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Indian and Northern Education  
Department of Educational Foundations  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  S7N 0W0
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to
my mother, Madeline Sasakamoose,
Ka peki se kwanis skwaw Iskwew,
whose compassion and love for me
has instilled seedlings of learning in which
I will continue to nurture
and to find growth.

Mom,
I Love You.

Oma masinahikan
Nimāmā ochi
Kitimakeyimiwin ēkwa
sakihitowin ēkwa kiskinohamowin ēmiyit ekwa nikaahkameyiman
ōma. ta-ati-poska kewin ekwa
Kiskeyihtamowin.
Mistahi Kisākihitin mistahi kisākihitin

To my brothers and sisters: Gilbert, Wilson, Edward, Maureen, Shirley, Joyce, Pauline, Lorraine, Hector, Frankie, Lawrence, Rodney and Kevin.

May you read and find growth in our mother’s words. I love you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend deep gratitude to my mother, Madeline Sasakamoose, who has shaped and clarified my understanding about what it means to be a Cree woman. She continues to be my guide, nitōkiskinohtahiwem, my strength, ne sa’ pewin, and my teacher, nitōkiskinahamākēm. Many thanks go to my family. To my son, Sheldon, whose cultural and ecological relationship is demonstrated through his love for the outdoors. May you continue to touch the earth and find your teachers. To Andrea and Faryn, my daughters, who have adjusted too well to the rigor of thesis work. I can hear their voices as I type this passage, "Mommy, are you working on your book? Can I read it?" My answer is always, "Yes." And, to my husband, Frank, whose love, patience, and encouragement nurtured and sustained me throughout the writing of this thesis. Without the support and patience of my family, this thesis work would not have been possible. Their love is reflected in this work as it is through them that I grow.

I have benefited greatly from the generosity of friends and colleagues throughout the course of this writing. Much appreciation goes to Micheal Charles and Caroline Bendig who became my life savers of technological wonder. Thank you, Freda Ahenakew and Valerie Ledoux for their assistance in Cree translations. To Willy Ermine for his valuable insight on Cree epistemology. Your gift of inspiration always left me in awe of your wisdom. To Kathy Vermette, Kathy Nelson,
Esther Sanderson, Ruth Ahenakew, Lucille Dorian, and Shirley Bighead, my sisters, who were always there for me in kindness, support and prayer.

I greatly appreciated the guidance, direction, and openness of my thesis committee, Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, Dr. Marie Battiste, and Dr. Lenore Stiffarm. A special acknowledgement is extended to Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam who spent many hours with me during the course of this writing. Her presence in my life has been a gift to me. May our stories continue to live in our hearts. To Dr. Mark Flynn, I am ever grateful to you for serving as my external examiner. Finally, I would like to recognize the children in our First Nations communities. Indeed, this thesis is part of the children, our future. This thesis would not be complete without the compassion of our Old People. Thank you, to Ka peki towhk sit Iskwew, my great, great grandmother, for instilling her stories in my mother. Thank you all for your guidance.
ABSTRACT

This study described the stories of a First Nations mother and provides an interpretative analysis on how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language, and identity. The stories presented are in the stream of mother-daughter communication. The oral transmission of the Cree stories communicated through mother tongue form the basis of this work. It is through the analysis of my mother’s stories that I have come to understand what it means to be a Cree woman. Throughout, we have a level of communication and understanding that has come full circle in appreciating my mother’s ways as we collaborated to interpret our stories.

The literature reviewed presents a theoretical discussion which illuminates Aboriginal matriarchal voice. The literature review explores works within the historical, contemporary, literary, and feminists paradigms which speak from Aboriginal women and their stories. The literature includes the perspectives of Aboriginal authors and their views on epistemology. In this naturalistic study, I used the descriptive narrative approach to reflect on a mother’s stories in the stream of day-to-day activity. I collected data using field notes gathered on-site, audio-tapes of stories from my mother’s lived experience, and a reflective journal of observations and insights that linked theory and pedagogy. Themes were derived from the stories which illustrated a metaphysical, ecological, and cultural journey toward wholeness. These themes represent the ways story is
used within the context of lived experience. Further, a cultural metaphor using the pattern of the flower symbolized a woman's connections with Cree knowledge. The study became an emancipatory narrative because it allowed a Cree woman's voice to be acknowledged.

Using storytelling as a narrative framework, I have found that the oral tradition is a fundamental communicative pattern for the Cree people. Further, the stories we share lead to growth and understanding of self as a Cree person. For this, the ways stories are told shape and form the basis of Cree knowledge. In this study, the use of analogies, symbolism, and metaphor are primary ways of coming to know.
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Cree Pronunciation Chart

The alphabet

\[ p, t, k, m, n, s, y, w, h. \]

Vowels: \( \hat{e} \) \( a \) \( \ddot{a} \) \( i \) \( \ddot{i} \) \( o \) \( \ddot{o} \)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Eng. ex.</th>
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<tr>
<td>( \hat{e} )</td>
<td>hate</td>
<td>českwa</td>
<td>wait</td>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>atim</td>
<td>dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \ddot{a} )</td>
<td>cat</td>
<td>častam</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>hit</td>
<td>iskwēw</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \ddot{i} )</td>
<td>beet</td>
<td>sīsip</td>
<td>duck</td>
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<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>ospwakan</td>
<td>pipe</td>
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<td>( \ddot{o} )</td>
<td>ōhow</td>
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<td>p</td>
<td>pakān</td>
<td>ā tap</td>
<td>although</td>
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<td>t</td>
<td>tawāw</td>
<td>tawāw</td>
<td>there is room</td>
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<td>kinesew</td>
<td>kihew</td>
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<td>m</td>
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<td>money</td>
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<td>y</td>
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<td>wāhyaw</td>
<td>wāskahikan</td>
<td>horse</td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>masinahikan</td>
<td>maskisin</td>
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During the writing of this thesis, my paternal grandmother, Judith (Sugil) Sasakamoose, passed away. At the funeral, an Elder rose to speak to the gathering of people. As I sat mourning the loss of a beautiful and kindhearted woman, I heard him saying:

...this woman has left you something very powerful, she has left you her stories. Now it is your responsibility to try very hard to remember those stories and share them with one another. I am sure that is one thing that your kohkom would have liked. Try to remember her stories...

This eulogy reflects the process contained in this study which is remembering, teaching, and passing on stories to the next generation. The oral tradition is a fundamental source of knowledge to the Cree people.

I believe that my kohkom’s voice is, in some ways, reflected in this study as she is a thread of connection in the circle. She will live forever in my heart, as I am sure the many who knew her will remember her voice in their stories.
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following terms are used:

ABORIGINAL: is used in reference to Status Indians, Non-Status Indians and Metis as a collective group. Aboriginal is used to encompass legal and cultural groups definitions of the descendants of First Nations.

AHTAHKAKOOP: A reserve in Northern Saskatchewan. It is also known as Sandy Lake.

CEREMONIES: prayers, rituals, and traditions which characterize a culture.

CONSCIOUSNESS: The whole thing. The conscious and subconscious mind, spatial perception, the physical, the mind, the brains and the heart (Lightning, 1993, p.244).

CULTURE: The collection of rules, values, and attitudes held by a society which allows people to communicate, to interpret behaviour, and to attach shared meaning to behaviour and events (Brizinski, 1993, p.409).

CULTURAL IDENTITY: "a shared identity or "peoplehood" which ethnic [cultural] groups often seek to perpetuate among their members" (Friessen, 1985, p. 21). Therefore, cultural identity is not only how one perceives oneself culturally, but also how one perceives others in the context of cultural group dynamics.

EMIC APPROACH: Looking at a culture within your own cultural background.

EPISTEMOLOGY: A theory of the nature and origin of knowledge.

FIRST NATION: Usually used to refer to a politically autonomous band under the Indian Act.

GRANDMOTHERS: In this study, terms such as Cheechums, Koochums, and Kohkoms, refer to grandmothers.

GRANDFATHERS: The term "mushom" refers to grandfather.

IDENTITY: "Each person has an internal sense of identity, by which they label themselves in relation to other people and have an opinion about their own self-worth. We also label other people assuming they have certain characteristics and qualities in relation to ourselves" (Brizinski, 1993, p.410).

INDIAN: Indian is a legal classification within the Indian Act of Canada referring only to those who have entered into a legal treaty relationship with Canada.
INDIGENOUS: Refers to all inhabitants indigenous to North America (before contact with Europeans) and their descendants (Brizinski, 1993, p.441). Preferred term at international level over terms like Aboriginal, Native or First Nations.

KNOWLEDGE: Comes from those moments when one experiences a hidden meaning - insight into nature's balance and relationships; growth and awareness. (Sometimes called a "sacred moment" (Beck and Walters, 1987). True sources of knowledge are found within the individual and the entities of Nature (Cajete, 1994, p. 30).

MARGINALITY: "An experience whereby individuals are unable to become or remain full members of either group, therefore finding themselves on the margins of each" (Stonequist, 1937). Marginality is feeling ambiguous and insecure about one's cultural identity.

MEANINGS: Learnings that are felt through experience and internalized as knowledge (Lightning, 1993).

NATION (NATIVE): "A group of Native people with common ancestry and who are socially, culturally, politically, and linguistically united" (Brizinski, 1993, p.412).

ORAL TRADITION: The "language" through which meanings are expressed in culture (Brizinski, 1993, p.2).

SACRED: Means something special, something out of the ordinary, and often it concerns a very personal part of each of us because it describes our dreams, our changing, and our personal way of seeing the world (Beck and Walters, 1987, p.6).

SOCIAL SITUATION: Social situation refers to the stream of behaviour (activities) carried out by people (actors) in a particular location (place). A social situation is observable and something in which you can participate. (Spradley, 1980, p.86)

SPIRIT: Gives life, shape and appearance to all that lives... The spirit communicates the personal and individual side of the sacred and the unseen powers (Beck & Walters, 1987, p. 10).

STORY: expressed through experience, myth, parables, and various forms of metaphor is an essential vehicle of Indigenous learning (Cajete, 1994, p.30).

SYMBOLS: "something that stands for or represents another thing; especially an object used to represent something abstract; emblem: as a dove is a symbol of peace, the cross is the symbol of Christianity" (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1957).
ETHNOLOGY: "a theoretical statement about relationship and meanings within a group or among a number of societies" (Lincoln and Guba, 1981, 369).

WORLDVIEW: "denotes a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well. World view provides people with a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place..." (Ortiz, 1973, cited in. Graveline, 1996, p.14).
CHAPTER ONE

nikāwiy, nitōtem, nitokiskinohtahiwēm, ni sa'pēwin:

My Mother, My Friend, My Guide, My Strength

I am a Cree woman and a member of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation. I am a mother of three children, but I am also a mother of my siblings' children, as well as the mother of future generations, nōsisimak ekwa nicāpānak, my grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Not only am I the daughter of my parents, but also the daughter of my aunts and uncles and the grand-daughter of all my mushoms and kohkoms. My relations span the continent and it is with this realization that I know I belong to a Nation, a community, and a family. Kahkiyaw niwahkomakanak, all my relations, have helped shape who I am. I am also an educator and as such have been exposed to the educational systems of the dominant culture. This exposure has been enlightening in many respects, primarily reflecting the absence of acceptance and belonging to the educational environment or recognizing the home as a learning environment. In this study, I intend to describe the Aboriginal learning experience as a foundation that supports Cree knowledge.

Although the relationship in terminology in this study is connected to Indigenous societies on a global scale, the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, Native American and
Indian are used interchangeably to refer to the Canadian experience. The term that this study uses more often is "Cree" and "First Nations" to reflect a place, time, and context within the stream of mother-daughter communications. Another clarification of terms is "Elder(s)" and "Old People." In my study, the term "Elder(s)" means those Old People who engage in ceremonial aspects of Cree society. This could include participation in ceremonies such as feasts, and Sundances. The term "Old People" reflect all others who have reached the age of maturity and have gained the respect of people within a community.

My research was first motivated by my observations that children in any educational environment need their families, their communities and their Nations to support and validate their experiences -- hence, their way of knowing, their worldview (Redhorse, Johnson, & Weiner, 1989). First Nations people see the world as a complex set of connected parts of a whole (SICC,1991). The knowledge gleaned from this understanding becomes part of their reality. Ortiz (1973) describes worldview as knowledge:

The notion "worldview" denotes a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well. World view provides people with a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition which transcends... even time. (cited in, Graveline, 1996, p.14)

For First Nations people, schooling does not always encompass their worldview or their knowledge. The colonial
experience frames it as not legitimate. By acknowledging a Cree mother's experience through her stories, we simultaneously legitimize Cree stories. My research seeks to understand this realm of knowledge, which is seen as "reality" by Cree people. Further, my research seeks to advance this way of knowing, in that it should be recognized as a legitimate form of knowledge. Hampton (1988) urges a redefinition of Indian education and, in particular,

"to think along with other Indians in the hope of making a reflective contribution to the conversation among Indian educators about defining and implementing an education worthy of our children and our ancestors." (p.1)

Cajete (1994) comments that education must include an "indigenous frame of reference as an important consideration in the development of a contemporary... learning and teaching" (p. 17). Further, Cajete says, "We must start with who we are, with the tradition, the values, and the way of life that we absorbed as children of the people" (1994, p.21). The only place to begin this type of reflective inquiry is within our own learning experience.

Because of my commitment in First Nations education, I feel that the source of my knowledge has to stem from the "Old Ones" (Ermine, 1995), in particular, my mother. As a First Nations educator, I am curious about the life experiences of my mother. More specifically, I want to reflect on her life experiences and interpret and analyze their importance to Cree learning and teaching. The connection shared between mother (guide and teacher) and
daughter (learner) may provide insights for interpreting the significance of mother as teacher. In telling my mother’s story, I am telling my story. This is a story about communicating my mother’s narratives. By including my story, it is not my intent to make my voice dominate but instead, to provide an interpretative analysis of my mother’s words. I am not usurping my mother’s voice but my mother is not an English speaker. I cannot write my mother’s voice and speak to the accuracy of the translation. All I can speak to is the interpretation of her teachings. It was an interpretative dialogue. In following this path, I describe the Cree stories, as I have interpreted and analyzed them. I derive from them their teachings, and thus frame a Cree foundation. These stories form a necessary prerequisite for redefining First Nations education.

My mother, Madeline, is a beautiful person. She is my friend, my guide, my teacher, and my strength. She is a traditional Cree woman who, in spite of many hardships in life, has never lost touch with her vision of reality. Her strength and endurance to maintain her identity has been the source of my inner strength as I continue the search for my identity as a First Nations woman. My mother’s stories (narratives) communicated through Cree language have taught me many lessons, these lessons remain alive in my mind and in my heart. This research seeks to describe the stories of a First Nations mother and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language, and identity. I intend to
reflect on the stories which my mother has so lovingly shared with me, making this spiritual, ecological, and cultural journey much more meaningful, and, in part, a "labour of love." This inquiry, too, has to become meaningful for the people who would read this study. Walter Lightning's (1992) work in *The Compassionate Mind*, had a profound impact on my decision to approach this work through narrative. He comments, "Meaning will develop and grow from life experience, study, and observation" (p.250). It is through interpreting my mother's stories that I came to understand what it means to be a Cree First Nations woman. In addition to Lightning (1992), Polkinghorne's (1988) research on descriptive narrative provided a framework for the approach of the study. Polkinghorne speaks to the validity of narrative and its importance in research as a paradigm for reflecting on meaningful experience. He says:

Descriptive narrative... produces an accurate description of the interpretative narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives meaningful. This research produces a document describing the narratives held in or below the surface awareness that make up the interpretive schemes a people or community uses to establish the significance of past events and to anticipate the consequences of possible future actions. The research does not construct a new narrative, it merely reports already existing ones. (p.161-162)

This research developed and grew from my understanding of the teachings within my mother's stories. Listening to her speak about her experiences is one way to gain Plains Cree knowledge. Graveline (1996) says that "There is no part of Aboriginal knowledge that is not touched by experiences"
This acknowledgement speaks to the importance of learning and teaching from story and the paramount role of reflection on our experiences.

Language is critical in interpreting cultural understanding. The importance of language as a tool for organizing our experiences is emphasized by Bruner (1986), who notes:

language is our most powerful tool for organizing experience, and indeed, for constituting "realities" the products of language in all their rich variety...[provide] a more interpretive posture: meaning [becomes] the central focus. (p.8)

Foremost, in this understanding, language is seen as a form of communication which encourages cultural meaning to be understood. Polkinghorne (1988) says:

Language is the factor that enables us to express the unique order of existence that is the human realm, because it serves as the medium through which we express the world as meaningful. (p.23)

Further, the research was conducted from an emic point of view because I (the researcher) am a Cree woman who is speaking to another Cree woman. The communicative pathway established over a span of thirty-five years has enabled me and my mother to amalgamate our lives sewing a pattern of understanding which is rich with stories. My mother is a fluent Cree speaker and her epistemological understanding is rooted in Cree worldview. Bruner (1986) reiterates that cultural connectedness enhances reliability of the project. He calls these cultural links "cultural tool kits". Bruner explains:
If one takes the view that human mental activity depends for its full expression upon being linked to a cultural tool kit--then we are well advised when studying mental activity to take into account the tools employed in that activity. This amplification by cultural tools is the hallmark of human skills, and we overlook it in our research with peril. (p.5)

It appears reasonable, then, to conduct research from a Cree First Nations perspective using descriptive narrative as a framework for describing the teachings through interpretation and analysis of Cree stories. Colorado (1988) emphasizes that by bridging Native and Western research perspectives, recognition and validity for both sciences will emerge. She says, "All peoples, including Native Americans, have some way of coming to knowledge" (p.49). My perspective in this research is to interpret and analyze the Cree stories as a way of coming to know. By describing my interpretation of my mother's Cree stories, the emerging themes seek to develop an understanding of self and the importance of mother as teacher.

**mosci nitahcahk: To Free My Spirit**

This research seeks to identify the teachings from stories of a Cree mother from her lived experience, and what she has gleaned as important teachings for the future and survival of the Cree people. Through listening and telling my mother's stories, I become a participant in the moment-to-moment engagements that become stories. The narrative pathway will provide the framework by which life experiences will yield meaning, and thus yield the teachings. Throughout
this study, the reader will hear Cree teachings that mark important steps to seeing in new ways, to keep growing, and to come to know and rediscover Cree culture, language and identity.

pikiskewina yotinihk: Voices in the Wind

My journey on this path to understanding Aboriginal knowledge has, to this point, been most frustrating. The source of my frustration has been the dominant paradigms of intellectual thinkers who press learners to either conform to the dominant paradigm or lose students due to the unwillingness to accept their ways of coming to know. In part, this study encourages students of the academy to celebrate their ways of expression by providing "high face validity" (Battiste, personal communication, May 21, 1996) to the tradition of oral history and First Nations knowledge. Thus, to clarify which path to follow on my search to qualify a First Nations perspective has led me on an enlightening journey. This journey has led me to review literature which invokes the qualitative framework, mainly the narrative approach (Polkinghorne, 1988). I have found descriptive narrative to be empowering, in the sense that it has freed my spirit to explore an alternative approach to the listening and the telling of stories. Stories can bridge our experiences, and help us to learn who we are. Further, stories can be seen as a way of knowing, and can be viewed as a means of formulating our experiences into something whole
and meaningful. Allow me to share with you a story about my journey.

I did not always have this willingness to learn. There was a time when I rejected every opportunity to learn from, and listen to, my mother and my Elders. Their words appeared evil, and had no relevance in my life. My ignorance led me to question my identity. I recall, as a child, sitting at the edge of a crackling fire, my mother beside me, singeing ducks. The sun was setting. It was a beautiful fall day. The breeze felt brisk as it touched my face. My mother was speaking to me in her mother tongue about some "foreign time" when women had the responsibility to "do this" and "do that", and the reasons for that responsibility. To me, her tongue was the crackling of the fire, and it burned me to hear the stories about her life teachings. So I would listen to the wind instead, and dream about far-away places. My way of escaping reality was by dreaming. I can recall growing up in a world of fantasy to escape the moment of reality. In a way, this helped me to ignore the harsh reality of living in a world of poverty. My mother would continue to talk, and every once in a while, I would hear her words, her stories.

Many of my mother’s stories were recollections of significant life experiences. These narratives were about origins, historical myths, analogies, and metaphors which symbolize why things are the way they are, why we should listen and do the right things, and so on. So there were different kinds of stories and different occasions for
storytelling, and they were told for particular reasons. For example, there have been countless times in the course of my life where I would find myself thinking, just thinking, about the stories my parents and grandparents shared with me. I would particularly find myself thinking about how those stories had relevance in the world. I chuckle to myself today to realize just how naive I had been.

Just the other day, as my mother and I were driving back from Ahtahkakoop, a reserve in Northern Saskatchewan, she looked out and pondered about the way the sun was sitting, and told me to look at the coloured rings around the sun. My daughter once commented that the coloured rings around the sun reminded her of the planet Saturn. My mother continued to speak. She shared a prophesy that her kohkom had told about the sun and its coloured rings. Then my mother became the weather woman and forecasted thunderstorms. Without thinking too much about what she had just said, I continued to dwell on my own thoughts about my children. Later that night, I was awakened by a pounding so great it shook the house. I immediately remembered my mother's story, and smiled quietly to myself.

This is only one of many stories she has shared with me about her own teachings, growing up in the bush along the shores of Stoney Lake. My mother did not receive formal education from reading texts and listening to lectures. She never attended school. In her growing-up years, there was a mixture of Christian and Native spirituality which combined
to make-up her faith. This fusion, sometimes called "syncretism" (Brizinski, 1992; Acoose, 1994), is defined as an attempt to "reconcile differing philosophical or religious beliefs" (Webster's II, 1988, p. 1174). However, her experiences are different in the sense that the teachings she grew up with enhanced her identity through metaphysical understanding and connection to Mother Earth. Further, it is through the Cree language and in-context learning that her experiences became meaningful. There is a connection through life experience, in-context learning and mother tongue which seems to form linkages to knowledge. Battiste’s (1994) words ring in my ears about Aboriginal epistemology and Aboriginal languages. She suggests that "there are many lessons in this tradition. First, is that Aboriginal ways of knowing or epistemology are integrally linked to Aboriginal languages" (p. 3), which led me to think that my mother’s stories hold a wealth of information which may be different from those we are accustomed to hearing. My mother, Madeline, received the kind of education that she calls "living life" and "serving life". As a result, she has experienced life. To believe that my mother’s way of life represented everything ancient, and, in some ways, evil, underscores the need for this study. We need to understand our traditional roots and to reclaim our identities. I believe that we can begin to do this by sharing our stories.

My heart tells me to share yet another story about my journey. I feel that as the experiences of a graduate
student on the path to learning, my struggles, too, must be heard. I live in Prince Albert and, therefore, must travel to Saskatoon for my studies. One day, although a joyous occasion, was filled with discouragement, bewilderment, and frustration. During the course of putting together this thesis, I made several revisions. After many long, arduous, and painstaking hours of searching for a theoretical framework, and trying to fit my thinking into academia's paradigm, I felt defeated. The emotions screamed in my head, and my heart sank into the pit of emptiness. Driving home that afternoon, I looked out the car window, and admired the beauty of Mother Earth. I prayed to my Creator for courage and strength to continue on my journey because at that point my spirit was truly defeated. The tears rolled down, flowing down into the pit of emptiness. I slowed the motion of time, and lapsed into consciousness. I looked to the sky, and there perched on the highest tree was an eagle. The warmth of the sun beat down on it, and its eyes strong with vision touched me. Feeling the bond with Mother Nature, I felt the courage fill up my belly, the power returned, and with promised guidance the soaring energy to find the center within me was welcomed and made me wipe away the tears.

