Islands of Culture: The experiences of post-secondary Cree language teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study recognizes that post-secondary Cree language teachers carry expertise in providing relevant teaching strategies for adult learners. Pursuant to this perspective, this study describes current Cree language teaching approaches for adult learners as practiced by selected post-secondary Cree language teachers. The Cree language teachers interviewed in this qualitative study are fluent Cree speakers who possess traditional Cree knowledge and understand the protocol within Cree communities.

The findings show that post-secondary Cree language teachers created “islands of culture” in unique cultural settings in the classrooms to teach Cree language to adult learners. The Cree teachers shared their cultural beliefs and values, along with the traditional learning and teaching experiences that they acquired from the circle of family relationships. Also, the academic training in teaching methodologies and in linguistics enhanced their teaching strategies in Cree language pedagogy. The study demonstrates that the self-identities of First Nations’ students were enhanced when students learned and acquired the cultural and historical background of néhiyawēwin or Cree language. When First Nations students developed mutual trust and honesty within their learning contexts in the classroom, they also developed respect and love for their mother tongue. The inquiry shows that post-secondary institutions need to recognize and support Cree language
programming to help alleviate the numerous problems experienced by Cree language teachers and by their students at the university level. The study also demonstrates that post-secondary Cree language teachers require professional specialized training to initiate multidimensional teaching strategies, and also to develop learning and teaching contexts using aesthetic arts in Cree language pedagogy.

The inquiry recommends that universities initiate guidelines to include Cree more provincially in its programming, and to sponsor special events geared to the promotion of Cree, in order to facilitate “islands of culture” learning and teaching contexts for both Cree language teachers and for post-secondary students.
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DEDICATION

It is with gratitude and respect that I dedicate this thesis to my late father David Baptiste, for his persistent encouragement "âhkamêyimo!", and to my mother Kate Baptiste for her moral support, to my husband Enos Willett, and to my sons Carman James Willett, Cameron Willett, and Colin Willett for their support, patience and understanding.
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CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

My son came to me recently and asked why I had not taught him to speak Cree when he was little. However, I was unable to answer his question immediately because I needed time to search my own heart. As I took the time to contemplate the question, my experiences of primary school flashed before me. I thought about the obstacles that prevented me from starting primary school early in my life. As I reminisced about childhood experiences with regards to barriers with language, my heart was flooded with mixed emotion. I became sad and tearful. I realized that I had not taken the time before to analyze my feelings concerning my language, and the reasons why I had not taught my children to speak it.

Many Native children during the early 1950's encountered problems concerning school attendance. My older brother and I experienced transportation problems. During my childhood the location of our home at Little Pine First Nation hindered accessibility to school because the Battle River meandered through the reserve. Without access to a bridge, families living on the north side of the river were unable to transport their children to the school, which was located on the south side of the river. My family lived on the north side of the Battle River and in order for us to attend school, we had to be taken across the river on a pony one by one, or on a
wagon drawn by a team of horses. Preschool programs such as kindergarten were not available at that time to prepare Native children like myself, whose home language was Cree, for school readiness.

I started school at the age of seven with inadequate communication skills in the English language. I could not speak, read or write in the English language. I remember arriving for my first day of school at Little Pine Reserve. When I jumped off the wagon that day, I was very naive as to what school really entailed, but at the same time I was jubilant and eager to begin my new venture. My recollection of the old school yard is that it was crowded and boisterous with Native students of different ages. I was showered with shrieks and screams of laughter from the children who were busy chasing each other everywhere. I remember the comfortable feeling of belonging as I rushed out to join the numerous little brown faces racing around merrily in the school yard. For me, it was a joyful experience to join my peers at school. I remember answering the call of the school bell along with the rest of the children, and stampeding toward the school entrance. I felt the shoving, the squish and the squirm in the lineup. I remember being ushered quickly into a small classroom and being assigned a specific spot in the classroom by a schoolteacher who had silver hair.

I recall my jubilant expectations quickly turning into confusion as I desperately tried to understand the teacher who spoke this foreign language. My confusion quickly turned into fear when I could not follow the instructions articulated by this teacher. I distinctly remember the piece of blank paper placed on my desk and not knowing what to write on it. Alas, I did not know how to write my name,
and without thinking I peeked over to my friend and copied her name onto my sheet. When she saw that I had written her name on my sheet, her taunting and angry expression left me feeling humiliated and dejected. When I finally understood what the assigned task entailed, my only thought was to escape from the teacher and from my peers. However, I managed to survive that first year of day school and eventually did acquire the bare rudiments of the English language. Sign language, vigilance, persistence and sheer determination all contributed to the successful completion of my primary grades.

The opportunity to begin school occurred late in my life and to catch up with my peers, I had to work diligently to master the English language. During my years of grappling with primary grades to a graduate studies program, I have managed to prevail in my stride toward a solid professional education. To provide an honest answer to my son’s question, I searched my own feelings. During that period when my sons were growing up, I simply wanted them to master the dominant language that was acceptable in our educational institutions, and to be able to express themselves effectively and automatically without language barriers. In my heart, I wanted my children to succeed and to achieve their personal goals in life without experiencing the struggles, pain and humiliation that I had encountered. It was later in my life, during my undergraduate studies, that I came to appreciate and to realize the importance of my mother tongue.

My respect and regard for my first language was enhanced as I studied history in university. I learned that the Cree nation played a primary role in the development of this country, especially during the contact period and the early fur trade era. The
Cree language flourished and was an esteemed language at one time on this continent. As I struggled to answer my son’s question at the time, I simply told him that it was more beneficial for him to master the dominant language utilized by his peers.

My perspective on the Cree language has developed into a deeper level of understanding today. I have come to certain conclusions about my language, based on my life’s experiences. Today, I feel emancipated in telling my sons that the Cree language is indeed a sacred gift from our Creator, and that it is regarded with reverence by its speakers. I acknowledge and support Kirkness (1989) who stated, “Language is a gift from the Creator. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values and the fundamental notion of what is truth” (27). Having gained a greater understanding concerning the sacredness of my language, and the important role that Cree language played in this country during the time of settlement, and also learning about the beauty and cultural meanings conveyed behind the structure of my language, I felt compelled to share these truths with my children and with others. My deepening understanding of the spiritual aspects, culture, and history of the Cree has indeed given me great pride in my language. It is now, that I feel that I have something important to share about my mother tongue.

In this inquiry, I chose to seek new meaning and a new understanding behind the narratives of Cree language teachers who are seeking relevant teaching strategies with post-secondary students to learn Cree, and also to help other adult learners who did not have the opportunity to learn Cree earlier in life.
Statement of the Problem

More First Nations language teachers are needed to help revitalize the various indigenous languages spoken in Saskatchewan. Research has shown that the "indigenous languages will be on the verge of extinction within the next two generations" (National Indian Brotherhood Assembly of First Nations (AFN), 1988, p. 75) and urgent action is needed to reverse this trend. There is a vital need for more trained language specialists (Fredeen, 1988; Littlejohn & Fredeen, 1993), and the "First Nations {themselves} agree that more aboriginal language instructors are required in First Nation schools" (National Indian Brotherhood, AFN, 1988, p. 76). The need for more language specialists was expressed in the Indian Language Program Survey conducted in 1987 by the Saskatchewan Indian Languages Institute (SILI) of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) to investigate the state of Indian language programming in Saskatchewan schools. The study was explicit in identifying two main concerns: the lack of funding and the lack of trained teachers (Littlejohn & Fredeen, 1993, p. 57). Again this problem concerning the lack of "trained language instructors" (AFN, 1992, p. ii) was articulated by First Nations in the report, Towards Rebirth of First Nations Languages. The recommendations that emerged from Fredeen in the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (S.S.T.A.) Report also called for "specialized teacher training in second language teaching and cross-cultural settings" (Fredeen, 1990, p. 14) for the northern Saskatchewan areas. There is a shortage of Cree language teachers throughout Saskatchewan educational institutions. Recent linguistic studies conducted in Saskatchewan schools have also confirmed the decline of fluent Aboriginal speakers.
The deficiency of specialized language graduates who graduate from the post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan is still a reality today, whether it is in the Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Assiniboine Nakota, Métis Michif, or Dene languages. If the need for more language instructors is not addressed, the children of First Nations throughout Saskatchewan schools will continue to lose functional communicative skills in the mother tongue. What is needed to rejuvenate the First Nations languages in the provincial school systems and in their communities? What teaching approaches are needed to attract and to train more First Nations language teachers?

More specialized language teacher training is definitely needed to rejuvenate the indigenous language programs in the Saskatchewan educational systems and in the First Nations communities. This study investigates instructional approaches that accommodate adult learners by exploring stories shared by experienced post-secondary Cree language teachers. The results of the inquiry may help post-secondary institutions to train specialized language teachers, who will be emerging into the provincial educational systems and also to the First Nations communities.

**Research Questions Investigated**

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe post-secondary Cree language teachers' experiences in learning and in teaching the Cree language. The research question is:

- What are the experiences of post-secondary Cree teachers in learning and teaching the Cree language?
Based on the results of this study, I suggest relevant teaching strategies that may help First Nations language teachers, adult learners and post-secondary institutions. Interviews were conducted with five, experienced, post-secondary Cree-language teachers to provide the data for this study. The data analysis and interpretation of data acquired from the interviews, the literature review, plus the notes collected from my own personal journal were formulated into recommendations.

