *nēhiyawak* in what we currently know as Canada.

As a body of writing or inquiry, southern multilingualisms demonstrate that people organize their linguistic resources in many multilingualisms or many ways (Heugh, 2017). The term “southern multilingualisms” comes from Christopher Stroud and Kathleen Heugh’s initiation of the Southern Multilingualisms and Diversities Consortium in 2012, which formally launched at the International World Congress of applied linguistics in 2014 to emphasize the pluriversalities of southern epistemologies, diversities, and experiences of multilingualism among Indigenous communities and minority and marginalized peoples of the world. Importantly, this writing also recognizes that there are multiple language ontologies (Heugh, 2017). Communities of the South hold artisanal knowledges and understandings of language that might differ from widely accepted understandings of language because of the interconnected ways in which these languages and social practices developed (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 43). Therefore, although northern perspectives might include an understanding of language as a method of communication that separates humans from nonhumans, this is not the only possible lens. For many Indigenous communities in the Americas, for example, language is part of spiritual communication (Hauck & Heurick, 2018). What can be expressed in Indigenous languages, then, “may be not so much an alternative epistemology but an alternative ontology” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019, p. 73). Because of these differences, what we understand by language needs to be open to interpretation, and how we engage in studies of language also needs to differ.

As *nēhiyawak*, we believe that our languages are alive and sacred. For millennia, not only *nēhiyawak*, but also others abundantly used the language. *nēhiyawēwin* is like any other spoken language but also contains other elements. As Ermine (1995) explained, “Our languages reveal a very high level of rationality that can only come from an earlier insight into power” (p. 110). In

terms of the origins of *nēhiyawak* and *nēhiyawēwin*, Belinda has heard on a number of occasions from orators and *kēhtē-ayak*, including Danny Muskwa and Alex Kennedy, that first there was sound, and then there was light. Voice and speech, the gift of the Cree language were given to the people so that they could acknowledge the Creator by using their Creator-given language:

The gift of language, *kinēhiyawēwininaw*, is a powerful and sacred gift. . . . This same gift has been given to the human beings by Creator. The *nēhiyawak* have been given this language, which is heard all across much of Treaty 6 territory. (McAdam, 2015, p. 24)

nēhiyawak believe in spirits. For each spirit there is a song, a Calling song for each of them: the Sun Spirit, the Thunderbird Spirit, the Wind Spirit, the Bison Spirit, and on and on. Among the *nēhiyawak*, the language also has a spirit and holds power, “and this spirit will leave if the language is not utilized” (McAdam, 2015, p. 25). Because of this understanding, engaging in practices of reclaiming the language and researching that process must also involve spiritual communication and the use of appropriate cultural protocols.

Indigenous Research Methodologies

The ties between research and colonialism are multiple (Deloria, 1969). Many of the “portrayals of Indigenous communities in peer-reviewed literatures have been problem focused and deficits based” (Drawson et al., 2017, p. 1). Indeed, for many Indigenous peoples, these approaches to research are “so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development” (Smith, 2008, p. 87). Mainstream higher education has traditionally had little to no room or space for other knowledges or other approaches to knowledge generation. This hegemony is also connected to language and culture. “Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 198). Indigenous research methodologies, however, show promise in disrupting this hegemony in knowledge generation. The studies that Drawson et al. (2017) reviewed suggest that “Indigenous research methods prevent the prioritization of Western ways of knowing” (p. 13). This is an important understanding for those of us who are working to understand how marginal and mainstream communities can exchange knowledge and expertise in reciprocal and respectful ways.

In explorations of language practices and systems of the South, southern researcher voices and ontologies should be privileged. One need, then, is for Indigenous-led collaborative

research so that others can learn from these language-reclamation initiatives through an Indigenous research paradigm. Indigenous communities are holders and stewards of a millennia worth of knowledge passed down intact with each generation. This knowledge is tied to language and land and “includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements” (Simpson, 2017, p. 161). Indigenous methodologies help researchers to recognize and draw on recognized ways of generating and sharing knowledge as practiced in Indigenous communities:

Indigenous communities hold an alternative way of knowing about themselves and the environment that has managed to survive the assaults of colonization and its impacts. This alternative way of knowing may be different from what was known several hundred years ago by a community, but it is still a way of knowing that provides access to a different epistemology, an alternative vision of society, an alternative ethics for human conduct. (Smith, 2008, p. 101)

Kathleen Absolon (2011), an Anishinaabe scholar from Flying Post First Nation, explained the connections of Indigenous knowledge to contemporary Indigenous research paradigms: “Indigenous paradigms/ways of understanding our existence, how we come to know about that existence and what we think about our existence are the roots of Indigenous methodologies in re-search” (p. 54).

Kovach (2015) identified four central aspects of Indigenous research methodologies: (a) Indigenous research methodologies begin from the understanding that “Indigenous knowledge systems are a legitimate way of knowing” (p. 53); (b) Indigenous research methodologies position “receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants” (p. 53) as a natural part of research, (c) “assume reciprocity to the community” (p. 53), and researchers understand that Indigenous methods are “a legitimate way of sharing knowledge” (p. 53).

Indigenous research methodologies acknowledged that knowledge comes from our land, our languages, and our stories. This connection between land and knowledge is also apparent in Janet Armitage’s (forthcoming) chapter in this volume. Knowledge also “flows through the layered spirit world about the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our Ancestors sit” (Simpson, 2017, p. 161). This knowledge can be accessed in a number of ways that are recognized as spiritual (Castellano, 2000). “Solitude with nature and the gift of

insight we receive from those experiences” is one source of spirit knowledge (Kovach, 2015, p. 56). Steinhauer (2002) explained that, “traditionally, much of what we did was influenced by our dreams, our visions, and our intuition (p. 74); and Kovach (2015) suggested that dreams “have long been a source of knowledge for Indigenous cultures” (p. 56). Belinda, the first author of this chapter, is guided by dreams and intuition in the language revitalization work and research that she conducts today. As she has written elsewhere, “So many have forgotten the art of visioning and dreaming; however, I have not” (Daniels, 2018, p. 282). When she was roughly 10 years old, she had one of her first dreamlike experiences. Belinda was lying on her kitchen floor, playing with a hand mirror, but not just looking at her reflection; she was imagining what was on the other side of the reflection. She then remembered the sensation of falling into a trance. Suddenly, her whole surroundings changed, and she was somewhere else, walking through an enclosed area that seemed to be a tunnel of some sort. Because etchings were visible on the rock walls, she reached out her hand and slowly felt the surface of the wall. She was a little frightened, but her curiosity pulled her deeper into the enclosed area. On the walls were symbols which she today understands to be petroglyphs and syllabics of her ancestors. She then turned and looked to her right and found herself back on the kitchen floor. This was Belinda’s first experience with a dream that offered her guidance. She had a glimpse into language reclamation, and the feelings have remained with her since. That dream connected Belinda to her ancestors, and they remain in communication with her to this day.

It is important to consider some things in drawing upon Indigenous cosmovisions in the study of Indigenous language practices. Reynaldo Macias (forthcoming) offered an important critique of cultural and knowledge appropriation that highlights the dangers of northern appropriations of decolonial thinking. Another consideration is research methods. If we accept the importance of ontological challenges to language, we must consider other issues, including approaches to research. Dawson et al. (2017) reminded us that, “unlike Western research methods, Indigenous research methods require that all components in the process embody the values of the Indigenous group involved” (p. 15). Accepting Indigenous cosmovisions in the study of Indigenous language practices means accepting the use of research methods that might challenge existing notions of valid inquiry:

Methods, such as dream journaling, that capture subjective data are destined to be a part of the discourse on Indigenous research methods. It will be an exciting new dialogue

about what counts as legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge is garnered.
(Kovach, 2015, p. 56)

Indigenous scholars are leading in theories of learning, being, doing, and knowing. Leanne Simpson (2017) described this process as “grounded normativity,” or the “ethical frameworks generated by these place-based practices and associated knowledges” (p. 22). Indigenous researchers have actively explored a variety of restorative practices with regard to land education and languages (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Kovach, 2010; Simpson, 2017). Indigenous language revitalization researchers are also well positioned to support the grassroots language-reclamation initiatives of Indigenous communities. *S?ímla?x*^w Michele Johnson (2012), Sylix language activist and scholar, explained that Indigenous scholars are also reclaiming the role of language-revitalization researchers within their own communities. McIvor and Anisman (2018) overview of language-revitalization initiatives revealed a “growing cadre of Indigenous researchers focusing on language research in their own communities and language groups”; these studies are “driven by Indigenous methodologies” (p. 95). Indigenous scholars are re-searching our own pathways and creating and generating knowledge about Indigenous-language revitalization. In our work we join these ongoing, community-initiated conversations.

Our Approach to Generating Knowledge About *nēhiyawēwin* Language Revitalization

Before we move further, it is important that we introduce ourselves. Locating ourselves is an Indigenous “way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality” (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 97). Five of the six authors in this paper are *nēhiyawak* (Cree people) academics, researchers, and language users. Belinda Daniels (Sturgeon Lake First Nation) is a grandmother, mother, wife, and teacher. She is an emerging adult speaker of *nēhiyawēwin*, a doctoral candidate at the University of Saskatchewan, and the founder of the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience, a not-for-profit language-revitalization organization. Andrea Sterzuk is a White-settler academic in language education at the University of Regina, an accomplice in the Indigenous effort, and a beginner learner of *nēhiyawēwin*. She recognizes that working together with Indigenous Peoples in ethical ways means that settler scholars need to speak out in support of Indigenous knowledges (Suzack, 2019) and Indigenous languages. Peter Turner (James Smith Cree Nation) is a husband, father, teacher, and beginner learner of *nēhiyawēwin*. He is also a PhD student at the University of

Regina. William (Bill) Cook (Southend, Peter Ballyntyne First Nation) is a husband, father, and fluent speaker and teacher of *nēhithawēwin* [*but teaches nēhiyawēwin because of the Y dialect territory he is in*]. Bill is also a master's student at the University of Regina. Dorothy Thunder (Little Pine First Nation) is a grandmother, mother, auntie, sister, wife, and fluent speaker and teacher of *nēhiyawēwin*. Dorothy has a master's degree in linguistics and is a faculty member in Indigenous Studies at the University of Alberta. Randy (Boyce) Morin (Whitefish First Nation) is a father, husband, and fluent speaker and teacher of *nēhiyawēwin*. Randy has a master's degree from the University of Victoria and currently teaches in the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan.

Our collective research project began in the form of conversations at Sturgeon Lake First Nation in July 2018. As *nēhiyawēwin* learners and teachers, we gathered together for a week at the land-based language camp. What began as a discussion of the value of exploring the camp as an approach to language revitalization quickly also included explorations of how we might approach this research. After the camp ended, we designed our study to include multiple meetings through online conference calls, e-mails, and messaging. One of the first things that we discussed was research participants. Although there are hundreds of past and present camp attendees, none of us was interested in recruiting research participants because of the potential hierarchical nature of these relationships. Fortunately, Indigenous research methodologies offer possibilities for innovation:

An important component of all Indigenous research methods is situating the research within the context of the data source(s). This means that the data collection, analysis, and interpretation may vary considerably more in research approaches using an Indigenous method or framework compared to typically Western methods that are often highly standardized and where removing context from the research is paramount. (Drawson et al., 2017, p. 13)

Indigenous research methodologies often blur the lines between researcher and participant and create opportunities for co-learning (Castleden et al., 2017). Ultimately, we decided to research ourselves as a group and arrived at a design that we felt would allow us to ethically investigate our collective experiences of the camp: a co-constructed story. Our project's research question is, What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based *nēhiyawēwin* immersion camp? As both co-researchers and study participants, our team members used three

sharing circles (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009) to explore the efficacy of language camps as a revitalization strategy. Sharing circles are an effective, culturally appropriate, and generative method that helps researchers and participants to make sense of complex experiences. Circles are different from focus groups because of “the sacred meaning they have in many Indigenous cultures and in the growth and transformation bases for the participants” (Lavallée, 2009, p. 29). As researchers, we have co-constructed a collective story based on these circles. We will share some features of and considerations from our collective research experience.