Perhaps, one of the most significant reasons why this research is important is because, as learners, we need to understand our inner core of being, which is sometimes called, "our special place inside" (Sams and Nitsch, 1991), or as Cajete (1994) and Ridington (1990) reflect, "that place
that Indians talk about." Also, the academy needs to understand what learners mean when they speak about their experiences through their stories. It is possible that feelings of "being absent" (Brookes, 1992, p.87) mean, the absence of belonging and acceptance of First Nations world view in academe. This may stem from the fact that, in the past, academic institutions expected students not coming from the mainstream to work within a paradigm with which they were unfamiliar. For too long, academic institutions have instructed students with an iron rod; maybe it is time for education to bend and to give voice to Aboriginal people. Moreover, to allow that voice to flourish in a manner that is connected to their life ways, and understood within their worldview.

This study will be a spiritual journey. To be able to understand our identity as First Nations people (Chrisjohn, 1986; Deloria, 1980; Lafromboise, 1983, Red Horse, Johnson, & Weiner, 1989) and to reclaim what has been lost through imperialist ideologies make for an emancipatory learning (Freire, 1970; Apple, 1979). In addition, to appreciate knowledge from a First Nations perspective, we must also respect the language through which knowledge is communicated (King, 1989). My mother communicates her lived experience through the Cree language.

For these reasons, I have chosen to write subjectively about my mother’s lived experience and interpret her stories, in the hope of describing meaningful experiences, which, when
reflected upon, represent the uniqueness of Cree knowledge. This knowledge may come in many forms and, therefore, the research is not limited to traditional storytelling sessions. It does, however, take into account the context in which they occur. It may take in the descriptions of actions, events, and other meaningful happenings which have an impact on human existence. Cajete (1994) says, "the living place, the learner's extended family,... and tribe provided the context and source for teaching... These foundations teach us that learning is a subjective experience tied to a place environmentally, socially, and spiritually" (p. 33). Polkinghorne (1988) says that by drawing together relationships, we create meaning; the "narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole" (p.36). Also, I feel that it is through our mothers that our primary learning stems, and their stories are ones that we carry in our minds and in our hearts. Lowinsky (1992) shares this view, as she comments, "Mother is the first world we know, the source of our lives and our stories... Yet the voice of her experience is seldom heard..." (p.xi). More specifically, thus far I have been unable to find anything in the literature addressing Cree mothers; instead, a limited literature on Cree grandmothers, or kohkoms addresses Indian women and their contributions. In these texts, "storying" as a way of knowing is discussed to some extent, but they do not critically consider the ways
Cree stories move us to knowledge. To stress the absence of mother's voice from a Cree perspective, I conclude this section by quoting Beverly Hungry Wolfe:

I do it in an effort to fill a space in history that has been empty for too long... there are no such books about my Indian Grandmothers... I hope that it enlightens many other book readers by showing that Indian women have knowledge to contribute to world history.... (1980, p.17)

ninitohten nitêhihk ohci: To Listen With My Heart

When Cree culture, language, and identity are viewed through the lens of Western ideologies, most, if not all, concepts would be construed, and more than likely, misinterpreted. As a Cree First Nations woman studying, observing, and participating in the study with a Cree, an "emic" perspective on Cree epistemologies and the importance of mother tongue may be illuminated.

In this inquiry, a narrative approach as prescribed by Polkinghorne (1988), is utilized. That is, "using 'narrative' and its cognates to refer to the process and the results, the context should clarify which meaning is intended" (p.13). This study describes the Cree stories of a First Nations mother, and interprets how she used the stories to teach Cree culture, language, and identity. My mother, Madeline, shared her lived experiences as she reflected on the past, present, and possibly future anticipations through narrative accounts. Polkinghorne says that narrative accounts or stories "display the significance that events have for one another" (1988, p.13) and, thus,
show the relationships the stories have to the whole. This assumption is further supported by Mishler (1986) in his analysis of narrative discourse and meaning. He says, "telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (p. 67). By proposing such a study, I hoped to capture the intricate meaning of my mother's stories as she reflected on her experiences using mother tongue narratives.

In our everyday experience, we use symbols as forms of communication: "Language is a system of symbols in which words (spoken or written) stand for objects or ideas" (Sacred Tree, 1988, p. 61). This reflects the basis of my research into discovering mother-tongue stories. It illuminates how stories teach us in developing a sense of culture and identity. Further, this research described how the use of mother-tongue narratives teaches us about the cycles within First Nations epistemologies. Ridington (1990) in his research with the Dunne-za people reflects on the language of the Dunne-za as being critical in describing their experiences. He says, the "language of storytelling" did "justice to the Indian style of teaching through which I gained my knowledge of their culture and their experience..." (p. xiii). Further, he states, "They fed us and taught about learning in an Indian way... Dunne-za stories..." [speak truly and from their knowledge...], (Ridington, 1990, p.x). Thus, story communicated through language can provide invaluable information about a culture.
By reflecting and describing what is meaningful to my mother, I determined that there are common threads and patterns in the stories which could assist First Nations people in their pursuit for a "culturally-informed alternative for thinking about and enabling the contemporary education of American Indian people," (Cajete, 1994, p.17). I identified common threads and patterns within the social fabric of a mother-daughter relationship, enabling an understanding of First Nations education by exploring what is meaningful to a Cree mother through interpreting her stories, thus, providing a model for accessing the foundational values and orientations which make community-based education the basis for renewal and growth. Renewal and growth are needed to revitalize and motivate the students in our schools -- more specifically, to assist them in developing a positive image and sense of belonging to a family, a community, and a Nation.

móniyaw ikiskinahamátowin ité yihtamowina:

Western Education as Colonial Ideology

Education in the past reflected the standards and proficiency comparable to the most authoritative experience and knowledge available from the dominant system. In most instances, the claims of superiority by colonial imperialists are still manifested in contemporary claims about what constitutes education and knowledge.

The understandings of the education of First Nation
peoples appears to be in conflict with some contemporary views of educators (Hampton, 1988; Ducharme, 1995; Ermine, 1996). Although much progress has been made in efforts to improve cross-cultural awareness, there remains a considerable gap in understanding what First Nations education is, and its role in our communities. "Cross-cultural," say Duran and Duran (1995), is problematic because of the colonial experience. 'Cross-cultural' implies there is a relative platform from which all observations are made... which remain... that of Western subjectivity" (p.5). This, in turn, further widens the relationship between the cultural understandings of First Nations peoples and Western contemporary education. In most cases, the philosophy of education reflects the philosophy of the culture.

Although Western education is important, it can be criticized for its narrowness to accept the validity of First Nations knowledge. A growing minority of educational leaders recognize and encourage that research be undertaken for and by First Nations people (Sioui, 1992; Hampton, 1988; Stokes, 1985; Lafromboise, 1983; Red Horse, Johnson, & Weiner, 1989; Darou, Hum, & Kurtness, 1993). This recognition of First Nations' ways of knowing empowers learners to communicate and express cultural understandings. Wason-Ellam (1993) notes, "variations in language, thought, or worldview need to be viewed as differences, not cognitive or linguistic deficiencies; for variety is a characteristic of living in a diverse community (Gundlach, Farr, and Cook-Gumperz, 1989,
cited in Wason-Ellam, 1993). Duran and Duran (1995) suggest that a post-colonial paradigm is needed, one that will "accept knowledge from differing cosmologies as valid in their own right, without having to adhere to a separate cultural body for legitimacy" (p. 6). Aboriginal stories and storytelling in educational settings speak to Aboriginal experience, and Aboriginal culture.

Mother-tongue research initiatives too are becoming prevalent (Ahenakew, 1992; Fredeen, 1991; Fishman, 1990, 1977; Cummins, 1979, 1983, 1981, 1989). However, I feel that if we are to enhance the movement toward redefining Indian education, then we must begin with our experience. Research specifically addressing our stories and the stories of Cree mothers is lacking. Naturally, "the ideals of this process were... founded on the continuous development of self-knowledge, on finding life through understanding and participating... a shared cultural metaphor..." which one can achieve through personal experience (Cajete, 1994, p.33). Language communicated through story cultivates one experience which leads to growth and being.

Review of the Research

Chapter One provided the background for the work in progress, the development of the research topic, and the description toward the process of its birth. This study describes the Cree stories of a First Nations mother and interprets how Cree teachings are contextualized in story.
The cycles inherent within the oral tradition speak the repetition of stories. Thus they express the vitality of the Nation and its dependence on story and oral tradition. Chapter Two presents a theoretical discussion of the literature which pertains to Aboriginal matriarchal voice. Chapter Three discusses the approach of qualitative methodology -- in particular, Polkinghorne's (1988) narrative description and analysis of narrative. Chapter Four and Five review the themes which emerged from my mother's (narratives) stories. They reflect my interpretative analysis of the Cree narratives. Chapter Six provides a description and analysis of the stories through the use of cultural metaphors. This was followed by recommendations and suggestions for further research delving into First Nations epistemology through story and Cree mother's voice as teacher.

**Ethical Concerns**

The guidelines established by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and adhered to by the University of Saskatchewan were followed in the study.

The nature of this study was such that the information that was gathered contained valuable data, including audio taped recordings, which the researcher wished to use for forthcoming family history. It was important to the researcher that the voice of one Cree First Nations mother was not lost. Thus, a letter of permission, a letter of participation, consent form, and a letter to request to waive
anonymity was drafted, and my mother’s signature, obtained (Appendix A, B, C, and D, attached).

Once the participant of the study was informed and gave consent, the letters of permission, participation, and waiver of anonymity were signed, and meeting times were established. The interviews ran approximately two to two-and-one half hours per session. The audio-tape was used for the interviews. Field notes were made immediately following each session. After each session, stories were transcribed. I read the transcribed data to my mother and asked her if she would like to add, change, or delete any of the information she had shared. If she considered transcription accurate, I continued with my review of the material and reflected on the collection of Cree stories. I coded the data into themes as they emerged.

My reflections on the Cree stories focused on how they were used to teach Cree culture, language, and identity. The results of the analysis of the collection of stories not only served to signify the importance of Cree epistemologies, but also served to provide voice for Cree mothers. This scholarly work will further demonstrate the validity of a First Nations way of knowing.
CHAPTER TWO
kimotowin askiya ēkwa wamihitowiahcahkwa
Stolen Years and Lost Souls

This section of the study expands on previous works by educators, researchers, and writers. It is a theoretical analysis of the historical and contemporary views on First Nations education and knowledge, more specifically, an exploration of women's voice, particularly, Cree mothers and their contribution to education through mother tongue narratives. This review also looks at some feminist literature to gain a sense of understanding of women's perspectives and to explore the literature as it reflects the experience of Cree mothers. The literature includes Aboriginal authors and their views on Aboriginal knowledge. The purpose of the literature review, although much weight is given to validity for Aboriginal knowledge, is on Aboriginal women with specific reference to Cree mothers and their stories.

My position as a researcher interpreting and analyzing descriptive narrative is supported by my belief that First Nation epistemologies hold valid information worthy of study. Analysis of several authors was initiated to examine my assumption as it reflects mother as teacher, and the use of story as the vehicle to transmit knowledge. A major challenge
confronted me. Among the myriad information and complex explanations, the task of interpreting the literature relative to my purpose began to unfold. To articulate the meaning of the printed stories, or what Cruikshank (1990) calls "paper stories" is an attempt to connect with my First Nations perspective.

A significant assumption must be examined at this point. As the review of the literature began to unfold, it was found that a striking contrast in understanding what is meaningful in Western culture, and thereby, reflected in their policies in education, was markedly different from First Nations understanding of a meaningful education (Ducharme, 1995). Academic research primarily focuses on the developing Western ideologies. The influence and negative impact of colonization via church and state on Aboriginal people devastated and nearly annihilated the cultural teachings of Aboriginal peoples. Thus, the literature often excludes Aboriginal voice.

Much of the literature reflects western approaches and methodologies (Deloria, 1980; King, 1989; Lafromboise, 1983; Red Horse, Johnson, & Weiner, 1989). Aboriginal ways of knowing are often discounted as meaningless, and viewed as unconventional and unimportant. Rosen (1986) says that personal learning experiences in formal learning environments are "rarely considered legitimate sources of knowledge" (cited in Erasmus, 1989, p. 268). Thus, the use of story as a communicative tool in formal learning environments is often
misunderstood, misrepresented and misinterpreted by non-Aboriginal audiences. Erasmus (1989) notes that in order to validate and legitimize the stories which Aboriginal learners share, "we must listen to their voices and hear their words and meaning" (p. 269).

It should be noted that readers should not approach this genre with preconceived notions with respect to the Western development of story. Western thinkers will surely be disappointed to find that the stories that emerge may not fit the usual convention. As Cruikshank (1990) comments, "The familiar model comes from... an author’s chronological reflection about individual growth and development..." (p. ix). The oral tradition of Aboriginal peoples is rhetorical in nature, and employs extensive use of parallel construction and repetition (Hymes, 1981; Underwood, 1986; Erasmus, 1989). Allen (1991) further explains:

stories from the oral tradition,... are from the world we know while other details refer to the supernatural... Many times the stories weave back and forth between the everyday and the supernatural without explanation, confusing the logical mind and compelling linear thought processes to chase their own tails. (p.5)

Therefore, rationalist thinkers are urged to engage in a thought process similar to First Nations, that is, holistically, not only physically and intellectually, but also emotionally and spiritually.

The research addresses stories about the lived experience of a Cree mother, it is not a life history, as is the case in the research provided by Cruikshank, or an
autobiography. It is what Polkinghorne (1988) calls "an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience..." (p.1). The stories that emerge are ones that have come to represent something meaningful to a Cree mother. This connected knowledge provides a means of drawing from personal experience to "make sense of the reality in which we find ourselves, and of the events which continually fill our lives... it illustrates a cultural response" (Erasmus, 1989, p. 268). Polkinghorne calls these individual stories "the emergence of multiple realities..." (p. 1), in which narrative presents itself as a legitimate form of knowledge. Further, the stories presented in this research provide an essence of the lived experience of a Cree mother, and can be appreciated by the reader from his/her point of view, or their worldview.

The persistence of First Nations epistemology is being felt by its ever increasing presence, not only in written texts but also in the community (Battiste, 1990, 1994; Ermine, 1995; Henderson, 1993; Graveline, 1996). The Old People are seen as the repositories of epistemology. This includes the men and women who have gained the respect of their communities, and have lived life and served life in a meaningful way. The stories which come from this lived experience are ones that guide and teach the young to live a meaningful existence. This assertion provides the context from which I write. It is acknowledged that the Old People guide my thinking as I strive to learn from a First Nations
perspective. Lightning (1992) comments in his text with Elder Sunchild:

There is recognition of responsibility and authority ... It comes from the Elder's having expert knowledge about the context of knowledge, about the place that specific knowledge is appropriately brought out and the readiness of the individual to perceive it... the ethos is self-enforcing, and a violation of it... can have resonate implications. (p. 230)

Lightning's use of the term "Elder" is somewhat different from my usage of "Old People". However, the ideology reflects a similarity in understanding the importance of listening to, and the sharing of stories to appreciate the teachings inherent in them. Lightning (1992) continues that through the recognition of age, life experience and observation, they have "paid their dues" (p. 25). They, have, therefore, an accumulated responsibility to share their knowledge with others who wish to learn. In my opinion, my mother has lived a meaningful life, and her stories reflect her experience that only comes with age and respect. Further, I believe that my mother is extremely careful when it comes to the appropriation of knowledge. She recognizes that the knowledge does not belong to her but that she has gained knowledge from her experience, as well as, her reflections on the teachings given to her by her kohkoms and moshoms, the Old People. In addition, it must be recognized that this research is about one Cree mother and her stories based on her lived experience and the researcher's interpretation of that experience. Ridington (1990) asserts
that

a person who speaks from the authority of his or
her experience "little bit know something"... empowers a person to live in this world with
intelligence and understanding... From...
experiences, children have grown into adults who
"little bit know something." (p.xv)

Further, Ridington (1990) notes, "Knowledge is highly
contextualized within experience rather than instrumental to
purposes removed from experience" (p.xv). He continues "to
know something is to have both experienced it and interpreted
it" (p. 20).

iskwēw ācimowina: Women’s Voice

I feel that it is important to record Cree women’s
voice. In fact, Cruikshank’s research on the stories of
three Yukon women was born out of the need to study women’s
voice and its importance to the political aspirations of the
Yukon people. She says, in "1974... politically active
Native women my own age... suggested that I might make a
substantive contribution by working with their mothers or
grandmothers recording life histories..." (p.13) in the hope
of bringing about change culturally and politically. My
research as mentioned earlier is not a life history of my
mother and therefore different from Cruikshank’s (1990)
research. In addition, linguistic and territorial boundaries
are different in that my mother is a Cree speaker belonging
to the Plains Cree of Saskatchewan. Graveline (1996) notes
that each geographical area has inherited knowledge that is
particular to that region, she says:
Any framework for understanding or protecting particular perspective about Aboriginal knowledge must be contextual and decentralized and respect the linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system. (Graveline, 1996, p.5)

This study is focused on one Cree mother and her stories, thus learnings which emerge encompass a Plains Cree perspective.

The use of Polkinghorne’s (1988) narrative framework in this research speaks to the Aboriginal mode of thought. The process of telling stories encapsulates the Aboriginal perspective, especially, when Polkinghorne discusses the idea of multiple realities. Graveline (1996) reflects on Aboriginal knowledge systems as coming from many perspectives. She says:

No uniform or universal Aboriginal perspective on knowledge exists in Canada. Many perspectives exist. Aboriginal perspectives of Indigenous knowledge in Canada are not found in literature in Canada. The existing literature does not acknowledge Indigenous knowledge, nor its scope or meanings... Thus to acquire an Aboriginal perspective on knowledge requires extended conversations with... each language group in Canada. (p. 4)

Graveline (1996) further supports this study in that she respects the use of narrative (stories) as a legitimate form of knowledge. In addition, she recognizes Aboriginal sense of space and contexts in which these learnings occur.

There is a limited body of literature that examines First Nations epistemology using narrative description. One example is Cruikshank’s (1990), focusing on life history through narrative explanations. Her study concentrated on
the life history of three Yukon Elders. Cruikshank utilizes storytelling as a customary framework for discussing the life stories of three elderly women. Using oral narratives is a genre "that simultaneously reflects continuity with the past and passes on experiences, stories, and guiding principles in the present" (Cruikshank, 1990, p.x). She acknowledges that each of us interpret the stories differently because we each bring to the story a "culturally embedded" account of the interpretation of the stories and of the people (p.x). This is important in that it reflects Polkinghorne's (1988) contention about "multiple realities". Lightning (1992) also supports the views of Cruikshank (1990) and Polkinghorne (1988) in that he says, stories can be "expressed from many different perspectives and from multiple angles" (p.250). Similar, also, is Ridington's (1990) approach to listening and telling of stories of the Dunne za people.

Another example of oral narrative is Battiste's (1993) article, "Annie Battiste: A Mi'kmaq Family History." This is the story of Annie Battiste's life as told to her daughter Marie Battiste in Mi'kmaq, and it is a strong testimonial to Mi'kmaq women's strength and creativity. There are many themes which surface in Battiste's narrative, for example, cultural, educational, social, economical and political oppression. It also speaks to the endurance and strength of a Mi'kmaq mother. Largely, what makes it different is it chronicles a life history, rather than relates just to the teachings.
A further example of literature which examines Apache epistemology using oral narratives is Boyer and Gayton's (1992) research on Apache mothers and daughters. Like Cruishank (1990), Boyer and Gayton (1992) are interested in the life histories of four generations of stories passed down from generation to generation from mothers to daughters. Interestingly, Gayton is the primary source of the stories, as it traces her life along with the lives of her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. In the end, it begins by tracing the life of her daughter. They are oral accounts of Apache women which "consist[s] of [oral histories] memories related by the living and recently deceased individuals" (p. xv). This record is very much a chronological life history of four Apache women. Boyer and Gayton (1992) recognize that Apache teachings instilled by women were, and still are, very important to the survival of their people. They say, "Apache women were and are the mainstay of their culture. Yet we know little about them..." (p.xii). This speaks volumes to the fact that there is preciously little in the literature that identifies the contributions of Native American women.

Ridington (1990) recognizes the importance of the oral tradition in appropriating knowledge through story. Ridington (1990) asserts that the language of the people is imperative in understanding narrative expressions. He says, "Because Cree knowledge is thoroughly contexted in experience,... it is most appropriately communicated (following Cree tradition) in the language of narrative" (p.108). (See also Lightning,
1992¹; Milne, 1995²; Sanderson, 1991³). Cruikshank (1990) and Ridington's (1990) studies acknowledge the importance of narrative as a form of communication to impart cultural teachings and understandings. However, although they acknowledge the importance of mother tongue, the authors do not speak or understand the language of the people they studied. They both relied on translators. This is important to note, given the fact that the language itself is knowledge and provides a way of knowing. Further, the stories shared by my mother form a connecting thread which is tied to my personal experiences. From this connection comes additional insight. The lack of understanding may be viewed as lacking in authenticity. However, their perceived understanding of the social situation is interpreted by them as knowledge. As a Cree woman, I understand the Cree language. My interpretation of my mother's stories is my perception of my reality which addresses the context, time and the understanding of her stories. This understanding brings insight into the study about one Cree mother's teachings on Cree culture, language and identity.


kohkominawak otacimowiniwaw:
Our Grandmothers Lives as Told in Their Own Words

To assist me in describing, interpreting and analyzing the Cree stories, I attempted to find similar studies. My attempts led me to research by a Cree woman, Freda Ahenakew. Ahenakew (Ahenakew and Wolfart, 1992) has recorded the Cree narratives of seven Plains Cree grandmothers. In the research with my mother, the grandmothers who shared their narrative accounts with Ahenakew "were able to use their mother tongue in speaking about their lives" (p.17). The text is a collection of stories, "autobiographical narratives" in which Cree grandmothers speak to another Cree grandmother. Ahenakew (1992) too, moves ahead of other scholarly writers, in that she has produced a document of grandmothers' lives that is translated into Cree. Ahenakew, a linguist, offers the reader an insider's view of mother tongue narratives. These narratives are translated into both roman orthography and syllabics. This research is not an autobiography, rather, the stories reflect teachings through the experiences of one Cree mother. In addition, Ahenakew does not analyze the narratives for a particular audience, she introduces the "uncut" version as the grandmother's live performance. Wolfart says in his editorial of the literature that "Since the discourse is not directed to an English-speaking public, it has not been filtered through the many layers of review and revision which prepare a work for a particular audience" (p. 19). Thus, because this research is to fulfil
requirements for a Master's degree, analysis of the narratives told by one Cree mother will produce a document markedly different from Ahenakew's narratives on Cree grandmothers. What is important to note is that Wolfart and Ahenakew (1992) have determined that "almost nothing has been heard... about the life of Indian women" (p.17) other than historical accounts about their lives, and this is seen predominantly through the eyes of European men. Acoose (1995) supports this statement by concluding in her research, speaking in reference to Campbell's (1973) autobiographical, Halfbreed, she notes "what she (Campbell) writes has rarely been said by Indigenous women in North America" (p.100).