**Significance of the Proposed Research**

The study may encourage post-secondary teachers to utilize appropriate teaching strategies in Cree language instruction, and it may help universities and other adult educational institutions adopt appropriate teaching methods for training specialized Aboriginal language teachers. It may also help to alleviate inequality in language programming by creating awareness of the importance of First Nations languages. The intention of this inquiry is to support adult learners’ acquisition of functional communicative skills in the Cree language, and also to equip graduates in establishing Cree ways of knowing and Cree ways of learning. In turn, these teachers should be able to transfer these skills to the Aboriginal communities. This study may also help diminish feelings of “cultural alienation” that were expressed by Native post-secondary students at the University of Saskatchewan (Baptiste, 1994; Biro, Ravichander & Hockley 1998; Waldram, 1986). Barnhardt (1991) stated that, “Language can serve as an important focal point for rekindling a sense of cultural identity and distinctiveness, and indigenous higher education institutions are often the
vehicle through which the spark is ignited” (p. 226). This study suggests ways to bridge the communication gap between Aboriginal post-secondary students, Native elders and Aboriginal communities, and in turn, members of the Aboriginal communities may feel more encouraged to participate and to contribute to their local university. Brandt and Ayoungman (1989) found in their study of second language learners that the learning experiences of minority children are more positive when the language they are studying is officially recognized. If additional Cree adult programs were fully developed and supported by the adult higher learning institutions in Saskatchewan, Aboriginal students may be more receptive to learning Cree, and more graduates would emerge from the institutions equipped with functional communicative skills. Barnhardt’s study on stable “indigenous higher educational institutions established in various Fourth World settings” (Barnhardt, 1991, p. 225) describes the “attributes and qualities, the character and intent, and the innovations and frustrations that have distinguished these indigenous higher education initiatives from their mainstream counterparts” (p. 201). Barnhardt explains why the indigenous higher learning educational institutions survived and were successful. He says that when the “collective interests of the indigenous community” (p. 223) were honored by these higher education systems, such as the “active role that local elders play in many aspects of the life of the institutions” (p. 225), and also when the use of the local indigenous language was “incorporated into the fabric of the institution” (p. 226), these indigenous higher educational institutions prevailed. In the same way, “more receptivity to First Nations’ interest and input into post-secondary Cree
language programming may create harmony and may encourage future cooperative work and joint business enterprises.

**Personal Narrative of the Researcher**

I am a grandmother, a mother, a Cree language teacher, and currently a graduate student pursuing a masters of education degree. As a participant in this study, I present my personal narrative of growing up within a Cree community, and how I attained Cree fluency early in my life. I describe my spiritual understanding of my language, and also I share my teaching experiences in Cree pedagogy with adult learners. Based on this cultural knowledge gained from my early upbringing, together with my personal life experiences and my academic background that has been refined with years of teaching experiences, I feel that I meet the protocol to add valuable ingredients to the metaphor islands of culture, which embraces what post-secondary Cree language teachers bring into their classrooms.

I am a member of the Little Pine First Nation located in central Saskatchewan where the Y Cree dialect is spoken. My academic background, along with my life experiences, have enriched my understanding of Cree ways of knowing, Cree ways of thinking and Cree patterns of behavior. I am in contact daily with elders such as my mother and aunts, and also with other Cree speakers who are from First Nations. For the most part, I am a Plains Cree from the central Saskatchewan area, but I also have a small portion of Saulteaux, Assiniboine, French, Scottish and Irish blood. My grandparents were the late Adam and Lydia Tootoosis. My grandfather, Adam
Tootoosis, was the son of the late John Tootoosis Senior. He was the oldest son in the Tootoosis family of eleven children. My grandmother's maiden name was Andrew. When my grandmother lost her own mother at an early age, she was adopted and raised by the late hereditary chief James Blackman from The Little Pine First Nation. Both of my grandparents were of mixed ancestry. My grandfather, Adam Tootoosis, had a mixture of Cree, French and Scottish ancestry, while my grandmother, Lydia Tootoosis, also was a mixture of Cree, Nakota and Irish descent. My own mother, Kate Baptiste, was the oldest daughter of the late Adam and Lydia Tootoosis. The late David Baptiste was my father and Kate Baptiste is my mother. I am the oldest daughter in a family of thirteen children. I grew up in a Cree community at Little Pine First Nation with my extended family, and I also spent many years of my young life in a boarding school.

My mother told me that I learned to speak quite early as a child. Empowered with speech early in my life, I felt free to communicate with my parents, my grandparents and extended family within my home surroundings. But my mother also told me that I made mistakes, especially when visitors whom I enjoyed entertaining arrived at our house. I was a confident child who skillfully utilized Cree rhetoric to get personal attention, and to get my daily needs met, and also I was able to defend myself whenever I encountered a dilemma. My oratory skills in Cree indeed enhanced my personal psychological growth to develop normally as a child within my home community.

My grandparents' family farm in Poundmaker First Nation, north of Cutknife in Saskatchewan, became my second home during my early childhood because my
family spent long periods of time there. My older brother and I were special to our
grandparents because we were their first grandchildren. We both developed precious
bonds of affection with our grandparents. My memories of the farm were indeed
happy, pleasant memories because my grandparents were gentle, kindhearted, loving
people. Some of my earliest memories were spent conversing in Cree with my
grandmother on the farm. I remember developing an intimate chitchat relationship
with my grandmother who painstakingly and lovingly took the time to answer my
numerous trivial questions. I remember carefully treading behind my grandmother’s
moccasins everywhere on the farm. I also remember sitting poised on grandfather’s
knee while his other foot tapped in rhythm to the traditional songs that he shared with
us. On those occasions the other children and myself would all squat on the floor as
we listened attentively to the magic of the drumbeat and to his rich deep voice.

It was on my grandparents' farm where I would wake up with the rising sun
shimmering down my face. Each morning that I was there, I was awakened by the
shrill cockcrow of the roosters. I used to listen to the frenzied chirping and chattering
of birds and chicks just outside the windowsill, and I squirmed with glee as I heard
the loud scolding and calling of the mother hen as she tried to muster her tiny troops
into formation. I remember the yelping of puppies and dogs, cows bellowing in the
barnyard for their morning feed, and the boisterous oinking of the mother sow
beckoning her piglets for breakfast. I remember looking out the window to catch a
glimpse of the poka dot colts prancing about merrily and playing, while the sorrels,
pintos and mares were busy munching on the luscious jade bed of grass that
surrounded the farm yard. I also remember poking my head out the window peeking
down the hill, to get a glimpse of Red Dawn, the majestic thoroughbred, chomping
down his morning feed in the corral. I remember the shuffle of my grandmother
working in her tiny kitchen as she prepared breakfast for her extended family. I
would wait for the whiff of bacon and eggs to permeate the house to arouse my
morning appetite. Then I scurried out of bed and jumped into my heap of clothes
beside my bed. I splashed my face with cold water in the basin, quickly brushed my
long tangled hair into a ponytail, and pursued that aroma of a scrumptious breakfast.
I flew to get ready for grandma’s tasty breakfast comprised of all the delicacies of
fresh cream, homemade butter and milk. My grandparents were by no means wealthy
farmers, but they lived comfortably off the produce of the land, from the grain
products, and also from grandmother’s huge garden and from the livestock that they
raised.

This comfort zone with my grandparents did not last long for me in my
childhood. The size of our family increased. We grew up quickly, and before we
knew it the time came for us to attend school. My older sibling and myself were
placed at a day school on Little Pine First Nation by my parents. I was shocked when
I could not understand my teacher who spoke nothing but English on my first day of
class at the Little Pine day school. My defense mechanisms to protect myself using
Cree suddenly disappeared in one day. Unfortunately, I experienced incompetence,
confusion and embarrassment before my first day of school was over. From being an
avid, seven-year old Cree speaker, I had no choice but to succumb to silence where I
simply became a listener and an observer in the classroom.
In my second year of school at Little Pine, my older brother and three of my younger siblings and myself were walking home from day school during the early part of September when we saw father waving to us to hurry home. As we got closer to home we saw an old gray car parked in front of our house. My father had hired a man to take us into town where a dark school van sat waiting for us. Four children in our family including myself and my younger sister, who was only six years old at the time, were all taken away from our home that day to attend a boarding school where we stayed for years. My parents had discussed the possibility that we may be going away to boarding school, but I had no idea that we would leaving so suddenly without saying good bye to our friends at school and to our relatives. According to my parents, we were placed in a boarding school for a number of reasons, but most importantly, we would have access to academic training, religious instruction, develop our personal skills, and also acquire domestic skills. At this particular boarding school, we were allowed to speak Cree outside the classroom, while learning to speak and to write in the English language within the classroom. But we also heard the French language being spoken consistently within the whole school by the French priests and nuns who operated the school. In fact, some of my teachers at elementary and high school level were French nuns who spoke English with heavy French accents. I gradually developed good oral English skills while my oral skills in Cree diminished. When we came home for Christmas and summer holidays, Cree language was spoken by everyone at home.

During my summer vacations I had opportunities to spend some time with my grandparents on the farm. One particular summer I remember feeling excited and
curious when I arrived at grandmother’s house. When I tried to ask my grandmother how many different kinds of farm animals they had on the farm at that time. I remember experiencing difficulty asking that simple question in Cree. To my surprise I had forgotten how to say *pisiskīwak* (animals) in Cree. I remember frantically trying to insert the English counterpart into my Cree question, but still my grandmother looked puzzled. I was fortunate because my aunt Julie came to my rescue, and she translated for me. It was after this embarrassing episode that I realized that my Cree fluency was not the same. I realized that my vocabulary skills in Cree had been hindered by being away at school. To this day, I can still recall how I felt at that time, and how my spirit grieved because I felt that my intimate relationship between my grandmother and myself had been curbed. I felt restrained from sharing my precious personal thoughts with her. It was out of respect for my grandmother that I learned to be careful of what I said to her afterwards because I did not want to bring shame to both of us. By that time I knew Cree protocol, and I had acquired traditional teachings from my grandparents and parents during those periods when we were at home.