In our research project we followed cultural protocols and incorporated the methods used to access spiritual knowledge, including smudging and prayer. *kākīsimō* is the *nēhiyaw* word for prayer, and it means to implore with your whole being. This kind of prayer typically has a rhythmic tune and is particularly recognizable when Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, or Old Ones conduct a ceremony. From an *nēhiyaw* perspective, prayer is a form of asking and is used to seek guidance, knowledge, and wisdom. It is an expression of intent, an action, and a sacred communion among spirits that help us (the spirits of the sun, buffalo, and the cardinal directions) and whom we ask to take our prayers to the Creator. It is also a physical action, a plea, and a human display of our humility, meekness and weakness. When the Old Ones pray, they express that we are pitiful as humans and ask the spirit helpers to ask the Creator to take pity on us because we need guidance and help. These prayers are important to our community and understood as powerful requests. We have different types of prayers and prayerful ceremonies. Pipe ceremonies are among the most significant. During these moments we sit on the ground to be the closest to the earth. We acknowledge the earth and the helpers of the plants, flowers, and trees. This is one example of relational accountability. Sometimes in prayer we use items besides the pipe, such as cloth and tobacco as offerings. Before beginning our research project, we made an offering of tobacco and asked our local *kēhtē-ayak* Joseph Naytowhow (who is Belinda’s great uncle) to assist us with prayers and guidance in this language revitalization work. We gave Joseph tobacco and a small gift, which created a good pathway for the project (Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

Our research is spiritual in nature. We understand ourselves as spiritual beings who are having a physical experience, and we conduct ourselves accordingly. This conduct includes the action of *miyāhkasikēwin*—smudging—which involves burning sage, although we use other plants and fungi as well. We began each of our sharing circles with a smudge. The members of

the circle used their hands to move the smoke over themselves. To smudge is a sacred act. We cleanse our hearts, minds, and spirits and reveal our true selves to Creator in the spiritual realm. We picked the sage that we used in our smudges and shared it amongst ourselves. In this project we harvested either Horse or Bison sage for our circles the year before we began our research. This harvesting also involved protocols: the process of laying tobacco on the ground, saying a prayer, and asking permission to pick the sage or sweetgrass. We then gathered the plants, dried them, and used them later. Both prayer and smudge are included in our research design to ensure that we do everything in the right way, for the right reasons.

Relationship-building as co-researchers is another important aspect of our methodology. Our group relationship formed in the language camps. As researchers, we invested in actions designed to strengthen our ties. Prior to our circles, we ate our meals together. Although we do not live in the same cities, we find ways to connect through conference calls and texts. When we are together, we socialize and plan opportunities for visiting. This is important because “visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion. Visiting is fun and enjoyable and nurtures the intimate connections and relationship building. Visiting is the core of our political systems” (Simpson, 2017, p. 165; Figure 2).

Figure 7.2

Relationship Building



We also pray together for 10 minutes each Monday night—for the spirit of the language and for the work that we and others do. Another aspect of our relationship building is the way that we use humour: “Maintaining good feelings is one reason why a sense of humour pervades Aboriginal societies” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79). Humour and teasing are deliberate actions and serve the larger purpose of maintaining connectedness through the development and maintenance of relationships. Our interactions (online and face to face) involve teasing and laughter, which are important in relationships for several reasons. We use humour as a method to draw attention to someone’s silliness without hurting them; in this way, the integrity of relationship is not affected. Atleo (2004) also described the joy of having fun as transformative, cathartic, healthy, and deliberate. Humour serves a purpose: It helps to maintain the connectedness of relationships and is healthy and important. Some of our most profound ideas, observations, and findings for our research have also emerged through humour. As we listened to our meeting recordings, the successful results of our relationship-building emerged. Close people talk closely, and our co-constructed stories are rich with insights. We worked hard to establish a democratic process of jointly constructing knowledge in a communal sense. Our efforts moved us closer to the possibility of conviviality (Holas, 2018).

It is also important to talk about our collaborative and circular data-collection, analysis, and coding processes. We met on three occasions in three different cities (Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Regina). We had traveled long distances to meet one another, which is reminiscent of how our *nēhiyaw* ancestors traveled to gather and share knowledge. The first time that we met in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in December 2018, we held a sharing circle that focused on our individual stories of language camp. We subsequently co-transcribed this circle online using Google Docs, and we talked to one another throughout the process using the Google Docs comment feature. This collective transcribing process informed our analysis and co-construction. Our approach to analysis continued with our second meeting. By this time we had read the complete transcription of our first circle (39 pages of text).

In March 2019 we met in Edmonton, Alberta, during the Think Indigenous Conference, which was held on the Enoch Cree Nation. At this second circle we shared our individual responses to the collective set of experiences and discussed the bigger picture of our stories. We also recorded this meeting, which resulted in a second set of transcriptions (26 pages of text).

The time between the meetings afforded individual digestion of observations and created opportunities for continuous contact through conference calls and text-message groups.

Our third meeting was in Regina, Saskatchewan, in May 2019. We had all read both sets of transcripts. For our analysis, we used a layered approach to align with our larger Indigenous research methodology. We engaged in open and holistic coding and subsequently regrouped the data into six categories to identify linkages (McGinnis et al., 2019): spirit, focus, kinship, wellness, land, and *nēhiyaw* conscientization. We then looked for data excerpts that fell into these categories. We placed six large pieces of paper on the wall and glued data excerpts onto the pages to assist our discussion (Figure 3).

Figure 7.3

Coding Together



The excerpts revealed many overlapping aspects or linkages among them; as a result, we often placed excerpts in more than one category. Our co-constructed narrative tells a story of language speakers in relation to language and non-language speakers who are working to acquire or possess a language. “We are helpers, conduits, catalysts; we are kin!” We will share

the results of our analysis and discussion in future publications in which we examine the kinship ties among land, language, and learners in Indigenous language-camp settings.

We would be remiss not to mention some of the bumps in the road that we experienced by choosing to conduct our research in this way. The ethics review process involved some challenges. Despite similarities to more recognizable methodologies such as auto-ethnography or duo-ethnography, the reviewers asked many lengthy questions about the study design, participant consent, and the nature of sharing circles. They concluded the review with a statement that seemed to imply that the research would not have an impact.

We met this challenge by writing a careful response to each query; ultimately, we received approval to conduct our research. Another challenge was simply that we had to learn how to do research together in this way, and we addressed the challenge in several ways. We had many conversations and read and discussed literature on the topics of Indigenous language revitalization as well as Indigenous research methodology to maintain the momentum of our learning and research. We discussed the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of our research practices and asked more questions of ourselves.

Conclusion

This research was a long winter story. Because the spirit of language calls us, we came together with a shared goal. In our research in the language camp, we became storytellers and shared our experiences and understandings. Through this process, we learned in spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, linguistic, and theoretical ways. These stories of our experiences are examples of survivance, or “ontologies directly connected to the ways that Indigenous peoples have always engaged the world” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 129). Our stories of survivance contain a *nēhiyaw* presence as well as traces of our collective resistance to settler colonialism; cultural, ontological, and epistemological imperialism; and, ultimately, linguistic dominance. Southern multilingualisms create space for oppressed groups to express, voice, and write about their world on their own terms. Writing from a *nēhiyaw* perspective fosters the regeneration of knowledge and theory and continued growth within a *nēhiyaw* paradigm. Writing from a *nēhiyaw* perspective also pointed to the way forward for those who are following closely behind or who do not yet know how to begin.

Our research project draws on Indigenous research methodologies to interrupt the hegemony of northern/mainstream knowledge systems. Through our centering of *nēhiyaw*

epistemology and ontology, our writing on the topic of Indigenous language revitalization research contributes to the literature and debates of decolonial and southern scholars who recognize and are comfortable with pluriversalities and multiplicities (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Connell, 2014; de Souda Santos, 2018; Mignolo, 2009; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2008). This research also validates us as a people, as well as the choices that we make regarding appropriate language pedagogy and appropriate research methodology. Because of our resilience, persistence, and survivance, Indigenous scholars are taking the lead, and we are using our own frameworks. The research process that we discuss in this chapter is an example of new beginnings within a *nēhiyaw* framework. For us as researchers/participants, this research project has affirmed that we must do our own work as people committed to the Indigenous efforts of language revitalization. Our experiences as oppressed people who are working against the powers shape our motivations, our work, and our discoveries. We hope that our research process and our personal stories of language revitalization will become a potential source of strength in discussions and decision making in academia.

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CHAPTER 8:
AWAKENING SLEEPING LANGUAGES IN SASKATCHEWAN
WITH CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULA
AND TECHNOLOGY

Abstract

In Canada it is a time of reconciliation. Indigenous languages in Canada are in decline, and it is also a time for action and a time for hope. Language loss began with the era of the White settlers, and the Indian Act (1876) and the introduction of residential schools exacerbated it. As a result of the trauma, many residential school survivors either abandoned or avoided their ancestral languages. These sleeping languages require positive, sustainable, and culturally appropriate pedagogies for revitalization initiatives. We argue that technology can support language-maintenance initiatives if they are implemented alongside culturally appropriate curricula. We also offer suggestions for mobile applications to complement the language-teaching strategies that Indigenous groups in Canada and abroad currently use.

CHAPTER 8:
AWAKENING SLEEPING LANGUAGES IN SASKATCHEWAN
WITH CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULA
AND TECHNOLOGY¹⁵

As settlers arrived from Europe, their languages began to dominate the social and economic environment of the Canadian prairies. The number of Indigenous language speakers declined rapidly as the people were exposed to new diseases, their land was usurped, and their way of life was dramatically altered forever. Residential schools (segregated schools in which many Indigenous children were forced to live and study) emerged as early as the 17th century (Kirkness, 2013). By the 19th century they had become effective tools in the effort to replace Indigenous language and spirituality with English/French and Christianity. McCarty et al. (2019) argued that colonial schooling was a primary instrument in the purposeful and targeted erasure of Indigenous cultures. Children were forcibly taken from their homes and placed in these schools, where they were punished for speaking their maternal languages. The schools were oppressive, and mortality rates were high. As a result of the trauma, some people rejected their language and heritage. Groups who survived or escaped the residential schools continued to speak their language but still lost much of their linguistic, cultural, and ceremonial knowledge.

It is noteworthy that the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996 (Chrétien, 2013). The long, fraught history of residential schools, government day schools, and system-based policies designed to solve the “Indian problem” has left deep scars amongst the Indigenous people in Saskatchewan and across the nation:

We encounter a complex web of influences: the punishment and abuse experienced in residential schools, destruction and replacement of traditional trade and economy, forced participation in public schools with homogenizing policy, and the fear and shame our people accumulated over several generations of assimilation policies. (Makokis et al., 2010, p. 5).

Fear and shame contributed to the rejection and loss of oral and written language.

¹⁵ Herman et al. (2021); 25% authorship by Belinda Daniels. This is an accepted manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in *Critical Mobile Pedagogy: Cases of Digital Technologies and Learners at the Margins* on November 27, 2020; available online: <http://www.routledge.com/Critical-mobile-pedagogy-Cases-of-Digital-Technologies-and-Learners-at/Traxler-Crompton/p/book/9780367204570>. Received permission to reuse from co-authors and publisher.

For Indigenous Nations, language is sacred; it has a spirit, and it is alive. It is also essential to identity and nationhood. Language defines who people are and where they come from. The language cannot be separated from land and culture. According to McCoy et al. (2016), “Language is not something developed in isolation in human brains” (p. 12). This idea reflects the notion that the land speaks many different languages depending on the Indigenous peoples who inhabit it (Cajete, 1994). Language is a footprint, and footprints indicate where one has walked before and point towards the future; they ground people on the land.

The loss of any language represents a loss to all humanity. “Linguistic systems and practices represent an infinite reservoir of human intellectual, cultural and scientific effort” (McCarty et al., 2019, p. 4). According to Crystal (2000), “About every two weeks another language dies, taking millennia of human knowledge and history with it” (p. 151). This can result in the extinction of 60%–90% of the world’s almost 7,000 languages in the next century (Romaine, 2007). Yet, there is reason for optimism. Because of the resilience and strength of Indigenous peoples, sustainable and culturally appropriate language maintenance and revival initiatives are emerging. Within the Canadian context, reconciliation and language revitalization are now at the forefront of social and political discourse. Reclamation is the ultimate goal. In this chapter we explore Indigenous language-learning tools and strategies relevant to Saskatchewan. We close the chapter with a brief discussion of how current technologies can benefit language revitalization efforts and the main challenges in implementing these technologies.

Language Reclamation in Canada

A Brief History

Indigenous peoples have inhabited the Canadian prairies for at least 13,000 years (Friesen, 2019). By the time Europeans arrived on the east coast of Canada, Dickason (1997) estimated that millions of people arrived and that “great multitudes” (p. 8) of people were living on the prairies. Roughly between 1650 and 1850, the fur trade, as well as the desire for land, were among several major impetuses for European expansion westward. This expansion brought disease. Some bands on the prairies, such as the Basquia and Pegomgamaw Cree, lost one half to two thirds of their people during the smallpox epidemic of 1782–1782 (Waiser, 2016). Along with disease, the fur traders hunted bison, a significant source of food and resources, nearly into extinction. Subsequently, various waves of immigration took place and brought increasingly more Europeans from diverse backgrounds and religious traditions.

Canada has seen a serious decline in speakers of Indigenous languages. “It is estimated that at the time of contact there were an estimated 450 Aboriginal languages and dialects in Canada” (McIvor, 2009, p. 1). Today, of the 10 distinct Indigenous language families, approximately 60 languages are still spoken (McIvor, 2009). In terms of population across Canada, we now have 260,550 speakers of these languages (Statistics Canada, 2017)—less than 1% of the total Canadian population. The additional urgency in the Saskatchewan context is a result of the coming shift in demographics. The Government of Saskatchewan has reported that 19,020 people speak Cree and 7,855 speak Dene as a mother tongue. These two languages are also listed in the top five fastest declining mother tongues in the province; Cree has declined by 5,645 speakers and Dene by 520 speakers since 2011 (Saskatchewan, 2016). At the same time, Townsend and Wernick (2008) predicted that by 2026, 36% of the Saskatchewan population aged 15 to 29 will be of Indigenous ancestry. Strategies and approaches to assist young Indigenous people reclaim their language and culture are crucial to their future personal well-being.