*kāyās acimowina: A Historical Perspective on Narratives*

Writings by Schoolcraft (1848 cited in. Bourgeois, 1994, p. 11) in which he recorded narratives (i.e., folklore) of an Ojibwa family, and Longfellow's (1856 cited in. Bourgeois, 1994, p. 11) poem "Hiawatha," have both received undue acclaim in Western literature. This reflects the European male dominance in early literary tradition. These early attempts to describe Ojibwa narratives were altered to suit the "literary tastes of that era, the writings transformed the original narratives almost beyond recognition" (Bourgeois, 1994, p. 11). Consequently, until very recently, this is how subsequent forms of writings represented Aboriginal peoples. Bourgeois (1994) himself, of European descent, speaks with authority about Ojibwa ancestral lore.
His manuscript is a replication of writings recorded by his ancestors in the late nineteenth century. Lutz (1991) comments that early writings were

heavily edited by non-Native missionaries, anthropologists, and hobbyist,...[who] tended to represent native 'tales' from the igloo, the smokehouse, or the campfire as 'quaint' or 'exotic,' fit for ethnological inquiry but not for serious literary study. (p. 106)

Another historical writer of the Cree people is David Mandelbaum (1979). In his research, originally published in 1940, he concentrated solely on gathering information about the Cree way of life and the changes encountered by the Plains Cree during a period of rapid change. As he points out, "The ethnographic focus is on the buffalo-hunting way of life and not on the experiences of the Plains Cree on reservations" (p. xiii). Mandelbaum (1979) deserves special mention as his text and research have been the focus when researching Cree people. This may be because his research also focused on narrative accounts of Cree people who were old enough to share their thoughts with him about the past lifeways of the Plains Cree. Overall, though, Mandelbaum's work is still a reader for the researcher of the Plains Cree. There is no concentrated focus on the Plains Cree women other than to mention women's games and that they had no social or political status. He says, "women had no officially recognized voice in political and social affairs" (Mandelbaum, 1979, p.106). Also that women who wanted to become involved in social and political affairs did so through the men. This is very disturbing information and
supports the patriarchal ideologies of that time (Mandelbaum gathered information on the Plains Cree in 1935 and 1936). Although Mandelbaum (1979) gives credit to women for holding certain powers (e.g., during their menstrual cycle and the fact that they could obtain a vision without going on a vision quest), these sacred rites were passed over as being insignificant in his writings on the Plains Cree. Patricia Buffalohead (1983) calls this thinking the "settler's ideology of women as submissive to patriarchal authority" (p. 236). Acoose (1995), relying heavily on Adam's (1975), Prison of Grass; and LaRocque's, Defeathering the Indian (1975), says:

Our once community- and consensually-based ways of governance, social organization, and economic practices were stripped of their legitimacy and authority by white christian males, who imposed an ideologically contrasting hierarchical structure. Of specific importance to this discussion is the removal of women from all significant social, political, economic, and spiritual processes. (p.47)

This reflects the need for Aboriginal writers to begin a process in which their history can be accurately reflected.

Ellen Smallboy, Glimpses of a Cree Woman's Life, by Regina Flannery (1995) is another historical account of one Cree Elder at Moose Factory. Flannery's objective was to "learn as much as possible about the Cree way of life in the James Bay area" (p.ix). Like Cruikshank's (1990) life history of three Yukon Elders, Life lived like a story, Flannery's (1995) text, also is a life history account of Ellen Smallboy. Flannery is interested in recording the "old
way of life" (p. 49) which is typical for an historian, but
lacks the flavour of life as it is presently lived and
experienced.

**cheechums, koochums and kohkoms: Grandmothers**

Closer to home, western Aboriginal writers, such as
Campbell (1973) and Acoose (1995), have brought attention to
Aboriginal women’s plight in the effort to decolonize and
demythologize the stereotypical images of Aboriginal women.
In their efforts to reclaim stolen years and lost souls, both
of these writers have returned to their roots (to their
cheechums in Campbell’s case, and Acoose’s Koochums) their
grandmothers for guidance. As Acoose (1995) reflects on her
journey, a journey in which her grandmothers come to her in
a dream to bring her home. She says, "two wonderful old
Koochums (i.e., grandmothers) came to me in a dream and
directed me back to my home..." (p. 17). Acoose (1995)
refers to the dream as a "maternal" energy which she
acknowledges that she had paid little attention to in the
past (p. 17). It is only recently that writers have sought
the guidance of these maternal energies. Although much of
the guidance has taken the form of "grandmother spirits,"
only now through this research will there be an account of
Cree mother’s role as teacher (i.e., guider).

Campbell’s (1973) autobiographical entry into literary
tradition provided a new face to the pages of history in
terms of demythologizing the images of Aboriginal women.
Much of Campbells' book, *Halfbreed*, is aimed at challenging long standing images of Aboriginal women. These images include the Indian princess and the easy squaw. By writing the book, *Halfbreed*, Campbell constructed her own story by "looking back upon her life with a renewed vision and a stronger connection to those powerful, resourceful, and dynamic women who came before..." (p.100). In addition, Acoose (1995) says, by using the colonizers form of writing, "Campbell begins to understand how her identity has been constructed for her," and through analysis, Campbell comes to understand how she can become reconnected to her family and her community (p.91). In one way, reconnection with our mothers is what this research hopes to gain, but it is much more than that, it is finding a process by which we gain acceptance, belonging and to regain the lost spirit within each of us. Acoose, too, acknowledges her feelings of liberation when she uses the colonizers form of writing and speaking to voice her opinions. She says:

My mind no longer directs my voice to speak our original languages,... the only recourse for me... is to use the english language to convey the reality of the Indigenous people, as represented by Indigenous women who continue to survive and give us life. In this way, writing in the colonizer's language is liberating because the process involved doing research and writing encourages recreation, renaming, and empowerment of both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous peoples. (p.12)

In addition, she says,"the act of writing is a political act that can encourage decolonization" (p.91). Decolonization is a topic which has received much attention recently,
writers (Battiste, 1990, 1994; Henderson, 1995; Ermine, 1995; LaRoque 1975; Campbell, 1975; Acoose, 1995) all speak to the need to begin using the colonizer’s methods (i.e., tools) in speaking and writing in an attempt to decolonize and demystify understandings between cultures.

nehiyaw ācimowina: Aboriginal Stories

Other literary writers, such as Paula Gunn Allen (1991), Lee Maracle (1988), Beatrice Culleton (1983), Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (1990), Louise Halfe (1994), Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) and Beth Cuthand (1989), to name but a few female Aboriginal writers, have all contributed to literature and Aboriginal women’s voice. In the article entitled, "Stop stealing native stories", Keeshig-Tobias (1990), an Ojibwa poet and storyteller says that

stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. (Globe and Mail, 1990)

In the process of writing, Aboriginal authors, too, are constructing their own stories from their own perspectives, thus accurately reflecting their culture. Keeshig-Tobias (1991) notes:

Native stories deal with the experiences of our humanity, experiences we laugh and cry and sweat for, experiences we learn from. Stories are not just for entertainment. We know that. The storyteller and writer has a responsibility — a responsibility to the people, a responsibility for the story and a responsibility to the art. The art in turn then reflects a significant and profound self-understanding. (p.66)

This means that we need to accept Aboriginal ways of knowing
as a valid approach to looking at the world. In addition, these stories must be told by the people who have experienced them. Telling our own stories gives voice to the people. LaRocque (1975) says that "there are a thousand angles from which to see Native people" (p.198). Not unlike Polkinghorne’s (1988) interpretation of "multiple realities", or Lightning’s (1992) "multiple angles", LaRocque (1975) encourages us to look at the diversity within our cultures and to appreciate and to respect one another.

In the literature on Aboriginal women, we have found that it is only recently that their voice is being heard in the literary context. This is evidenced by Acoose (1995), Campbell (1973), Paula Gunn Allen (1986) and others in their attempt to construct their own stories. Further, Ahenakew’s (1992) narrative accounts of Cree grandmother’s lives, and Battiste’s (1992) narrative on a Mi’kmaq mother, in addition to the historical accounts of Flannery (1994), Bourgeois (1994) and Mandelbaum (1979) all contribute to our search to find the significance of a Cree mother’s voice.

iskwēwa otācimowiniwāwa: Women’s Voice

The literature search to seek out Cree mother’s voice has led the researcher to acknowledge the feminist genre. Feminist literature will be briefly examined to gain a sense of their perspective on mothers and motherhood, in general, and to explore the literature as it reflects Cree mothers. There is a vast array of literature on the feminist view of
classism, racism, sexism and so on, but in the past there was not as much emphasis on narratives about mothers and motherhood.

The Western feminist genre on mothers and motherhood is examined briefly, noting that more recently the topic of mothers has become a central focus in many of the narratives by feminist writers (Lowinsky 1992; Walker, 1983; Garner, 1991.) Farr (cf. Daly and Reddy, 1991) says that, the "central feminist concern [is]--our mothers" (p.94). Daly (1991), however, would add that although mothers and motherhood are seen as important in the lives of women, it often times is passed over in the heart of discussions pertaining to women. Daly calls this, the "maternalization of poverty", in that, issues, such as race, class, sex, and so on tend to "disproportionately affect mothers." Daly (1991) argues:

Mothers’ voice continues to be ignored. Even in women’s accounts of motherhood, maternal perspectives are strangely absent. We most often hear daughters’ voices in both literary and theoretical texts about mothers, mothering, and motherhood, even in those written by feminists who are mothers. (p.1)

This controversy among feminist thinkers is still being debated, however, many acknowledge that "much of the feminist literature has been daughter-identified" (Lowinsky, 1992, p. xi). Lowinsky, also notes that "we are so full of judgements about what mother ought to be that we can barely see what mother is..." (p.xi). I must concur with the author on this statement. Still, there is much that invites further
discussion, particularly with respect to First Nations worldview and the role and status of women in traditional societies and the role and status of women in contemporary First Nations. Giving voice to First Nations women through our reflections of the past and our visions for the future is important, and will change the face of feminism by including the voice of First Nations mothers.

ka-msitohtamān nikāwiy otācimowina:

To Understand My Mother's stories

In the development of my research, understanding and listening to mother's voice became important. It became important for me to understand the meaning within her voice. As Lightning (1992) says, "my task is to focus on meaning" (p.127). My intention is to interpret and analyze the stories in such "a way that helps people understand it, that contributes to meaning" (p. 128), in other words, to provide insight into the teachings and experiences of one Cree mother. In order to focus on meaning, one must experience the "flux-to note the referral points and see the regularities in the flux" (Battiste, personal communication, May 27, 1996). "Coming to know" and understanding the meaning in story involve process. The process of "coming to know" then becomes the focus. First Nations people have arrived at a point in their history where they must turn to those significant persons in their lives to help guide them on their path. We must turn to our communities to assist us
on our journey, and work to make our communities harmonious again in terms of giving back the responsibility of "teaching" the foundational values to the men and women who have lived a long life and have gained the respect of the community for their knowledge. This realization will make the Cree people a strong, proud and viable Nation.

nēhiyāwēwin: Creeenness

Ahenakew (1992) attributes "Creeness" as "Nehiyawin," as a descriptor for being Cree. It implies a responsibility which requires a recognition that Cree people must strengthen positive attitudes and identity to ignite the "inner fire of spiritual identity" (Lightning, 1996, SIFC Spring Conference). Survival of First Nations people rests on the process of coming to know who we are as a people, as a Nation. This realization encompasses a spiritual base which many Indigenous authors (Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1988; Milne, 1995; Sioui, 1992) recognize as foremost in the development of identity. Not only does spirituality encompass identity, but also strengthens the sense of belonging that First Nation individuals desperately need in developing the total person. This research examines the process involved in the development of self as a Cree woman on my journey to know.

kâkêskimâwâsowin: The Oral Tradition

In traditional times the journey to know something was a "normal" process in the development of a child. Teaching
and learning were incorporated into the everyday experiences of the child (Milne, 1995). Life (i.e., living) experiences were not separated from other contexts in the process to learn. Full opportunity of the child's experience was capitalized to enable the learning and knowledge to grow as the child grew (Deloria, 1988, Milne, 1995). Family members were seen as the key element in the process of total development (Milne, 1995; Lightning 1996; Ermine, 1995; Katz & St. Denis, 1991). This aspect of family involvement in teaching and learning is not necessarily happening today. At this time, the researcher sees the school is taking the role once reserved for the family, but schools lack knowledge of Cree understandings and values, especially when it comes to understanding the power of oral storytelling. Wason-Ellam (1993) notes, "the telling of oral stories might not always be practised or valued in schools" (p.40). Farrell-Racette (1989) says it is important not to trivialize oral stories and their cultural and spiritual significance. These stories when written down provide "a valuable record of stories that may have otherwise been lost to us" (p.2). McLaren (1994) too, says:

Educators need to stare boldly and unflinchingly into the historical present and assume a narrative space where conditions may be created where students can tell their own stories, listen closely to the stories of others, and dream the dream of liberation. (p. 217 cited in Graveline, 1996, p. 105)

To act as a support, the means must be provided and the educational setting must establish that responsibility not
only in the educational setting, but also in the home. It means to acknowledge and recognize Aboriginal ways of knowing.

The oral tradition passes on its stories in characteristic ways. Ahenakew (1989) says, there are distinct types of Cree stories, such as real occurrences, "Acimowina", or "old time story". Stories which teach, she says, "have no traditional term for such stories but they might be called, kakeskihkemowina, or 'counselling texts'" (Ahenakew, 1989, p. xii). These two distinctions are included in this study. Other distinctions include funny stories, "wawiyatācimowina", and autobiographical collections, "ācimisowina". Acimowin is a "factual account", which encompasses the idea that the "advice to honor the old ways is not given by the storyteller himself, but by the old man whose life experiences he relates to us," (Ahenakew, 1989, p.xii). A good story, says Johnston (1976), includes four levels of meanings which are: enjoyment, moral teaching, philosophic and metaphysical (p.70). I believe you will find that my mother tells some good stories.

kanisitohtamohk ēheiyawkiskēyitamowina:

Understanding Cree Knowledge

Many Indigenous authors have provided guiding principles to assist educators in understanding the (Cree) processes involved in the journey to knowledge from a First Nations perspective. Lightning (1996) in his presentation at a
recent conference of First Nations educators shared Elder Gordon Ray's perceptions as to what it is that guides our journey toward the process of educational development. Lightning notes, (according to Elder Ray) four principles are required on our path toward process of educational development: 1) commitment on the part of the person to walk the path; 2) perseverance to become dedicated to the challenge of staying on the path; 3) will-power to have the strength and courage to move in the direction the path leads; and 4) tolerance, to endure the trials which may hinder the process toward total development. As a researcher, I have sensed my spirit of commitment to serve my people, especially the children; they have been my driving force to stay on the path and persevere. My mother is my strength. It is through her that I tolerate the blindness of even some of our First Nations people in the journey to illuminate what is meant by gaining knowledge from a Cree perspective.

Lightning (1992, 1996) speaks to the need to raise the consciousness of the First Nations people. The First Nations people need to recognize that our mothers have something to share. The First Nations mothers have knowledge to transfer, a way of life, culture, a worldview which has helped to ensure the survival of First Nations people for centuries.

 nehiyawewin, nehiyawihcikewina, okawimaw-ācimowina
Acimowina: Cree Language, Cree Culture and Mother's Stories

One of the barriers to understanding Cree knowledge is
communication. The Cree language is important for succeeding generations to understand Cree thought processes. Cree language, according to Lightning (1992) is a system of "creation, recreation-mutual relationships of personal engagement, of information" (p. 231). Lightning (1996), Sanderson (1991), and Milne (1995) all say that family connection becomes important in transferring Cree knowledge. They also say that connection and the engagement of knowledge should involve the process symbolic of the Cree, which is Cree story. For this reason, conducting research with a Cree mother, the center of my family, was paramount in my decision to pursue an understanding about Cree knowledge. More importantly, it is my conviction to First Nations children which led me to descriptive narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988) and its possibilities in examining First Nations education through the stories of a Cree mother.

Henderson (1993) suggests that the Western emphasis on a noun-based vocabulary is evidence of control (p. 3), as opposed to the verb-based vocabulary of Aboriginal peoples which "contains the essential ways in which we experience and interact with our culture" (p.3). Battiste (1992) supports this thinking, she says, "any attempt to change the language is a direct attempt to modify traditional tribal epistemology or consciousness." She continues by citing Paulo Friere "the manipulation of human minds... is an instrument of conquest..." (p. 12). These Aboriginal writers claim that language becomes a crucial thread in connecting with
Aboriginal knowledge. Battiste (1994) speaks to this issue succinctly, she says:

Aboriginal languages are sacred to Aboriginal people. They speak the voice and lessons of a sacred place, and Aboriginal homeland. Our oral tradition gives us strength, guidance and a place to belong. This is our link to the lessons of our Being... to our survival. (p.3)

First Nations education encompasses more than what is being taught in contemporary educational institutions. There is so much more knowledge to be shared by Cree mothers that could be of use in our schools. Understanding in a holistic sense is one way, using mother tongue is part of that understanding, but it also requires a change in goals, a change in the thinking process, a change in how we approach knowledge, and a change in what we validate.

The study into Cree knowledge is a powerful, exciting and affirming vision. Delving into Cree epistemology may also have resonate effects on creating and recreating identity of the Cree people. It is a reawakening of foundational values and understandings that have lain dormant in the hearts and minds of our mothers for too long. Its reawakening is the affirmation of belonging within the hearts of our children. Sally Milne (1995) a Woodlands Cree mother, educator and writer equates the teaching and learning between Elder [mother] and learner to a "journey". She says that an analogy can be made to "equipping the child with a good program..., it is like packing for someone, who is going on a long journey" (p.5). I invite you to walk with me on my journey, to think mutually with me as I describe the Cree
stories of a First Nations mother, and to interpret and analyze how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity.
CHAPTER THREE
notokwēwi kiskinahamātowina

Moments in Time: "Old Lady Teachings"

The context of the study was situational. My mother's home was the setting. On occasion, my mother travels with me to different places. These occasions, too, provide insightful moments of engagement which transformed into storytelling sessions or reflections about the past which I find very informative in making meaning and understanding the human condition. More important, is that, the stories reflect a time and a place which is rooted within the environment from which my mother speaks. Cajete (1994) says "people... identified with a specific place or region... continue to reflect an inherent environmental orientation and sense of sacred ecology" (p.16). My mother's stories transmit ideas, events, and portray First Nations worldview. Ridington (1990) views stories as containing important information in which

culturally coded interpretations of personal and collective experience... is shared [and] contributes to the knowledge. Stories are interpretations of experience through which subjective information is organized and communicated intersubjectively. (p. 14)

Oral traditions use stories to reflect on life; life processes and teachings which are First Nations education. In
addition, stories become the medium from which important teachings are shared in a naturalistic setting. Maria Campbell calls these kinds of stories, "old lady teachings" (p. 172). Campbell's (1992) story comes to mind, she says:

"...those old lady teachings were stories about hunting properly; the way that you use rabbit skins; the way that you use partridge and an example of that and I'm sure some of the native people here remember sitting with your grandmother after you'd been partridge hunting and there's a part in the neck that's full of seed and everything. I don't know what it's called in English, but they would teach us how to clean that out and blow it and we would have balloons and they would tell us stories while we were blowing these balloons up. We were also able to see what they were doing with the work that they did. (p. 171)

When I was a child I recall many evenings similar to Campbell's description of "old lady teachings". In fact, I remember cleaning out the "seed bags", and blowing up the balloons myself. We would also make rattles out of the seed bags. As a child, I would sit and listen to my mother and grandmothers. We called my grandmother "kohkom," and my great grandmother, "Chu-Chapan". Another great-grandmother we called "blind Kohkom", because she was partially blind. I recall afternoon visits, where by the light of day, I would lead "blind kohkom" through a meadow in search of sweetgrass. And "Chu-Chapan," by the fire, showing me how to clean fish and fillet them. Chu-Chapan also showed me how to clean fish guts and cook them over an open fire. The fish guts would sizzle and scrunch up into little worms for us to eat. They were sure tasty. All the while they would tell stories. Each one of these beautiful women played a significant role in my
life. To me, they are all my mothers. And they treated me as their precious flower.

The nourishment that my grandmothers provided sustained my hunger to learn the traditions, but ultimately, it was my mother who instilled the bulk of my learning of First Nations lifeways. This natural learning was always accompanied by story. Lincoln and Guba (1981) say that this kind of naturalistic inquiry is "aimed at understanding actualities, social realities, and human perceptions...It is a process geared to the uncovering of many idiosyncratic but nonetheless important stories told by real people, about real events, in real and natural ways...these stories will reflect what respondents view as salient issues, the meaningful evidence, and the appropriate inferences...Naturalistic inquiry attempts to present...episodes documented through natural language and representing as closely as possible how people feel, what they know and what their concerns, beliefs, perceptions, and understandings are. (Wolf & Tymitz, 1976, p. 6, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1981, p. 78)

I share a closeness with my mother that can be viewed as positive in the research sense because "the phenomenon under study ... is relatively uncontaminated by preconceived notions and categories...." (Patton, 1975, p. 27). Further, "the inner perspectives assumes that understanding can only be achieved by actively participating in the life of the observed and gaining insight by means of introspection" (Bruyn, 1963, p. 226; cited in Patton, 1975, p. 27).

By choosing my mother as a primary resource in my research, I believed that the trust relationship was built, and that, as a researcher, I would not have to worry about fitting into a social environment prior to undertaking
research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) comment that validity in purposive sampling "increases the scope or range of data exposed...[and] the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered...," (p.40). Further, they express that methodology should "take adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values..." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.40), this is all part of grounded theory. In addition, because my study involved a First Nations perspective on education and looking at Cree culture, language, and identity from that perspective. As a First Nations person my position was advantageous. Sioui (1992) calls this "Amerindian Autohistory" in that the study I conducted was positioned from a Cree perspective.

nanitaw ka-isi-māmawi-nisitohtamahk:

Connecting through Storytelling

I chose to use Mishler's (1986) method for analyzing narratives in this study. The inquiry was approached through an interpretative analysis that spoke to my presence while listening to my mother's stories. This means, when I was there, I interpreted. My voice does come out in the study but, in doing so, I am highlighting my mother's voice. The use of in-depth interviews, participant observation, descriptive field notes and a reflective journal were the primary sources of analysis. Several theoretical issues led me to this decision.

First, as Gee (1985) asserts, "One of the primary ways--
probably the primary way—human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form..." (p. 67, 68). This statement reflected the essence of the communication in First Nations cultures. Stories (narrative accounts) were the primary form of communication to explain "what was" and "what is" with respect to culture, language and identity. In addition, through in-depth inquiry, relationships that exist, embedded in the narrative accounts of a Cree mother's experience, enabled the researcher to delve into the meaning of discourse as a symbol of communication. Second, using Polkinghorne's (1988) narrative approach allowed me to reflect on on-going patterns of connection. Thus, this reflective nature provided a means of reflecting on the environment and making that environment meaningful. MacIntyre (1981) explains this best when he comments that

> because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out that the form of narratives is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told. (p. 197)

The process of reflection enabled me to make sense of my analysis and interpretation of events that have transpired, and therefore, my engagements with my mother became meaningful, not only because of the "speech act" or "speech event" (Mishler, 1986; Hymes, 1967; Gumperz, 1982; Polkinghorne, 1988) itself, but also because of the environment in which the speech act takes place. My understanding of this statement is that we must take into
consideration the form of communication (speech) employed by the person(s) and the community that is representative of that form of communication. As well, the process by which the speech is gathered and interpreted must also reflect the person(s) and the community. In this case, it was the use of Cree stories by a First Nations mother using mother tongue. Further, Gumperz’s (1982) explanation of "speech activities" may serve to transform our thinking in that the interviews can serve as a catalyst in emergent theory in that "meaning through [connection]" and "telling [of] stor[ies]" imply certain expectations about the kinds of stories that may emerge from the interaction of speech activities (p. 166). I found that the stories that emerged included facets of culture, language and identity. More important, it was the personal relationships that existed between a Cree mother and culture, language and identity, and the analysis and interpretation of the relationship served as emergent theory.