Over the years, I have come to realize that despite the fact that my grandmother could not speak the English language fluently, she had greater abilities and skills than I had with regards to the Cree language. She understood a certain amount of the English language without access to formal training, and she was fluent both in the Cree language and in the Cree syllabic writing system. For it is the Cree syllabic writing system and not the Roman orthography that produces the precise sounds and the precise meanings within Cree learning and teaching contexts. Based
on my life experiences, I have also enriched my cultural and spiritual understanding of the Cree language and Cree traditions.

As a little girl I acquired Cree fluency at home from my family members within a monolingual Cree environment. I was a fluent speaker till I started attending boarding school, where English and French were spoken by my teachers. I began to lose my fluency throughout my elementary and high school. I also lost some fluency in Cree because I married a non-Native and lived within a non-Native community, where English was the dominant language. But all through my years of marriage, I have also managed to keep my language. It was at university level where my linguistic skills were enhanced and I developed an interest in sharing my knowledge about Cree. Acquiring the historical perspective and studying the grammatical structure of my language helped me to develop a greater regard and esteem for my language. I have regained my oral skills in Cree, but I have also come to a greater understanding that learning and fully comprehending Cree language is a lifetime process.

**The Sacredness of Cree Language**

My spiritual understanding of the sacredness of Cree language was strengthened as I matured in the knowledge of my Creator. My personal knowledge and life experiences also molded my spiritual understanding about Cree. My spiritual understanding of the Cree language is a biblically based narrative which says,
In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Our Creator, God the Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob creates when He speaks. And God created man in his own image by speaking it out. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). The Creator demonstrated His desire to communicate with mankind through the sacred bestowal of speech in order to allow mutual communication to occur between the Creator and man. Aboriginal people who know and believe in God humbly respect and revere their languages because they see their language as a gratuitous sacred bestowal from their holy Creator. The Word of God also tells us in the beginning man was monolingual, that, “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech” (Genesis 11:1). In Genesis 11:9, God’s Word states that during the building of the tower of Babel, God gave people diverse tongues and dispersed them throughout the earth. It was also at this time where the mother tongue of the great Lenni Lenape language family or the Algonquian language family began, and it is where the Cree language saw its origins.

Like the Cree language teachers in my study, I did not plan to become a Cree teacher initially when I registered for undergraduate training at university. However, when I began to study the grammatical structure and history of Cree language, I did very well in my academic Cree courses, which motivated my personal interests to teach Cree language. My love for my mother tongue was enhanced through academic studies at post-secondary level. And because there was a great need for Cree language teachers, I felt that I was fluent enough to teach it. Teaching and developing adult Cree language programs has also helped me to regain Cree fluency. At the same time, I am currently and consistently striving to improve my communication skills in my language.

Learning Cree grammar and the historical context of Cree at university helped me to appreciate and to value my language. I learned that Cree language played an
important role during the settlement of western Canada. Because it was spoken so widely across this land, interpreters who spoke Cree were utilized by government officials and First Nations leaders to negotiate with First Nations to acquire the land through treaty settlements. Cree language was widely used during the earlier period of the fur trade era as well. It was expedient for government officials to communicate and to negotiate with First Nations through Cree because it was used from eastern Canada to the rocky mountains. Despite the declining rate of fluent Cree speakers today, it remains the most prevalent Aboriginal language in Canada, with 100,000 speakers, of whom 56,000 live in Saskatchewan.

I do not believe that my Creator wants Cree language to disappear or to diminish at this point in time. My spiritual understanding concerning my language has enhanced my choice to participate in preserving and promoting the Cree language for my people. I love my language. I love teaching Cree to adult learners, and I enjoy my work in curriculum development. However, teaching Cree at adult level has not been an easy task because it is costly and time consuming, especially when I have to develop my own materials and teach at the same time, and the lack of teaching material and teaching resources at adult level continues to exist. But I also remember the great feeling of pride that I felt as a child where I was able to communicate effectively with those around me. I remember experiencing the sense of pride along with the feeling of belonging with my people who all spoke the same language. During that time as a child growing up, I felt was heard and recognized by my family members growing up within my community. My desire today is to participate in helping to renew that personal pride and to re-instill that sense of
belonging for Cree adult learners, and also to the new younger generation of Cree First Nations.

**Summary**

I learned my mother tongue from my circle of family relationships. As a little girl, I remember feeling proud to be able to speak my language fluently. Learning the cultural and spiritual aspects and beauty of my language, and its rich history gave me an identity, and a deep respect and love for my language. Based on my life experiences and my spiritual and cultural knowledge about my language, as well as with my teaching background, I feel that First Nation students at post-secondary level who are attempting to learn their mother tongue such as Cree need to learn the culture that is embedded in the language. The First Nation adult learners in my teaching experiences have requested for prayer before major exams or tests, and the non-Native students have also demonstrated a keen interest in developing an understanding on the cultural meanings that are embedded in the Cree vocabulary. First Nations language teachers who are seasoned with the language and culture also comprehend protocol, and they are able to teach productively and efficiently at university level. It is important for language teachers to try and instill a positive identity that builds up a good self-esteem and pride among First Nation adult students at post-secondary level simply because many of these students were raised in urban centers. And this might entice interesting sharing sessions in the classrooms for those students that come from the First Nations communities who already possess this
knowledge, and who already speak the languages. In order for students to identify with their heritage today, I feel that language teachers need to continue to share their cultural knowledge and life experiences to these urban students. Most of all, language teachers need to adapt their teaching styles by utilizing multiple language teaching approaches. The language teachers also need to invite the community resource people such as Native elders to participate and to contribute their knowledge and experiences. Community resource people may motivate both the adult learners and the non-Native students to learn the indigenous languages more effectively.

The next chapter will shed light on the background of the Cree language and also, it will review the teaching approaches of a second language.
Definition of Terms


Bilingualism: “A person’s ability to process two languages” (Williams and Snipper, 1990, p. 33).

Communicative Function: How language is used in its context, where situations and social factors are included (Littlewood, 1981) such as, “requesting” and “apologizing” (Jensen, 1992).

Communicative Competence: The ability to use a language with “the knowledge of what is socially acceptable in a language” (Savignon & Berns, 1984, p.128). It refers “to people’s pragmatic awareness of what constitutes an appropriate use of language in specific contexts” (Williams and Snipper, 1990, p. 35). It “entails ability to speak a particular language and the knowledge of cultural and social norms of appropriate language use in given interactional contexts” (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 393).

Comprehensible Input: The input constitutes the language to which the learner is exposed. It can be spoken or written. Input serves as the data which the learner must use to determine the rules of the target language” (Ellis, 1989, p. 298).

Cree Language and Cree People: The language spoken by Cree people in Canada, but “to the people who speak it, the Cree language is known as “Nâyhiyuwâywin” (néhiyawêwin) I believe this to mean, “The Way of
Speaking Accurately” or “The Precisely Spoken Language” (Logan, 1958, p. 4). The terms Kistineaux, Kiristinous, Kilistinous, are a few of the variants from which the present term, Cree, was contracted.

Hives explains that, “Cree” is from an abbreviated form of the word Kristinos, or Klistinos as they were known to these early (European) traders” (Hives, 1952, introduction). The Plains Cree called themselves nêhiyawak” (Mandelbaum, 1979, p. 15) or “The Exact People” (Hives, 1952, introduction).

Cree Dialects: “Variations of a same language”. “Dialects are not different languages, but are variations of a single language, exhibiting varying degrees of differences in the areas of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse patterns” (Heit & Blair, 1993, p. 112).

Cree Syllabic Orthography: A writing system using Cree Syllabics.

First Nations Language: The mother tongue, the language that is spoken or acquired at home by First Nations children. For Cree First Nations people, the mother tongue is the Cree language.

kiskinwahamâkê: This is a Cree verb meaning to educate / to teach (Bellegarde & Ratt, 1992, p. 175).

kiskinwahamâkêwin: This word is taken from the verb ‘kiskinwahamâke’ which means “learning / teaching”. It means, “the act of teaching rather than convey the concept of education. It is more in line with the idea of a teacher who conveys information to students as in a classroom setting” (Ratt, 1995, September). The Process of Education in Cree.
Paper presented at the meeting of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians “Mock Trial on Treaty Rights to Education” Regina, Saskatchewan.

kiskiwahamâtowin: This is a Cree noun meaning “teaching one another” and “learning” (Ahenakew, 1987, p. 207), and also “conveys the concept of education in Cree” (Ratt, 1995, p. 1). According to Ratt, the initial morpheme ki reflects reciprocal learning between the teacher and the student. ski conveys learning from the land and surroundings. nwa carries the notion of a nurturing process for the participants. ha expresses man’s power to change destiny through learning. mà comes from the word Manito - spirit that moves all things meaning that human beings are able to move in the right direction with proper spiritual guidance. to means learning is a community endeavor, and finally the morpheme win tells us that learning is a concrete real process (Ratt, 1995, September).

Language Proficiency: People’s ability to process language in each of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading writing (William and Snipper, 1990, p. 34).

Mother Tongue: The first language spoken or acquired within the home environment, and the language spoken by parents (Hebert, 1994, p. 109), and is synonymous with “first language” (Fredeen, 1988, p.13).

néhiyawêwin: A Cree word meaning “the precise spoken language” or the Cree Language. It has the largest number of speakers within the
Algonquian language family in Canada and is spoken across the country from Quebec to Alberta.

**Official Language:** A language formally designed by a state or federal government as the language to be used in governmental and educational contexts (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 395).