Control Over Indigenous Education in Canada

When Canada was established as a nation via the British North American Act of 1867, the assimilation of Indigenous people was a significant goal of the Canadian government. Through the infamous Indian Act of 1867, the federal government took control of Indian education. (Although education is the purview of the provinces, the federal government remains in charge of Indigenous education to this day.) Churches became heavily involved in managing residential schools in 1892–1893, and attendance at residential schools became mandatory in 1894. Not until the late 20th century did Indigenous people regain a voice in their own affairs. With Indigenous control of education in 1972, which is now referred to as “First Nations control of First Nations education,” the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) published a policy paper on how education could include the Indian philosophy of education and recommendations. During this time Indigenous language-revitalization efforts were initiated in earnest.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) proposed 94 calls to action, 8 of which involve language preservation, reclamation, and/or maintenance. These calls to action are congruent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007), which states: “Article 13.1: Indigenous peoples have individual and collective

rights to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their Indigenous languages” (pp. 12-13).

It is interesting that the only countries that voted against the draft were Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States—which speaks volumes about the politics with regard to Indigenous populations in these countries. Indeed, of the nine provinces and three territories in Canada, only one province and the three territories currently have some legislation to support the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages. (It is interesting to note that, while we were writing this paper, on October 24, 2019, the province of British Columbia introduced Bill 41 to establish a legislation framework that aligns with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007) declaration; the federal government and the remaining provinces have yet to follow suit.)

Yet again, there is room for optimism. Indigenous language preservation and revitalization have come a long way in Canada. Indigenous languages are now being spoken in Parliament (Wright-Allen, 2019), which is another positive step toward recognizing the importance of Indigenous-language use.

Linguistic Characteristics and Writing Systems

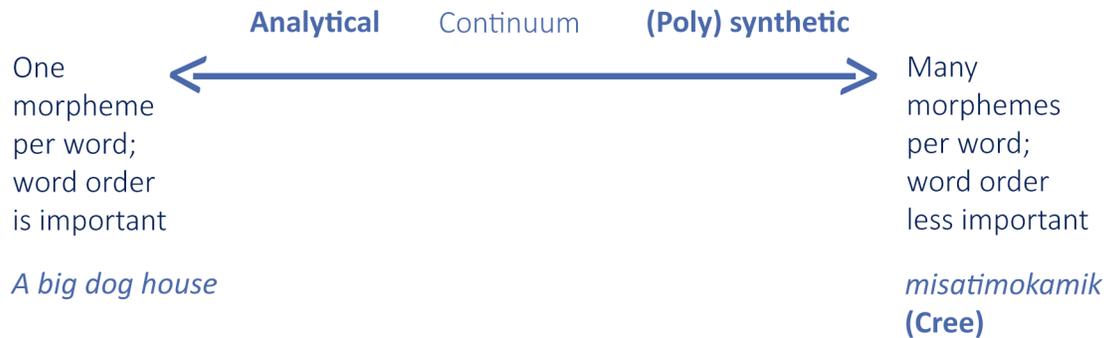
In addition to colonization, intergenerational trauma, and systemic discrimination, language preservation is hampered by the prevalence of the English language (Makokis et al., 2010), the complex nature of polysynthetic languages (Kell, 2014), and the lack of resources for teaching and learning such languages.

Language Characteristics

Many of the Indigenous languages in Canada are polysynthetic rather than isolating (Kell, 2014). This type of language, also called an “incorporating” language, often contains very long words comprised of morphemes (i.e., word parts; Figure 4). They have prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and circumfixes; and the placement of the morphemes follows regular rules. In contrast to more isolating languages such as English, the meaning relies less upon sentence structure and/or context. Polysynthetic languages can be either fusional or agglutinative. Fusional languages can have several meanings for one affix, and they combine and change pronunciation. On the other hand, in agglutinative languages such as Cree and Dene, each affix represents one unit of meaning; affixes do not fuse together and do not change pronunciation when they are combined with other affixes (Kell, 2014).

Figure 8.1

Analytic-Synthetic Language Continuum



It is not possible to translate an English sentence directly into an Indigenous language. For example, in Dene the English sentence “The girl is playing with her dog” becomes “*ts’ekuaze* [girl] *bets’i* [her] *li* [dog] *hel* [with] *senádher* [play].” There are no Dene words for “the” or “is.” Words from synthetic agglutinative languages (i.e., in which inflectional morphemes such as affixes express grammatical relationships) are translated as several words or even as a complete sentence for less-synthetic languages such as English (i.e., analytic languages in which meaning is conveyed through word order and helper words).

The relationships among language, thought, and culture are also significant. “Indigenous languages in their symbolic, verbal, and unconscious orders structure Indigenous knowledge” (Battiste, 2013, p. 146). To illustrate, the Cree language contains animate and inanimate nouns (the animate/-inanimate noun categories are different from the masculine/feminine noun categories in some European languages). Animals and people are animate, but some objects are difficult for nonspeakers to predict. For example, rocks and feathers are animate, whereas a river is inanimate. Such differentiation can inform a Cree speaker’s worldview. Therefore, a different mindset and different teaching methods can be helpful.

Writing Systems

Cree and Dene were primarily oral languages passed down through storytelling, prayer, song, and speech. The Cree and other Indigenous groups in North America had additional, highly developed ways of communicating, “such as sign language, mnemonic systems, and (more recently) writing systems, [including] petroglyphs, petrographs, wampum belts, hide paintings, and syllabics” (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 283). The standard Roman orthography (SRO) writing

system and syllabics are part of current language-learning initiatives. SRO generally consists of an English-equivalent alphabet with some use of symbols and diacritics (i.e., symbols added to characters, such as circumflex accents or macrons). Syllabics are based on the use of symbols to show sounds in the Indigenous language. For example, in the Dene language, the word “man” is translated as *deneyu* in SRO and ᑭᑎᑦ in syllabics. The Cree-speaking groups in Saskatchewan use three distinct dialects: Plains (y-dialect), Woodlands (th -dialect), and Swampy (n-dialect). To meet the needs of each dialect group and to facilitate communication among them, SRO and syllabics require standardization.

Traditional and Emerging Language Teaching and Learning Techniques

A range of macro, system-based strategies (Table 1) support the development and implementation of language-learning programs. In other words, at the system level, the lack access to resources or teacher training, for example, might restrict the implementation of teaching and learning strategies.

Table 8.1

Macro System-Based Strategies

Strategy	Description
Resource creation	Production of resources by language workers and activists for use in language learning and teaching. (McIvor, 1998)
Documentation and preservation	Documentation and preservation of Indigenous languages for future and current use; technology is often used in this process. (McIvor, 1998)
Teacher training	Training of teachers to utilize appropriate teaching methods, to learn the Indigenous writing systems. (McIvor, 1998)
Research	Researching best practices in Indigenous language learning, teaching and current sources of information related to Indigenous languages. (McIvor, 1998)
Policy and political advocacy	A focus on policy change which utilizes strategizing, fundraising, and planning to support Indigenous language initiatives. (McIvor, 1998)
Technology	Utilization of various forms of technology for learning, documentation, preservation, and enhancement of Indigenous languages (such as recordings, websites, and mobile applications).

Language teachers note that even if they teach the languages in school, learners might lack an authentic context in which to use the language. Community engagement and being on their land are pivotal in Indigenous-language maintenance and preservation. Makokis et al. (2010) stressed that “it is important to understand that the language is a gift, and [everyone has] a responsibility to teach and to learn it” (p. 43).

Teacher training is also a notable influence on the acquisition of language. Table 2 presents 12 different teaching strategies that Indigenous language teachers in Saskatchewan currently use and advocate in classrooms and community contexts. The integration of these strategies into the development of mobile apps and desktop applications (apps) holds significant potential.

Makokis et al. (2010) posited that the best ways to learn an Indigenous language are in immersion, land-based activities, ceremony, song, and storytelling. Experiential learning in an Indigenous context is sometimes referred to as “land-based learning” (i.e., the language-camp language-learning strategy). The *nehiyawak* Summer Language Experience in Saskatchewan, which Belinda Daniels founded, is an example of land-based learning. It is an annual summer camp based on the land that focuses on building language skills in the original context of the Cree ancestors.

Honouring traditional approaches whilst taking advantage of recent pedagogical techniques requires careful consideration. Parents, grandparents, Elders, and children should have opportunities to access high-quality resources within authentic, natural language-learning contexts such as at home, in the community, and on the land. Implementing a language-learning approach requires building relationships with a community to understand their needs, goals, and traditions. Finally, communities need more high-quality language teaching and learning resources—both paper and digital (see examples in Table 2).

Technology in Language Teaching and Learning

Over the past two centuries, technological developments have played an important role in language preservation. Recordings of Elders still exist on wax cylinders, cassette tapes, floppy discs, and magnetic recordings. Early Indigenous-language preservation and teaching methods included handwriting in syllabics and SRO and distribution by photocopying. As computers became available, coding special characters on older computer mainframe systems and later inserting symbols in the early word processors were arduous processes. The production of

Table 8.2*Language-Teaching Strategies*

Teaching strategy	Description	Potential mobile apps
Early childhood language and immersion programming	Includes programs such as language nests in which learners are immersed in the Indigenous language (McIvor, 1998). Language nests were first developed in New Zealand (Galley et al., 2016).	Age-appropriate games and activities that reflect curriculum
Total Physical Response (TPR)	Developed by Dr. James Asher, TPR includes the teaching of vocabulary connected with actions (First Peoples' Cultural Council, 2016).	Using the accelerometer of a smartphone, an app could be developed that tells a learner to perform an action, such as stand, sit, walk forward, etc.
Accelerated Second Language Acquisition	Developed by Dr. Stephen Greymorning, this method has less of a focus on vocabulary and action-related learning activities but more focus on quickly developing learners' ability to understand and produce simple sentences of two or three words (First Peoples' Cultural Council, 2016).	Apps can be developed that help to create connections between pictures, words, and the development of phrases and sentences (i.e., morphology and syntax).
Picture-word inductive model	The picture-word inductive model is a strategy that helps students to develop their reading and writing from a picture (Calhoun, 1999).	Apps can be developed that help develop connections between pictures, words, and the development of phrases and sentences.
Adult language classes	These are classes that target adult learners at varying levels of language fluency (McIvor, 1998).	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools that facilitate authentic dialogue. Automated exercises, audio recordings. Tools for self-checking progress.
Music and song	This strategy refers to the use of music, song, and dance to teach a language (Koole & Lewis, 2018).	Apps could play songs with synchronized lyrics; activities such as quizzes, close exercises, word identification exercises, etc.

(table continues)

Teaching strategy	Description	Potential mobile apps
Master-apprentice programming	In this immersion method, a fluent speaker is paired with a motivated adult learner to learn the language in a one-on-one setting (Galley et al., 2016).	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools to facilitate dialogue
Language houses	Adult language-learning immersion programs in which adults live with a fluent Indigenous language speaker and speak only the Indigenous language (Galley et al., 2016).	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools to facilitate dialogue
Courses for Silent Speakers	Courses that help speakers who understand the language but do not speak it (Galley et al., 2016)	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools to promote dialogue; dictionaries, exercises
Elder groups	Language learning in which fluent Elder speakers teach the language to nonspeakers and/or their peers (Galley et al., 2016)	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools to facilitate dialogue
Land-based learning	Encourages critical thought through interaction with the land and an understanding of nature	Plant identification apps could help learners to identify medicinal plants and other resources for a multitude of day-to-day activities.
Language camps	Opportunities for immersion and/or land-based learning in an authentic context (utilizing a blend of approaches; Galley et al., 2016)	Mobile synchronous and asynchronous communications tools to facilitate dialogue

computerized text in the syllabic system proved to be difficult until the development of the Unicode system in 1987–1988.

Technology can be positively implemented for linguistic and cultural revitalization by developing relevant and engaging materials as well as communication tools with which to practice the language. Current generations, even in remote parts of Saskatchewan, can connect (albeit sometimes intermittently) with mobile technology, create content, and circulate information at a rapid rate. “Mobile services via LTE were available to 99.0% of Canadians at the end of 2017. In rural communities, OLMCs, and Indigenous reserve areas, LTE was available to 95.9%, 99.0%, and 72.8% of the population, respectively” (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, 2019, p. 32). Indigenous reserves in Saskatchewan have

96.3% accessibility to LTE networks (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, 2019). However, in northerly regions outside communities and reserves, connectivity can be unreliable at best.