As Mishler explains, this is clearly an alternative method to interviewing "as discourse between speakers" (1986, p. 36). Stories shape meaning into events and provide a form of teaching that brings to light the significance of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 91). If meaning exist in our stories, I sought to interpret and analyze the significance of both the positive and negative "impact" of life experiences to find out what kinds of stories emerge which make us who we are. If the relationship between significant events and storymaking exist, then my voice and
experience becomes an important contribution to the developing research.

In telling my story it is not intentional to dominate my mother's voice, rather, to provide an interpretative analysis between my experience and my mother's words. My experiences also included my father, and by excluding him in my research, it does not mean that his presence in my life was not important. On the contrary, his humor provided the family with laughter, and his resources as a provider helped us survive. However, it was my mother who instilled the teachings through her stories. My experiences, past, present and future, shape who I am as a Cree woman.

My experiences have been both positive and negative as in any family relationship. I experienced the horrific winters when my brother and I had to haul logs from the bush and chop the wood in the dead of winter, in the middle of the night, just so we could have warmth. And, on the nights when one of my brothers or sisters was ill, I felt the sickening pain in my heart when I would witness my mother's frantic efforts to revive a convulsing baby. Or the more joyous times when we would sit and listen to my father tell stories. He was a good storyteller, and was known far and wide for the stories he could tell. I suppose he was kind of a "trickster," or as Tomson Highway would acknowledge "the trickster sitting beside him" (cited in Acoose, 1995, p.110) in that he would make people laugh and cry with the stories he told. In fact, there were many times he was asked to
travel to several First Nations communities to tell his stories. I know he felt great pride in his ability as a storyteller. My mother shared these experiences with my father. And she tries several times to recount my father's stories. These were happy times. These experiences had a significant impact on me. More importantly, though, I wondered what the significance of my mother's experience as the teacher in my learning has been. In an effort to understand this relationship between mother as teacher and self as learner, these events provide useful threads through which a pattern could emerge.

Third, by interviewing my mother, her narratives served as a model in explaining my continuity and my tribal continuity through my role as mother. This understanding is best explained by Cohler (1982) in that he says, "personal narratives...[represent]... the most internally consistent interpretation of presently understood past, experienced present, and anticipated future" (p.207). He also comments that the approach parallels personal narratives used by successive interpretations by persons to explain their own history. Cohler (1982) explains that narrative "parallels the approach actually used by persons in the successive interpretations or reconstructions of their own history as a personal narrative across the course of life" (p. 207). And Jameson (1981) refers to the use of narrative as an "all-informing process" and the "central function or instance of the human mind" (p. 13). This assertion parallels Gee's
(1985) assumption that the primary way human beings make sense of their experience is by the telling of stories. It was my hope that my innocence and hunger to "know" the relationships between our experiences and who we are as First Nations people would be transformed into a knowledge base that can be shared with others as I experienced the beauty of narrative through the voice of a Cree mother. The focus was on the guidance my mother has provided me as I struggled to learn from a First Nations perspective.

Fourth, the use of metaphor in explaining our experiences also became an important construct in developing meaning from narratives. Mishler (1986) commenting on McAdam's (1985) proposal that "story metaphor" as a theoretical construct for study of identity development states that "identity stability is longitudinal consistency in the life story..." (cited in Mishler, p. 68). Thus, conducting a study on describing Cree stories of a First Nations mother, and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity is to delve into the constructs of reality and metaphor reflecting a primary form of interpretation for First Nations people. For example, in Hampton's (1988) use of the six directions, Graveline's (1996) use of the Medicine Wheel, and Ermine's (1995) use of the seasons, these Aboriginal authors use aspects of nature as metaphors to theorize and interpret Aboriginal epistemology. Since it was my hope that a form of knowledge would be gained from this study on Cree stories the
researcher could not assume that the use of metaphor would not be used in my mother’s stories. I say this because a pilot study was conducted with my mother in that she participated in a study for a previous class, in which we were asked to encapsulate what a First Nations pedagogical perspective might look like. This led me to my mother. The following story is an excerpt from that journey:

One evening, I visited her in her home, and as I walked in, I saw her haunched over the kitchen table. She was sewing. It was early Spring, the season when the nights begin to fade, and the sunlight honours the day a little longer. She had her lamp beside her, and she had on those old thick-rimmed glasses that made the beads look larger. She looked up, and smiled as I entered the kitchen. I sat down, and looked at her wrinkled hands. She smoothed the flower design she had been sewing. Her voice was strong and vibrant as she stared at the colours of the beads. She felt the fabric, her wrinkled hands roamed the flower. She looked outside, the sun had now disappeared. She told me to listen carefully...

This particular journey led me to see the act of sewing in a new way. Furthermore, it led me to a cultural understanding using the flower pattern as a metaphor to interpret my mother’s story. As illuminated by other Aboriginal authors, the researcher also felt that metaphor would be used to describe, analyze and interpret a Cree mother’s experience to illustrate meaning in discourse.
Polkinghorne (1988), too, supports MacAdam (1985) and Aboriginal researchers, in that his research into narrative knowing alludes to metaphor as being a reflection of reality, and that we can use metaphor to explain how we construct our experiences. He says:

'metaphor constitutes reality' and that the notion that narratives give an understanding of the past through techniques, such as configuration,...[which serve to] organize the events of the experience into meaningful wholes. (p. 55)

Therefore, metaphor as a tool in analyzing discourse can be viewed as a viable form in which the process of knowledge attainment can be interpreted. As a First Nations researcher, this notion of configuration (i.e., metaphor) was determined by my relationship with my mother and my understanding thus far of the Aboriginal community of researchers. It also meant that method and philosophy should give meaning to the cultural experience.

The narrative approach enabled the researcher to describe Cree stories of a First Nations mother, and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity. Through interpretative analysis this study allowed me to approach the broader issue in regard to the relationship between what has been called "Tribal" education and its connection to contemporary education (Cajete, 1994). More specifically, it interpreted the significance of mother as teacher. It delved into what Milne (1995) and Sioui (1992) interpret as foundational values and beliefs as the core of community–based education. Cajete
(1994) also contends that our communities must become involved in learning and teaching these processes founded in traditional value systems. He states that

...every community must integrate the learning occurring through modern education with the cultural base of knowledge and value orientations essential to perpetuate its way of life. A balanced integration must be created (1994, p. 18).

It is important to the researcher that the audience of this study and the general public felt a sense of urgency in appropriating First Nations epistemology into contemporary education for the benefit of children. Therefore, the ethics of doing research must be considered when doing research with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal epistemology, in the past, has been appropriated. Katz (1986) says, "research becomes 'research with' or 'within', rather than 'research on...' Without this foundation of respect, research truly becomes a disrespectful process of inquiry..." (p. 2). In this manner of speaking, "mother as teacher" was initiated by an Cree woman doing respectful research.

A Cree perspective using narrative analysis as a framework provided subjective interpretation of a Cree mother's lived experience. A methodology of participant observation, audio-tape recordings, in-depth interviewing, careful descriptive detail and a reflective journal were also used in the data collection process. Descriptive field notes added to my reflective journal in that it served as another source and method of data collection which also served to triangulate the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305).
Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note:

The field notebook is the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher. It becomes filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; and it becomes a place for ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging. (p. 45)

Patton (1990) suggests that as an alternative paradigm, qualitative methodologies rely on "qualitative data, holistic analysis, and detailed description derived from close contact with the targets of study" (p. 203-4). Naturalistic generalization "aims are understanding, extension of experience and increase in conviction" (Lincoln and Guba, 1981, p. 376), in providing an accurate description of one Cree mother's experience. Therefore, analysis of the narrative approach is embedded in stories. Polkinghorne (1988) says that

data collection results from the collection of stories. The goal of analysis is to uncover the common themes...in the data. Analysis is carried out using hermeneutic techniques for noting underlying patterns across example of stories. (p. 177)

I analyzed in detail and interpreted the transcripts of narratives provided by my mother to establish a representation of themes that emerged in the data collection process. The stories then formed the basis for analysis and interpretation of the significance of mother as teacher.

Mishler (1986) argues that interviewing must be understood as discourse in the sense that there must be a free flow of information provided by the interviewee, thus enhancing reliability and trustworthiness of the data.
Lowinsky (1992) suggests making the respondent the heroine. The central question to ask is, "What was it like for you?" (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 212). According to Lowinsky (1992), this approach enables the respondent to reflect on the personal meanings of her experience. By allowing my mother to reclaim her mother tongue, her culture and her identity, I can begin to uncover the cultural roots that has shaped who I am (pp. 212-216). In this way, she becomes the teacher. By "casting yourself as a learner correspondingly casts the respondent as a teacher" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.81). In this study, it was imperative to let her speak, to empower her voice as she reflected on her experiences. But equally important is to provide a guide to frame the issues which reflect culture, language and identity. Therefore, my overarching question was, "What are the ways my mother taught me about culture, language and identity?" Most of the interview questions were open-ended and depth-probing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) because I did not have a presupposition of what to expect from my mother’s response. For qualitative inquiry, it was important to keep in mind the overarching question as it was served as a marker for research in progress. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain, "While the research remains in process, interviewing is a "what else" and "tell me more" endeavor" (p.85). The interview was guided by my mother’s response, and my probing for clarification, description, explanation and evaluation (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 85). Therefore, I began by posing broad questions sometimes in Cree, and was prepared to
follow unexpected twists and turns in conversation, further, to pursue the leads that arose by asking probing questions.

As the study progressed, I focused and relined, refocused and appended (Johnson, 1992) my study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say:

Theory emerges from the inquiry from the naturalist, it is not given apriori. Methods can only be clarified as theory emerges and the method may very well change in the process. (1985, p. 224)

My mother's emerging stories were guiding this research, and by hearing her voice, as the learner I came to know, and connect with the nuances which evoke meaning in the voice of one Cree mother. My mother's words moved to a place which brought me closer to my center of being. In describing this process, I analyzed and interpreted her stories and found that the customs, traditions, values and belief intertwined with the Cree language. A cycle of knowledge based on the telling and retelling of stories from different angles nurtured my understanding as I grew. My identity was shaped and formed by the cycle of stories. Polkinghorne (1988) says that "as the person lets out the emerging story, it becomes recognizable as his or her own story. The person comes to know through telling, through hearing her or his own authentic story..." (p. 180). In this way, as a First Nations researcher, iskwew, oka'wimaw, ekwa otanisowawa, woman, mother and daughter, I can come to a form of "knowing" which legitimized Cree epistemologies and provides a voice for Cree mothers.
CHAPTER FOUR

kihci-átayohkan: Telling a Special Story

I enter my mother's kitchen, and quickly notice her sewing bundle on the table. Her thick-rimmed glasses facing downward touching the petals of her design. It is just like her to feel connected to her life. The smell of smoked moosehide fills the air. I see the patterns of flowers scattered around as if searching for a place to take root. I turn toward her, and see that she is making tea. The mist from the kettle emanates and carries messages of gentleness and compassion as it wafts through the evening air. The little frame of a woman standing by the stove is my mother. Her floral dress moves rhythmically back and forth in suspense of the journey on which we are about to embark.

Madeline Sasakamoose, my mother, is a little woman with strands of gray hair. Her braid resembles the path to her heart as it falls from the root of her mind, and curves to rest gently on her breast. Her wrinkled face reflects her life struggles. The lines penetrate deep to outline the gifts which life has bestowed upon her. She motions me to sit, and she pours the liquid that begins my consumption of the essence of life. And the story begins to unfold.

The stories received from the interviews comprised this chapter. The beads of time are strung together in moments of
connection which together lace bits of wisdom and a teaching philosophy that characterizes a Cree way of teaching. The research is centered around the Cree stories shared by Madeline Sasakamoose, my mother, my teacher. I invite you to share my journey as I search for a way to describe the stories of a Cree woman, and to interpret how she used stories to teach me about the Cree culture, language and identity.

In-depth interviews were conducted in which my mother shared her stories about her lived experiences. The data, which were presented in the Cree language, were then translated into English. Madeline was an important part of the transcription process. The co-creation of the translated version is a work of collaboration between my mother and me. We listened to the tapes together, and whenever I needed clarification, she would reiterate in Cree in order to interpret the Cree words. A reflective journal and descriptive field notes were also used in interpreting the Cree stories.

I reviewed the research consent forms, reassuring her that she had full authority in the entire research process. My role as a participant observer would not allow me to contradict her presence as mother and teacher. She seemed to be very comfortable with her role as teacher. Telling her that she had the right to review the tapes for accuracy, in addition to reviewing the tapes to add, change, and delete any stories she wished seemed to put her at ease. In fact,
I believe it becomes apparent just how comfortable she feels based on the length of the sessions. Each session ran approximately three hours. This reflects the trust she extends to me, and my research endeavor to record her voice.

The knowledge gleaned from my mother’s Cree stories provide personal insights into Cree epistemologies which are the focus throughout the research process. This chapter explores four primary themes: Stories, Family, Pathway to the Sun, and Cree Language. A section at the end of this chapter is called, “A Cree Mother’s Philosophy”, which is an interpretation of what I believe to be a Cree mother’s insights into life as a mother and a woman.

I. e-kistikehk kis cisanisa kiskinanamakehk
acimowina: ka aniskowahpitamehk

Planting Seedlings of Learning

Stories: Threads of Connection

Among the Indians of the America’s the tellers of stories are weavers... their designs are the threads of their personal sagas as well as the history of their whole people. Though the designs are always traditional, the hands that weave them are always new. (Highwater, 1981, p. 113)

My mother, Madeline, and I are sitting at the table sipping warm tea. At one end of the table is her sewing bundle. It is really an old white pillow slip cover which she transports from her bedroom to the table each day. In it, she carries the essentials for sewing: needles, threads, thimble, and beads of many colors. The beads are strung along a path which shimmers with red, white, black and yellow, as well as many other shades of color. The hues from her sewing
bundle beckons me to express its meaning. Half-finished "wrap-arounds" (i.e., high-top moccasins) have that familiar flower pattern sewn onto the moosehide. Emotion fills my mind, and my thoughts move toward the pattern as I reach out, and touch the design and feel the beads. The design flows over round corners, and sparkles translucent rays to illuminate a past, present, and a future.

Madeline picks up her glasses, and her scrawny fingers gently catch the wisps of gray hair that had fallen over her eyes. She smooths her hair pinning it to the base of her head. My mother looks at me and smiles. In her eyes, I see an inkling of her vision. It moves me in her direction, and now we are ready to begin our journey.

Among our people, stories are the roots that bind us together. Our stories continuously move in the direction we live our lives. They can be entertaining stories, "scaffolding" stories, as in story upon story. They are stories about the oral tradition. They are stories of analogy and metaphor about life in process. They are the threads of connection which hold family and community together. These stories are ones that keep us warm on our journey. They encompass a healing of family and community. My mother's stories sketch tales about the men who are the keepers of the fire. But mostly, they are about the women whose awesome strength and courage become transparent whenever we think, not only about togetherness, sharing and caring, but also about our emotional times, and our times of
crisis. These are moments in my life when my mother came to the forefront of my mind to nurture my wounds or glorify my presence in moments of joy. For me, in my journey, it is sharing a connection with a woman, my mother, my teacher, whose image is mine. Her stories help me to remember, and are the essence of who I am, and of who I have yet to become. For me, this is an awesome realization. My mother became my "ideal" my flower in full bloom. I hope to learn to become the flower she is, and her stories are the gifts which helped me to begin my journey.

Her stories are about the children whose laughter brings joy to our hearts, and whose eyes light up when we tell them a story. These stories are about honoring the wise Old People by sharing their stories and their lives. Madeline, my mother, has never said that life was a problem. She narrates her stories about life as a struggle, yet filled with richness and connectedness to a time, and a place, and to others. These stories come from the oral library of my mother’s mind. Walk with me, and be open to learning, and grow in knowledge about First Nations oral tradition. Her Cree stories are about the ways she used story to teach me about my Plains Cree culture, language, and identity.

iskwëyac okiyokëw ê-ëcimiht: The Story about the Last Visit

The context of the first interview is in my mother’s kitchen. Hanging on her walls are shelves decorated with shiny crystal ornaments and dainty figurines. In Madeline’s
home, there is an ambience of tradition. One example is her sewing bundle, which she carries with her from place to place. In it are a wealth of stories waiting to be told. Another example is her oral tradition which is communicated through mother tongue of Plains Cree. Today, she is wearing a blue dress of varied hues that compliments the color of her skin. Her brown skin looks leathery as if worn by the sun. She gathers her flower patterns, and places one in front of me. We begin to trace flower patterns.

I notice a change in her tone. It is very calm and almost too quiet. At first, I felt that she may be tired, and I immediately ask her if she wished to sleep. I was glad when she said she wanted to continue telling stories. I have learned through my own experience that evening time is when her stories are clear, and her voice is strong and focused. I call her quiet voice her "teaching voice" because I have noticed that she becomes very focused when she talks quietly. She is in deep concentration.

We are tracing flower patterns onto moosehide. The first is a rose pattern. She traces the outside and I trace, or what is more like copying, and trying to imitate an artist drawing a rose in freehand. But I try not to lose the moment of connection. I slowly trace the flower. I continue to listen as she talks. The process is familiar to both of us. We work, she talks, and I listen. In doing so, she answers my silent questions, and invokes my intuition to travel through time to "that place that the Indians talk about"
In gathering my mother’s stories, a traditional form of storytelling known as "Kakeshihkemowina" or "counselling texts" (Ahenakew, 1989) are evident. Another form ascribed by the same author is called, "kayas acimowina" or "old time story." Madeline’s stories have elements of these forms of narrative.

Telling stories involves experience. That is, in order to have a discourse, and understand the meanings, we attach to our stories we need to feel what we mean. My mother, Madeline, attributes this way of knowing to reflection. When we remember, we reflect and we learn.

Today, when I think about the stories and the lessons,...I think about the stories in order to know. Now it has been shown to me in my life...we were taught and we try to remember. (L586-92#1:15)*

Madeline is sixty-two, and she has no formal schooling. She learned within the context of environment, family, and community, in particular, the Old People. Her relationship with the Old People is the most striking feature of this study. Madeline’s reflections form the basis of this research. Her stories are the teachings passed down to her from generations past in the oral tradition. These stories were told by a people living in the isolated bush. The stories give birth to knowledge. She talked about how the umbilical cord can be seen as a metaphor, a thread that

* Notes on transcription of dialogue and story conventions:
  Line. 587 to 92
  Interview 1, page 15.
binds and guides a person on the path to knowledge (personal communication, August 1, 1996). This research is, in part, about that path, and its connection to one's life.

The circle begins as we trace flower patterns together. Gradually, I began to understand that the flower patterns my mother sews are connected to the forces which help make the flower grow and bloom. This growth is encapsulated in the stories that she remembers, and that bind me to others and the natural world. From this energy, I learn about life from the flower's perspective.

Our stories come to us in many forms. Reflecting on our experiences includes remembrances of events which are not always pleasant. We hold the stories connected with the experience in our minds. For Madeline, one such experience occurred when her paternal grandmother, Ka peki towhk sit, was dying. My mother grew up with her paternal grandmother as her primary teacher. In my mind, her paternal grandmother was the "umbilical cord of life" for the community of Stoney Lake.

Stoney Lake is a boreal forest covered by thick bush and swamp, yet, the beauty and grandeur is reflected on the lakes which are interspersed throughout the area. The lakes and rivers flow freely, and carry life in liquid essence to feed the spirits which embrace it. Madeline's childhood memories come from this time and place. My mother speaks fondly of memories, teachings taught to her by her paternal
grandmother.

This is how I was taught. These are the lessons that I have come to know. My grandmother used to show me these things... I would ask my paternal grandmother, and she would say;

She tells me to listen:

... These are the things you have to know that is why you are shown them. This is for you to know. (60-85, #1:14)

The last visit to my mother's kohkom, Ka peki towhk sit, my Chu-Chapan, is very moving. I was touched by the spirit which resonates each time her name is spoken. Ka peki towhk sit, means something related to the whispering sound of thunder as it rolls into an area. It is a name which has a spiritual connection, the whisper of thunder warns people to prepare for turbulent times. What follows is an excerpt from my mother's story in which she remembers her grandmother as a teacher:

I remember the day that they came for us to go and visit my grandmother on her deathbed. She was already very ill. This visit was to be the last time we saw our grandmother. I remember her words. They are very clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. She said to us, all of us formed a circle around her, she said: "Try to remember the lessons that I have taught you. The stories that I have told you. Use your minds to remember. You have strong minds to remember the lessons that I have taught you,"... Those words stuck with me throughout my life. Then we were taken away. It was not too long after, my father was summoned again.

So that was the last time we saw our grandmother and those were her last words to us. To use our mind, that we were all given minds to use and that we should use them properly. (807-826, #1:20-21)

It seems that the community of Stoney Lake revolved around the Old People. Their voices were honored, and their
wishes were respected. Moreover, their stories, and way of
telling stories required careful listening. My mother
attributes the knowledge of the stories she shares with the
Old People when she says:

You know who I was brought up by... whose teachings
that I live by... is the teachings of the Old
People. That is where my learning stems. (331-333,
#1:8)

She adds:

These are the stories that I know and these are the
stories that I share. The stories I share are the
stories that the old people shared with me.
(L574-76, #1:14)

Madeline tells the story about a time in her life which
marked a transition. A time when they came out of the bush.
The death of her paternal grandmother marked a changed for
everyone in the community. Change seemed imminent, and the
westward movement foreshadowed hardships and struggle. Oral
tradition tells my mother that the Old People foresaw the
struggles the family would face. They were visionaries, and
could prophesize occurrences, past, present, and future. My
mother says,"the Old People had a special power, a gift of
experiencing visions.. it is a very strong intuition that
guides them..." (L,431-432, #3:16). This gives a glimpse of
the power of story. And, although Ka peki towhk sit’s
earthly journey was complete, her stories continue to live.
We could infer that this woman, Ka peki towhk sit, held a
role of Sacred power. The respect her community had for her
teachings has become her legacy as the stories continue to be
shared and grow. My mother was part of that tradition where
the telling of stories contributes to a way of knowing that validates a First Nations way of coming to knowledge.

The oral tradition is a reflection of the capacity to remember events, time, place, and context so that the stories could live on. In addition, by gathering Cree stories we will see that the oral tradition instilled a way of knowing that maintained patterns for living a good life. According to Madeline, her paternal grandmother played a tremendous role in the lives of her family. She held the family together. Through her teachings, her stories, the family thrived. They survived. Ka peki towh sit was the life line for all that happened in Stoney Lake. The flowers bloomed. Everyone grew healthy when she was alive.

Upon her death, it appears that the Circle became disconnected. The family disbanded, and a transition initiated a move out of the bush. I can picture my mother at a youthful age of ten, skinny with braids, with a crown of greenery circling her head. She loved to play with the plants. She would braid the vines of greenery, and place them on top her head. These were her "toys" (personal communication, August 10, 1996). When the family left the bush, she was walking a trail of new light. One step at a time, she left behind the rivers of life through which many stories flowed. Recalling the existence of those tales had opened the doors to creativity and wonder. The remains are full of stories, memories of a life that represented survival of a people. Experience embedded in stories. Stories about
snowshoes, sleds, drums, birch bark baskets, making hides and sewing patterns. These are the spontaneous stories about the learning experience. The careful watching, listening, thinking, and doing all entwined to demonstrate a beautiful artistry of skills, knowledge and values.

It is interesting to listen to her "sewing stories" because within the context of making and creating patterns, we embark on a journey. In my case, my mother provided me with a pattern of a flower upon which her stories take form and shape. My mother, Madeline, lifted my spirit, and planted a seed of learning which began my journey to find the path to understanding Cree knowledge.