**Orthography:** The study of the use of letters and the rules of spelling in language (Crystal, 1996, p. 433).

**Language Acquisition:** “The process through which an individual develops the ability to use a language. The term is generally used to refer to first language development, and has also been used by researchers such as Krashen (1982) to refer to second language development which occurs in naturalistic settings” (Fredeen, 1988, p.12).

**Learning Style:** The “way in which people most easily learn and remember new or difficult information” (Gilliland, 1988). “A learning style has three dimensions: cognitive, affective and physiological...Cognitive styles are “information processing habits representing the learner’s typical mode of perceiving, thinking, problem solving and remembering” (Henry & Pepper, 1988; Messick, 1969). Affective style includes: “attention, expectancy, emotion and valuing”. Physiological style incorporates: “sex-related differences, personal nutrition and health and accustomed reaction to the physical environment” (Henry & Pepper, 1988, pp. 69-71)
Roman Orthography: A writing system using the Roman alphabet. It was Dr. David Pentland who standardized a Roman orthography for the Cree language (Hunter & Karpinski, 1994, p. iii).

Traditional Learning Styles: Culturally-specific ways of learning an Aboriginal language that was accepted and practiced by a cultural group. An example would be children and adolescent learning from their grandparents through storytelling.

Target Language: “The language to be learned. Often synonymous with ‘second language’” (Fredeen 1988, p.15).

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One sets out the problem of the thesis, the research question to be investigated and its significance to adult educational institutions, to First Nation language teachers and also to students. This chapter describes my personal narrative with regards to my beliefs and values concerning my mother tongue. Chapter Two includes a review of the research literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three explains the research methodology, and narratives shared by post-secondary Cree language teachers are described in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five provides the interpretative analysis of the data.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

To stay linked to the focus of this study which centers on the pedagogy of Cree language with adult learners, and also because the majority of First Nations adult learners at the post-secondary institutions are currently second language learners, this chapter begins with a literature review on the teaching approaches of learning a second language. The next topic for discussion in this chapter centers on the background of the Cree language. It explains the different dialects and unique characteristics that embody the language. It highlights recent findings about an ancient historical account of the Algonquian language family, and it also conveys the important role of Cree language during the era of Canada’s frontier. In order to fully understand the current status of Cree language within post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan, a brief historical perspective outlining the gradual erosion of indigenous languages in Canada is also needed to provide a better understanding why the speaking of Cree in the prairies have deteriorated, and why Cree needs to be rejuvenated today.
Language Teaching Methodologies

Various language teaching methodologies are recognized by the academic field in language pedagogy. The grammar-translation teaching approach, popular from 1930 to 1960, was based on “behaviorist theories of learning” (Lowenberg, 1995, p. 23). This structuralist language teaching method originated from the classic views of teaching Latin and Greek and “its primary purpose was to enable students to ‘explore the depths of great literature’” (Ornaggio, 1986, p. 54).

“Grammar-translation teaching satisfied the desires of the ‘mental faculties’ school of thought and the traditional humanistic orientation” (Chastain, 1988, p. 86). This language teaching approach involves translating selected readings from the first language to the second language, followed by writing exercises, and reciting the grammatical rules of the target language. The goals of grammar translation are based on the ability to read and write the target language where students strictly follow the teacher’s direction in the learning process. “A secondary objective was to gain a greater understanding of the first language,” and “an equally important goal was to improve the student’s capacity of coping with difficult situations and materials” (Chastain, 1988, p. 86). Some of the features in the classroom include memorization of lengthy literary vocabulary lists, and the mastery of grammar rules such as drilling or writing out verb paradigms, along with imitative translation exercises with an emphasis on meticulously developing students’ accuracy in reading and writing. The emphasis on grammar translation centered on imitating and repeating selected texts, and did not emphasize developing oral communicative skills. Relative to developing oral proficiency, this method has its drawbacks, in that there is
no sign of spoken language, and the little oral practice that is in evidence consists of reading aloud. There is no personalization or contextualization of the lesson to relate to students’ experience, no pair or group interaction for communicative practice, no concern for the teaching of cultural awareness...students are clearly in a defensive learning environment where right answers are expected. (Omaggio, 1986, p. 56)

A positive feature of grammar translation centers on the accuracy of learning the grammar of the target language. “Comprehension and assimilation of grammar and vocabulary were put to the test in translation” where students compared the first language and the second language, and also, they learned skills in problem solving, “the problem being that of puzzling out the correct forms assisted by grammar rules and the dictionary” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 87). Clearly, grammar translation tends to be “strenuous and boring” (p. 56) and provides the learners no opportunities for creative language or experiential learning. However, grammar translation does have some value for adult learners in Cree language pedagogy. The approach helps adults to develop a greater understanding and to acquire a holistic view of Cree, in that they are able to formulate its structure by analyzing the grammatical components. According to Ellis (1985), “older learners can learn about language by consciously studying linguistic rules. They can also apply these rules when they use the language” (p. 108). The Cree language is a verb-based language where the learning and teaching context centers on the verbs, and segregating and teaching Cree verbs touches on the grammar translation approach.

The “theories of habit formation were theories of learning in general,” and these hypotheses were “applied to language learning” called behaviorist learning
theories. This habit formation theory through imitation, repetition and reinforcement “dominated discussion of both first and second language acquisition up to the 1960s” (Ellis, 1985, p. 21), and it is still being utilized today within language educational institutions.

The audio-lingual method or audio-lingualism is derived from the Latin language. “Aduire” meaning “to listen” and “lingua” meaning “tongue,” which emphasized listening and speaking skills in the language learning process. This language teaching was used widely during the 1920s and 1930s, and it was accelerated after the Second World War when language knowledge was a “crucial national asset” (Chastain, 1988, p. 88), and when language training was suddenly needed for American military personnel to learn foreign languages. The “American descriptive linguists who had worked extensively with American Indian languages” (Krashen & Terrel, 1988, p. 13) during the 1940s and 1950s were called upon to provide the expertise in language learning at this time. Linguists initiated studies on “Indian languages, many of which had no writing systems, [where] the oral form of the language became the only data source,” and out of this deliberation emerged the school of “structural, or descriptive linguistics” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 60). “Basing their insights on their conceptions of the behavioristic model of learning, descriptive linguists concluded that language learning is primarily a process of developing appropriate language habits” (Chastain, 1986, p. 87). In this language learning process, patterns of dialogues that consisted of everyday conversations were imitated and repeated by the students. “These situational-based dialogs were practiced and memorized, followed by oral drills,” and finally, learners were engaged in
“conversation sessions with a native speaker” (Krashen & Terrell, 1988, p. 13) till these conversations became automatic. The choral speech was practiced first within a large group in the classroom, and it was followed by oral practice on an individual basis, or within paired learning contexts. This language learning approach was accelerated and intensive, where students were expected to achieve fluency within a short period of time. In this approach, the rules of grammar were not taught, and where dialogues and oral drills substituted texts, students did not have adequate access to written material for references. “Every ALM (Audio Lingual Method) textbook chapter consisted of three basic parts: (1) the dialogue, (2) pattern drills, and (3) application activities. There were very few grammar explanations within the pages of the text: some books had none at all” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 62). The audio-lingual method has some useful features: for example, it emphasized accurate pronunciation in its colloquial form, which, on occasion, is appropriate within its socio-cultural learning context, and it also creates opportunities for learners to develop a recombination of narratives. Some negative implications of the audio-lingual teaching method are that it fails to produce an abundance of bilingual speakers. The students become dissatisfied with the rote learning and with the intensive memory work. It is also time consuming and physically exhausting for the learners. Creative language expression is also curtailed for the students because the “structures became unconscious habits” (Krashen & Terrell, 1988, p. 15). Therefore, the ability to communicate freely and to fully comprehend the target language is limited.
The direct, oral or natural method was “advocated by educators such as Berlitz and Jespersen, orginated in the nineteenth century” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 57), but the traditional descriptions of teaching grammar stems from Meidinger’s work in 1783, and according to Stern (1983), “no full and carefully documented history of grammar-translation exists” (p. 453). This language teaching approach was influential “in Europe on the early stages of learning French or English” (Stern, 1983, p. 458). The approach is recognized under various names such as “natural, psychological, phonetic, new, reform, direct, analytic, imitative and so forth” (Krashen & Terrell, 1988, p. 9). However, all these teaching methods “refer to traditional ways of learning based on the use of language in communicative situations usually without recourse to the native language” (Krashen & Terrel, 1988, p. 10), and also where “language is learned through the direct association of words and phrases with objects and actions” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 57). An example of the natural method is Terrell’s Natural Approach, which is discussed later in this chapter. This approach “emphasizes speaking in the target language and avoids the conscious learning of grammar” (Crystal, 1996, p. 425), and includes “translation as a technique” (Stern, 1983, p. 456). The direct method centers on “spoken everyday language as the object of early instruction” (p. 458). This teaching process is an inductive teaching of grammar, where the teacher introduces a text and initially has the opportunity to explain difficult expressions, “using the target language with the help of paraphrases, synonyms, demonstration, or context” (p. 459). The teacher begins the class using the target language and initiates question-answer exchanges where the classroom discussion centers around simple actions, visual objects or
pictures. The teacher asks a question, and the students try to create their own sentences to answer the teacher's questions. The teacher devotes ample time developing interesting and meaningful questions in seeking the students' responses, and also skillfully guides the students to discover the grammatical rules in the text. This method focuses on good pronunciation where errors are addressed in the class.