Ready access to the Internet, whether through broadband or cellular networks, opens possibilities for increased interaction, content creation, and content sharing. Wilmarth (2010) observed that engagement with social media such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, video, e-mail, text, and the plethora of image sharing apps available have made people both consumers and producers of content. Youth have become actively engaged in language-preservation initiatives through their use of digital technology:

Community-based language revitalization efforts have the potential to bring together youth, who are more comfortable with digital technology as users and producers, and Elders, who are language and cultural knowledge holders, to work collaboratively on language initiatives and projects—thus allowing for an intergenerational exchange of ideas, skills and learning opportunities. (Galla, 2009, p. 108)

Furthermore, technology can make language accessible in day-to-day social interactions and business—in addition to school-based programming. Using computer and mobile technology to enhance language learning and teaching has other positive implications, such as the ability to work at one’s own pace and receive immediate feedback, and mobility. Writing e-mail in the target language helps students to learn to read and write, and synchronous conferencing tools allow remotely based students to join conversations. Internet access creates opportunities for scanning, locating, synthesizing, retrieving, accessing, and exercising judgement while curating resources and information. Independent and/or communal use of the internet can create a sense of ownership for learners and communities because they can develop and access resources relevant to their specific communities. Last, “students will become multiliterate in their Native language and English, in addition to being literate in information and computer technology” (Galla, 2009, p. 178).

Challenges

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of digital tools for language revitalization. The Digital Tools for Language Revitalization in Canada (*wicêhtowin* University of Saskatchewan, 2020) database contains information and links to websites, video/audio repositories, and apps useful for Indigenous language revitalization in Canada (Koole et al., 2018; Koole & Lewis, 2018).

Initially, we found 156 online resources, of which 83 were dictionaries and 73 were audiolingual tools. Because we were unable to locate interactive apps for learning and practicing syntax in any Indigenous-Canadian language, communities might consider collaborating with technologists, designers, and researchers to develop the much-needed digital resources. At the same time, it is important that language acquisition also reflect the current words and concepts associated with modern life so that the language is fully useful in day-to-day life.

In designing mobile language tools, “it is important to consider how to design pedagogical activities and tools in ways that are respectful of the people’s needs, worldviews, protocols, and physical environments” (Koole & Lewis, 2018, p. 2). Although the statistics (above) suggest that First Nations reserve communities located in Saskatchewan have good LTE access rates, off-reserve and some northerly regions still lack consistent connectivity to support digital learning technologies; therefore, stand-alone apps are a better choice. Well-designed apps allow users to update or refresh content in areas of reliable connectivity and still use the apps in poor-bandwidth areas.

Cost and travel are also significant barriers for some learners (Parker, 2012). With digital technologies, particularly mobile technology, in remote locations, learners can continue their educational programs without having to leave their communities. Technology allows access to language-learning content and coordination with land-based and/or community-based activities such as harvesting, hunting, trapping, and fishing, thereby incorporating culturally relevant activities.

It is also advisable to consider the risks of technology in language revitalization. The loss of control over traditional knowledge (i.e., how we use it, who uses it, and when) is a serious issue. Some stories, for example, should be told only in certain seasons; some knowledge should be shared only within ceremony. In addition to inappropriate use, sometimes people outside the community commoditize traditional knowledge and practices. Galley et al. (2016) noted that “not all communities or Elders that are being recorded have access to data collected by outsiders after projects are completed and sometimes are asked to pay for [resulting] materials and dictionaries” (p. 14). Moreover, some Elders still do not want to be recorded with audio or video technology (Koole & Lewis, 2018). For some, sacred information, which is traditionally taught orally, cannot be shared through social media or other electronic forms of video/audio technology. Indeed, Elders and communities might view computer technology as potentially destructive and

distractive (Galla, 2009). However, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) wrote that “the risks of sharing information are less dangerous at the present time than the risk that it may otherwise be lost forever” (p. 92). Galla (2009) also argued that

technology has helped to document and preserve the voices of our people, gifting our future generations with priceless knowledge and wisdom. Since technology is so much a part of today’s culture, the future of Indigenous languages will depend partly on technology to engage students in learning. (p. 178)

Concluding Observations

Colonization, assimilation, and segregation policies have had a detrimental effect on Indigenous people throughout the world. In Canada “the situation of languages is very diverse; . . . for some, revitalization is needed; for others, maintenance is needed” (Galley et al., 2016, p. 22). Whatever the situation, language loss is occurring at a rapid rate and requires action, particularly in Saskatchewan. Sustainable resources through any technological platform should be developed in consultation and collaboration with local, situated communities. The land is life; it is spirit; languages are born on the land. Therefore, language learning must be connected to the land. In addition, the incorporation of both modern and traditional vocabulary will encourage day-to-day use. With proper planning and guidance from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Language Sharers in Indigenous communities, materials will be respectfully produced and made available if and when appropriate. The effective integration of technology can help not only to preserve, but also to share languages. With language and cultural knowledge intact, Indigenous peoples will be able to heal and move toward prosperity and nationhood, and future generations will be able to trace the footprints of the ancestors.

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CHAPTER 9:
CONCLUSION: I AM “HOME,” *NĒHIYAW* OMA NIYA

Abstract

Interrupting colonial spaces and the hegemony of mainstream educational institutions requires that we change the way that we think about and teach *Language*. To take up a gaze on the instruction and revitalization of language that is situated in a land perspective honours this as the source of language. Language is alive; it is ‘kin.’ Understanding language as kin generates notions of regeneration. Centering Indigeneity, language, and land work in unison enhances *nēhiyawak*, Indigenous persons, and enhances their identity.

CHAPTER 9:
CONCLUSION: I AM ‘HOME,’ NĒHIYAW ŌMA NIYA

In this final chapter, I explain how, through my work in language reclamation, I am working to interrupt colonial spaces and the hegemony of mainstream educational institutions. In conducting my work, I engage with and rigorously navigate Indigenous lifelong learning, founded in Indigenous community, language, and land. Ontology, epistemology, and relationality are the guiding “grandfathers” and “grandmothers” to and for Indigenous education. It is critical, then, that Indigenous education reflect the *nēhiyaw* spirit. Through my research, I have come to understand how Indigenous and Western knowledge can co-exist ethically in higher learning if we use protocol and respect and ensure that Indigenous scholars lead within the field of language revitalization. In sharing and interrogating my life collection of stories, lived, told, retold, and relived over decades, and intertwined with the stories of my ancestors in the present and those who will arrive in the future, I have worked to make visible the regeneration of *nēhiyaw* knowledge within a *nēhiyaw* paradigm. I have come to believe that it is imperative that we change the way that we teach, given my new and deepened understandings of *Language*, which I have acquired through a gaze from a land perspective. This last point is essential because language comes from the land. Language is alive, and it is ‘kin.’ My research has demonstrated that reproducing this idea through teaching and learning is possible and that it can become a strength-based approach, a success story, a love story, a *nēhiyaw* story within education. I am home. *nēhiyaw ōma niya* means I am a Cree, I am me.

***nēhiyawēwin* in Public Spaces . . . Interrupting**

When I observe my friends and family, my colleagues and my students, I see that their use of *nēhiyawēwin* language in public spaces is a clear indication that language lives in the hearts and minds of not just the old(er) speakers of the language, but also in those of new speakers who are awaking every day to its importance. Throughout my career of teaching and learning language, the emphasis between Cree speakers and Cree learners in language revitalization and reclamation has been on building, connecting, and interweaving relationships. Since I started this journey, I have laboured with extra careful attention and effort to surround myself with Cree-speaking people, such as colleagues, who have become my family. I have taken the time over many lunches, dinners, visits, walks, and ceremonies to practice speaking Cree with family and friends. Then, in turn, I have connected with other learners and attempted

to be a better teacher of Cree language by sharing all that I know for those who want to be *nēhiyaw* through language. I am always growing and nurturing my circle of relationships through the use and promotion of the Cree language.

Speaking the Language

I, my colleagues, and other Cree-speaking people, as well as those willing to learn to speak *nēhiyawēwin*, are making an authentic effort that goes beyond the classroom and the university. I am beginning to hear the language in the streets, in restaurants, in community, and, most importantly, in homes, whether it is the residents themselves who are speaking it or I hear the language on television or radio. Those of us who are speakers and mentors of the Cree language encourage each other by greeting and asking, “*tānsi ētawiya*”: How are you doing? Despite being infants in the language, the new generation of speakers is making gains in the revitalization and reclamation of *nēhiyawēwin* with the help of an ever-growing support system.

Naming and Signage

We see, hear, and use the consciousness of language in daily life and through concerted effort. We see the Cree language in the form of place names, signs on buildings, and street signs. Here in Saskatoon we have an art installation on Broadway, on the Saskatchewan Craft Council building, a team effort between my cousin Joseph Naytowhow and Tony Stallard, written in syllabics that translates to “River and Sky.” The syllabics on the entrance to the newly built Remai Modern Art Gallery spell out “Saskatchewan,” which is another Cree term that is the name of the river. Parks and bridges in Saskatoon with Cree origins include the Meewasin Valley and Kiwanis Memorial Park and the newly constructed bridge, Chief Mistawasis. Oskayak High School in Saskatoon has had a longstanding Cree name and, this past spring, Wahkotowin Elementary School is the new name that replaces the former name, Confederation Park School. “Linguistic landscape research tells us that the language we see in print around us” (Sterzuk, in press) is concrete evidence that Cree people honour the language and are asserting with fierce recognition that Cree people have always been here.

Media

We can also hear the Cree language on television and on local radio stations. The popular Missinipiy Radio Station in Lac La Ronge has two Cree language broadcasters, Abel Charles and Charly Durocher, who broadcast from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. daily during the week (Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation, n.d.). MBC is an Indigenous radio network that uses the Cree

language to enable speakers to understand the news in Cree. The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network offers children's Cree-language programming such as Louis Say, a popular show for young children. The National Film Board now showcases the animated series, *Wapos Bay*, which is another children's program in Cree. In 2020, Carl Quinn, from Saddle Lake, Alberta, another Cree performer, musician, and storyteller, received the Polaris Prize for a short film entitled *nēhiyawak nipīy* which is normally a music award but Quinn is speaking Cree. By airing these types of programs and exposing children to the language at a young age, media outlets are helping them to become familiar with the tone and intonation of the Cree language and are promoting pride and heritage. Using the Cree language, as we hear it in different multimedia, is another significant way to promote and honour the language.

For the first time in history, the National Hockey League broadcasted its games in Cree (Sportsnet, 2019). At the time, Sportsnet asked me to forward the names of people who might be suitable for or interested in the broadcasting job. I recommended my colleagues and friends Randy Morin and Bill Cook, both of whom work with the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience. However, Sportsnet selected Clarence Iron from Pine House, SK, for the play-by-play position of announcer in late 2019. Cree broadcasting of National Hockey League games is yet one more indication that spoken Cree is an active and ever-growing presence throughout the province and beyond.

Music

Music is another medium that influences the use and revitalization of the Cree language. We hear Cree lyrics on the radio, on television, or in person at concerts and live shows. Cree musicians and groups are being shortlisted for Grammy or Juno Awards. Performers such as the Northern Cree drum group have been nominated nine times for a Grammy Award and performed at the Grammys in 2017. Young Spirit, another group who sing and perform round dance songs (Kessler, 2019), also took to the same stage at the annual 61st Grammy Awards show. An Edmonton-based performing group called *nēhiyawak* received a nomination for their song "*nipīy*," which means "water" in Cree, for the Juno Awards in March of 2020. (No relation or connection to Carl Quinn.) These are only a few examples of how music and the Cree language work in unison in the performing arts to promote a resurgence of the intentional use of Cree in current times. The language is taking its rightful place on its lands and being spoken proudly in public spaces.

***nēhiyawēwin* in Academic Spaces . . . Interrupting**

A great deal more opportunity exists now in Saskatchewan than there was in the past to join and take part in *nēhiyawēwin* language opportunities, from formal spaces such as Cree classes to elementary bilingual-education programs to online classes and informal evening classes that the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience hosts. In Chapter 2, I discussed such language-learning opportunities, many of which Indigenous language teachers and their communities are leading. Chapter 6 makes visible an emerging awareness and the growing opportunities to study Indigenous language revitalization in academia. Indigenous language revitalization research and practice is occurring in such places as the Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute, Blue Quills College, First Nations University, University of Winnipeg, and University of Victoria, to name just a few sites in Western Canada. Although Indigenous scholars such as Dr. Greymorning, Dr. Onawa McIvor, Dr. Michelle Johnson, Dr. Patricia Steinhauer-Hill, Dr. Shelagh Nicolas, Dr. Patricia Shaw, Dr. Verna Kirkness, Dr. Teresa L. McCarty and Dr. Benard Perley, to name but a few, are undertaking a growing body of scholarly research, it is still a relatively new phenomenon. It is wonderful to see the field growing further through the work of up-and-coming scholars such as Andrea Custer, Ryan Caire, Chelsey Vowel, Simon Bird, Charlotte Ross, Joline Mearon-Bull, Cameron Adams, and William (Bill) Cook.

Generational Language Transmission

Some of this language revitalization work is the result of the efforts of language activists teamed with local *kēhtē-ayak*—“Old Ones”—in Indigenous communities. Using Indigenous methodologies, *kēhtē-ayak* share their experiences and efforts in the area of language revitalization while researchers capture and inquire into those experiences. Blue Quills College, First Nations University, University of Regina, and the University of Saskatchewan are a few postsecondary institutions that collaborate on such efforts. In Chapter 8, I described a few of these collaborations in detail and recommended further application of the learning that arises from such research.