The values were intricately sewn into the customs, beliefs and traditions that weave a pattern that blossomed when words were spoken. The stories she told intertwined the life experiences of my family, my mother and my teacher. These important oral teachings were carried in the minds of the people. As I grew, Cree stories were shared as reflections.

As my roots from the seedlings laced and tugged at the hemlines of Mother Earth, and the sacred ecology entwined with the people and the land, values of love, compassion and patience reverberated the soil. Tilling the soil of new found roots wrapped in oral communion warmed my service to sprout and grow in this new light.

Seeking knowledge in this manner has been my choice. It is the context that I feel most comfortable with. My Cree
background provides the narrative framework, the Cree stories provide the substance. The flower metaphor is critical in that the stories seem to revolve around my mother’s knowledge about roots and flowers. Madeline reveals a worldview and an ideology in rhythm to the Plains Cree culture.

The sharing of stories, the asking of questions, and the remembrances of teachings about the grandmother’s roots and flowers are stories gathered about the pattern of life. They are the stories that make me think about the flower, its roots, its growth, and its development along the way. It is the pathway to Cree knowledge, and a way of looking inside oneself, to find the center, and to find a way to blossom.

**ka-nitaw-kiskeyihtamihk kiskeyihamowin ka-kiyokehk:**

**Visiting as a Source of Knowledge**

The responsibility of maintaining the purity of that history... falls to the storytellers who earn the right to pass the wisdom to the next generation. (Sams, and Nitsch, 1991, p. 2)

It is obvious from the statements made by my great-grandmother, Ka peki towhk sit, that our stories should be kept in our minds. This retention of knowledge involves thinking about the stories very carefully, in addition to being able to think selectively. Therefore, keeping the stories in our mind in storytelling is seen as part of individual growth.

Visiting provided an audience where the sharing of stories either confirmed or added to knowledge. Madeline
enjoys visiting and sharing. Visiting allows her to remember teachings, and finds communion and confirmation in her community of friends and relations. Community is important because it brings a gathering where story is used as a primary structure to inform and instruct people about relationships. This view of kinship, in Madeline’s mind, instills responsibility.

Madeline says that we must always be alert when listening to stories because there may be something in particular that the Old People will share.

It is like to know more about those things that I already know, because maybe there is something that I didn’t remember and by sharing stories with the Old People they may share something in particular that they would like me to remember. (29-32, #4:2)

Stories hold a wealth of information, and by listening carefully, your curiosity will be piqued. For example, the above comment implies a responsibility to listen and share on my mother’s part. This is seen as a request by the Old People to listen to the story. This is where the questions come from, and where learning begins. My mother sums this understanding more appropriately:

Yes, and this is where asking questions is important because you remember. It makes you use your mind. It makes you remember the things that are important and by remembering those things you are bringing back the stories and keeping them alive. (400-02, #4)

pimātisiwin ācimowina: Existence Stories

Our survival methods may take in technological knowledge, but ultimately, the necessary skills needed to
operate technology are ones that come from experience. For example, a close examination of hunting, trapping, and fishing skills would lead one to realize that there are certain processes that are in place in order to learn these skills. Madeline was brought up in a community where these skills were essential learnings. The Old People would tell stories about their existence as part of methodology, and process as it reflected their relationship to the environment. For example, preparing, building, and sewing were the methods, as lessons were embroidered within stories. She recalls the times when she would follow her grandmother into the bush to pick berries and roots. As a little girl, she sought to learn from her grandmother. I can envision this little girl with braids dancing, running along side her grandmother, tugging at her apron strings yearning to know how the plants grow, why the sun follows a path, and where the roots go... these are the kinds of stories she learned. My ancestors used analogy and metaphorical language to explain the relationships with people and the natural world. This connected knowledge frames the worldview of the Cree people. Madeline says:

I would listen to them when they used to teach me stories. When they used to teach me things, how to live by the land, and I remember these things now. It is because I was taught by the Old People and that's what I remember. (423-26, #1:10)

My interpretation of Madeline’s learning in this instance is that she was taught how to survive in this world. She learned this through story. Madeline learned about
survival by thinking selectively, and practising through imitation. She is a testament that the lessons told through story were internalized. And, even though the stories were of her time and place, they continue to be my source of strength and encouragement as I continue my struggle in my time and place. I have come to know that, when we share our stories they transcend even time. Many stories speak the language of process. For example, the construction of a dogsled might involve several steps to complete. Observing the steps is one aspect of learning, careful listening to stories while working and thinking about the steps, then imitating through practice result in essential learnings. Process as method could be envisioned in many of the lessons, such as making birch bark baskets, or using root containers for storage. Preservation of a kill and the uses of the remains encompassed a methodology through story and a language of process. For example,

... another method of preserving food... they cleaned the intestines and soaked and washed them then tied one end with sinew... They also used the sack that surrounds the heart as a container. The sinew from the moose's back would be used to tie the sack. They never threw away any part of the kill... They even used the inside layer of the hide. It is like a second layer of tough skin... the tough skin container would be tied with sinew. They used to chop the bones of animals and use the bones as scrappers... Today they do not use any of these survival methods... (713-40, #1:18)

Storage places included treetops and muskeg mounds. They would be filled with meat, berries, and roots which the people had gathered all summer and fall. In the winter, the
adults would get foods they wanted from their storage places.

Preparing for winter involved making containers, but it also required making equipment for themselves and their animals. The horse and dog were the primary mode of transport. During the summer months, the canoe would also be used to transport foodstuffs, supplies, men, women and children. The stories continue to revolve around process...

The harness too, would be made out of canvas or hide. For the dog lines they would stuff the inside with deer fur. When they sewed these together they used the sinew of the back of animals. It is very strong thread and that is what is used to sew things together. Even when they made the snowshoes, they would use the hide to make the snowshoes. For the snowshoes they would scrape the fur to expose the hide. They would dry the hide. They used a forked willow branch that had been prepared by soaking the branches in water and shaped to form a threader... to weave the snowshoes with wet hide which had also been soaked in water. This is how they would lace the snowshoes... The snowshoes were made by scraping the deer hide, and soaking the hide, which was cut into strips. The willow branches which had been soaked, also made up the end product by weaving and braiding the laces of the snowshoes. (669-84,#1:17)

The process preparing for winter also provided an opportunity to show off their skills in basketry, harness making, and snowshoe making. With the hides, they would make drums and other ceremonial objects. The women, too, would demonstrate their skills as weavers and sewers. Craftsmanship combined with artistry were displayed "on the road" as they moved from one place to another gathering produce for winter.

They also made backpacks. The backpacks too, demonstrated the makers fines skills at producing a backpack. There was some good craftsmanship in those days. There were some beautiful works of art. (685-87, #1:17)
Preparing for winter was a community endeavor. People helping people in order to survive: "Everyone in the old days helped one another. When something needed to be done, everyone in the community chipped in to help" 72-73, #1:6). One example of visiting as a source of knowledge was given when my older brother visited me and my mother. My mother was eager to share her stories. She immediately asked me to turn on the tape recorder so that my brother could hear her voice. My brother listened to the part where she recalled her story about preparing for winter as a being a community endeavor. My older brother recalls these community "work bees" and has warm thoughts to share. He says:

those stories are right, I remember that, I am old enough to remember those times when the people would get together... The people would come from miles around to help one another. There was this one Fall, I remember, he says, that he stood overlooking a field. It was dad’s field and the horses would be hitched up and the people scattered the field as though they were little ants working together. They were gathering hay, piling them into stokes and moving onto the next pile. I remember these times, he says. It was nice in those days when people used to help each other. (field notes, 29 May, 1996).

This closeness of community provides an opportunity for story telling. It also serves to confirm stories, in addition to foreshadowing how change in cultural ways have progressed or regressed in a relatively short time span.

The lifeways of the Cree people included hunting and gathering. A change to a agrarian lifestyle initiated new ways to survive, that is, from digging and gathering roots to clearing the land by hand, to make room for hay fields.
Survival today may not lend itself to developing self through the digging of roots, as in clearing the land by hand. Today, technology in the form of machinery called caterpillars has taken over to clear the land. This leads hunter-gatherer societies to refocus their traditional ecological relationships without compensating Cree ways of knowing in light of the new technology. Methodology and process become entwined with reaffirmation of traditional ecological relationships, and emerge as First Nations people reclaim the processes which thread cultural understanding into their identity.

Change brings stories. The ways of the people bring stories. For example, the lifeways of the Cree people included hunting and gathering. Madeline recalls many seasons where she would dig roots, or clear land by hand to create growing fields for hay. Change implies process, movement, growth and development. The most profound change came with the advent of technology.

Technology has brought change in many ways. Television (called the whiteman's forecasting tool, in Cree), and radio (i.e., the box that talks), have both exploited children's minds and have fooled them into thinking that it teaches them. Madeline feels that technology has spoiled us, "it makes us babies" (295, #1:7). Technology, such as television

... wrecks the minds of children. It makes them foolish... it is like they are fooling around with the young children's mind. A long time ago it wasn't like that. They didn't fool around with their minds. They sat them down quietly and they talked to them. (313-16, #1:7)
Technology has made great strides, and changed the face of travel and communication immensely. For example, travel by horse and wagon was replaced by automobile. And, before the television, the radio (i.e., the box that talks) was appreciated, and listened to on many nights for evening leisure.

One promising wave is that technology can be used to tell stories. For example, Madeline sews while she listens to a northern broadcasting station. She listens to the radio every day from one o’clock to three o’clock. She listens while she cooks her bannock, while she cuts strips of moosemeat for making dry meat, or while she sews her flower patterns. Each visit with her could be filled with stories she had heard that day on the radio. This is because the stories are told in Cree. She is able to listen to Cree stories, and she makes the connection.

kiskinahamatowin, nistam pimatisiwin ēkwa
peyakwa ta-isí-pimatisihk:
Schooling – Acculturation and Assimilation

The above illustration of connected knowledge was interrupted by Western forms of schooling. Western schooling bought about change, in terms of culture, language and identity. The residential school system is still a bitter memory for many First Nations people. The traditional forms of educating the young were not understood by colonial thinkers. Connected knowledge became disconnected knowledge
for many First Nations people. Western schooling bought change in many forms. The more evident change was the change in behaviour. The acculturation and, sometimes, total assimilation of First Nations people encouraged loss of identity, and contributed to the disconnection of the meaning of relations and kinship.

The environment changed as technology changed. The Cree people have associated change in lifestyle and behaviour with the advent of new technical ways introduced by the Europeans. The Old People had visions about the new ways. One was about the new light, the electricity, which, they say, has brought new diseases to the eye. Another is the manner in which the Cree people have changed their cultural ways, and have moved away from the customs and traditions to become acculturated, and in some cases, totally assimilated into the mainstream culture. Madeline's relationship with formal school is nil. She is not a product of formal schooling. Therefore, she is less acculturated than most community members. Schooling, for her, seemed punitive.

Madeline feels that formal school may be one of the primary reasons why children are confused. She says, "The Cree have become assimilated to European ways. There have been a lot of things that have been invented for children that make them confused" (307-09, #1:7). Hence, with new ways to find knowledge, the old ways have gone by the wayside, the result of the formation of these new methodologies is that they do not have a lasting impression
on the minds of children. These methods include those necessary life skills that they need to cope and survive. There have been many changes in our society in the past few decades. Many new diseases have been introduced, likely, as many as there are new foods. With these changes, however, comes cultural change, and this has led to the artificial flavoring to our identity.

An example of this artificial flavoring to identity is the introduction of alcohol and tobacco products. Madeline speaks from experience as she tells me about the changes that occurred when the move out of the bush sparked a flame of disruptive behaviour, and encouraged disconnection among family and community. Life suddenly became different when alcohol access through bootleggers became the source of disillusionment and lost spirits. Their parents struggled to keep up with the stream of change. Thus, disassociation, disconnectedness, and disrespect followed with eerie footsteps.

These are the footsteps that we, the children, are walking today. The changes that Madeline shares are ones attached to the disrespect we have for our bodies, and the lack of understanding in First Nations philosophy. This implies that we do not know our bodies. Our body is a being which embellishes mind and spirit. Its Sacredness is envisioned only when we come to know its capabilities. The potential of our body, mind and spirit is great. Acknowledging this Sacredness of being and its potential for
knowledge illuminates the transparency of our teachers, the Old People. They are the original carriers of valuable stories which reflect the lessons of Cree teachings.

Cultural change is spurred by technological advances. For example, television has become the forecasting tool versus the Old People, and their knowledge, and gift of intuition and prophesy. Some Old People have the gift of visions. They experience premonitions about an event or happening, and are able to foretell these situations in order to forewarn the people to prepare themselves. One story that my mother shares is a story about the premonitions that the Old People had when they were living in Stoney Lake.

They would be able to see into the future and they could tell when the Europeans would be coming into their lives. (L421-425, #3:66)

The story tells about how the Old People had a vision about the coming of Europeans/traders into their area. The word spread around the community, and preparations were made to go and meet the Europeans, as part of the vision foretold of the hunger the travellers were experiencing as they had journeyed many miles. As well, the Old People knew exactly how far the travellers were from the camp, and they cautioned everyone to welcome them.

The special power that some of the Old People have is the gift of experiencing visions. "It is a feeling, a very strong intuition" (L432, #3) that reflects a knowledge base so connected that upon will some visionaries can conjure a premonition. In comparison, technology needs a physical
presence to move it, whereas visionaries need total connectedness and total understanding about the life forces and life energies which help them move mountains. Tapping into this knowledge is almost incomprehensible, only the few who have made that journey can tell the story.

II. őkwa kwěyask k–őhpikihtahk ocêpihkwa ōmapěyakōskān
  őkwa kā–mamawi–wǐkiyahk:

Family and community as Ties that Bind

It appears that family and community contact was an essential way to keep the stories alive. Family connections and community relations bonded friendships, and relations helped one another to learn about values by sharing stories. Asking questions to gain understanding with visitors was one way to encourage the sharing of ideas and insight into things that may be troubling you. For example, if a person had difficulty understanding a particular teaching, that person could ask another person how s/he understands the teaching, and the sharing of stories would begin.

As well, when you ask questions of family or community relations, there is a trust instilled by sharing. This sharing deepens the community connection.

Like today, I went to visit my sister-in-law, and we shared our stories. We talked about the old days, about how things used to be. We ask each other questions...(404-406,#1:9)

Visiting allows us to share ideas by asking questions to gain understanding. Our stories allow us to reflect on our experiences to converse in meaningful discourse. Hence,
visiting could be seen as a custom which encourages the sharing of stories, bonding friendships, and knowing your relations. Madeline adds: "We try to remember the stories behind the lesson... we share our stories. If they ask me stuff, I try to tell the stories that I remember. That is what we do when we visit one another" (L592-95, #1:15). In this manner, we are caring for the roots by paying attention to one another.

**kitimākeyihtowin kīkināhk ohci:**

**Compassion in Our Home**

When speaking about the home and family, Madeline implores parents to respect each other. Parents must respect the decisions they reached together (L19-22#2:24). Family connection is an important first step toward wholeness. Compassion in our home feeds our children to know about love and caring virtues. The children whose lives are touched by love will be shaped, formed, and nurtured to grow healthy. Love is a reflection of compassion. Love and compassion are healthy, and provide for a great many lessons on endurance, courage and strength to walk the path.

The evening Madeline and I spent tracing flower patterns is an example of a story that teaches values. Her quiet teaching voice, and the act of tracing imply values, such as patience and courage, offering us the perseverance to stay on the path. Patience teaches us to control our thoughts, and curb our emotions. Compassion teaches us love. The Cree
people have these values sewn into their stories. These are all important values for nurturing our roots on our walk to serve our purpose on the path.

The values of faith, will, and strength also come through in Madeline's stories. It is faith that shields and guides us on the path. Great honor is shown to the Old People because they are the keepers of this knowledge. Respect is a sign of humility. Once we acknowledge humility, our humble request through prayer will be reflected by the path we walk in life.

Knowledge of family and community responsibility has faded in our First Nations teachings. Madeline says that we can learn from the behaviour of others, and the path we choose is reflected in our relationships. Disconnection occurs because many of us are not aware of relationships and relations. Therefore, respect for family and community is seldom visible. This is attributed to the disconnection of family. Children feel lost because they do not know how they are connected.

Disconnection for my mother's family, if one recalls, began with the westward movement out of the bush. The westward movement marked a transition to a more colonized state. The choices in a colonial environment did not encourage the metaphysical, ecological or cultural relationships. Rather, degradation of the traditional lifeways of the Cree people was enforced. The scars are deep, and healing the wounds of colonization will not be
easy.

Disconnection in families has resulted in dysfunction. Families unraveled, and have been deprived of acts of love. Thus, misguided parents fall into a rut of frustration, confusion, anger and blame. The cycle continues in the lives of their children if intervention and most importantly, prevention of dysfunctional behaviour is not instilled at home. Alcohol has been blamed as one of the culprits of much of this disruption. It has been one of the sources that has led many First Nations people to struggle on their path to know. Alcohol has wilted a once healthy system. It was not until alcohol became more available and accessible that disruption overtook family values, and disconnection occurred. Relationships were effected, and alcohol became associated with negativity and isolation. Madeline has tremendous will power, and her strength and belief in the teachings of the Old People keep her clean in mind and in spirit. For Madeline, her faith in her Creator has given her the strength to walk the path. Patience, courage, and strength through prayer are virtues she lives by as they have been reflected in many of her life struggles. This declaration speaks to the determination of this woman whom I am proud to have as my strength, my mother, and my teacher.

wâwiyeyâw ka-mâmawi-ayâyahk: The Circle of Community

So when people are not told in our own family and people are not told in their families, how do you expect them to know how they are related. So that is something that has been missing, and that is
something that was alive and strong a long time ago. (L298-301, #3, :61)

The understanding behind the Circle of Community is the building of community relations and kinship bonds. Nicely sewn into these stories about the circle of community are various teachings. Though not obviously apparent, these stories may hold precious teachings which encompass connectedness and bonding among friends and kinship. For example, in the story about visiting and sharing, we have seen connection to the circle of community.

Connectedness was seamed through sharing stories about how one was related to another family, or to families which stemmed from adjacent communities or surrounding communities. These stories were shared by each member of the family, and community and the knowledge would grow within family and community. The community was connected, and everyone shared the stories that the Old People would tell them. Many times, the stories (the lessons) would be connected to existence stories which further connected the circle of community.

The circle of community is reflected in the stories about social gatherings. Some of these gatherings included: traditional gatherings, such as sundances, pow-wows, and feasts, or the modern gatherings, such as nickel dances, wedding dances, basket socials, and picture shows, as well as weekend soccer and weekend softball games. There is a social connection and relationship bonding at these gatherings. They secured the kinship among its members as they socialized and worked together to know who and how they were related to
one another. Madeline noted that knowledge of connection and relatedness is lost today. She notes, "we do not even know how most of us are related when we meet our relations" (L298,#3:15). This is because we have lost our connection, our roots. There is no union when one does not follow the laws of kinship. Those laws include seeking and asking about this information which will make you more knowledgeable. Our stories reflect this teaching of family and community connection.

Community connection was vital to survival of people. Coming together to share stories at social gatherings provided ample opportunity, to not only restore friendships and reconnect with relatives, but also it was a time when the community could share their cultural beliefs, customs and traditions.

One example is the digging of roots. My mother believes that one reason she knows about roots is because they dug up roots: senaca roots. Senaca root was not only a root used by the people, but also a root of value because it provided a revenue for families as the senaca root is used by pharmaceutical companies for medicinal purposes. By digging up the roots of not only the senaca and other plant varieties, my mother says, by visualizing the roots of plants and touching the Earth, one becomes open to learning about the roots. In this way, she connects this knowledge to knowing family roots. Relationships become easier to grasp. It is sad that this method of teaching is disappearing with
the disappearance of our Old People.

A connecting thread in the stories link the Old people to the children. The Old People have taught the young through songs. The occasion for singing songs depended on the context. Some songs were sung to the children more for fun and entertainment. They sang songs which told stories about the processes in nature, and their relationship to their environment, as well as to the Creator. The Old People’s role in the community is vital to the health of its members. They are truly needed in our communities, and play a significant role, for their knowledge is immense, and their methods of teaching last. They are survivors. They are youthful and strong in mind, heart and body. And, they remain to be the carriers of stories.

nimamitoneyihten peyakoskan kayas acimowina ochi:

A Thought About the Beginnings of a Family History

Madeline would like to begin a family history, a family tree to help our family know their roots, and to learn how we are connected to our family and our community. She cautions, however, that putting this kind of knowledge on paper is weaker than carrying knowledge in our minds. My immediate feeling to this thinking reminded me of what my grandfather told my mother while walking through the school grounds. He said:

The Old People said that we have to be careful of the written word and what it says. You have to really understand what it says there in written form... you see that is right, they were right, the
Old People were right. They said that the written word is not learning truth. (L350-356#3:64)

The kind of truth that my grandfather is speaking about is the kind of truth which comes from experience. When we can feel the learning, then we will know the teaching. My interpretation of this story is to know the truth, and is to be connected to "that place that the Indians talk about" (Cajete, 1994, p.73).

III. Kiskéyihtamowin-mėskanās: Pathway to the Sun

A Connecting Thread of Knowledge

Kiskéyihtamowin ochi: Storytelling as a Source of Knowledge

Even though technology has advanced methods of teaching, it is still important to train the mind about process. Education today may be fooling the mind. That is, methods of teaching may easily undermine the capability of the mind. This is reflective of not respecting the mind's capability to learn, and to internalize the lessons taught. Sharing stories with a person who has first hand knowledge of the teachings in his/her life is powerful. These stories are powerful because they are shared from mind to mind rather than from paper to paper. The mind is powerful. It is a representation of strength whereas the pen and the paper are nothing. This understanding is a reflection of the mind in action which, in turn, represents understanding life processes. It involves thinking about the path. Your life, your walk through life. The understanding behind this philosophy is that while the child is young and growing, the
mind, too, is developing and growing in knowledge. The mind in action reflects a process which will not be easily forgotten because the lessons are likely to become internalized. It is important to have clean thoughts when teaching because clean thoughts are a representation of strength and purity. Hence, clean thoughts give the mind power.

For Madeline, learning involved experience. She was taught by the Old People. As she grew, her knowledge about the past grew with her. This knowledge carried in her mind stayed with her throughout the years, and has been the source of her strength many times over. Today, the education that we are learning may not be seen as useful knowledge because it does not help us survive in our Cree ways. However, acknowledging that change involves learning new ways to help us sensitize society to our ways of knowing. Telling our stories is a positive step toward reclaiming First Nations knowledge. It helps people learn to accept a First Nations way of knowing, and helps to validate this knowledge in the new education system.

Madeline counsels, kakeskinhkemowin:

If it is believed that you will not find anything in these stories, then that is what will happen. You will not find anything of value. (L38-40#4:2)

If there is one thing that I learned from Madeline that will stay with me for the rest of my life, it is this: Unless a person is open to learning, then learning will not occur. You will learn when you are ready to learn. Readiness for
learning depends on the context and content of the learning environment. As teachers, the manner in which we approach our teaching task speaks clearly about our assumptions. In addition, the techniques we employ through our methods, too, uncover the attitudes we carry about the learning process. Keeping our mind open to learning will advance our intellectual capabilities. Moreover, intellectual growth will advance significantly if one considers how learning occurs, by giving structure and substance to the learning situation.