"When the grammar is explicitly taught, it is taught in the target language" (Omaggio, 1986, p. 58), and when the vocabulary is understood, "the teacher asks the students to read a passage on the similar theme aloud from their text" (p. 58). The teacher avoids translating the selected passage, but rather continues to ask questions using the target language to elicit students' responses. The direct-method, language class ends with a motivational activity such as a song. The effectiveness of a direct, language-teaching session depends on the skills of the teacher to create the "mood of a conversation class" (Krashen, 1982, p. 135). "The direct method is strictly sequenced, which distorts efforts at real communication" (Krashen, 1982, p. 136) in that the conversations developed in the classroom are meaningful, but may fall short of producing speakers who have authentic and spontaneous communication skills. Because the emphasis rests on good pronunciation, and "grammar rules are not explicitly taught; rather, they are assumed to be learned through practice" (Omaggio, 1986, p. 58), this approach may also cause students anxiety. To create a natural learning context within the classroom where students acquire individual attention also creates some difficulties for language teachers. However, the direct approach "has been very successful with certain populations, among students who have
intrinsic motivation for language study and who believe that the study of conscious
grammar is essential” (Krashen, 1982, p. 137).

The cognitive language teaching approach sprang from the grammar
translation. According to Stern (1983), “no single theorist can be identified as the
main proponent of a cognitive approach” (p. 469). The school of thought on the
cognitive theory was derived from the “behaviorist school in psychology and the
structuralist orientation in linguistics” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 65) which appeared in the
1960s. The behaviorists “stressed changes in behavior” and cognitive psychologists
emphasized “the role of the mind in processing the information acquired” and “that
learning is the perception, acquisition, organization, and storage of knowledge”
(Chastain, 1988, p. 90). The new initiatives of psycholinguists who developed
cognitive and behavior learning theories greatly affected language pedagogy at this
time. Cognitive psychologists including Ausubel (1968) were promoting meaningful
learning experiences, while linguists, such as Chomsky (1965), advanced the nativist
theory which suggested the innate ability of language acquisition and advocated that
all “humans are born with language acquisition device” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 66).
During this time, the emphasis on language acquisition was placed on the learner and
“not [on] the agent in the environment controlling the stimuli and the reinforcers”
(Chastain, 1988, p. 90). Some academics who initially supported Chomsky’s
nativist views fell away by the late 1960’s, maintaining that semantics in the text
were more important than syntax. According to Chastain (1988), cognitive learning
approaches involve helping students “to develop the same type of abilities that native
speakers have” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 66) and allow the instructor to “move from the
known to the unknown” (p. 66), relevant to the knowledge of the students.

Competence must precede performance in the language learning process according to the cognitive approaches. As well, the teacher must “promote creative use of the language” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 67) where students are taught generative and transformational rules of grammar within meaningful learning contexts involving “contextualized practice activities” (Chastain, 1988, p. 69). The generative rules include basic sentences and the transformational rules encompass communicative skills in practical settings. The aim of the cognitive approach is “to emphasize understanding rather than habit formation” (p. 92) and “to develop students’ competence to the point at which they can formulate their own replies to previously unmet language situations” (Chastain, 1988, p. 91). The cognitive approach has adapted and improved the methods that were utilized in grammar translation and in the direct method.

The communicative language approach appears under different names in the literature. Aiming to develop communicative skills rapidly, the emphasis remains on social interaction where language pedagogy is geared to specific tasks, such as working in a restaurant or a bank. The communicative approach is relative to the direct language approach, and “in cognitive-code literature it appears to be synonymous with ‘fluency’” (Krashen, 1982, p. 133). For some scholars, “communicative language teaching (CLT) is not a classroom approach .... [It] is better categorized as an emphasis or an aim rather than as an approach” (Chastain, 1988, p. 106). Linguists who support the communicative method place “emphasis on the use of the language in the classroom” where various activities include “receiving
and giving information; giving orders and making requests; describing objects and ideas; expressing opinions, feelings, and needs; and expressing concepts such as time, location, action, and intention" (Ministry of Ontario Education, 1989, p. 8).

Firth, a linguist from Britain, who supported the communicative language teaching approach, initiated the move “to combine the basic principles of the communicative competence paradigm into a theory of language” (Lowenburg, 1990, p. 29). The communicative language teaching approach has proven to be effective with second language learners because of its emphasis on acquiring communication skills within a short period and also forming interpersonal relationships in the classroom. According to Brooks, (1990) “classrooms are active and dynamic communicative environments in which both social and academic goals are pursued” (Brooks, 1990).

There were other direct language teaching approaches that appeared during the 1970s. These approaches include The Lozanov’s Suggestopedia which is based on suggestive techniques in language pedagogy, and Curran’s Community Language Learning (CLL) is also called, The Counselling-Learning Method (Curran, 1976) and this language teaching method “stresses the role of the affective domain in promoting cognitive learning” (Omaggio, 1986, p. 79). For the purposes of this study, only the language teaching approaches that are applicable in the findings are discussed, which include grammar translation, direct approach, audio-lingual, the natural approach, and also multidimensional language teaching approaches.

The Natural Approach, described by Krashen and Terrell (1988), “is in many ways the natural, direct method rediscovered” (p. 17). The Natural Approach
designed for foreign language pedagogy for adult learners was initially developed by Terrell in California prior to Krashen’s work in the Monitor Model. Krashen’s Monitor Model carries five hypotheses that describe language acquisition. The first hypothesis is the acquisition learning model where learners subconsciously learn grammatical rules within appropriate learning contexts. The second hypothesis involves the natural order hypothesis claiming that all learners “acquire grammatical rules in a predictable order” (Chastain, 1988, p. 97).

The third hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, asserts that knowing rules helps increase competence, but does not necessarily help with performance. The fourth hypothesis is the input hypothesis which explains “how individuals internalize language” (Chastain, 1998, p. 98). The affective filter is the fifth hypothesis explicating the barriers in language learning such as the importance of a positive attitude. The monitor model presents “inner-directed” theory for language acquisition. Providing relevant comprehension input for students in the natural approach is the most important feature in classroom practice.

The natural approach specifically geared for language teaching was developed by Terrell during 1977 and 1986, and was closely in line with Krashen’s Monitor Model. The five principles set out in this model outline that communication is the first principle, and secondly, “comprehension precedes production” and the third principle states that speech emerges in stages. “Acquisition activities as opposed to language activities” is the fourth principle, and “lowering the students’ affective filter” is the final guiding principle (Chastain, 1988, p. 99) in attaining language.
Asher’s Total Physical Response (TPR), introduced in 1982, was designed to help second language learners through commands in body movement to master the target language. This approach was very successful where “students [about 80%] can rapidly internalize the linguistic code—the structure of the language and vocabulary—when language is synchronized with actual movements of the student’s body” (Chastain, 1988, p. 96). According to Asher, the TPR approach was successful because “students ‘acquire’ second language at an accelerated rate,” and “they remember what they have learned for a long time,” and also “they do not find second-language learning stressful” (Chastain, 1988, p. 96). In this study, the TPR was the most successful language activity utilized by the participants in Cree language pedagogy.

The multidisciplinary or multidimensional approach in language learning incorporates “linguistics, psychology, and sociology” which was fully explained by Stern (1983) in *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, presenting “a flow of thought from theoretical disciplines to practice and from practice to theory” (p. 47). The language teaching model presented in this text includes “four key concepts: language, learning, teaching, and context” (p. 48). Stern states that “an educational interpretation of language teaching is clearly interdisciplinary.... we used concepts of objectives which are psychological and concepts of content which derive from linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies and educational theory .... The teaching strategies which we identified have an equally multidisciplinary origin” (p. 513). Stern elaborates “on the importance of research on learning is no reason to neglect research on teaching, descriptive language research, studies of cultures, historical
research, or critical investigations on current innovations" (p. 516). Finally, Stern proposes that “if a language is to be presented in a sociolinguistic and sociocultural context, sociology, anthropology, and sociolinguistics are necessary for a language teaching theory” (p. 517).

Pucciani and Hamel in Omaggio’s Teaching Language in Context described the multiple approach having the following features,

Language is generated-- that is, uniquely created-- by each speaker. It is not learned through mimicry and memorization techniques. Therefore, excessive use of pattern drills is avoided and spontaneous responses are encouraged.... Language is also culture; therefore, cultural knowledge is transmitted through the teaching of the language per se, as well as through cultural-awareness activities and the use of culturally authentic materials.... The target language should be used exclusively as the medium of instruction.... There should be a single emphasis in each lesson; that is, only one thing should be taught at a time. Both grammar and vocabulary should be sequenced and carefully programmed to build on previous knowledge.... All skills should be taught at the same time; that is, there should be no appreciable time lapse between the introduction of aural/oral skills and reading and writing practice.... Grammar is taught inductively in the target language, with examples first and then an explanation of the rules .... The language is introduced either through relatively long dialogues, accompanied by question-answer exchanges led by the teacher, or through sentence groups consisting of question-answer exchanges. (Pucciani and Hamel, 1986, pp. 70-71)

With reference to the theories of language acquisition in general, Piper’s concise explanations and summary of behaviorist theories, linguistic theories and cognitive theories are relevant for this study. She states,

Behaviorist theories hold that there is nothing unique about language learning, that all human behavior, including language, has its basis in physical processes and can only be studied in terms of those processes. Linguistic theories, on the
other hand, hold that language develops from structures and processes that are unique to language and are present in the brain at birth. Cognitive theories, and information theory is a particular type of cognitive theory, share with behaviorism the belief that language learning is not fundamentally different from other human learning. Interactionist theories, in contrast, assume that the course of language development is influenced by a myriad of factors—physical, linguistic, and social—and that these factors interact with one another, modify one another, and may produce different effects in different children. (Piper, 1993, p. 61)

Various language teaching methodologies and theories on language acquisition have been explained in this chapter. The discussion will now investigate the historical perspective and unique characteristics of the Cree language, and also inquire into the current status of Cree language programming at the university level.