The Cree language teachers with whom I work are committed to a vision to honour our ancestors through generational language transmission. We want to pass on the language to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. In conversations on research with many of my Cree family and friends, we concluded that transmission of the language is essential to our work.

Through continued training, my colleagues, particularly those who are involved in the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience, are continually learning how to teach the language effectively. To be effective, we research, share, and disseminate best practices to maintain language continuity for our learners, either through the annual *nēhiyawak* Language Experience or in our language classrooms. Language maintenance is also part of this practice; we not only teach and share among ourselves, but we also preserve and keep up with modern times by ensuring that others write, share, store, and learn the language. Participating in annual language camps is one way of ensuring maintenance. The language teachers with whom I work are all skilled in writing down the Cree language, whereas I am still, at best, an amateur at this practice.

In our language maintenance team, Randy Morin specializes in language revitalization, Dorothy Thunder in linguistics, and William (Bill) Cook in Cree online learning. We research alongside active learners of the Cree language, also in the field of academia. Dr. Andrea Sterzuk, an applied linguist with the University of Regina, and Pete Turner, a PhD candidate who is studying antiracist education, both continually take part in *nēhiyawak* Language Experience camps and online or face-to-face classes, drawing on their experiences of Cree as a second-language adult learning. As a research team, we are all concerned with Indigenous language revitalization and are working towards the development of best practices for transmission.

The Language Spirit

nēhiyawēwin, taught deliberately with focus, reveals the “spirit” of what the language holds. This way of teaching and learning includes *nēhiyaw* ontology, epistemology, and relationality. As I discussed in Chapter 7, *nēhiyawēwin* is a gift from Creator. As *nēhiyawak*, we believe that language is alive with a spirit, and we honour this sacred spirit through the intention of appropriate protocols, prayers, and offerings. We lay tobacco on the ground at Cree languages camps; we pray, we sing, we smudge. We take part in Sweatlodge ceremonies, and we then offer cloth or food or a gift in ceremony:

Because the spirit of language calls us, we came together with a shared goal. In our research of the language camp, we became story-tellers and shared our experiences and understandings. Through this process, we learned in spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, linguistic, and theoretical ways. (Daniels et al., in press)

Spiritually, we learn with and through the land by taking part in prayer, song, smudge, and Sweatlodge ceremonies and building an understanding of language from root words. For

example, the word for “day” is *kisikaw*, “sky” is *kisik*, and “eye” is *miskīsik*. The land, its environment, and our bodies are connected relationally. Emotionally, we connect through relationship building with one another, with the land, and with the language. By physically taking our bodies out on the land, we are embodying the language and learning the language and its connection to our environment. Mentally, we are learning and relearning ancient knowledge systems, remembering and reenacting what our ancestors might have known. Linguistically, we are speaking and learning the roots of words and connecting words to phrases and stories. These are all practical examples of authentic learning in that we practice how to say words and phrases over and over again. Theoretically, we are planning, dreaming, and theorizing about what our ancestors have always done.

The *nēhiyawak* Language Experience includes individuals from all walks of life, such as teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, artists, film directors, and musicians. We work together to interrupt the colonial hegemony of mainstream institutional education by learning from our own people on our own lands. In past ceremonies or events, I have heard the non-Indigenous participants, learners who are not Cree, referred to as our White cousins; they too are included because there is room. Because our White settler relatives are physically out on the land with us, it is an indication that they, too, want to support the Cree language and its People. Through this shared language experience, we make allies built on relationships. The effort that people make to come from faraway places such as Toronto and Vancouver to take part in an annual language camp is evidence of their belief in the importance and validity of gathering knowledge on the land and learning from First Nations community.

Changes: Movement and Action

Becoming a language revivalist in these current social and political times involves new and emerging forms of antiracist education. Social movements such as and the actions of concerned citizens who make up our diversified society support language revitalization. Four women, Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean, and Nina Wilson, founded Idle No More. These three Indigenous women and one White settler “felt it was urgent to act on current and upcoming legislation that not only affects our First Nations people but the rest of Canada’s citizens, lands, and waters” (Idle No More, 2020). In November 2012, these women held their first “teach-in,” a peaceful protest to spread the word that the Canadian government was lifting the restrictions of the protection-of-the-environment policies and putting First Nations people at

risk, along with the lands and waters. Their work grew into a worldwide phenomenon; created solidarity work between Indigenous Peoples and Settlers, who worked together as allies; and was a direct connection to our Earth and a direct relationship with Indigenous lands, languages, and Peoples.

These unique opportunities for Indigenous languages and Indigenous Peoples are exciting, and the diversified collective actions of Indigenous Peoples with White allies have created hope, as I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and speak to the determination to break free of conformity, patriarchy, and linear Western ways of thinking. They are exemplified in the allied partnerships and initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), processes such as “Indigenization” of the workplace, cultural responsiveness initiatives in educational curricula and education systems, and the growing development of programming on Indigenous language revitalization across the disciplines of academic studies. Recently, and most important, they are evident in the federal government’s passing of the Indigenous Languages Act in 2019, a significant indication that we are moving forward together.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (2015) Specific Calls to Action 14 to 17 focused on Indigenous languages. Following these calls to action, in 2019 the United Nations declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages. This decision arose from the alarming dramatic decline in numbers of Indigenous languages around the world, the direct link to colonial oppression, and the loss of Indigenous lands. In the same year, a concerned collective of Indigenous leaders and allies prepared for the Indigenous Languages Act. Consultations took place across Canada between the federal government and various First Nations representatives, and government representatives looked for solutions and ideas to formulate the new act. I was a part of the consultations, along with many of my colleagues involved in language recovery work.

The Indigenous Languages Act of 2019 is significant because it finally acknowledges the Indigenous languages of Canada. It speaks to our collective existence, it generates notable support through federal direction across the country for Indigenous languages, and it creates a foundational database of revitalization strategies. The federal government, through Heritage Canada, is currently seeking candidates for the position of commissioner and three directors of Indigenous languages. Filling these positions will create a substantial learning hub through which to collaborate and disseminate Cree dialects across the country. It is a good start.

However, although the Indigenous Languages Act is an act of respect, the government has yet to attach federal monies to support the 70 languages and dialects. Through reconciliation, we hope that in the future the Crown will finally honour the original Treaty agreements.

Looking Backward

In researching my lifelong journey home and my experiences as a language revivalist, I have become conscious of lessons that I have learned at various points in my life and the knowledge that I carry forward with me and why.

As a child, I experienced the same methods of “knowledge keeping” in my engagement in daily activities that my grandparents did when they were children. As I explained in Chapters 3 and 4, when I was a child, the Cree language spoken throughout my community affirmed my existence, surroundings, environment, family, and identity. My childhood seemed blessed with the discipline and appreciation of land, language, and community. Because of the land education that I received as a child, I have come to realize that “relationships to land are familial, intimate, intergenerational, and instructive” (McCoy et al., 2016, p. 9).

In revisiting and unpacking my experiences in urban public school, which I storied in Chapters 3 and 4, I came to understand that the institution of schooling is a controlling mechanism that disengages and isolates Indigenous children from their own people’s way of being in the world. In the public-education systems I felt the pain of racism, inferiority, and classification and realized my state of poverty in this type of setting. At this time I learned that I was “landless and property-less” (Paperson, as cited in McCoy et al., 2016, p. 116):

Land is a predominant concern in settler colonialism, and thus, people are arranged—raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, dis/abled, il/legalized—into triadic relations to land: the settler whose power lies in shaping the land into his wealth, the Indigenous inhabitant whose claim to land must be extinguished. (p. 116)

Without the inclusion of the history of my people, who inhabited this land for thousands of years, I was erased; we were erased. A key aspect of the work of language revitalization, then, is to address this erasure and to consciously teach and learn in ways in which we unlearn these “raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, dis/abled, il/legalized” (p. 116) relations to land.

The high school sciences, like biology, in my schooling as a youth made me think about land as something insignificant and separate; again, as a commodity. The labels that we used in school for land were “habitat” or “environment”:

Environmental education has been largely silent on land, that is, silent on the settler colonial recasting of land into ‘environment’ and silent on broader Indigenous understandings of land as ancestor, as sovereign, as people-places with their own politics and identities. (Paperson, as cited in McCoy et al., 2016, p. 118)

The idea of environments in a general sense instead of conceptualizations of land or territory, as I discussed in Chapter 7, is to further prevent Indigenous peoples from belonging anywhere. It is essential, then, that language revitalization be land based; that is, centered in a place and as a way of belonging.

Returning to the Present

How do I bring these lessons forward as an educator in mainstream schooling? How do I resist colonialism and share a history in which our ancestors lived off and with the land? I live my learnings as a language revivalist by annually harvesting sage with my students, practicing protocol while we do so. I show my students what I remember and have learned about who we are as *nēhiyawak* people. I plan with the fall seasonal weather patterns and observe local areas periodically. Then eventually I take my students out to pick, pull, and cut two types of sage. I relive my past, intertwined with our shared present, to honour who we are. Together with my students on the land, I show a continuous appreciation for the abundance of what the earth has to offer. Outdoors, we are physically on the land, and this is where we belong.

How do I bring these lessons forward as a *nēhiyaw* on a lifelong journey home? I continue to learn with my family and community, to identify and teach the plant relatives and the cures that they offer. I participate in our community’s annual gardening program in the neighbourhood of Mount Royal in Saskatoon and the “Boys to Men” Youth Warrior Club, whose focus is on language and land-based learning in my home community of Sturgeon Lake. I also play a major part in community development, primarily through the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience, a space for critical engagement with language learning, revitalization, and reclaiming, as I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. My work and research in language revitalization have awakened me to my multiple roles and responsibilities as a community leader/mother/teacher and as a scholar.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discussed my roles of mother, teacher, and community leader in great detail; they stem from the same place of wanting the best for my family and community. I discussed my role of teacher and related it to the role of auntie in Chapter 3. I remember during

one staff meeting, when I commented on how much I care about my students and that I love my students as much as I do my children and want the very best for all them, I witnessed the rolling of eyes and abrupt stares of the other staff members, who considered my remark wildly absurd. I believe that that is part of the problem: that the role of teacher is one of an extended family member. As I discussed in Chapter 3, schools are not neutral places or safe for me or my Indigenous students. In Chapter 4, I explained that I stepped out of the typical teacher role, made a greater effort to go back home to my community of Sturgeon Lake, and began to share my gifts and talents outside the education system through my work with the *nēhiyawak* Language Experience.

Relationality is the story that I told when I introduced myself at the beginning of this dissertation: *niya ōma okohkōma, okāwīya, owikimākanēw, okāwisa ēkwa okiskinwahmakēw*: I am Belinda (*kakiyosēw*). I am a grandmother, mother, wife, auntie, and teacher. Relationality is the story that I tell about myself in every chapter in this dissertation as I locate myself within my people and on the land. Caring for family and maintaining relationships are my first roles and responsibilities. Carrying the history of beginnings and the lands that we occupied and transmitting the language and what little I know to others—my livelihood (my work)—is my second relational responsibility.

Weaving in and out of Community and Academia

Returning to community for me has been the most fulfilling and powerful act of reclaiming my identity, a pride and love affair with my people. Leanne Simpson (2017) referred to this act of reclamation as “grounded normativity,” which she defined as the “ethical frameworks generated by these place-based practices and associated knowledges. . . . We’ve always known our way of life comes from the place or land through the practice of our modes of intelligence” (p. 22). Going back to land, all of the lands in Treaty 6 Territory, has been a sensational feeling of connection paralleled with learning to speak and understand *nēhiyawēwin*. Community, land, and language reclamation have incommensurably given me purpose and strength.

The annual language camps have had some movement, literally, from Sturgeon Lake to Little Pine, Mistawasis, Saskatoon, and La Ronge and into mini language workshops in 2019 and 2020 throughout the cities of Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. We are also teaching Cree online language classes and developing apps, as I discussed in Chapter 8. In these urban settings

the language workshops take place in community spaces and non-profit organizations because these settings are more natural and complementary to acquire language over the sharing of food and visiting than is the formal classroom style of learning. Teaching in this way is an enactment of informal politics and creates a language movement over “visiting” (Farrell Racette, 2018; Simpson, 2017).

Pursuing doctoral studies has engaged me deeply in thinking about mainstream learning systems and assisted me in unravelling and unpacking linear thinking:

When Indigenous knowledge is omitted or ignored in schools and a Eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledge and languages, these are conditions that define an experience of cognitive imperialism. Cognitive imperialism is about white-washing the mind as result of forced assimilation, English education, Eurocentric humanities and sciences, and living in a Eurocentric context complete with media, books, laws and values. (Battiste, 2013, p. 26)

When I go home to Sturgeon Lake, I decolonize, I relearn, and I observe. I take in more lifelong learning founded in language, community, and land. Each time adds strength to who I am, and I acquire *nēhiyaw*-ness. “Amerindians think that while they have changed, like everything in the world, they are still themselves. Their vision is the same: they maintain their respect for the earth” (Sioui, 1992, p. 23). I grow more assured as a *nēhiyaw* with every encounter that I have with all of my relations.