Madeline says that it is one thing to listen quietly and sit patiently but, if one approaches learning with a closed mind, then s/he will not be able to see the teachings. Moreover, by observing and watching carefully the teachers presented at your feet, you will miss the teaching if you do not have an understanding about the context of the teaching. The instructions come in the form of narrative. Storytelling provides a form of knowing which describes the process. For example,

What may be a simple journey to a sundance might involve a lot of thinking and a lot of preparing... including in the telling of stories that are told along the way. If you listen carefully, you are beginning to learn about the process, through the stories shared along the way...(L56-60#4:3)

We have alluded that sharing stories is a source of knowledge. This exchange of ideas through asking questions yields understanding that is meaningful for the learner. The process of listening, observing, thinking, and reflecting defines our experience so that learning takes place. The
articulation of our experience is an expression of our emotions at that time. Even stories that make us laugh are considered rich in lessons. The Cree people are known for their humorous stories. I can honestly say that I have been honored by experiencing first hand the beauty of storytelling in this way. My father was a teller of humorous stories. Humor was used as a form of teaching as it welcomed members of communities to come together and listen. This contributed to the health and well being of people because humor warms our hearts, and the expression of laughter shows our inward joy.

Teaching and learning are meshed to create storied lives which speak volumes about our need to tell our stories. Our interpretation of our experience is our story. It is an explanation about the thinking process. That is the first lesson, learning how to think. Quiet listening and silent thoughts, like listening to the whispering sounds of thunder, bring stories. The careful thinking demonstrates the determination of mind in process, mind in action. Once engaged, the mind will produce beautiful patterns which ultimately will yield beautiful flowers.

... tracing flowers... thinking about the color of the beads... thinking... about the design... sewing your pattern... The whole thinking process is involved in that one decision. (L54-52, #1:13)

Process is learned by doing. Teaching and learning involve experience. It is a reflective process. My mother learned by sewing, and by digging up roots.
Teaching as Process:

Teaching as process was illuminated through a story about how she plans to help my daughters, Andrea and Faryn, to learn how to sew flower patterns. She feels that it is important to teach the children sewing skills while they are young. She will teach them the patterns, and how to make an impression on the moose hides by careful watching, careful listening to her stories, thinking, imitating, and sewing to make a pattern, and encourage them to stay on the path so that it will make a lasting impression. She says:

I would really like to do that, you know, make them sit with me and make them sew. If they sit quietly they can listen carefully, I will talk to them. They will sit quietly as I talk to them. I will make them understand. (214-17, #1:5)

Unfortunately, in our education, process too often becomes interrupted, and disconnected learning occurs. This kind of knowledge is difficult to learn and, therefore, more difficult to internalize. In the past, it was important not to interrupt the process when a teaching was taking place. For example, whether it be building a dogsled, digging roots or concentrating on a flower pattern, the process was not to be interrupted. My mother provides an example:

Another important point to remember is... to work slowly and carefully and to think about the process... the children could not go there and interrupt the process... We were told not to interrupt the process... Instead we were told to stand still or sit still and observe... They would say, 'these are the lessons that are going to help you in the future.' That was very important. (644-55, #1:16)
Today, process is interrupted in our daily lives. Even the simple act of sewing patterns, or making bannock, or cutting strips of moosemeat for drying becomes a labor to complete, it has become a chore for many young people. They do not see this activity as a learning process, rather, they see it as a chore. Movement of the body today implies work, and people do not like to move their bodies. Madeline implies that this may be why many people are stuck, it is because they cannot move their minds to work. Coming to know involves engaging your mind to think, and to move it in the direction the path leads. In this manner, growth happens and roots begin to grow, and the roots connect with other minds so that they too can grow. Knowledge is food for the mind, and growth is food for the heart because it feels strong when we have gained strength in knowledge.

newo e–isi–totimeh: Four as Process

From the stories, one thinks about the relationship s/he has to one’s life. Some of the stories are analogies, others use metaphor; still others use symbolic relationships to create an ideology representing Cree lifeways. These stories sustain that culture’s belief in the metaphysical, ecological and cultural relationships. Much of the storytelling process involves doing things in repetitions of four or doing things in fours. For example, making teas using four plants. There is a tree called, mis si mitah mistik, which, when translated, literally, means "the tree with the big heart".
The tree, as do all plants, has many purposes, one of which is, as a mix for tea. In addition, the tree with the big heart had a more honored role in the Sundance ceremony, and that role took the part as Center Pole in the Sacred Center of the lodge. Besides extracting roots or branches from the tree, other plants were combined in four to brew a mixture of philosophy and Cree understanding, which, when consumed, would stay with you for the rest of your life to guide you.

Four as process, as in mixing branches or roots from the tree with the big heart, saskatoon, pincherry, and chokecherry roots brew knowledge about plants and their value to our total being. Drinking the tea "makes you feel good physically, clean their bodies... as well as having a spiritual connection to the earth, and mental development of their minds because they are learning something" (109-13#4).

Madeline shares another story about how my father received his survival skill teachings from her father, in particular, learning how to properly snare a rabbit, or knowing how to track a moose, or learning the position of the sun in relation to where you are now when you feel you are lost.

By looking at the sun starting in the East and you stay on the path the sun travels, you will see that the side the sun travels always shines on the trees. So if you look at the trees, on the side the sun travels, you will see that side is much lighter. The sunlight hits it, therefore, it is not as dark as the other side, and so you can tell that, that side is probably the South side, therefore, the back of the tree would be the North. (L334-339#4:13)

Following the pathway of the sun to find our way when we
are lost involves thinking. Part of this kind of thinking involves prayer. It involves knowing where you stand in relation to the natural environment. Your sense of direction to follow the path the sun follows involves process. It involves commitment to stay on the path because in the bush, if you do not follow the sun and if you are unfamiliar with the signs of nature, you will panic, and become lost. My mother began this lesson by talking about tea. She added the roots and branches, and brewed the tea. From there, she moved to snaring rabbits and tracking moose to following the sun’s path way. At the first glance, these stories may have just slipped by as simple stories about life in the bush. Yet, a closer examination reveals teachings about process. Process which moved from concrete to concrete understanding about a beginning, to find our path. Foremost in this lesson is that we must look to nature (i.e., concrete reality) to find the path. The ultimate teacher is nature, and we are her pupils.

_ayamihāwin e-isi-totamihk: Prayer as Process_

In discussing prayer as process, we bring into story the spiritual plane. We have alluded to this dimension of Cree thought in earlier sections, but the opportunity to illustrate it seems appropriate here. Prayer has been Madeline’s guiding force behind her work as a mother, and as a teacher. Madeline’s beads on her flower patterns reflect this spiritual domain. There have been times when I would
walk into her kitchen to find her in deep concentration. Her head would be bent over her sewing bundle, and the reflection from the shiny beads would tell the story of her beauty. Her brown leathery skin has been traced by beads, and her wrinkled lines form deep paths onto which the threads of life are sewn. Her strands of gray hair fall gently on her breast, close to her heart. She prays while she sews. She notices me, and smiles. I ask her what she is doing, her reply is always, "I'm praying for you."

Prayer brings beauty and light, and is reflected as truth on our journey. Madeline equates truth to the real experience. Praying and sewing are rituals for Madeline to grow inward, to experience truth. This kind of truth involves courage and an inner strength which is her faith. It involves total connection in all four dimensions, the spiritual, mental, physical and the emotional planes. Total awareness of body, mind, and spirit connect simultaneously to allow one to feel and see the truth. This expression of being illuminates the circle of understanding that acknowledges maturity and experience as the ultimate source of Cree knowledge, as beauty and truth.

Ultimately, it is the children who are the beholders, too, of beauty and truth. Our prayers are always connected to our children. It may not be nearly the same experience as one would experience in a life giving fulfilment of truth as described above, but in the periphery of that experience is the acknowledgement of a greater source of power which is
enveloped in the minds, hearts and bodies of children. The innocence and purity of children speak to our heart and minds as we walk on our paths. We should always be connected to the children because in them we see the fruits of our labor. Their growth and development are the manifestation of our knowledge about nature, and our place in it. In sum, to know truth is to experience it totally, only then can one honestly say that one knows the truth.

It warms me to know that I cannot say that I know the truth, but that I can say that I am not alone on my journey to know the truth. It is like drinking warm liquids. Warm milk or warm tea does not burn inside when consumed. The warmth, filled with liquid essence, welcomes the flow and movement toward consumption. It invites you to drink more of the life giving flow that runs through our viens to live, or to come alive. Sometimes, the timing is crucial, and receiving the warmth may not be welcomed at times, but after a while, it will sink into our systems, and neither will we be able to deny who we are nor the knowledge that will come with it. It is part of our growth.

**kakēshk̓emowinihk ̓-isi-totamihk:**

**Counselling as Process**

Counselling of the young children took place on a regular basis. It was part of the daily existence. This was neither a formal nor technical process. Temporality was part of the context. The counselling sessions were included as
the stories were told within the context of place and time. The inability of young children to understand oral tradition and Cree language has caused a myriad of problems, one of the most serious is communication with the Old People. The Old People feel that the young children should be taught the Cree language in order to understand Cree teachings. So the children can be counselled in good ways.

To counsel implies that care and respect be given to the mind. This involves thinking positively, and knowing the difference between right and wrong.

People were given a mind to use... When we share our stories... we help each other, we help our fellow man that way. Our stories can go either way, they can be negative or positive. People can be jealous, and they spread jealous stories... that is when things are not right... So you have to learn how to listen carefully and that is when you know when things are right or wrong. You learn to differentiate between the good stories and the bad stories. (377-85, #1:9)

Thinking selectively will help you choose the direction which is right. This requires you to take the mind seriously, moreover, to respect its potential. This is why respect and care are given to the child. It is a visual example of respect for the child’s mind.

Loss of Cree understanding is connected to the loss of Cree identity which is inherent in the language of the people. My mother recalls a story her father told her about a person who lost her identity. This story was embedded within a funny story. The story tells about "a girl who was trying to act like someone she was not...she would return to the reserve and try to impress everyone with her new found
language skills" (L172-76, #2, p. 30). The Cree understanding of teachings and lessons of the Old People were lost when we try to assimilate into mainstream culture. English language acquisition disrupted and interrupted Cree understanding. My mother’s teachings in this text are spoken in Cree with the additional Cree understanding and meaning behind each phrase she speaks. I feel torn when I know that I may be missing something behind the words. The extent of Cree meaning that I have grasped may not totally encompass what she meant in her teaching. However, I feel, that what I have gained is a lot in terms of collecting stories about her teachings because it allows me to turn to them, for guidance. Each time I turn to them, my understanding will have deepened. This is what I find happening as I ask, and seek clarification from her words. It is an enlightening process toward learning in a Cree way (Reflective Journal, 20 June, 1996).

My belief in bilingualism and biculturalism is that it enhances our understanding of society whether the setting is monocultural, bicultural, or multicultural. Our Cree understanding, in any situation, will be flavored by the knowledge of two languages, two ways of knowing. We come to respect and understand the difference when we feel comfortable and have accepted ourselves as children of our ancestors. Ability to speak the Cree language enhances our ability to communicate in other languages. Further, to be bicultural lends itself to sharing our understanding with
others who are taking their first steps on the path to learn about Cree culture.

IV. kistikewak mip-kiscikanisa wihtamätowak

Tapasinahikewin

Planting Good Seeds: Communicating the Design

Cree Language: nehiyawewin nehiyaw píiskwewin

It seems that a long time has passed since I last visited my mother. I hunger to know more about my people, and I want to learn more about myself. I weave the paths that lead to her home, and when finally I reach the yard, I see her tending her flowers. Her crooked body rises to straighten the wrinkles on her dress. She is wearing the black dress with the pretty scattered roses. We go inside. I see her patterns scattered on the orange sofa. She plants herself on the sofa, and with strong hands, begins to assemble her patterns. Her sewing bundle lies dutifully on the coffee table. And her ugly thick-rimmed glasses lie face down beside the bundle. She warms me inside with her smile, and points to the outlet against the wall. I know she is ready for this interview, and she quite enjoys sharing her stories. Today I want to ask her about the Cree language. My research has led me to grow in knowledge, and develops a pathway toward the Cree language. This is where we begin our session.

So why is Cree language important?

The idea of planting good seeds in the form of good
stories, in the minds of children is articulated through language. For the Cree people, ideally, the language of communication should be Cree. There are important reasons for this choice. The foremost in priority is that embedded in the language of the people is the cultural understanding of the stories. As a Cree, the articulation of Cree concepts emerged in the form of Cree stories. These Cree stories connect with knowledge from prior experience to enhance understanding of the concept which when expressed in the Cree language, becomes meaningful to a Cree person.

Madeline continues to plant flowers in my mind. The term flower, "wapakwane", means more than beauty. The Cree understanding implies movement, process, change and growth in connection with light. Cree is a meaningful language, for example, mis si mitah mistik, "the tree with the big heart", implies that the tree is alive, it is living, growing, and changing. The strawberry, "Otahimin" (i.e., heart berry) too, has the root word, "heart," in its Cree name. The heart of the Cree language beats to the drum of our understanding. The sounds come from our heart to utter teachings which invite us to learn. This potential to learn sounds drums of celebration which beat in the minds of our Old People. The Cree language identifies us for life. It is rooted to our being. My mother explains:

When I talk Cree I understand the process... how process develops, their uses, and I understand the questions that you ask me, like I understand the uses of these things and the meaning of these stories. I understand those things because of my language and I show you these things when I talk in
my language and that is how I understand... when you talk Cree, you understand... process. You understand what Cree things are. (L229-34#4:9)

"I show you these things when I talk in my language" (L232#4:9). This statement reflects the mind in action. My interpretation of this line is that the Cree language speaks from a place where visual representation is vivid and clear. The telling of the story unfolds, and continues to shape the story until its meaning is understood and internalized. My mother adds:

I understand all of these things that we are talking about because we talk Cree, because we are Cree people. If you could understand the Cree language, then you will be able to show yourself all of these things and what they are used for and the stories that go along with them. (236-39#4:9)

The "things" Madeline talks about are the flowers, trees, roots, etc. which form the foundation of many of her stories in this research. The foundation also includes experiencing the formation of knowledge. The stories will help, but ultimately, it is the experience that will teach. This is what my mother implies when she says, "show yourself these things." One way to begin is to go and talk to the Old People. Talk to the Old People because, "to talk to the Old People you would have to use your Cree language in order to communicate, in order to understand" (234-44, #4:9). This enables you to "think about the language and it will come to you" (245-46,#4:10). This is immersion in Cree, and my mother is suggesting that possibly this is the best way to learn the Cree language.

Madeline tells a story about the time when she first
moved to Ahtahkakoop. Her experience with the English made for a difficult transition from a place where Cree language consumed her understanding. Madeline says, with laughter, the English language sounded funny, like some foreign language where your immediate impression is that the people are swearing at you. Most of the people on the reserve spoke fluent English. The few that did not speak English formed a connection with my mother. These few people who could speak Cree were also the people who held strong beliefs about the traditions and customs of the Cree people.

In this context, the connecting thread was the circle of community who shared similar ideals, and was able to communicate those ideals with each other. This reflects the helping tradition among the Cree people. Their English-speaking relations in the community were able to learn from them and vice versa. This illustrates that we must walk a cautious trail of understanding so that we may walk the path together. This is a lesson that we are learning in contemporary education which, in fact, is not new at all; we are relearning Cree life ways which encompass a helping tradition through the sharing of stories.

My fluency in Cree was hampered by the English speaking people surrounding me when I was growing. My mother tells me that I didn’t want to use the Cree language which baffled her at first because Cree was the language spoken at home. It was our first language. The disruption came when other families and peers spoke only English to communicate with us.
I guess the need to speak English and to communicate with the children was more strong in your heart than the communication with the adults who were speaking Cree. (284-86, #4:11)

I feel very sad that I have lost something that was part of me for a while. My mother continues:

It is through playing with the children that you began to lose your Cree language and then you went to school and of course that continued. Yes, I feel that you have lost something along the way. You lost something valuable. (295-99, #4)

My older brother’s fluency in the Cree language is a constant reminder of the value attached to speaking in Cree. Their communication skills in Cree are broadened by far when they learn the lessons of Cree teachings. While my growth in the Cree language has been disrupted and put away, I know the value of the Cree language, and continue to be open to learning.

Another realization that I have had to live with is the realization that this loss has affected my identity. My older brothers became bilingual because they were immersed in the Cree language while they were young. Their environment was filled with Cree speakers. That is why I believe that I have lost something valuable with the disruption of my language. Although my understanding of Cree language is good, I do not feel that I am fluent. I say this because even though I have translated these interview sessions from Cree into English, I know much is lost in translation; hence, this knowledge, too, may mean that I have missed something that may be important. This is how I feel with the issue of identity. Language identifies the Cree person, and to be
able to understand that person, you need to know the language. I believe that our self-concept is strengthened when we learn Cree. Madeline explains it in this manner:

I feel good inside when I talk Cree. I feel like it was a gift that was given to me from the Creator, the Cree language... It is ready for me to use. I feel like when you ask a question, I feel like I can answer you without thinking too much about the question, like taking one step after another...

(360-361, #4)

And I try to explain where I am at in relation to her place:

I feel like I am lost because I am a Cree person and I do not speak the language as fluently as I should speak it. I speak English and yet I have to learn so much English in order to feel good about it and I don't feel good about it because I really don't know who I am. (371-74, #4:14)

Even if one is fluent in English, when you are a Cree person, your Cree language places you in the Cree context. It tells you who you are, a Cree. My mother feels that this may be why so many Cree people feel lost today, it may be because they have lost their path and they do not know which path to follow. So the challenge is to find the path that does not compensate one language for the other.

The Cree language is the oral tradition which creates our world as Cree people. It means that we have to begin sharing Cree stories so the language "will spread like the roots" (418-19, #4:16). It also means Cree people will have to really understand the Cree language when they talk, and understand what it means to be Cree. My mother has noticed that Cree stories are returning slowly.

The Cree stories were not paid attention to by the children and so now it is coming around again and they are starting to pay attention to it. The Cree
people are starting to come back to the language and trying to understand it. And that is good. (420-425, #4:16)

So when I think about the story about the sun, about finding the pathway to the sun when one feels lost, maybe this is what we should be doing (341-345, #4:13). This circle of understanding illuminates the path to Cree knowledge. Our Cree stories transmitted through the oral tradition symbolize a way to find the path. Understanding the flower metaphor helps us on our journey. The analogies to one’s life in the form of story connects with the circle of understanding of Cree knowledge.

é-mawasakonainihkwapwaniya: nikiwiy
omâmitonêyihcikan

Gathering Blossoms: A Cree Mother’s Philosophy
The Keeper of Songs: nikamona okanaweyihtam

My mother’s philosophy encompasses the strength in oneself to be humble. Madeline has this special thinking which reminds me of Edward Ahenakew (1973), in Voices of the Plains Cree, where he talks about Old Kiyam. Part of my mother’s philosophy is to say "kiyam", when one feels discouraged or when one is experiencing negativity on the path. I have come to know that one gathers strength and power from this small word, which means, "That’s Alright."

She says, "you have greater strength in the end when you do not fight. Let the people laugh. They are weakening themselves" (L406-407,#2). When this understanding is
internalized, it makes us stronger as people, and clears our minds to think positively. Two principles which guide us toward humbleness are faith and inner strength.

Madeline, too, is the keeper of Songs. These Songs were sung to her by her grandmother, Ka pe ki towhk sit. Many Songs have been forgotten by the Cree people, as many have forgotten to reflect on the past teachings. People have come to ask her for the songs. These Songs are extremely Sacred. She does not sing them at just any time. These Songs are Sacred Songs sung only during Sacred moments when the song needs to be sung. These Sacred moments transcend time, and speak to the Creator, and ask him to guide us as we struggle on our journey.

**kiskinowātosiw: Patterns**

Our discussion flows, and moves on to the patterns in nature. The designs are simple, and so is the philosophy, or so it would seem to my mother. The philosophy behind the development of this thesis discussion is that the pattern of the flower is the one my mother chose to teach me about Cree culture, language, and identity. The flower pattern is one example that can be elaborated in this paper; the other, the Center Pole teaching, is included as a primary text to illustrate the connectedness of Cree teachings. However, the teaching of the Center Pole, as it is related to the Sacred Ceremonies of the Cree people, invites participation. I cannot speak to the Sacred teachings of the Center Pole with
true expression as I have not experienced this journey yet. My experience has been to grow in knowledge about what being centered means. The flower and the Center Pole have a center. I have a center. The metaphors teach me by pointing me to my center. My primary concern is to find ways to connect with the stories, the metaphors, the analogies, and the symbols to find my center. Buber (1965) conveys this as the separation of the human body, as the bearer of perception, from the world round about it. The body comes to know and to differentiate itself in its peculiarities; the differentiation, however, remains one of pure juxtaposition. (p. 211)

What is added to this understanding are the deeper meanings, the next layers of meanings, so to speak. Lightning (1992) used the analogy of an onion in that the layers of an onion represents a new layer of knowledge. This growth in knowledge is compared to the plant which grows from the body of Mother Earth. It is a basic understanding, but to learn from the growth of the plant is something that we are missing according to Madeline. This is reflective of Lightning's (1992) onion story in which he says, "The knowledge seems to be layered, like an onion," (p.250). Madeline summarizes this understanding in the following manner.

It's like anything else in nature. It is like anything else that grows from the earth... because everything that grows from the earth eventually opens and unfolds. That growth is part of the root. The plants that you see growing above the ground, well that kind of growth happens underground as well. It is like if you plant something, to plant something in the ground. The roots will grow underground, and if you watch it, you will see it grow above ground. And that growth will continue to develop and then it will come to the stage of full bloom or full growth then the
petals start to open and unfold and the flower just opens. (L167-76, #3,:12)

The growth of the flower is reflective of our growth in knowledge about nature and our place in it. Our journey, then, is related to the plant, the flower in that, we try to sow good seeds good stories in our lives, and in the lives of children. The path to knowledge may be stunted by fruitless learning. But ultimately, once we see and feel the seeds of knowledge growing inside us, then we can say that we think we know something.

The stories that Madeline shares are stories about flowers and roots. Her learning encompass teachings in story told by the Old People. She did not attend formal school because the Old People advised that formal schooling would not be of value in her life. This statement again is reflected in Lightning's (1992) assertion that the manner in which teaching and learning are shared is important to get full benefit, and value from the stories. These stories are carried in the minds of learners, and their value is directly related to the experience and its telling. As Lightning (1992) says, "During the time when I was involved with the Elder who told me about my mind and the plume of the Eagle,... that I would get confused or I would later forget the valuable knowledge and it would not be useful or beneficial to me" (p.251). This is what I interpret the Old People's understanding behind their refusal to allow my mother to attend formal schooling. The knowledge in the new technical education system was not reflective of her way of
coming to know, and therefore, not of any value to her. Madeline’s knowledge forms, bends, curves, and shapes her understanding of who she is, and where she stands in relation to what she knows. When one thinks about nature’s patterns and roots, one can imagine learning as being connected, developmental and growing. Cajete (1994) shares this view. He says, "These stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you--but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn" (p.41). It is a life-long process. My mother is still learning. The stories that were shared many years ago are being experienced during her lifetime. As she says, "Now it has been shown to me," (590, #1:15). Therefore, her education stems from the teachings about nature’s patterns and roots as she grows in knowledge which she attributes to stories.

**pisimomëskanas-kāohci-kiskēyihtamohk: Pathway to the Sun**

**Ways of Knowing**

Ways of Knowing imply that "lessons come in many forms" (L440#2). Madeline notes that careful listening and observing will help the young; further, learning to read the signs of nature to understand their implicit meaning and its connection to life. This ecological relationship is illuminated in a story which tells us where to look if we feel we are lost. She says:

Look to the sky, the sun. Find your place in relation to the sun and you will find your way. She points out the whiteness of the bark on south facing slope of the birch tree, and the moss that
grows, moreso, on the north side of the evergreens. She speaks of each direction in relation to the sun's path in turn of importance. In summary, the East is where the sun rises, the beginning of a new day, then follows a path which is midday, noon follows, and finally the sun rolls to the West to complete its path across the sky. You will be able to judge the path for yourself when you know where you are in relation to the sun.