**Background of the Cree Language**

The Cree Language or “nêhiyawêwin,” meaning “the precise speaking people,” is one of the more widely-spoken indigenous languages in Canada today. Cree language was categorized by early scholars as being part of the Algonguian language family with 100,000 speakers spread from Quebec to Alberta. The Cree Language or *nêhiyawêwin* is comprised of five dialects or variants where each dialect is spoken within a specific area in western Canada, and these “dialect differences also include vowels, words, and even syntactic and semantic differences” (Ratt, 1994, p. 3). The “Y” dialect is spoken by the Plains Cree who are located in central Saskatchewan and parts of central Alberta. The Plains Cree referred to their
language as, “PRAIRIE LANGUAGE or Paskwâwinîmowin” (Hunter & Karpinski, 1994, p. iv). The “Th” dialect is spoken by the Woodlands Cree who are spread throughout northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta and northern Manitoba. The Swampy Cree from northern Ontario and Saskatchewan and the interior of Manitoba speak the “N” dialect. The “L” dialect is spoken by the Moose Cree who reside around the Hudson Bay area. The “R” dialect was the fifth dialect spoken at one time by the Atihkamek Cree in Quebec (Bellegarde & Ratt, 1992; Logan, 1958).

“Despite the differences, speakers of any dialect can understand each other, with the exception of some colloquial expressions. An experienced speaker readily identifies another dialect and respects the customs of its speakers” (Hunter & Karpinski, 1994, p. iv). A unique French-Cree dialect of its own called ‘Michif’ was prevalent at one time among the Métis people in Saskatchewan, “who were of French-Cree descent, and is still spoken by some people in certain areas” in Saskatchewan (Heit & Blair, 1993, p. 104).

The Cree language, like many other languages, is unique in its characteristics. Sealey (1977) described Cree language as:

a language of beauty; beauty of sound, clarity, regularity. It is a language of richness; rich in words, vowels, imagery and symbols. It is an oral language; a language of oratory and poetry. It contains few harsh words. It is a language which like all languages, has evolved over tens of thousands of years. It is different as all languages are different. It enables its speakers to categorize tribal experiences and its structure reflected the interrelationships of language, culture and environment. It served its people and its structure shaped their world view. (Sealy, 1977, p. 12)
Logan described Cree as being, "much more descriptive" (p. 19) and "more precise" (p. 11) than the English language. He stated,

The Cree language is a system of oral sounds and pauses used to convey ideas from one person to another, but in a manner quite different from modern European languages. It has its own peculiar sequences of ideas, its own system of sound-symbols for ideas and its own systems of grouping or combining ideas—symbols to form understandable utterances or expressions. It is only reasonable to assume that it has its own system of rules of grammar and syntax—not merely a set of rules corresponding to those of English or French (p. 6), and, it is inadequate merely to try to find ways to make it fit the grammatical structure of any European language without trying to find out how much the mental ideas of the original speakers differ from those of present day speakers of European languages. (Logan, 1958, p. 5)

In a recent study of the oldest written historical account of Native North American people, anthropologist David McCutchen (1993) established that the Algonquian language family is part of the larger national language family of the Lenni Lenape (Delaware Indians). This study shows that the Cree language, recognized as the main affiliate within the Algonquian language family in Canada, is merely one of the many other languages rooted to the greater Lenni Lenape language family in North America. McCutchen states,

the great national family of the Lenni Lenape has been misnamed the Algonquians [also called the Algonquin or the Algonkins] after a small tribe in Canada, as if the Delawares were descended from them, instead of vice versa. (McCutchen, 1993, p. xvi)

McCutchen (1993) explains that the Algonquian language family or Lenni Lenape (Lenape family), who were "later named the Delaware Indians" (p. 3), recorded their ancient journey to North America using pictographic records called
the Wallam Olum, or the Red Record which served as the Bible to the Delaware people and "is a record of their ancient history, told in the form of an epic song" (p. 4). The Red Record is the history of the Cree language because of the original connection of the Algonquian language family to the Lenape language family.

The Lenni Lenape people, according to their own record, demonstrated all four Aboriginal spiritual dimensions of human development specified in the current Native Studies Curriculum Guide, the archetype or prototype being The Red Record itself. Having in mind the goal of preserving their spiritual history, they responded to an idea accepting these as a reflection of both their known (what they knew) and potential (what they were capable of doing). In so doing, they demonstrated the capacity to express these ideas using symbols in speech, art and mathematics and made the possibility a reality. The result was the preservation of their spiritual and historical record.

"The aboriginal source of the Red Record, the Lenni Lenape, or 'Original People,' was widely known and respected among the Indian tribes. They had a special status in the eyes of many other Indian peoples: they were reverenced as the 'grandfathers,' representatives, after a fashion, of authority and legality" (McCutchen, 1993, pp. 3-4). The original words used by the Delaware Indians in the Red Record describing their Creator are indeed more vivid and eloquent than the English counterpart. McCutchen explains,

The compressed, evocative nature of the words of the Red Record is consistent with descriptions of the Lenape language. William Penn, for example, called the language "lofty, yet narrow, but like the Hebrew, in Signification full, like short-hand in writing; one word serveth the place of three, and
the rest are supplied by the Understanding of the Hearer... and I must say, that I know not a Language spoken in Europe, that hath words of more sweetness or greatness, in Accent and Emphasis, than theirs. (p. 16)

The Delawares utilized words in the Red Record that embraced creation and harmony, and also precise vocabulary portraying images of gentleness and magnificence at the same time. The original genesis narrative in the Red Record stated,


McCutchen’s English translation states,

From out of the deep came a mist, and within it moved the Creator, the Great Spirit eternal and omnipresent (1:1-4). The will of the Great Spirit brought forth the sky, the heavens, and the heavenly bodies, all moving in harmony (1:5-6). (McCutchen, 1993, p. 53)

McCutchen states that, “The Great Spirit was usually referred to by the Lenni Lenape as being male; however, the Shawnee, their close Lenape family relatives, referred to the Great Spirit as ‘Grandmother’” (p. 53). “The Delawares today firmly believe that this [The Red Record] is the record of their past” (p. 4). The spiritual vernacular of Cree Nations was patterned by Wallam Olum or the Red Record, or what their ancestors referred to as ‘Grandfathers’ and also have similar spiritual terms in their language for their Creator such as The Great Spirit, and Cree people also use ‘Grandfathers’ (spiritual ancestors) and ‘Grandmother’ with reference to Mother Earth.
During the early Canadian fur trade era, the Algonquian languages were utilized in negotiations between the Europeans and the First Nations of this land. The Cree language was spoken widely during this era, and on occasion, it was expedient for government officials to reach diplomatic and mutual agreements with the First Nations in western Canada through translators who spoke Cree. However, the Cree language became subordinate to the official languages, English and French, of Canada during the settlement of western Canada.

**Background on the Loss of First Nations Languages**

Colonization had devastating effects on the indigenous languages throughout the world, and more specifically, to the languages of the First Nations in Canada. According to Brookes, "Indigenous languages in Canada were undermined as early as 1600 and 1750’s when New France in Acadia supported missionary schools with the purpose of assimilation, but the goal [of the missionary schools] was for the educated Indians to return to their tribes and teach their people the French way of life" (Brookes, 1991, p. 163). The early missionary schools established in eastern Canada by various religious groups disregarded and disrespected the sacred indigenous languages spoken by the First Nations of this land. “By 1763, New France was absorbed into the British Empire and the control and administration of Indian affairs was taken over by the British Imperial government” (Brookes, p. 164), and as a result, the English language became a dominant language within the school systems in eastern Canada.
Numerous industrial schools and residential schools across Canada were established by missionaries for First Nation students during the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. In 1830, “the administration of the federal Department of Indian Affairs was transferred from military to civil authority and a new philosophy became evident in Indian schooling” (Friesen, 1991, p. 16) where government plans emerged to implement industrial schools so that trades and domestic skills were offered to First Nation students. The British North American Act (1867) legislated language policies in Canada recognizing English and French as the official languages, and this law created devastating effects on the state of the indigenous languages. The European colonizers and immigrants imposed languages policies to protect and support their own languages, and in the process, relegated or dishonored the indigenous languages in Canada.

The Indian Act of 1876 was implemented by the federal authorities to govern and to control the lives of the First Nations in Canada where they were placed into reserves, and where they “were to stay there until such time as they were needed, and were ready, to take their place in society” (Brizinski, 1989, p. 144). The federal government negotiated numerous treaties with the First Nations in western Canada in order to expropriate the land for settlement, and to settle them into reserves where they could be controlled and educated under their administration. These federal government policies were sustained into the nineteenth century by The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) imposed devastating effects on the First Nations languages throughout Canada. The federal policy on Native education in Canada conducted by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern
Development (DIAND), “attempted to destroy the diversity of Aboriginal world-views, cultures and languages” (Battiste, 1995, p. viii). The gradual shift “towards secularism” (Friesen, 1991, p. 17) broke the residential school systems where federal authorities began to take over the schools across Canada, and the repeated efforts of the government to assimilate the First Nations into the mainstream society caused repercussions in decreasing the indigenous language speakers. The Hawthorn Report (1967) was a study implemented by federal authorities to assess the poverty conditions of the First Nations in Canada. This report recommended integration policies for the First Nation students who attended the public school systems where English or French as a second language was offered, rather than learning their first language. By 1969, Canada became a bilingual country through The Official Languages Act when the English and the French languages were given equal status. These two languages were the legitimate languages that received government financial support throughout the Canadian school systems.