For me, taking the time to engage in language learning has been arduous. At the same time, it is a sacrifice to which I have remained committed, much like ceremony, which takes time and is also a sacrifice and has its place out on the land. “If you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it” (Simpson, 2017, p. 165). This is so true in the Cree language camps. When the people and the language spirit are ready, we teach and we learn. This is relationship to the land and to the Creator. As I discussed in Chapter 6, we seriously seek ethical engagement and draw it into Indigenous education. In that chapter, Andrea Sterzuk and I conceptualized creating ethical space that values the teaching of Indigenous languages, with Indigenous peoples leading in this field as key knowledge holders of language and land. We then extended this idea and imagined possible solutions through the fields of language revitalization and applied linguistics working together. Currently, mainstream

education does not allot time to the development of this kind of relationship; thus this type of expansion of *nēhiyaw* thought processes continues to be overlooked.

Expansion of *nēhiyaw* Consciousness

The expansion of relating makes ontology, epistemology, and relationality the guiding “grandfathers” and “grandmothers” of Indigenous education and its connection to *nēhiyaw* spirit. This idea came to me during our shared research project, as I discussed in Chapter 7. When we coded as a group—Randy Morin, Pete Turner, Andrea Sterzuk, Dorothy Thunder, Bill Cook, and I—the consciousness, the mind, or the thought processes of Cree people at Cree camp arose as a main theme. The collaboration process in itself was enlightening and relational.

This is the kind of learning that affects the consciousness and our behaviour and stirs up memory—collective memory. In Cree, *maskikiw mām[i]tone[yi]hcikan* refers to a kind of collaboration [that] has a long history. The collaboration is in fact “the indigenous mind in action.” In Cree terms this may be expressed as *maskikiw mām[i]tone[yi]hcikan*, which reflects that in thinking, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. (Lightning, 1992, p. 228)

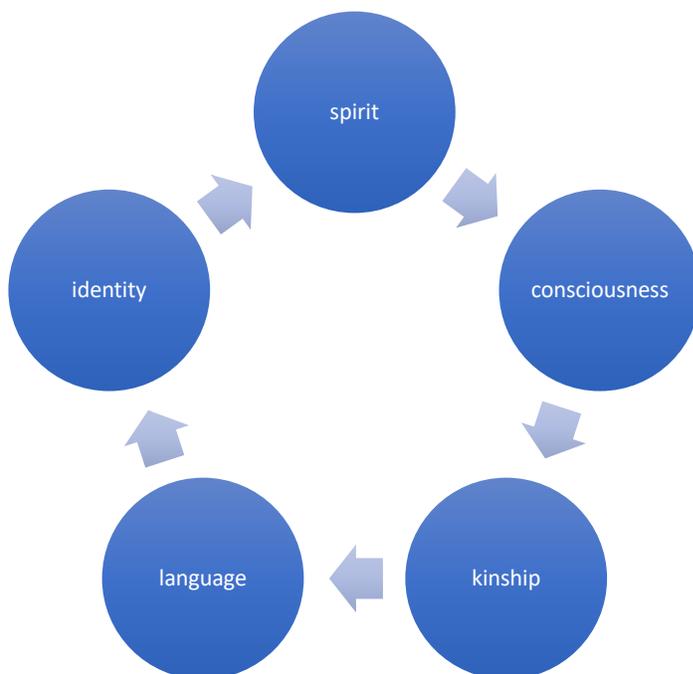
We discussed our similar thoughts of our past, how we were raised and taught what we believe about the land and the people. As we camped together multiple times over the years, we began to know each other better. I believe that this is how all of these occurrences are relational and how I made sense of them. All elements of the camps—the language, the land, the people, the teachers—are about relationality. Figure 5 illustrates how my experiences have helped me to understand how these aspects work together. “Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship” (Wilson, 2008, p. 74).

Spirit and Consciousness

From my teachings I know that I come from Spirit, an all-knowing consciousness sometimes known as Creator; I carry a piece of spirit within me, as I come from that “Hole in the Sky.” I am here only temporarily to receive, learn, evolve, and grow. I intend to grow old and return to *kīwētinoḥk*, towards the north, and then to that Hole in the Sky. In Cree, the hole in the sky translates to *pakonē-kisik* which an elder from the Pas/Opaskawayak, MB who shares Cree origins on a local radio station (Buck, 2016). My touchstones for guidance while I am here existing are my dreams, visions, and intuition, along with the physicality of ceremony, land, stories, and our language. This is *nēhiyaw* identity.

Figure 9.1

nēhiyaw Identity



Spirit in Cree is *ahcāhk*. We all have it within us. Whether people are Cree or not, we are spiritual beings with a physical experience—a temporary experience at that. We come from the stars, which in Cree is *acāhkosak*. Our spiritual teacher is *wīsahkēcāhk*, and *he* teaches us many lessons while we are on Earth. I have learned that we know our physical story before it even begins, that our life lessons are known before we are born, and that our Spirit gains wisdom and evolves from our expectant life experiences. We learn from the teachings that we must not interfere in the life journeys of others, but that we must help to guide their journeys, and that this teaching extends to our own children as well. Our children are gifts from Creator; we do not own them, but we are here to help them to evolve and expand, acts in which we engage out of love. This love is a part of the spirit within us. Spirit is within everything alive on Earth that the Creator has given us out of love.

Kinship

Our relationships with Creator, our families, and our children constitute our Kinship system; we can consider it “Kinstellations” in reference to the stars and Cree people coming

from the stars. My cousin Karyn Recollect, an English professor at the University of Toronto, used this term. This kinship concept that we value and regard as law extends to land as well; land is also kin. Kinship also goes beyond our extended families and our communities. It includes land, water, sky—all of the places that have life; all of this is kinship and is about our relationships.

Within our kinship of communication is language, and how we address each other is significant. We use our language to convey terms of endearment and relationship; it determines how we address each other and how we think and behave. In family units we refer to each other as auntie, uncle, cousin, and so on. Family units are extended, which is why we have many relatives. This is also why in prayer we close with *kahkiyaw niwāhkōmākanak*, which means “all of my relations.” Again, it is about everything and everyone to whom we are related beyond immediate family; we extend it to the land, the water, the sky, and beyond the sky, such as the sun, moon, stars, other planets, galaxies, and the cosmos. It is never ending.

Language

Language has a song. We hear and see the sound system of *nēhiyawēwin* in the early writing system, sometimes known as *syllabics*, which I discussed in Chapters 2 and 8. The story and gift of syllabics comes from the Spirit world. The symbols collaboratively are in the shape or form of a star; *cahkipēhikan* indicates the name of these symbols. Furthermore, *nēhiyawak* believe that we come from the stars, *acāhkosak*; within each of us resides *ahcaāhk*, a spirit or flame. “The gift of language, *kinēhiyawēwinaw*, is a powerful and sacred gift. The *nēhiyawak* have been given this language, which is heard all across much of Treaty 6 Territory” (McAdam, 2015, p. 24).

The Cree language, then, informs our communication with one another; *nēhiyawēwin* encompasses everything about what it means to be a *nēhiyaw*. Ontology and epistemology work closely together in relation to being Cree, speaking Cree, and teaching Cree. “To start, this work is premised on a belief that nested within any methodology is both a knowledge belief system (encompassing ontology and epistemology) and the actual methods. The two work in tandem” (Kovach, 2009, p. 25). Language gives us this. The meaning of life and everything about life, the teachings are all there within the language: the way of being, knowing, doing, and thinking. Being among *nēhiyawak* is where the language lives, which thus gives me the identity of being *nēhiyaw*.

Identity

Identity is made of all of this; spirit, consciousness, kinship, language are who we are; they are collectively who we are, *nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw*. I am still learning, still on this journey, and I still do not know much about such things.

Relationality captures our interdependence in interlocking and respectful systems. It is a process of harmony and balance. As a child I understood and appreciated this; however, when I was exposed to mainstream education, my view became fragmented, and I became confused about my existence. My intuition and belief in prayer tapped into *mamāhtāwisiwin* and led me slowly and essentially back to my inherent Creeness, with the help of higher learning. I could not name it before, or place it, or be analytical about it. I have not readily or easily admitted this insight, but higher learning has taught me to think critically about the difference between schooling and education.

In our study, which I documented in Chapter 7, Randy Morin, Andrea Sterzuk, Pete Turner, Dorothy Thunder, Bill Cook and I used Sharing Circles as a methodology situated in *nēhiyaw* epistemology, pedagogy, relationality, and ontology and “grounded in normativity” (Simpson, 2017, p. 22). Simpson stated that “grounded normativity isn’t a thing; it is a generated structure born and maintained from deep engagement with Indigenous processes that are inherently physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual” (p. 23). We came to understand that “our co-constructed narrative tells a story of language speakers in relation to language and not of language speakers working to acquire or possess a language. ‘We are helpers, conduits, catalysts, we are kin!’” (Daniels et al., in press). It is interesting to note that the voice of Land clearly surfaced through this collective experience. We are mending, re-creating, and reenvisioning relationships with the Land. We remember and celebrate the relationship to land, the Earth, the water, and the sky.

The Voice of the Land

One member of our research team, Peter Turner, from James Smith First Nation, who is a husband, father, teacher, doctoral candidate, and learner of Cree, captured the notion in our research circles that being connected to land and operating from this position keeps us whole as a Nation and distinct:

I see language and Land as two ways to maintain our identity and our citizenship in our community [Nation]. . . . In maintaining our identities, being on the land, whether we are

sleeping, sitting, in a ceremony or in our way of being, doing, speaking, thinking, involves the land. (Research circle conversation)

Peter explained that, given who we are as *nēhiyawak* people, our bodies, minds, and spirits are imbued with the land and its ecologies and that the rhythm that takes over is the Land's heartbeat.

Because of the understanding that all things are interrelated, Land-based language teaching is an important area of Indigenous language revitalization. Language and Land work in unison. Learning in this way goes back to the beginning for *nēhiyawak*. It is as it has always been. "The Land, *aki*, is both context and process" (Simpson, 2017, p. 151). Colours in Cree carry significance in relation to Land. The colour "blue" is *sīpikwaw*. The word for "river" in Cree is *sīpīy*, and water is *nipīy*, a correlation. "Green" is *askitiwāw* in relation to *askiy*, the Earth. *kisik* is "sky"; however, "day" in Cree is *kisikaw*, which we see only when the sun is up—*pīsīm*. The elements of nature and its natural elements, wind, water, rock, earth, trees, and plants, all have a name and a song; all are alive. The natural elements long to hear their names spoken and heard in prayers. They are Spirit Helpers, waiting and assisting people/human beings.

Indigenous communities are fully aware of their relationship to the Land; the moons and seasons are named after the "happening" of the environment. For instance, January is known as *kisē pīsīm*, which means "Elder" or "great moon." April is known as *ayīki pīsīm*, which is "frog moon." June is *paskāwīhowi pīsīm*, which means "when the birds have hatched." October is *pimihāwi-pīsīm*, or "Flying or Migrating moon." Observation was and still is a key element in and being of the Land. As *nēhiyawak*, we thrive in this aspect, as in a sense of maintaining and regenerating knowledge, engaging with spirit and in spirit, and creating awareness, and as learners who choose to be speakers. We remember Land, and it becomes the impetus of identity and its kinship ties to us and hence re-creates and rebuilds Nationhood.

The *nēhiyaw* language persuades speakers to look forward. For example, in Cree the word for "life" is *pimātisiwin* as shared by scholar Willie Ermine... The word *pim* is the motion/notion of moving forward in life. *pimohtē*, *pimicikē*, *pimātso* are all about moving forward: Our bodies, our machines, our lives move forward. McCarty et al. (2019) explained that "we focus on the forward-looking work of the survivors of linguistic assimilation and what we call the four R's: resurgence, reclamation, revitalization and resilience, . . . exploring the dynamic, multi-sited, multi-vocalic language practices within contemporary Indigenous

communities” (p. 1). Indigenous languages maintain current traditional knowledge systems and regenerate new knowledge. When we use and speak Indigenous languages, we honour and appreciate land and its diverse ecologies, which results in a healthy environmental space and place. From most Indigenous perspectives, both animate and inanimate objects have a life spirit that is essential to harmony and balance, well-being, and interrelationships. In learning language, then, we learn to communicate in all kinds of ways with all kinds of things. Believing in unseen powers and accepting the fact that all things are linked and depend on each other enact, relive, and reinstate the concept of “all of my relationships.”

How Do We Reengage?

In exploring how Indigenous and Western knowledge can co-exist ethically in higher learning through the use of protocol, respect, and by ensuring that Indigenous scholars lead within the field of language revitalization, I believe that those in higher education first need to readily accept that Indigenous peoples are key knowledge holders; let us honour this.