You will know your path if you listen well, then you must follow the path. Look to nature, the sun, the roots, and if you are open to their teachings then you will come to understand the meanings, therein. Have compassion for all you meet, for you have been given the privilege for that meeting. As the sun shines on Mother Earth so should we shine in our knowledge that comes from understanding the path and, furthermore, live the path. (L183-196, #3:13)

The thinking of finding a pathway to the sun transcends the process of living close to nature, and has implicit meanings. Consider the following story.

Madeline is pulled to shiny things. For example, one of her stories is about her experience about offering the spirit helpers a plain old cup, in exchange for a shiny pair of barrettes. Her love for shiny things is reflected in her home, as the glass ornaments and figurines on her shelf in the kitchen will prove. Her sewing, too, is filled with shiny beads. The flower patterns she sews are shiny and transparent, and if you observe closely and listen carefully, you will find that, she too, is transparent. The glow from her walk is guided by the Creator who lights her way and mine.
A Mother's Role: A Reflection

okāwīmāw otatoskēwin, ē-ma-māmitoneyihtaman

Every relation has personal missions to complete so that life abundant may flourish and grow. (Sam, and Nitsch, 1991, p.5)

Madeline's mind is strong, and her reflections are clear, as if the time and context were yesterday. She places herself in that context and tells the stories which teach the lessons she has learned along the way on her path. The knowledge she shares with me speaks to knowing her roots. These stories carried in her mind bear truth which she shares with those who are willing to learn. As I sit and listen to her stories, I reflect on how her role resembles that of Mother Earth.

Mother Earth looks after the trees, the animals and the people. They are her children. I see her role as caregiver, nurturer and protector. There was this one time when the sun shimmered rays of sunshine onto a little girl. She wore a crown of greenery around her head. She was gathering roots and flowers as she played; her braids danced with her to the melodies of nature. Suddenly, a rumbling sound was heard. It was a beautiful sun shiny day, and the sounds of rolling thunder seemed impossible... This was the first time Madeline experienced the sounds of an aeroplane and saw with her eyes the first time this dragonfly in the sky. This strange flying object, "Sawakunapises," the dragonfly in Cree, was seen as a threat, and she ran away from the noise. She ran for protection underneath a bush, much like the lilac...
bush, a bush with thick branches, and she covered herself with its branches. In this instance, she ran to Mother Earth for protection, and she prayed that the dragonfly would not kill her.

This analogy to Mother Earth as caregiver, nurturer, and protector shows through in other settings as well, such as her analogy that one is considered rich to have many children and grandchildren. It is a representation of wealth because the seeds are planted, and they have grown healthy, and are on their way to survive to full bloom. This understanding reflects the metaphor of the flower.

The richness that I have is displayed through the children. I have many grandchildren. I am rich... I have the children...(L401-04,#2).

In this instance, the analogy to life using the metaphorical language symbolizes the spiritual relationship with nature. In addition, this metaphor may also speak to the circle of relationship as a framework to connected knowledge through story.

The following may assist us in understanding this relationship. Madeline tells another story about a woman who had nineteen children. This woman felt really sad and discouraged because she could not keep up with her responsibility as a mother. An old lady found the woman crying one day, and asked her, "What was the matter?" The woman shared her feelings, her story. The old lady consoled the woman using an analogy to the flower. She said:

Your life will be rewarded. It is just like the roots. It is like the flower that has blossomed.
You have given life and the seeds flourish as you have planted them and they grow. That is a similar thing that you are doing by giving life to the children. You are giving life just like Mother Earth gives life to her children. You are giving life just like Mother Earth gives life to all things on earth. It is similar to the flower... They do not know about the flower. They do not understand how it unfolds and gives life with its seeds... (L597-603#3:74).

Giving life to children is an experience which can be illuminated in many ways. I believe this teaching does not speak only to natural mothers. We have mothers’ ways reflected in our daily lives. For example, as teachers in a contemporary learning environment, we show our motherly ways by offering our knowledge to the children with whom we come in contact. The hand or shoulder that we offer our friends, family and neighbour is a reflection of motherly ways. This lesson is touching the surface of the old lady’s teaching because her story involves a much deeper connection to the spirit of the teaching, and this understanding can only be gained by opening up to the First Nations way of seeing the world, and how it grows. This is the knowledge that must be understood and validated by the teachers.

This ideology supports mother’s ways as they are reflected in our daily lives in that our words, actions and behaviour stem from our understanding about the position from which we speak. We might add that within First Nations epistemologies, the connection is also spiritual. The thinking, it seems, is grounded in experience that develops as we grow.
In my mother’s case, she learned through the process involved in making hides and sewing. These situations involved process within a context where telling stories laced teachings about family values and community responsibility. The Old People were her primary teachers as their knowledge about the lessons are vast. Mothers, it seems, were totally involved in the process of survival. Their teachings became part of the process. Childrearing became part of the process. So making hides and raising children were simultaneously part of the teaching process.

The Old People were the primary source for knowledge. In my mother’s case, when the family lived in Stoney Lake, her paternal grandmother taught her to sew, make hides, dig up roots, learn the patterns in nature, and so on. Her method of teaching my mother was by repetition, a process of try, retry until the lesson became internalized. Therefore, repetition and internalization of teachings were very important until the next cycle would be introduced. Madeline recalls the many occasions when her paternal grandmother would make her redo her sewing after she thought that she had completed the pattern. The pattern was literally torn apart, and my mother would have to return to her model tipi, which Ka pe ki towhk sit had built for her, and sew. It appears that the Old People knew the cycles of development for each child. With this knowledge, they would tell their grandchildren that they were old enough to complete the lesson, and to complete the lesson in the correct manner.
This claim acknowledges that our Old People carry knowledge about the developmental cycles of children and adults. As I sit and listen to my mother telling her stories about the lessons and the teachings, I sense that she puts herself in the context of time and place. Her memory calls her back to that time and place as she shares her stories. Yet, today is just as important. This story is a teaching that will be used tomorrow; therefore, the story must be true. Its accuracy, as she understands it, is crucial in the telling of the story. That is why she only tells what she knows to be the truth. And the truth is based on her lived experience.

Process is ever present in the telling of her stories. Each person had a role in the continuity of the community. Each person had the responsibility to observe, listen, understand, and think about the processes which would help the community thrive and survive. Men were taught to be the keepers of the fire while women were taught about the caring for, and nurturing of roots -- the children. Together, men and women had the responsibility to nurture the growth of the children. Each person, including the children, had a space where they could grow and learn and be responsible to grow and learn, in a manner that benefited the community.

For my mother, the stories taught to her by her grandmothers have proven that her walk is still ongoing. Her stories continue to be told in the lives of her children, and their children's children. And as the babies of these families are cared for, and nurtured, they, too, will grow to
tell the stories of their Chu-chapan, Ka Pe Sikwanis Skwaw Iskwew, my mother, my teacher, the Foreseer of Thunderclouds Woman, as I am now telling Sheldon, Faryn and Andrea, and I will keep telling them the stories.
CHAPTER FIVE

I. pimātisiwin pimohtēhowin: Life as Journey

Life is seen as a miracle. And, although death is inevitable, that realization enables us to think about our time on earth, and to try to walk the path which resembles the path the Creator wishes us to walk. The umbilical cord is the lifeline. The cord is representative of many analogies in life. For example, it could represent our life, our struggles and our joys, for no other event in our lives is more touching, more fulfilling, yet more painful than giving birth. Great care must be given to the mother during this time. As well, great care is taken to service the cord of life. The umbilical cord cannot be let go until the moment is right. This attachment to the baby is analogous to our connection to the life forces and the life energies inherent in our environment.

Many metaphors used in this study reflect Madeline’s philosophy as a mother, and as a teacher. The umbilical cord of life is a poignant reminder about just how sensitive our pathway to knowledge attainment can be. The purpose in this study has been to describe the stories of a First Nations mother, and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity. The question was approached following Mishler’s (1986) and Polkinghorne’s (1988)
discussion on narrative analysis, and how analysts arrive at understanding the meaning generated from the telling of a story. Mishler (1986) says:

My own view is that the use of cultural understandings is unavoidable... To accomplish this expansion of meaning, the analyst uses her or his "best understanding," makes explicit pronominal or elliptical references to other material as well as to presumable shared knowledge between the participants, and introduces factual material from other parts of the interview or from general knowledge of the world. (p. 95)

This is, in essence, how the researcher approached the analysis and interpretation and the eventual findings which emerged from the study. The researcher presents a cultural interpretation of the oral accounts which, in turn, determined the focus of the study. By attending to the discourse as it emerged in the context of the respondent's environment, the researcher was able to "combine detailed description of linguistic features of spoken discourse with the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation" (Mishler, 1986, p.96). Further, this method of interviewing allowed a dialectic in context and content, which simultaneously evokes a connection of discussion and narrative. Upon reviewing the transcriptions and the descriptions of the transcripts, as a researcher, I pondered about my overarching question: What are the ways that my mother taught me about culture, language and identity? This led me to believe that the "answer" was embedded in the stories which my mother shared. I was suddenly overwhelmed by the dilemma of searching through the many plots to find the meaning in her stories. However,
Polkinghorne (1988), using Mishler's (1986) understanding on narrative, offered a solution, he says: "descriptive narrative research... seeks to describe the stories that underlie the values and assumptions of... members into a group" (p.162). Polkinghorne further says:

The premise the researcher works from is that people strive to organize their temporal experience into meaningful wholes and to use the narrative form as a pattern for uniting the events of their lives into unfolding themes. (p.163)

Essentially, in keeping with the emic approach to this study, this research, for the most part, is presented in first person pedagogy. As a member of the Cree nation, and as primary participant in this research, my involvement as participant-observer has evoked a special relationship with the respondent who is my mother. Further, the language of communication in the data collection process was the Cree language. My English translation has been my interpretation of my mother's stories guided by her clarifications and restatements. This emic perspective is a reflection of the communicative pathway which my mother and I have shared for years. Hence, I bring my experiences into my interpretation of the data. As well, the flow of the conversations, too, provides an emic approach to the collection and interpretation of data. This research, then, is a co-creation about the learning process. It encompasses what I have come to learn about Cree culture, language and identity. It truly has been a journey to knowing which encapsulates the Cree concepts embedded in the language of my people. The
thematic approach suggested by Polkinghorne (1988) has allowed my mother to determine the findings. Further, this study has sought to clarify four assumptions which include:

First, Gee's (1985) assumption that one of the primary ways that human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in narrative form.

Second, it explores Polkinghorne's (1988) and MacIntyre's (1981) assumption that we live storied lives, and through a process of reflection, it enables us to make sense of "speech events" (Mishler, 1986) in a meaningful manner.

Third, my intent was to search for a pattern for describing Cree culture, language and identity. Within the context of story, the literature suggests that we can describe our experiences through the narrative genre.

Cohler's (1982) suggestion that to understand the past, experience the present, and anticipate the future, one must consider narrative form as a pathway to interpret our own history. Further, this assumption ties in with Gee (1985) in that the primary way human beings make sense of their experience is by the telling of stories.

Mishler (1986) proposes that whatever else the story is about, it is also a form of self-presentation in which the teller is claiming a particular kind of self-identity. The analysis can be directed to the content of this self-identity, and to the various episodes and themes that interviewees selected in support of their identity, and to the cultural values presupposed by it... because "everything
said functions to express, confirm, and validate this claimed identity, the narrative analyst can search for statements and references related to the teller's identity throughout the account (Mishler, 1986, pp. 165-66).

Fourth, my search in narrative genre has enabled me to explore discourse theory, and to express my cultural understanding by using hermeneutic techniques vis-a-vis story metaphor (McAdam, 1985). McAdam suggests that story metaphor is a theoretical construct for identity development. Mishler (1986), suggesting configuration, says, "stories are retold in different ways and at different times, depending on the particular issue that is being explored" (p.149). Further, Mishler, quoting Ricoeur, (1981) notes, "the art of narrating... require that we are able to extract a configuration from a succession... This complex structure implies that the most humble narrative is always more than a chronological series of events" (pp. 278-279, cited in Mishler,1986, p.148). Polkinghorne (1988) in asserting his definition of discourse theory states:

The insights of discourse theory can help us to understand the dynamics that are involved in the production of narrative in the interview context. In discourse theory, the story is the result of the total situation. (p.164)

Throughout this study, many thoughts evoked my cultural beliefs, I have come, in this experience, to this: what to do with the knowledge gleaned from listening to stories? How am I to approach what I have learned through the oral tradition of my people? These are the struggles which emerged for me
in my experience of gathering blossoms. It became a choice between life and the disconnection of life. It is a choice between servicing the cord of life in a meaningful way, and detaching oneself from the teachings, and to become confused and to feel lost. Whichever path I choose, the choice and the responsibility were mine.

Learning to reflect on our experiences, and expressing them through story hold keys to unlock doors of promise, and windows of realization about what it means to be a Cree person. By observing and listening to Cree stories, a Cree person will begin to know the cultural understandings which make them Cree. These are stories about process, and their relation with the environment. The environment speaks to our being to articulate cultural underpinnings of Cree knowledge rooted in Cree philosophy (Journal, 7 July, 1996).

I have determined that the primary way we make sense of our time and place is by casting it in narrative form. Story is a reflection of who we are as a people. Developing a discourse in theory reflects the manner in which we make sense of our lives. And story metaphor provides a vehicle for understanding our storied lives. I have developed four main themes that I felt emerged, and speak to the four assumptions. The themes are called, Planting Seedlings of Learnings, Stories; Nurturing the Roots, Family and Community; Pathway to the Sun, A Connecting Thread of Knowledge; and Planting Good Seeds, Cree Language, Communicating the Design. A section at the end of this
chapter entitled, Gathering Blossoms: A Cree Mother’s Philosophy has been presented in a way that is consistent with the narrative genre. The analysis of these themes as derived through a methodology of open-ended, in-depth, unstructured interviews. As well, the use of descriptive field notes and a reflective journal aided in the interpretation of the Cree stories. An exploration of the literature was again initiated to seek clarity in understanding emerging data.

Nistam Piṁتاحisiwin ḥkwat Kiskikinhamatowin:

Culture and Curriculum

Storytellers, Julie Sams and Twylah Nitsch (1991), speak from the heart to tell us, "those of you who have ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to understand know that these truths are for all races, all people" (p. 6). In addition to other metaphors inherent in this phrase, I believe that Sams and Nitsch (1991) are illuminating their belief that First Nations stories speak to the health and well being of all people. This belief is shared by the Old People, and their stories reflect the gifts that the different colors have to share. Further, the process of coming to know involves hearing, seeing and understanding the stories which explain our existence. These are the gifts which contribute to our growth as human beings.

However, Western education in the past rejected First Nations stories. Instead, it turned to beliefs which
encompass the cultural ideals of the Western world. Little or no attention has been paid to the Original peoples or their worldview. As a result, First Nations and other minority peoples of Western industrial North America have lived under the umbrella of a technical scientific ideology. Apple (1979) comments, "only by seeing how the curriculum field often served the conservative interests of homogeneity and social control, can we begin to see how it functions today" (p. 80). The seventh generation of First Nations people are emerging to face the injustices. The illogical manner in which their nature-centered curriculum was cast aside, and worse, not even considered as viable but rather evil, speaks to the embedded reliance Western education has on technical, economic and social controls. Unfortunately, for many First Nations, the children have had their culture, language and identity schooled out of them.

Cajete (1994) offers a window through which we can reconnect with cultural understanding. He says, the cultural ideals which emphasize process are mutual connections contextualized in a giving and receiving relationship, and can no longer be thought of as "specializations" to be learned only in school. This can be seen in the way we create our stories. For example, forming connections in the community, through art, dance, song, etc., reflect our creative storymaking. Cajete (1994) says, "stories... symbolized through... art, dance, rituals, etc., [are] insight[s] into [Cree] nature and characteristics as seen through the eyes and minds of [Cree]
people..." (p. 200). This means that we must change the way our stories has been scripted because we know that today First Nations stories have rarely been told (Keeshig-Tobias, 1990). Cajete (1994) says of curriculum, "curriculum content and presentation... [has been their] story" (p. 196). Cajete’s urges people to recognize that, "story is a primary structure through which humans think, relate and communicate... we live stories..." (p. 151). Hence, it follows that, curriculum developers should be from the community. They can communicate with, and can provide an accurate reflection of its members.

Nistam Pimātisiwin ēkwa nistawēyihtākosīwin:

Culture and Identity

Understanding Cree knowledge involves a process, a guiding vision, to understanding the Cree people. Inherent in the culture of Cree peoples is a set of values and ideals which shape the culture. Cajete (1994) notes "a culture isolates a set of ideals that guide and form the learning process in its educational system." In turn, "reflect what that culture values as most important qualities, behaviors, and value structures to instill in its members' contemporary education" (p. 26). The researcher has found that inherent in the Cree culture is knowledge to help educators understand what are important qualities, behaviors, and values to be taught in contemporary institutions.

A person’s identity is shaped by his/her culture. The
environment becomes critical in developing identity. Cajete (1994) comments that one of the biggest problems in modern society is the issue of identity. He believes that identity is in crisis. He says, we "suffer from an image without substance, technique without soul and knowledge without content" (p. 26). The writer believes that one possible explanation for loss of identity is because we have not been grounded in the foundational values of First Nations philosophies. Sioui (1992) supports this assumption by stating that the "chief flaw... in Euroamerican historiography is that it has internalized the values of cultural evolutionism" (p. x). Given the history of suppression of First Nations ceremonies, beliefs, customs, and language, it is little wonder that First Nations identity is in crisis.

The lack of understanding of First Nations values have led to conflict in the hearts of many First Nations youth. Acknowledging the compassion reflected in this study, is the compassion of describing the stories of a First Nations mother. In the same way, interpreting how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity recognizes that these values, as guiding principles, have formed the basis for many of the teachings. (Cajete, 1994; Milne, 1995; Hampton, 1988, 1995; Sioui, 1992). The reference to the younger generation, as reflected in this study, are confused about their cultural reality. This has been attributed to loss of cultural identity where values form a foundation for
guiding a young person toward a path filled with connectedness and belonging. Therefore, I feel outraged for the violation of First Nations value systems. Subjugation, oppression, appropriation, and exploitation of First Nations people are still present in the Western world; however, it may present itself in different forms, politically, economically and socially. The purpose of this review is not to explain away the injustices, rather, to bring them forward, and highlight the research findings as they pertain to the stories of a Cree First Nations mother.

A review of the literature (Lightning, 1992; Cajete, 1994; Hampton 1988, 1995; Graveline, 1996; Ermine, 1995) illuminates a unity represented by the uniqueness of First Nations people as reflected in their works. As well, we see that positive connection to community strengthens unity, and the cultural identity of a person heightens awareness for developing that "special place inside" which can be empowering for individuals and communities. My mother communicated this thinking to me:

I visited mom today. She had made fresh bannock. She was cutting strips of moose meat for drying. While I ate a moosemeat and bannock sandwich she was telling stories... "Another way to feel connected is by touching the earth"... She says she never stands alone... "Not on the floor", she cautions, "you must stand touching the Mother Earth... Especially, if there are two people or more, then the strength and connection grows... (Journal, 20 June, 1996).

Strength and unity are implied in her story about touching the earth.

I felt connected in my mother's presence. I feel
proud when she speaks... my understanding is growing through my mother's stories. Her knowledge fills me as I hunger to hear more stories" (Journal, 20 June, 1996).

Thus, as individuals envision a pattern of connectedness, and develop a sense of belonging to persons and/or community, then self concept is elevated. Polkinghorne (1988) says:

We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story... one conceives of one's own particular existence as a special story. (pp. 150-51)

Therefore, as First Nations people, we are called to reclaim our stories and our identities, and to empower the people to validate First Nation epistemologies. Finding a way to return to our traditional roots as First Nations people is critical to rediscovering our identity. Lightning (1992) states that First Nations communities must reverse internalization of cultural evolutionist mentality to the "internalization and actualization within oneself in a total way" (p. 243). This, reverse internalization is called "decolonization" (Battiste, 1994). Colonization and imperialist ideologies have helped perpetuate negative images of First Nations people through colonial aspiration which Apple (1979) calls "predictive and manipulative" (p.79). The decolonization of First Nations people from imperialistic endeavors can begin with the telling of our stories from our own perspective.
Culture and Community

The history of suppression led to oppression of First Nations people. The result is "alienation, loss of community and a deep sense of incompleteness" (Cajete, 1994, p. 26). The circle of community is encouraged to unite and speak collectively for First Nations people. St. Denis (1992) feels the "need for First Nations communities to access the right to generate knowledge about their world and to use that knowledge to influence decisions regarding their lives is paramount" (p. 68). She continues, "not enough research has focused on identifying those strengths of First Nations communities that will ensure cultural and economic survival" (p. 68). The current research is a stepping stone to rectifying this dilemma. It is hoped that by describing and analyzing the stories of a First Nations mother, and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity, the inherent teachings held by Old people will begin to resurface. Lightning (1992) believes that teaching should be based on "the observation that relationships between people are inevitably reciprocal..." (p. 246). By observing, listening, thinking, and acting in a responsible, cooperative manner, the health and well being of the community are ensured. This process involves "mutual thinking" (Cajete, 1994, p. 243) in which the learner is asked to "think mutually with...active attention, humility of the learner, and respect for...[the] Elder" (p. 230) to gain
insights. Survival of First Nations communities, as reflected in this study, has shown that the stories we share with one another secure relationships, and create friendships which are vital to the entire social fabric of community relations. Thus, a connecting thread that binds people together is reflected in the custom of visiting. Visiting is seen as a viable form for keeping First Nations stories alive. The community, as a whole, had to have some form of keeping traditions, customs, and beliefs alive; this form has been by casting it in narrative form (Cajete, 1994; Gee 1985) First Nations communities have a strong oral tradition which is their hallmark. The oral tradition and their connection to the land have ensured their survival as a people. Lightning (1992) urges First Nations people to assist one another in the process of coming to know in a holistic fashion. This holistic learning, he says, is manifested in unity. Striving for balanced learning on the path is the responsibility of the learner. This truth is reflected in this research. Lightning’s (1992) guiding principles for process toward knowledge include: humbleness, centeredness, remaining on the path, truth, and indivisibility (p. 246).

_Nistam Pimatosiwin ekwa iyiniwpiiskwewin:_

_Culture and language_

This study has described, through interpretive analysis, the importance of Cree language as an expression of our
experiences. In Cree culture, the oral tradition transmits a culture’s ideals, therefore, the Cree language is a vital source of knowledge. In thinking about the issue of Cree language, I have found that Cree teachings are communicated through our language. Inherent in the language and environment is an understanding that shapes our identity. The context, time, and place serve as important foundations in Cree epistemology because without the language we would not have the teachings.

In keeping with the oral tradition, my thesis investigates narrative. My cultural understanding is founded on the knowledge of myself as a Cree person. I have found that what I speak to in this thesis is my attempt to connect with the Cree teachings which simultaneously describes my journey to coming to know. This journey involves telling my story as part of my growth.