The White Paper of 1969 was designed to eradicate the treaty rights of First Nation peoples across Canada, and also the federal authorities “sought to transfer federal responsibility for First Nations education on reserves to the provinces” (Battiste, 1995, p. vii). However, as a result of major protests initiated by the Indian Brotherhood, and later the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), along with other indigenous groups across Canada, The White Paper was withdrawn by the federal authorities. In turn, the Indian Brotherhood proposed their own red paper policy to federal authorities in 1973 outlining an Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) where they “presented their vision for Indian education and languages” (Ahenakew,
The ICIE outlined a “four-point policy dealing with parental responsibility, school curriculum and programs, teachers and school facilities” (Kirkness, 1992, p. 16). When the First Nations proposed to take control of their education by developing their own education policies during the 1970’s, the languages of the First Nations in Canada gradually began to gain some ground over English and French language instruction in local Aboriginal communities where immersion programs were developed and implemented, such as the James Bay Cree immersion program and the Mohawk language immersion programs at Kahnawake.

The influences of modern media through television, radio communications, computer technology and the internet, where the English language is utilized as an international language, have also contributed in the gradual loss of fluent speakers who speak indigenous languages. In spite of the fact that Cree language currently has the largest number of speakers in the prairie provinces, it is also experiencing a gradual decline of its fluent speakers within the First Nation communities and in the school systems.

Current Status of Cree Language in Saskatchewan

Research conducted recently within Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan shows that the number of fluent speakers of Cree has greatly diminished, and this dilemma is well articulated by various Aboriginal groups. The AFN has advocated that Aboriginal languages should receive financial support equal to English and French school programs within Canadian educational institutions (AFN, 1990, p. 40).
First Nations have also asserted that “the Government of Canada has a moral obligation to rectify previous government action to suppress our languages and culture. Canada also has a legal obligation to protect and promote our languages under treaties with First Nations, and under constitutional law” (AFN, p. iii). With reference to the total population in Saskatchewan, and according to the statistics generated by AFN and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), the Aboriginal language population is 7.9 per cent compared to 2.6 per cent who spoke other minority languages. Clearly, French speakers are outnumbered by Aboriginal speakers in Saskatchewan, yet curriculum development with regards to Aboriginal languages is not a priority within the provincial education system. The 1981 census indicated a total of 99,188 Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, which is 10 per cent of the total provincial population (Heit & Blair, 1993, p. 107). Despite the existence of 16,610 Cree speakers in Saskatchewan (Burnaby, 1986, p. 11), the Cree language still lacks the status of the French language in provincial school systems and in post-secondary institutions. The federal government has funded the “Heritage Languages Act which supported the maintenance of ethnic group languages” (Battiste & Barman, 1995, xiii) throughout Canada. But financial support for Aboriginal languages under this Act was not secured because Aboriginal people refused to be considered under the umbrella of a heritage group. Instead Aboriginal groups sought their own legislation which ultimately has not materialized, but current negotiations are in process. Based on the number of Cree speakers in Saskatchewan, more Cree language programs are definitely needed within all levels of the provincial educational institutions.
The University of Saskatchewan acknowledges an Aboriginal undergraduate student population of 1,117 during 1996 and 1997 (University Studies Group, University of Saskatchewan, 1997). The institution needs to provide additional Cree language programs to accommodate this ample enrollment, and with this influx of Aboriginal students, a formal evaluation for program improvement is also needed of the Cree courses that are currently being taught.

A number of research surveys on Aboriginal language programming at the elementary and secondary educational level in Saskatchewan are now available, but a lack of research data concerning post-secondary Cree language programming in the province still exists. Because Native secondary students entering post-secondary institutions affect Aboriginal language programs, these studies are worthy of consideration in this research review. Heit and Blair (1993) presented a research paper titled “Language Needs and Characteristics of Saskatchewan Indian and Métis Students: Implications for Educators” at the 1987 Native American Languages Institute (NALI) Conference in Saskatoon. An Indian Language Program Survey Report: Saskatchewan K-12 Programs was conducted by the Saskatchewan Indian Languages Institute in 1987 (1987a). Frideres and Reeves (1993) presented a paper entitled Indian Education: An Alternative Program, in which Indian post-secondary issues concerning Native Studies courses and Native language programs were addressed. All these studies have called for more relevant Aboriginal content in the courses, and the availability of more Aboriginal language programs at university level.
In 1986, a survey of Native students at the University of Saskatchewan was carried out by Waldram (1986) to determine the underlying issues behind their academic success or failure. In his recommendations, Waldram advocated for more development in Native educational programming to meet the needs of Native students at the University of Saskatchewan. However, the need for Aboriginal students to reclaim their indigenous languages, to learn and to appreciate their language and its cultural aspects, was not addressed in this study. A paper addressing Native students at the University of Saskatchewan was discussed by Purich in 1989 who recommended a plan of action to “spur development of new initiatives” (Purich, 1989) in Native programming. Again, efforts to encourage Aboriginal students to retain their own indigenous linguistic needs was not fully discussed by Purich. Instead, Aboriginal language programs became subordinate to other Native programming at the University of Saskatchewan, such as courses on Native Health and Native Literature. No major initiatives were taken with regards to Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota or Dene language programs during this period.

Baptiste (1994) completed a study titled Native Students at the University of Saskatchewan: A Study on Retention, which identified the needs of undergraduate Native students registered at the University of Saskatchewan. Based on the total number of respondents of Baptiste’s survey, 53.8 percent of Native students at the university spoke English as their first language. She also noted that over half of the Native students registered at the University of Saskatchewan did not speak their mother tongue. A recent study shows 80 percent of Aboriginal students registered at the University of Saskatchewan “indicated English was their first spoken language”
This recent study has demonstrated a declining rate of Aboriginal students attending the University of Saskatchewan who can speak an indigenous language. The number of Aboriginal students at the University of Saskatchewan who cannot speak an indigenous language at the University of Saskatchewan has increased, yet new initiatives on Aboriginal and Cree language programming at the institution are still not forthcoming.

Perley's (1993) study on retention of Aboriginal students from a university in New Brunswick found that students left their studies because of “insufficient interaction with others” and “disagreement with prevailing value patterns of the university collectivity” (p. 125). This study demonstrated that Aboriginal students need to feel that they are a part of the university environment. Since the personal identity of an Aboriginal student is fundamentally associated with the mother tongue, “and the loss of identity occurs when language is lost” (Ermine, 1998. p. 26), and when higher learning institutions continue to disregard Native language program development, the self-esteem and academic success of the Aboriginal students are affected and may be hindered. Aboriginal students at the university level need access to their own languages in order to build up their self-esteem, and to understand that “history and languages distinguish them as the original peoples of this land” (Gardner & Jimmie, 1989, p. 22). Barnhardt (1991) studied successful indigenous higher educational institutions throughout the world. In his evaluation of successful institutions, he concluded that the “unequivocal commitment to the community they serve tends to be the most critical factor in their success and ultimate survival as an institution” (Barnhardt, 1991, p. 224). With the rising Aboriginal population in
Saskatchewan, Barnhardt’s study is significant because it outlines the importance of the Aboriginal input in post-secondary programming.

The Assembly of First Nations conducted a national survey on the status of Aboriginal languages and presented their findings in a report titled *Towards Linguistic Justice for First Nations* (Assembly of First Nations, 1990). The *Sociolinguistic Survey of Indigenous Languages in Saskatchewan: On the Critical List* was carried out in 1991 by the Saskatchewan Indigenous Languages Committee. These two studies identified the health status of indigenous languages in the Aboriginal communities across Canada and in Saskatchewan. Both studies indicated the declining number of fluent speakers who speak their first language in these areas. Fredeen (1988) also completed a thesis on *A Foundation for Cree Immersion Education*. Based on her findings, she recommended the implementation of Cree immersion programs from kindergarten to grade eight in Saskatchewan. To reverse the trend of the loss of the mother tongue, such as the Cree language, Fredeen affirmed that immersion programs are desperately needed for Aboriginal students.

**Summary**

The academic language teaching approaches are varied. The First Nations traditional ways of teaching and learning languages are different where in the past, the learning environment of children occurred in the home within their communities. For generations, First Nation children have acquired their oral skills by carefully listening to stories from their parents, grandparents and community elders. The
characteristics of the Cree Language are indeed unique and may be enlightening to language educators. I present a historical perspective on the Cree language based on my findings. I share my beliefs that are perhaps different from the First Nation mainstream traditional teachings, and the participants in this study also have their own because “there is no one generic First Nation worldview” (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), 2000, p. iii). Language teachers and other educators need to be open, and they “need to understand that all First Nation people are not alike and do not have the same values or beliefs” (FSIN, p. iii). In this chapter, the sacredness and respect accorded to the mother tongue by Cree people were explained, and their historical significance was also described.