In finding a position in which to start in the process of co-existing ethically, according to Ermine’s (2007) theory of ethical space, we already have a model of co-operating in friendship; it is the Treaty relationship and it will help us all move forward:

We have in this country attempted to follow some measure of international protocol and honour among nations through treaty-making. The treaties between the First Nation and the Crown are historical models of how negotiation can happen between nations as the representations of diverse human communities. (p. 200)

What we need to do next is to make a concerted effort to clear the chaos that colonialism has created, chaos that has nearly obliterated the *nēhiyaw* mind, identity, and knowledge systems. Let us acknowledge this fact and agree, to some degree, that we all have lost our way. As a *nēhiyaw* being, fixated on mainstream and modern Canadian culture, I believe that my ideals were confused. “The ideas from our knowledge bases are so entangled and enmeshed with the other that we now find it compelling to decipher Indigenous thought from European thought” (Ermine, 2007, p. 197). Language of the Cree can clarify this confusion.

How do we emphasize and demonstrate learning from this reengaged friendship and produce holistic thinking in mainstream education? The fragments of Indigenous education in subject-based courses in schools create fragmented learning and cause a disruption. Teaching from an immersion state of learning in Cree does not disrupt learning. How can the dominant

other let go and promote a mutual level of leading? As I discussed in Chapter 6, developing a field of language revitalization requires space for Indigenous scholars and their voices to be heard. The same is true in the education school system:

If we want to live a different present, one where Indigenous languages are once again languages of community interaction, it will require great effort and must continue to be lead by Indigenous communities and scholars. Yet, strategic efforts from Indigenous language revitalization in aligning with allies in all fields of interdisciplinary academia, including applied linguistics, can create new emerging pathways. We will have to be courageous in trying something different. (Daniels & Sterzuk, 2019, p. 3)

Let us reengage with mindfulness, authenticity, and the real need to have a healthy relationship with two thought processes to create a world that is balanced, equitable, and fulfilling for future generations.

Gazing Through *nēhiyawēwin*

Because of the inherent belief that the Cree language is alive with Spirit, it is imperative that we change and approach language like that of loving parent or grandchild. Language is sacred and deserves the utmost respect as reflected in *nēhiyaw* practices such as utilizing protocol with ceremony. Such respect is critically important in education, especially if it involves language revitalization and reclamation. “This resurgence engages both youth and adults as second language learners who are bringing ancestral languages into new uses and domains” (McCarty et al., 2019, p. 3); but it is still ancestral, ceremonial, healing work. We want future generations to have what we all did not have when we grew up, which is language sanctity.

Language reclamation is not only about language learning, but also about questioning why and going deeper into the language “to express something closer to an Indigenous ontology to

“We are, therefore I am.” Extending this, we might imagine that the ontology of place-based paradigms is something like “I am, therefore place is”; in contrast, the ontology of land-based pedagogies might be summarized as “Land is, therefore we are.” (McCoy et al., 2016, p. 45)

Bringing language and its kinship systems back to the home front re-establishes learning about language through community-driven initiatives and theory. “Learning to navigate different epistemologies and ontologies has important social cue, serving as a useful strategy for the

emergence of better relationships and for addressing material and cultural inequalities” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019, p. 121). It also creates deep interconnecting ties among the immediate family.

Attending to Community Divides

An ongoing Indigenous-community divide still exists between traditionalism and religion, which means that some Indigenous peoples practice *nēhiyaw* ceremonies, such as feasts, round dances, sun dances, shaking-tent ceremonies; whereas others go to church, sing the gospel of God, and read and believe in the Bible. No way is right or wrong, but as community we must work together because there is no suggestion of solidarity between church go-ers and traditionalists with regard to language continuity.

Funding

Cree language learning and transmission, in my experience, are not yet priorities. We still lack funding, both in urban areas and especially on reserves, and we need current funding for services that are crucial to life. However, language immersion programs cost money, a luxury that many Indigenous communities do not believe that they have. We hope that the Indigenous Languages Act of 2019 will make a difference in this regard, because we have no promises of funds. Currently, the federal government works through Heritage Canada and has dispersed monies through this body, but it is still not enough to sustain the 70 Indigenous languages, including dialects, across Canada.

Language Speakers and Teachers

We currently have a scarcity of fluent speakers, certified teachers specialized in language development, and ongoing teacher training. Hinton (2011) confirmed that teachers not only need to speak the language, but also understand theory and development in second-language acquisition. Further, they have to be committed to do this hard work beyond their regular work schedules with heart, tenacity, and courage.

At this moment, as I have learned from experience, language teachers are overworked and underpaid. First, they must contend with the Saskatchewan curriculum and then transfer and/or translate it into Cree thought. Because the Cree language is very difficult to translate into English, much of the meaning is omitted. Second, Cree teachers often receive little respect in some communities and mainstream schools because they are often slotted as “prep-time” or

“release-time” teachers. Such positioning does not honour the language or the person who teaches the language, and all school communities need to address and change this attitude.

School Calendar

Perhaps the way that the school system is structured is part of the problem. The current school calendar is not suitable to the realm of Cree ways of knowing, being, and doing. For example, harvesting time is in July, the busiest time for picking medicines, berries, and mushrooms. It is an opportune time to learn, grow, and gain practical *nēhiyaw* knowledge. I have suggested ideas for the learning plan of my home community of Sturgeon Lake, such as allowing students four to six weeks off school in June and July to accommodate Sun Dance attendance and summer harvesting and another four to six weeks off in December and January to provide students time for winter story learning, making, crafting, round dancing, and visiting. I have also suggested ways in which schools can include community knowledge holders, such as parents and Elders, to assist language teachers and make learning possible in half-day programming blocks. This would enable students’ learning on and with the land and community engagement with the school, while at the same time reducing pressure on language teachers.

Parent Engagement

With regard to the future for Indigenous language reclamation, what recommendations can we put forward? What are we currently awake to and doing? Alternatively, what are we missing? Reconciliation work requires being open-minded and allowing Indigenous peoples, researchers, practitioners, and community members to lead. The kind of alternative knowledge that they generate and will generate might very well define the future of the language reclamation field. Although policy will help, real change will come from the peoples in communities.

In that regard, parent engagement—the engagement of family members in the role of caregivers in the lives of children and in acts of parenting (Pushor, 2013)—is a crucial pillar in our move toward successful language reclamation. “Schooling” took children away from parents, grandparents, and communities at a most fundamental time of opportunity to teach them. I propose that we give their autonomy back to parents. Indigenous education is much bigger than schooling. Teachers, schools, and systems can do part of the work, but let us honour parents and community for their part of the work too. Pushor (2019) pointed to the need to place autonomy back in the role of parents: “It is important to name the role of parent because of its special

significance within a family . . . [and] its special significance within a school” (p. 243). Parents’ role in the family is momentous because they are the first teachers of their children. Parents’ knowledge “is generated, held and used” (Pushor, 2015a, p. 16) for a number of years before schooling. Children already understand who they are and how much they are loved; they know what is valued and important from their home-learning experience. Children comprehend their realms of life. Just “because parent knowledge [is] not formalized by society” (p. 14), it does not make it any less significant than teachers’ knowledge. “Let’s acknowledge that teachers and parents both hold knowledge of children” (p. 9). Let us acknowledge homes and communities as places filled with *nēhiyaw* “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 2005) and practical lived experiences.

Pushor (2015a) demonstrated that parents’ knowledge arises from “bodied or embodied” experience (p. 16). This unique and particular knowledge grows from intimate childrearing and parents’ practical familiarity with their children. Parents’ and children’s living together in a dynamic rhythm of family life is a continual learning process. For example, when I grew up with my grandparents, we always paid attention to the seasons and weather because we had only a wood-burning stove for heat in the winter. All summer we would harvest deadfall and cut down poplar trees. *nimosōm* referred to these as “green” trees and would say, “Let’s go cut and haul some green wood.” This taught me that this type of wood burns longer in the wood stove during the winter nights and, related to this, that we would have to clean out the pipes more often. I now offer my own children this land-based education. They know, for example, that a couple of days after a good rain in the latter part of summer, we can pick chanterelle mushrooms. My children know the significance of offering tobacco to the land for multiple purposes and reasons; they know and understand that this protocol is specific and special. As my examples illustrate, children who see, observe, and “be” alongside their parents in everyday life receive an education and are engaged in a “birth to forever” (Pushor, 2013, p. 8) teaching and learning process. As a result, parents play a sacred role in the lives of their children and have knowledge to share with them—and thus with the school as well.

Given this sacred role of parents, it is critical that their presence and knowledge extend into school, elevated and highlighted, to ensure that the *nēhiyaw* thought process, as a stream of learning, continues inside as well as outside school. Currently, we have a disconnect “because schools are structured to privilege teacher knowledge, and provide very limited, and superficial,

opportunity for parents to share their knowledge” (Pushor, 2015a, p. 19). Yes, we have community Elders who are sometimes involved in special occasions such as the once-a-year seasonal feast or in an opening or offering at a Pow-wow, but we also need more of a set precedent. “When schools are viewed as places of teaching and learning for teachers and children only, with parents positioned off the school landscape, teachers and parents remain foreigners to one another” (Pushor, 2015b, p. 40). This must change. Parents and their knowledge are critical to the school’s goals and values and language revitalization and reclamation. Let us ensure that parents’ gifts—cultural if not linguistic—remain integral in the processes of learning.

In our current “schooling,” are we continuing the trend of residential schools? Has the absence of parents extended into public education? As an educator, I do not see parents, grandparents, or *omosōmimawak* and *ohkomimāwak* walking through the halls or having a presence in the classrooms of our schools. It would make sense to engage parents in learning with the teacher, the school, and the child. Perhaps then Indigenous parents such as I would feel comfortable in reengaging with the school in a more meaningful way of authentic relationship building. Let us overhaul the school’s structured system. “Let’s change the story of whose knowledge counts on school landscapes” (Pushor, 2015a, p. 10). Let us do this together as a return to a holistic perspective, to a *nēhiyaw* gaze.

The Cree language matters; it has a spirit. The Cree language spirit, like that of *nēhiyaw* children, is uncertain about “schooling.” We still feel the history and trauma of residential schools. This chapter reveals ideas for where to start and how to approach language reclamation. In this critical time of Truth and Reconciliation, positioning parents and community leaders to lead in this matter is the right thing to do, the only thing to do. The *nēhiyawak* Language Experience offers yet another way of engaging parents with their children. Moving towards an authentic and respectful way to approach language learning and reclamation will finally bring us all home.

In all areas, in education and beyond—in governments, government-controlled agencies such as provincial schools/universities, nations, community, groups, and individuals—shifting and raising the consciousness of the *nēhiyawēwin* will contribute to the power of revitalization.

pē-kīwēk! kinitawēmikawināwāw, pē-kīwēk!

There is a call out that the *otīpwēstamākākēw* says to the Sundancers, “It is, *pē-kīwēk! kinitawēmikawināwāw, pē-kīwēk!*” This means “Come home!” (K. Lewis, personal communication, October 19, 2019). This work needs to come to every home. It indicates what we can learn from each other, what we have learned about the Cree language, its spirit and the land, which has always sustained who we are as *nēhiyawak ōma kiyanaw*. This work can heal us; it can guide us to the way back home. The work of language revitalization and reclamation is collective and ongoing. It will never end, and here is an offering of one solution. This is only the beginning of a courageous movement forward.

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APPENDIX A:
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD: CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL



*Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Dr. Andrea Sterzuk

DEPARTMENT
Faculty of Education

REB#
2018-214

TITLE
Language camps as an Indigenous language revitalization strategy: The nêhiyawak (Cree Peoples) Language Learning Experience

APPROVED ON
November 21, 2018

RENEWAL DATE
November 21, 2019

APPROVAL OF
Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review Consent Form

Full Board Meeting

Delegated Review

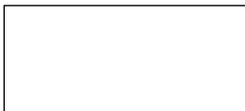
The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, or related documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, procedures or related documents should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for the renewal and closure forms:

<https://www.uregina.ca/research/for-faculty-staff/ethics-compliance/human/ethicsforms.html>



Laurie Clune PhD
REB Chair
University of Regina

**APPENDIX B:
PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM**

**University
of Regina**

Participant Consent Form

Project Title:

Language camps as an Indigenous language revitalization strategy: The nêhiyawak (Cree Peoples) Language Learning Experience

Co-Researcher(s):

Belinda Daniels
University of Saskatchewan
(306) 280-2714, bcd127@usask.ca

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Dorothy Thunder
University of Alberta
(780) 492-0523, dthunder@ualberta.ca

Andrea Sterzuk
Faculty of Education, University of Regina
(306) 585-5607, andrea.sterzuk@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

- The purpose of our research is to examine the experiences of adult participants in a land-based nêhiyawêwin immersion camp.
- The objectives of the research are to contribute to Indigenous language revitalization research through: a conference paper at the International Symposium on Bilingualism, University of

Alberta, June 2019; b) a multi-authored journal article on the topic of Indigenous language revitalization pedagogy; and c) reflection/discussion on/of the language camp which can be used towards the planning of next year's annual camp

Procedures:

- study uses two Sharing Circles to explore the efficacy of language camps as a revitalization strategy.
- The first Circle, video-recorded and transcribed, invites participants to share camp experiences as participants. The transcriptions are then shared with the research team.
- The second Circle, also video-recorded and transcribed, provides an opportunity to discuss the first circle. As researchers, we now co-construct another story based on those of the first Circle. We will each take turns discussing our responses to the stories of the first circles and thoughts as a result of the first Circle.