In the course of writing my thesis, I understand my responsibility to include speaking and writing as a political act in an effort to decolonize. Campbell (1975) and Acoose (1995) reiterate this ideology in their works. They say writing and speaking in the colonizer’s language is a way to decolonize from oppressive and suppressive ideologies. The oral tradition, as in genre stories, is a pathway to reclaim the Cree language. As one begins to flourish in its teachings, one will grow in the knowledge about the Cree culture which is contexted, and embedded within the environment and the language of the people.
In researching English translations to Cree words and concepts, my frustration grew because there is no English equivalent to some Cree words and concepts. King (1989) says that the English language imprisons our thinking, and traps us in linguistic cages. In describing Cree culture, Madeline speaks about her lived experience as reflections and process. Her stories continually move in her life. Henderson (1993) says that the Western emphasis on a noun-based foundation is evidence of domination and control (p. 3), as opposed to the verb-based vocabulary of Aboriginal peoples which "contains the essential ways in which we experience and interact with our culture" (p.3). Paulo Friere (1971) called this control "the manipulation of human minds... (p. 144). These writers claim that language becomes a crucial thread in connecting with Aboriginal knowledge. Battiste (1994) speaks to this issue. She says:

Aboriginal languages are sacred to Aboriginal people. They speak the voice and lessons of a sacred place, and Aboriginal homeland. Our oral tradition gives us strength, guidance and a place to belong. This is our link to the lessons of our Being... to our survival. (p.3)

This assertion speaks to the importance of context and process in our learning experience. For Aboriginal peoples, language is their life.

In interpreting and analyzing genre stories in this study, I have focused on the ways story is used to teach Cree culture, language and identity. In reference to the study, I have found that genre stories are used in many forms. For example, existence stories, in this case, survival stories
are deemed important in Cree culture. The ways we express our storied lives, too, speak to the ways we use story to teach. Cajete (1994) says, "Aboriginal people recount their journeys through stories, songs and dances" (p.57). Madeline used the Cree language and the oral tradition to tell about her lived experiences. These reflections served to articulate lessons about life using metaphor, analogy and symbolic representation as a form of teaching Cree culture, language and identity. I would like to end this section by quoting an Aboriginal writer, N. Scott Momaday, who sums up what I have learned in looking at Cree language and the oral tradition, Momaday says;

Man exists because of language, consciousness comes through language, or the world comes through language. Life--language. Language is life, then. (cited in Coltelli, 1990, p.108)
CHAPTER SIX
Tāw-ayihk ka-māmitoneyihtomihk

The Concept of Centering

The previous chapter discussed the literature in reference to my study. This chapter takes the reader back to the genre stories to explore the major findings. This chapter describes the four assumptions: (i) the primary way we make sense of our time and place is by casting it in narrative form; (ii) story is a contextualized reflection of who we are as a people; (iii) developing a discourse in theory reflects the manner in which we make sense of our lives; and (iv) story metaphor provides a vehicle for understanding our storied lives. These four assumptions describe how one could approach knowledge. They offer suggestions for a learning process reflecting the outcome of this study. The reader is asked to think mutually, and interpret the findings as a thread, a lifeline, to First Nations way of coming to know.

Cajete (1994), Lightning (1992), Sioui (1992), and Milne (1995) have reiterated that culture, language, and identity are key elements in the teaching process. The manner in which we come to knowledge is also reflected in the comments made by these Indigenous researchers. First is the recognition that each culture has a unique set of ideals which guide them in their quest for knowledge and identity.
rooted in their language. Second is the acknowledgement that art forms, such as song, dance and story, are creative forms used in storymaking and storytelling. Third is that the values inherent in culture represents guiding principles which sustain a people to stay on the learning path. And fourth, the path begins to unfold as First Nations begin to reclaim their stories, and script them in their voice as it represents the essence of their lives.

Eber Hampton (1988) offers a beginning to approaching culture, language, and identity. He says, "we must start with who we are, with the tradition, the values, and the way of life that we absorbed as children of the people" (p. 21). Reflecting on Cree culture, language, and identity ultimately involves the analysis and interpretation of Cree epistemologies. This holistic journey includes absorbing the thought processes of the Cree people by listening to them tell their stories. In a Cree context, this includes an emphasis on "traditional native methods... in context learning, personal and kinship relationships..." (p.5). Cajete (1994) asserts, "the Cree believe that a three-way symbiotic relationship unfolds between storyteller, story, and listener. Ultimately, if people nourish a story properly, it tells them useful things about life" (pp. 138-39). This statement is reflective of the methodologies we use to teach children. Essentially, we come to knowledge by sharing our stories in our own unique oral tradition. By writing our stories, we are contributing to the body of
knowledge available in contemporary educational environments while confirming the pedagogy that it yields to. Cajete (1994) says that

the difference between the transfer of knowledge in modern Western education and that of Indigenous education is that in Western education information has been separated from the stories and presented as data, description, theory, and formula. Modern students are left to re-contextualize the information within a story. (p.138)

Duran and Duran (1995) say that although Indigenous families and communities are trying to accommodate Indigenous philosophies in teaching and learning, many appear to be in conflict with Western philosophies. The cross-cultural methodologies serve to perpetuate Western ideology, rather than legitimize our stories. These authors write, "as long as the language implies that discourse is cross-cultural, we are perpetuating the notion that other cultures do not have their own valid and legitimate epistemological form" (Duran and Duran, 1995, p.5). Aboriginal writers (Red Horse, Johnson and Weiner, 1989; Deloria, 1980; Lafromboise, 1983; Chrisjohn, 1986) also suggest that Western research methodologies are in conflict with First Nations ways of approaching knowledge. Essentially, these writers emphasize that cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions should be the focus of research. Cree knowledge in the form of experience and oral tradition symbolizes the worldview of Cree people. The current research is one approach to dealing with this dilemma in our communities. Describing the Cree stories of a First Nations mother, and interpreting the ways she used
story to teach Cree culture, language, and identity are the analysis of narrative which has become my task, my responsibility, and hence, my contribution to the Cree nation.

miyototawew totamohawin is-ayawin ohci:
Respecting the Forces of Nature:
An Ecological Relationship

We, as storytellers, know that each part of nature carries a language that can teach us to further understand the validity of our planetary counterparts. These languages of nature are a way for us to join in harmony and walk our paths of self-discovery with All Our Relations. (Sams, and Nitsch, 1991, p. 4)

To the Cree people, weather patterns too are our teachers. My mother says that if one listens carefully, one will be able to hear voices in the wind, and one will be able to understand the words that the wind carries in its mist. There is a spiritual connection implied here, and this connection to the weather patterns brought forth, by way of, the elements hold great strength that could bring destruction if the powers of the elements are not respected. For the people who live on the land, this teaching is most important. Knowing how to read the signs of nature is one of the elementary skills children should know in order to survive. Signs of nature include knowing how the animals behave during certain seasons. Knowing how to prepare oneself for the coming of bad storms, too, encompasses teachings with a spiritual connection.
Much of nature's patterns is found in the art of the people. Great meaning is attached to these patterns. For example, the star pattern reflects a spiritual relationship. The flower pattern, too, holds different levels of meaning for the person who sews. This is a cultural teaching that many are unaware of. Entwined within the patterns sewn by Cree, there is a wealth of cultural understanding.

These patterns of nature are not only related to the visual beauty of nature, but also, the patterns symbolize a spiritual connection that the Cree people have with Mother Earth and other life forces. It speaks to the wisdom of our Old People. The teaching about the flower teaches us about developing self. Not only does the teaching of the flower imply movement as it grows, but also, there is an openness to this growth on the part of the flower because it, too, develops as it is nourished. The root of the flower is its center, so to speak, because within the center of the flower is the life line which stems from the blossom to the root. In the life span of the flower, its petals will fall and the seeds will be carried by the wind, which will flourish to grow once more on new soil.

This ecological relationship reflects the care and nurturing of plants. The flower is used as an analogy of planting seeds, as in the effort to plant good seeds in our children. One way to do this is to plant good stories in our children. This takes much work and thought. In the end, when we plant good seeds, in the form of stories, our efforts
will be reflected in our children as they grow and flourish.

The patterns in nature reflect the learning process; in many ways, the teaching of the flower is one way to begin to understand the meaning behind the ecological relationship which exists among many First Nations communities. Learning by listening, observing, and experiencing, as in the learning to sew the flower pattern, requires courage and strength to stay on the path. This courage and strength are given through prayer. So we receive guidance from a higher power. It is holistic learning which encompasses the physical, emotional, intellectual, and the spiritual domains, the metaphysical. There is continuous movement in learning. As the mind grows, so does our understanding of our selves in relation to what we know. This is the idea behind the Old People's teachings in that their stories will remain in the hearts of children so that from beautiful stories, come beautiful children. Nature provides an array of colors, and has shades of teachings in everything that grows. Even the rock has babies which are represented by the pebbles, and the tiny grains of sand which flow through our feet when we walk on the beach.

The stories within stories, such as the snowshoe story, the birch bark basket story, the dogsled story and the sewing story, as well as others shared in this study, all point to the importance of process. Again, this implies growth and movement. Teachings which move us are the ones more likely to stay imprinted in our hearts forever.
Our journey leads us down many pathways. Sometimes we experience hardships; we can call these the "ruts" for the struggles that we encounter. Cajete (1994) suggests that during these times it is helpful to think about the word "pathway", because "we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognize and interpret signs, seek answers..." (p.55). He says that the word "pathway" "path denotes a structure, way implies process..." (p.55). Life has many ups and downs. It has many disappointments, many snarls, yet, it also comes together to show us the happy, more joyous times. "Pathway" moves us closer to "that place that the Indians talk about" (Cajete, 1994, p.73).

**tapiskoc wapakwaniy: Flower as Metaphor**

The metaphor of flower is used primarily because this is the pattern that resonated in my mother's teaching in this study. Teaching is a process which moves; it has to flow. It implies patient listening, observing and then acting. For example, I have learned that coming to know in the Cree context involves seven components: observing, listening, sharing stories, selective thinking, following a pattern, stitching the pattern, and making an impression. I can picture the flower pattern with its petals open being sewn to connect the knowledge so that the teaching would be internalized to make a lasting impression.

When my mother sews a flower pattern, the flower relates intimately to her as it embodies the story of her life. An
analogy can be made to our life as it imitates the life of the flower. We observe and listen to the forces around us. In Western thinking, these forces, most immediately can be the people who surround and fill us with their stories or knowledge. From the stories that are shared, our thinking is shaped; and by thinking about and reflecting on the story, we plant a seedling of meaning behind the story. By further reflection we bring prior experience and understanding to the pattern which we can then practice on ourselves by thinking about story in our minds, and sewing that thought into our heart. When that happens, learning begins because we have begun to make an impression in our heart which is going to last a lifetime. Whenever we hear the story again, regardless how many times we hear the story, we will attend to the story with new eyes and ears because each version of the story will bring change in us in the way that the story is observed, heard, and internalized. Bruner (1973) notes:

> The reward of deeper understanding is a more robust lure to effort than we have yet realized... The deepening and enrichment of this earlier understanding is again a source of reward for intellectual labors. (477)

The seedlings of the learnings will be the voices that we hear as we share our stories. Along with the flower pattern is the understanding of its roots. Without the roots, the flower would not grow. Everything which gives life to the flower touches it in a special way to nourish its growth. All of these elements connect as the flower grows. All the teachings are connected. There seems to be a
powerful force behind the telling of stories guiding its expression to serve a purpose in its articulation. The significance of the roots -- the ecological relationship to the Cree people -- is this: to know your roots is to know what it means to know your culture, language, and identity.

**tāpiskoc taw-ayihk místīk:**

The Center Pole as Metaphor

We began this section by talking about the Center Pole. I was motivated by a prior interview in which my mother talked about the flower and its value to her as a teaching. I could not grasp this analogy at first, and this led me to ask the question about her meaning behind the Center Pole. Prior to this session, however, I met with my advisor, and she shared a story about how profound the understanding was behind the meaning of the Center pole. This excited me because of my disillusionment at the time about finding meaning underlying the flower, and my mother's analogy to it as a teaching about the Center Pole. After discussing the possible significance to developing my understanding, the Center Pole as metaphor became my next leading question which, in turn, focused my research (field notes, 12 June, 1996).

"The root starts there and grows outward..." (L1-17#3), my mother says, as I sat earnestly trying to understanding this teaching. Then she reminds me that this is a lesson that she tried to tell me about in an earlier interview. Now she says that she was going to show me. She leads me outside, and points to the birch, spruce, and lilac trees. Then she takes me to a lilac bush, searching through the branches to find the main trunk, and says, "this is the main root and these are its children," as she points to the branches (personal communication). And so, my lesson began
by asking, reaching out, and touching the main root and its children.

The trunk is the main root, and the outward growth that stems from the main root represents the outward stretching of children. She makes an analogy of the outward stretching of the branches to children. It is like the main root giving birth to children. It reminds me of the Sundance that we attended that Sunday, and I ask her about the Center Pole at the Sundance.

It is like that Center Pole and those connecting poles are like the children. The Center Pole is like the root, the main root, and the outward poles are the children. (L. 26-28, #3:48)

The Sundance lodge becomes my visual connection as I try to understand the teaching. The Center Pole is connected by twelve poles which represent the roof of the lodge. The roof is also surrounded by twelve poles. They are all connected. The poles, too, are a representation of roots that grow from the main root, a representation of the children. It, then, became a symbol of centeredness for me. My mother solidifies my thinking by saying:

It is a very powerful thing, the Center Pole. I showed you the Center Pole in the trees outside and that should bring you to a better understanding about what I was talking about to be centered" (L24-25#3:48).

Her teaching really grounded me in my understanding, but I felt that I was only beginning to know what it meant to be centered. Yet, I felt a great sense of pride and confidence in knowing where my roots began.
The Language of Metaphors Revisited

Madeline tells a story about an old man and his vision. The old man was going to burn the poles of a Sundance Ceremony, and it is said that someone spoke to the old man and said, "Why, why are you bothering my children, you should not bother the children" (L61-64#3:11). And so it came to be that the people, from that vision, wouldn’t burn the poles that were used in a Sundance ceremony. It was thought that the poles represented the children, and they were to be honored and not burned.

As she continued to speak about the Center Pole and the surrounding poles, I began to feel the spiritual connection. The underlying meaning of the Center Pole encompasses her spiritual belief through symbolism. That is, to Madeline, the Center Pole is representative of the Creator, and the surrounding poles are representative of the messengers for the Creator who work amongst the people. They are the teachers. "Like everything on earth is our teachers including the spirit helpers" (L2934#3). Furthermore, the Center Pole is analogous to the main root, and the surrounding poles are analogous to the children, as in the mother-child relationship (SICC, 1990). The understanding gleaned from the Center Pole is multi-layered, and one can use this teaching from many angles (Lightning, 1992). The interpretation would depend on the individual’s growth and level of understanding of First Nations ways and worldview.
There is a spiritual understanding and a deep-rooted connection to Mother Earth, as the Center Pole and the surrounding poles are planted into the body of Mother Earth. This understanding is reflected by storytellers, Sams and Nitsch (1991). They say that Mother Earth speaks to us to tell us "you are a part of my body. You hold my wisdom" (p. 34). It is a spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth, and well-being that are experienced when you know even a little of the teaching. You always have the potential to grow and learn on the path. As my mother says, "you grow inside from the teachings of the Center Pole" (L2-5#4:19). Madeline’s stories continue to unfold teachings. She says that the poles are also growing upward connecting with Father Sky, who lives with the sun. Father Sky is the protector, the keeper of fire, and Mother Earth sustains as the nurturer, the caregiver of life, the survivor.

In this manner of thinking, no greater honor can be given to the Creator and the messengers than the honor of respect. Speaking words of respect when thinking and praying demonstrates humbleness, for this is a powerful source of energy that stems and transcends the understanding and meaning of the Center Pole.

For a non-believer, the power of Cree stories is devoid of significance or harmony. But to the Cree people, these Cree stories are rich with blossoms from the past and are a reflection of tomorrow. To the Cree people, the customs are representative of the oral tradition and truth. This
includes learning the stories about the past lifeways of the Cree people, stories which tell us about Cree customs and traditions, and their relevance to our lives. The Old People are the source of knowledge for these lessons.

Cree customs and traditions intertwine with Cree language. For a Cree person, Cree customs and traditions are embodied in the language of the people. The Cree language strengthens the roots of the belief system of the Cree people. Sharing my mother’s stories, my attempt is to stay in the direction that the path leads.

The beliefs which speak to Cree identity are ones related to becoming a whole person. This research has been a story about communicating and understanding my mother’s stories. In this journey, I have come from many angles, and my understanding of who I am is shaped by my mother’s stories. This shared knowledge rooted me in the Cree language, and contextualized a pattern from which I grow. The relationship I have with the flower is one connected to the metaphysical, ecological, and cultural make-up of who I am as a Cree woman. I am, metaphorically speaking, the flower. The stories nurture my existence, and my primary concern is to grow to be the person I should be within the Cree context. I am rooted in this tradition, and my personal experience speaks to my existence. This knowledge has filled me with humility. Humility feeds the hunger to know.
Suggestions and Recommendations

Envision my mother in her blue dress with the varied hues, or in her black dress scattered with roses, planting seedlings outside. She is connected to Mother Earth because her feet touch the ground. Now look at her sewing bundle, you see her needles, thimble, beads and thread. Her sewing bundle carries everything she needs to sew wonderfully inspiring stories. The thread connects her to the members of her community. She visits others to grow in knowledge about Cree culture. This is a reflection of the path, and how story is used to teach. The children learn from becoming connected with their community. My journey has come full circle in that by telling my mother’s story, I am telling my story. The stories are not new. They have been told and retold, but as I transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted these stories, I came to understand these stories as being an important part of my life. The flower pattern my mother used in storytelling came to me in cycles of understanding and growth. She would tell and retell a story from different angles to bring me closer to my center of understanding in Cree worldview. My learning path was anything but ordinary and routine. It was creative and very fulfilling. It is a far cry from sitting in a room with concrete walls and immoveable structures. This illuminates that inquiry should be creative, and teachers should not fall into the rut of routine or, too, follow only Western methods of teaching in
pursuit of knowledge. Learning should be fun and enjoyable for them. Cajete (1994) says:

Each teacher and student involved in Indian education must relearn and practice contexting information in culturally sensitive and holistic ways. Making story the basis of teaching and learning provides one of the best ways to accomplish this contexting and enhancing of meaning in all areas of content. (p.139)

As well, we should consider teachings which introduce children to stories at the appropriate cycles in their growth. That is, we should not be afraid to risk the telling of stories which are considered to be at a higher level of understanding. Instead, tell the story in such a way that the children will grasp the meaning. It is analogous to the cord of life. The child is connected to the body of knowledge and the Cree understanding of attachment to the lifeline; in addition to the Cree meanings, it carries in its veins. The understanding gleaned from this kind of knowledge creates a richness which emulates the riches we have in our future, for the children.

Eber Hampton (1988) eloquently urges us to form a circle of community that speaks to the relevant issues which accurately reflects our culture. He says:

this new circle must encompass the importance Indian people place on the continuance of their ancestral tradition, respect individual uniqueness in spiritual expression, facilitate an understanding within the context of history and culture, develop a strong sense of place and service to community, and forge a commitment to educational and social transformation that recognizes and further empowers the inherent strength of Indian people and their cultures. (cited in Cajete, 1994, p. 27)
Based on this philosophy, and the possibilities outlined in this text, Indian education truly has started to emerge as a story of its own making.

This journey to find the pathway to the sun has come full circle. The seedlings of learning were planted in me through stories. The gentle caress of Mother Earth protected me while family and community nurtured my roots. The warm rays of sunlight touched my eyes, my ears, and my heart to learn the Cree way. Life as articulated through the traditions of my people sounds drums of celebration. My understanding dances to the rhythm of the heart beat of life. My senses are alert as I feel the emotions of time beneath my feet. And I hear the whisper of thunder as it murmurs ever so softly to my spirit...

I hear my great grandmother and mother speak to me...
The Last Words

Try to remember the lessons that I have taught you, and the stories that I have told you. Use your minds to remember. You have strong minds to remember the lessons that I have taught you...

To use our minds, that we were all given minds to use and that we should use them properly...

kiskisi kikway nikiskinhamakewina ohi acimowina.
ka-wihtamātān kiskisi kimamitoneyihta mowinihk.
kimāmitoneyicikaniwāwa miyāsinwā
ka-kiskisiyēk ohi kiskinohamakewina.
kimamitoneyichikana āpacihtak.
kayask ka-āpacihtayahk.

ka-pe-kitowsit iskwew, ka pe si kwaniis skwaw iskwew:
(Whispering Thunder Woman and The Foreseer of Thunderclouds Woman).
REFERENCES


LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

Dear __________________________

As you know, I am in the process of conducting a research study that will tell the story of one Cree mother. To tell it properly, I hope to draw on your stories about your lived experiences. Your Cree stories (narratives) will help me to interpret how stories are used to teach Cree culture, language and identity.

With your permission, I hope to do the following:

1. Conduct an series of interviews with you, these sessions will be tape-recorded. (About 8 sessions)

2. Participate in the stories as listener, learner and a researcher. This will involve asking you questions as they pertain to Cree culture, language and identity.

Besides contributing to my thesis work in Indian and Northern Education, I am hopeful that the Cree stories shared by a First Nations mother will be of interest to the teachers who might be interested in a First Nations way of knowing and the oral tradition of First Nations people.

As a participant in this research, you have important rights of confidentiality and anonymity. I have discussed this with you and have summarized these in the consent form (attached).

I look forward to hearing your stories as you share them in your language.

Respectfully,

Mary Bighead
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FORM

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations and enrolled in the Indian and Northern Education Program. The study I will conduct in partial fulfilment of the requirements for my master's degree will describe the Cree stories of a Cree First Nations mother, and to interpret how she used stories to teach Cree culture, language and identity. The title of the document is: NI KĂWĪY OKISKINOHĂMĂWINA – Mother as Teacher: A Cree First Nations Mother Teaching through Stories.

The purpose for the study has been explained to me. I understand that:

1. My involvement is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

2. All tapes and transcripts will be used in a manner that will respect my rights to confidentiality and anonymity and will be erased when the study is completed, if I so wish.

However, given the nature of this research, in that, the audio-tape recordings may provide useful information for further research into our family history, and/or research in narrative form, I am willing to grant Mary E. Bighead the right to keep the recordings for these purposes. In addition, my real name may be used in the final document.

3. Participation in this study will require interviews of approximately one to one and one-half hours per session. During this time I will share my stories which reflect the aim of the study.

4. The transcription will be read to me and I will add, change, or delete any information I feel is necessary. I will have the right to review the transcripts from my interview(s) to ensure that they are valid.
With these conditions, I hereby agree to participate in the study.

Signed: __________________ Date: __________________

If you require further information, please call me at (306) 922-8366

Mary Bighead: _____________ Date: _______________
APPENDIX C
REQUEST TO WAIVE ANONYMITY
REQUEST TO WAIVE ANONYMITY

I have participated in the study entitled: NI KĀWIY OKISKINOHĀUMĀWINA - Mother as Teacher: A Cree First Nations Mother Teaching Through Stories, conducted by Mary E. Bighead. I have reviewed the personal references made to me in Mary’s thesis and am therefore requesting the use of my real name in the final document.

I HEREBY REQUEST THAT MY RIGHT TO ANONYMITY BE WAIVED AND THAT MY REAL NAME BE USED IN NI KĀWIY OKISKINOHĀUMĀWINA: MOTHER AS TEACHER: A Cree First Nations Mother Teaching Through Stories.

Signed: ______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF PERMISSION
LETTER OF PERMISSION

I have participated in the study: NI KĀWIY
OKISKINOHĀMĀWINA: Mother as Teacher: A Cree First Nations
Mother Teaching Through Stories, conducted by Mary E.
Bighead. I have reviewed the personal references made to
me in this study and I have waived my right to anonymity.
Further, I understand that part of this research will be
on-going, in that, there will be a forthcoming family
history and/or a record of the stories and conversations in
some narrative form.

I HEREBY GRANT MARY E. BIGHEAD THE RIGHT TO KEEP THE
AUDIO-TAPED RECORDING OF MY STORIES.

Signed: ____________________________________________
Date: _______________________________________________