Potential Risks:

- Potentially stressful topics relating to Cree (residential school system, language suppression) may come up. We hope that by following protocol, beginning with smudge and a prayer, that this will minimize these risks. In the event that you experience distress, you can leave the circle and discontinue your participation in the project at any point.

Potential Benefits:

- The project has the potential to identify ways to contribute to the continuation of the Cree language through language camp immersion.

Confidentiality:

- Because of the nature of the research design, confidentiality cannot be ensured.

Storage of Data:

- The transcripts and data will be stored on Andrea Sterzuk's password protected computer.
- The documents and files will be kept for five years after which time they will be deleted.
- The data will be seen by all members of the research team and possibly one research assistant if funding is secured.
- The University of Regina Library offers researchers the opportunity to store their research data in the University of Regina Dataverse. For sharing transcripts with the research team, the transcripts will be deposited here.

Right to Withdraw:

- If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will tell another member in the group about your decision and this person will tell the rest of the researchers.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until June, 2019. After this date, it is possible that some results will have been analyzed, written up and/or presented and it may not be possible to withdraw your data. Should you wish to withdraw, please tell someone in the group
- Withdrawing data from sharing circles is by definition difficult, since each person's contribution is part of the context for everyone else's contributions. While your story will not be included in the data if you choose to withdraw, it will be difficult to remove its possible influence on the stories of others entirely.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact Belinda Daniels by email or phone using the information at the top of page 2
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the U of R Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (306-585-4775)

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

Researcher's Signature *Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by Andrea Sterzuk.

APPENDIX C:
LETTERS OF PERMISSION FROM PUBLISHERS

December 10, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Hello, my name is Belinda C. Daniels. I am currently a doctoral candidate with the University of Saskatchewan in the interdisciplinary program in my 6th and final year. I am writing a manuscript-style dissertation thesis and preparing for submission as part of the requirements for my degree at the University of Saskatchewan.

I am writing to seek permission to use “e ka pimohteyak ote nikan: nehiyaewin (Cree language) revitalization and Indigenous knowledge (re)generation”, which will appear in the Book: *Sociolinguistics of the South* (Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism) 1st edition. ISBN-13: 9781138631380. I will be using the whole chapter. I will be ensuring that all authors are named, and I will acknowledge that the chapter has been (or is to be) published by Routledge, with all of the appropriate citation details

My research topic is Indigenous Language Revitalization and my methodologies are narrative inquiry and Indigenous methodology. In my dissertation, I am writing about my journey of reclaiming language in a decolonial way, as I am a 2nd language learner of Cree. I hope my work will be a valuable contribution to the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization and Indigenous Methodology, as well for the k-12 school system within our province and beyond.

This dissertation will be distributed among my interdisciplinary committee at the University of Saskatchewan.

•My thesis will be publicly available in U of Saskatchewan’s online digital repository, and to U of Saskatchewan and to Library and Archives Canada.

I am requesting a reply by the end of the year, December 31, 2020.

I can offer to send you/publisher a copy of my completed work.

Sincerely,

Belinda C. Daniels
Ph.D. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Dept. University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A2

Mary Sheilah Stewart <maryisstewart@gmail.com>

Tue 2020-12-22 2:10 PM

To: Belinda Daniels

Cc:

Abla Mansour;

Lynn Butler-Kisber Dr.

Dear Belinda,

Please feel free to use your work that was published in LEARNing Landscapes journal (A Whisper of True Learning). All we request is that you give proper attribution to the journal using APA or another recognized format.

Good luck, Belinda. And stay well!

Sincerely,

Mary Stewart, on behalf of Lynn Butler-Kisber
Managing Editor, LEARNing Landscapes Journal

NORTHERN
ARIZONA
UNIVERSITY



College of Education

P.O. Box 5774, Flagstaff, Arizona 86011-5774

Phone 928 523 0580; FAX 928 523 1929

Web site: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/>

E-mail Jon.Reyhner@nau.edu

February 12, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

As the person in charge of Northern Arizona University's College of Education's Indigenous education monograph series (see <https://www2.nau.edu/jar/books.html>) I am providing this letter to confirm that Belinda Daniels does not need our permission to use the materials she contributed to the chapter entitled "At the Convergence of Theory and Practice: Nourishing the Learning Spirits of Indigenous Language Teachers in Schools" being published by Northern Arizona University in *Sustaining Indigenous Languages: Connecting Communities, Teachers, and Scholars*. The contributing authors for this publication have retained the copyright to their work.

Sincerely,



Jon Reyhner, Ed.D.
Professor of Education

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8400 or send an e-mail to support@copyright.com.

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**APPENDIX D:
LETTERS OF PERMISSION FROM CO-AUTHORS**

December 10, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Hello, my name is Belinda C. Daniels. I am currently a doctoral candidate with the University of Saskatchewan in the interdisciplinary program in my 6th and final year. I am writing a manuscript-style dissertation thesis and preparing for submission as part of the requirements for my degree at the University of Saskatchewan.

I am writing to seek permission to use “e ka pimohteyak ote nikan: nehiyaewin (Cree language) revitalization and Indigenous knowledge (re)generation”, which will appear in the Book: *Sociolinguistics of the South* (Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism) 1st edition. ISBN-13: 9781138631380. I will be using the whole chapter. I will be ensuring that all authors are named, and I will acknowledge that the chapter has been (or is to be) published by Routledge, with all of the appropriate citation details

My research topic is Indigenous Language Revitalization and my methodologies are narrative inquiry and Indigenous methodology. In my dissertation, I am writing about my journey of reclaiming language in a decolonial way, as I am a 2nd language learner of Cree. I hope my work will be a valuable contribution to the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization and Indigenous Methodology, as well for the k-12 school system within our province and beyond. This dissertation will be distributed among my interdisciplinary committee at the University of Saskatchewan.

•My thesis will be publicly available in U of Saskatchewan’s online digital repository, and to U of Saskatchewan and to Library and Archives Canada.

I am requesting a reply by the end of the year, December 31, 2020.

I can offer to send you/publisher a copy of my completed work.

Sincerely,

Belinda C. Daniels
Ph.D. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Dept. University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A2



Heather Blair
Professor
Language and literacy education
University of Alberta

Feb. 19, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of permission granting Belinda Daniels to our co-authored article "At the theory and Convergence" written by Blair, Buffalo and Georges. Belinda Daniels has contributed 25% to the article. She also have permission to re-use in her manuscript style dissertation as a collective piece on the topic of Cree language revitalization. Belinda also has permission to change, and or correct the Cree language spelling to match the standardization of the Cree spelling in Saskatchewan.

Best,

[Redacted signature box]

_____(name of co-author)

Feb. 19, 21

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of permission granting Belinda Daniels to our co-authored article "At the theory and Convergence" written by Blair, Buffalo and Georges. Belinda Daniels has contributed 25% to the article. She also have permission to re-use in her manuscript style dissertation as a collective piece on the topic of Cree language revitalization. Belinda also has permission to change, and or correct the Cree language spelling to match the standardization of the Cree spelling in Saskatchewan.

Best,

A rectangular box with a black border, used to redact the signature of the co-author.

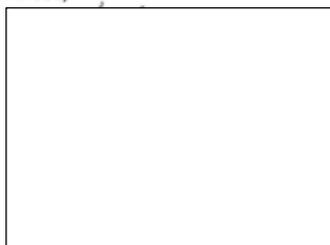
(name of co-author)

Feb. 19, 21

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of permission granting Belinda Daniels to our co-authored article "At the theory and Convergence" written by Blair, Buffalo and Georges. Belinda Daniels has contributed 25% to the article. She also have permission to re-use in her manuscript style dissertation as a collective piece on the topic of Cree language revitalization. Belinda also has permission to change, and or correct the Cree language spelling to match the standardization of the Cree spelling in Saskatchewan.

Best,



(name of co-author)



Kathleen Heugh <Kathleen.Heugh@unisa.edu.au>
Tue 2020-12-15 2:55 PM

From: Kathleen Heugh

To: Dear Belinda,

All fine for you to include the chapter (7) in your PhD thesis – Acknowledging that it appears in the book with the book's details.

So that was easy!

Best wishes to you and thank you for such a lovely chapter. It's in a section on Southern and Indigenous research methodologies.

I really hope you will like the book and also the work of contributors from the Anangu people in the Central Desert in Australia.

Warm wishes

Kathleen



cheryl herman <cher_herman@hotmail.com>

Tue 12/15/2020 3:23 PM

To: Koole, Marguerite; Daniels, Belinda; Herman, Cheryle; Lewis, Kevin



Hi,

Yes, Belinda, you have my permission.

Cheryle

Sent from my Bell Samsung device over Canada's largest network.



Kathleen Heugh <Kathleen.Heugh@unisa.edu.au>
Tue 2020-12-15 2:55 PM

From: Kathleen Heugh

To: Dear Belinda,

All fine for you to include the chapter (7) in your PhD thesis – Acknowledging that it appears in the book with the book's details.

So that was easy!

Best wishes to you and thank you for such a lovely chapter. It's in a section on Southern and Indigenous research methodologies.

I really hope you will like the book and also the work of contributors from the Anangu people in the Central Desert in Australia.

Warm wishes

Kathleen

Koole - Co-Author Permission Ch. 8

From: Koole, Marguerite <m.koole@usask.ca>

Sent: December 15, 2020 2:45 PM

To: Daniels, Belinda <bcd127@mail.usask.ca>; Herman, Cheryle <cdh132@mail.usask.ca>; Lewis, Kevin <kevin.lewis@usask.ca>

Subject: Re: Important: Action Needed

Hi Belinda,

You certainly have my permission.

Best wishes!

Marguerite

Marguerite Koole, PhD
Assistant Professor, Educational Technology & Design
Curriculum Studies
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan

I acknowledge I live and work on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. By making this statement, I pay respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Google

Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=gj275K8AAAAJ&hl=en>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0041-5615>

Lewis – Co-author permission ch 8

Lewis, Kevin

Tue 2020-12-15 3:44 PM



To: Daniels, Belinda

Cc:

Koole, Marguerite;

Herman, Cheryle

tânisi Belinda!

Yes âpacihtâ! That's a yes from me.

mwêstas

Kevin

Sent from my iPhone

Re: Permission to use co-authored chapters

By way of this letter, I give my permission to Belinda Daniels, PhD Candidate in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, to use the following two co-authored papers as chapters in her PhD dissertation:

- Daniels, B., Sterzuk, A., Turner, P., Cook, W.R., Thunder, D., & Morin, R. (in press). ē-ka-pimohteyāhk nīkānehk ōte nīkān: nēhiyawēwin (Cree language) revitalization and Indigenous knowledge (re)generation. In K. Heugh, C. Stroud, K. Taylor-Keech and P. De Costa (Eds) *A Sociolinguistics of the South*. Routledge.
- Daniels, B., & Sterzuk, A. (2019, June). *Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics: Conceptualizing an ethical space of engagement between academic fields*. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics. Vancouver, BC, CANADA.

If you require any further information, please don't hesitate to ask.

Yours truly,



Andrea Sterzuk
Professor
Faculty of Education
University of Regina



Dear committee,

I would like to offer some background on Belinda Daniel's involvement in writing the chapter:

Herman, C., Daniels, B., Lewis, K., & Koole, M. (2020). Awakening sleeping languages in Saskatchewan with culturally appropriate curricula and technology. In H. Crompton & J. Traxler (Eds.), *Critical Mobile Pedagogy*. Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group).

I was approached by Professor John Traxler of Wolverhampton University about contributing a chapter to an edited book project. At this time, I was working with a master's student, Cheryl Herman (a members of the Clearwater River Dene Nation) who had just completed writing a paper for a course. I thought the paper would be close to what Prof. Traxler was seeking. So, I asked Cheryl if she would be interested in submitting a draft of the paper. I told her that I would both contribute to writing the submission and mentor her through the process. As a faculty member, I believe is highly valuable to graduate students to gain experience in academic writing and publishing.

As I was working on the chapter with Cheryl, I thought that Belinda would be able to make some valuable contributions as someone leading a current, land-based language revitalization program, *the nehiyawak Language Experience Camp*. I also felt that it would be helpful if Belinda could review the chapter to ensure that the chapter expressed ideas respectfully and appropriately. Belinda contributed knowledge from 1) her experience in leading the language camp, 2) her background and knowledge from her PhD research, and 3) her cultural knowledge. Belinda read through the chapter and provided suggestions for editing the paper.

Our group worked at a distance physically, and each author's contributions were independent—except during the editing and revision process. With each revision, I incorporated the suggestions and edits of all the authors and sent out the resulting draft. The interaction of the authors was mostly coordinated through me, so one might argue that it was a *mediated*, discursive process as each author read, critiqued, and suggested edits.

Please feel free to contact me should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Marguerite Koole, PhD.
Assistant Professor, Educational Technology & Design
Curriculum Studies
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan

I acknowledge I live and work on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. By making this statement, I pay respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.