The federal authorities and the colonizers imposed legislative policies that supported European languages over indigenous languages and generated “linguistic genocide” (Ahenakew, Blair & Fredeen, 1994, p. 5) among the First Nations communities. The waves of epidemics created devastating effects on the indigenous language populations in Canada. Mission schools, industrial schools and residential schools placed restrictions on First Nation students from speaking and practicing their mother languages, and these schools contributed greatly to the loss of First Nation speakers in Canada. Government legislation attempted “to suppress and assimilate Aboriginal culture” (Assembly of First Nations, 1990, p. iv) through the Indian residential schools by discouraging Cree speakers from speaking their language. This legislation has caused a gradual decline of Cree speakers within the First Nations communities, and consequently, relatively few First Nations students who entered post-secondary institutions today are fluent in their mother tongue.
The impact of the past government policies on the suppression of indigenous languages in Canada provides opportunities for educational institutions to address and to reverse the trend on the deterioration of indigenous speakers. Leavitt’s study on the role of the universities on the death of indigenous languages in Canada recommended that, “we must confront language death— and openly acknowledge that language is a nonrenewable resource” (Leavitt, 1992, p. 8). In 1985, Leavitt made the following recommendations to the higher learning institutions at the annual conference of the Canadian Indian / Native Studies Association at Trent University in Peterborough, where he stated,

universities should help Native communities establish and maintain collections of Native-language materials -- annotated texts, interviews, recorded conversations, history, legends, stories, songs, prayers, grammars and dictionaries - in written, audio, and audio-visual formats.

universities should train Native people to use such collections for both research and personal enjoyment, and to use what they learn a community planning, education, cultural affairs, and the provision of services. universities should continue to train Native people as language experts and language teachers.

universities should undertake to study the transition from being Native-speaking to being bilingual (or from being bilingual to being English-speaking) in order to help communities identify and conserve what is crucial to Indian identity. This might be done by examining the strategies of people who are successful in both the Native and non-Native worlds.

universities should train Native and non-Native educators to identify the needs of Native communities and to work from the strengths of these communities, especially in regard to English-language learning and professional development (Leavitt, 1992, p. 8).
It is apparent that “the Aboriginal languages {in Canada} cannot be revitalized or supported in other countries (West Canadian Protocol Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, 2000, p. 2). With due respect to the protocol that First Nations are stewards and indigenous to this land in Canada bestowed by their Creator with their own unique history, along with their own set of spiritual beliefs and cultural values, my study pivots on the knowledge of my people, The Cree First Nations, nehiyawak, who are the keepers of nehiyawewin, The Cree language, and who are also the keepers of Cree knowledge. Therefore, it is the Cree people who need to be consulted with regards to the language instruction of their children. This study is attempting to do that by acquiring this knowledge from seasoned post-secondary language teachers, who have the experiences of living with First Nations communities.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Description of Research Design

My study employs a qualitative research design, which uses ethnographic techniques. The research data were collected from the Cree language teachers to “produce a cultural description” (Spradley, 1979, p. 25) of a learning environment for adult learners that is conducive to attaining fluency in Cree. It strives “to understand another way of life, from the native point of view” (Spradley, 1979, p. 3) of Cree language teachers who teach adult learners at post-secondary level. My study seeks “to uncover and understand... about which little is yet known” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19) namely appropriate teaching methods of Cree language with adult learners. As I engaged in my research endeavor, I found that research data on Cree language programs at post-secondary level was difficult to find. My inquiry also entails an inductive process in “describing” and “interpreting” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 20) data in the “form of words rather than numbers” (Miles, Huberman, 1984, p. 15) in “natural settings” and “real life experiences” (Miles, & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) shared by Cree language teachers. My research process involves “mediating two worlds through a third” (Agar, 1985, p. 19) voice and generating data that are vivid, rich and holistic. In this inquiry, I have collected data from narratives of Cree language teachers and from my personal reflective journal. This collection
of data from the narratives shared by teachers and from the personal journal was rich in description, highlighting the meanings encoded behind a Cree language program, and also behind the authentic native voices who were the Cree language teachers within a university cultural setting. "A qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry" (Patton, 1990, p. 196). My study allows this flexibility in the collected research data where input was derived from Cree language teachers at different age levels, who have a repertoire of teaching experiences from various institutions, and who have their individual ideologies derived from their own cultural background.

I feel that Cree language instructors are an important resource to provide this information. Cree language teachers do have firsthand experience and understand the difficulties experienced by adult learners attempting to learn the Cree language. I interviewed five Cree language instructors who have teaching experience at the adult level. I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. "Open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents" (Patton, 1990, p. 24). The interviews lasted from half an hour for one participant, to one and half hours for the other participants, and the interview data were recorded on audio tapes and fully transcribed by the researcher. After each interview process, I expanded the notes with observations that reflected the interviewees' emotional responses which consisted of "phrases, single words, and unconnected sentences" (Spradley, 1980, p. 68). The meta-language (body gesture, tone of voice, etc.) data
were useful in analyzing and interpreting the responses where focus on certain issues or information was required.

A personal journal was utilized by the investigator to record the “personal side of fieldwork” (Spradley, 1980, p. 71) which served as “the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 45) during the initial part of the research. A journal was used to record daily personal reflections, and it helped during the initial stages of the interpretative analysis in “exploring the researcher’s own biases” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 45), and in analyzing personal feelings from an objective stance. The journal provided the opportunity for the investigator to “become a major research instrument” (Spradley, 1980, pp. 71-72) in this inquiry because it recorded the researcher’s personal reflections concerning the participants, and on the research process itself which did not surface during the interviews.

This study allowed for similar patterns of concepts and major themes to emerge spontaneously. The data collected through the transcriptions were carefully examined for corresponding topics. The categories that were similar, such as the early experiences of Cree language teachers, and becoming a Cree teacher, and also the problems experienced by Cree teachers, as well as the teaching approaches to Cree language were all sequentially arranged in a binder, and condensed five times. All the participants in the study were given ample opportunities to edit their transcriptions. The copies of the transcriptions approved by the participants were assigned page numbers and placed in file folders. The key teaching concepts that worked for adult learners articulated in the interviews such as the use of total physical response were identified and color coded and descriptively analyzed. The
relationships among these concepts determined the patterns or major themes, and subsequently, it is these significant topics that shaped and described the interpretative analysis. I also developed concept maps that were color coded to show the relationships of the major themes, and also to help with the description of the final interpretative analysis.

A pilot interview was conducted with one Cree language instructor to test the interview questions and to make allowance for revisions. However, the data collected from the pilot interview were rich enough that the researcher decided to incorporate the pilot interview as part of the main interview process. The code of ethics recommended by the University of Saskatchewan along with the ethical guidelines recently established by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People were observed. The unique perspectives of First Nations' peoples discerned in cultures, histories and languages that may emerge from this study was respected and carefully considered. The protocol established in each First Nation community with regards to language and communications was also observed and followed. The Cree language teachers and the researcher have a similar cultural background with similar interests and desires. The participants in this study shared and described teaching experiences in order to identify relevant teaching strategies among adult learners. All the participants are Cree First Nations people who provided input to this inquiry, and who were given an opportunity to correct any misinformation, ethnocentrism or racist interpretations which I may have had. The participants are experienced post-secondary Cree language teachers who possess traditional cultural knowledge, and who experienced lifestyles in Cree communities, and who are academically.
trained in language teaching methodologies and linguistics. Equal voice was given to male and female perspectives and age groups, including elders and adults. The interviews were conducted during July and August of 1999, and the transcriptions began in August and were carried out during September and October, 1999. Because the participants began teaching university courses in the fall of 1999, I experienced some problems in attaining the transcript release forms. For example, the transcript release form for one transcription took four months to attain. I worked independently throughout the research process in consultation with my advisor.

Summary

In summary, this chapter explained the research methodology applied in this study. This inquiry also focused on Cree language programs at the university level in order to elucidate instructional approaches that are relevant to adult learners. The concepts on effective teaching strategies emerged from the analysis of the stories and personal experiences shared by teachers of Cree. The end result was that I, a researcher, became the interpreter, the medium that voiced the final interpretations of the study. The input provided by teachers through the interview process enabled me as a researcher to develop a better and a holistic understanding of the essence behind the Cree language programs currently offered by the post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan.
In order to gain a better understanding on First Nations learning and teaching contexts with regards to language pedagogy, the following chapter will broaden the description on the teaching experiences of current post-secondary language teachers.
CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVES SHARED BY POST-SECONDARY CREE LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Introduction

This chapter presents the information shared by post-secondary teachers in this study about their experiences in learning and teaching the Cree language. The most significant experiences expressed by the teachers that helped them to learn Cree during their early upbringing centered on the moral encouragement and support they received within the circle of family relationships, from their parents, siblings and from their grandparents. It was the use of language which helped to implant Cree traditional knowledge and wove their personal perceptions about their individualities or identities. The teachers revealed that learning Cree at an early age, gaining traditional knowledge, and also knowing about their own family histories helped to refine their personal identities. Their professional training in learning the unique structure of Cree helped the teachers to develop a deeper respect for and a personal pride in their mother tongue. It was also fully comprehending the significance of retaining and preserving the language that motivated and steered these educators into their profession as language instructors.

The background of the participants will be presented in this section, as well as the recollections narrated by these teachers which touch on their early experiences in
learning Cree. Some of the pertinent questions addressed in this section include how these teachers learned Cree within their home environment and the important determinants within their learning experiences at home which helped them to remember and retain the mother tongue. I also describe how fluency in the Cree language influenced their ways of learning and ways of thinking, and how traditional teachings at home affected their perception about their language. The data will pave the way for addressing the major research question of what pedagogy is currently used with adult learners at the post-secondary level. The problems experienced by the teachers and students in post-secondary institutions regarding language instruction follow this discussion. The concluding comments of this chapter highlight teaching strategies currently being utilized by post-secondary teachers for Aboriginal students.

**Background of the Cree Language Teachers**

Three of the Cree teachers who participated in this study speak the Plains Cree Y dialect fluently, and two of the teachers interviewed speak the Woodland Cree Th dialect. The five Cree teachers interviewed originated from First Nations reserves located in central, southern and northern Saskatchewan, and one teacher came from the central part of Alberta. These five language instructors are currently teaching or working at post-secondary educational institutions in Saskatchewan and central Alberta. These teachers have professional training in language teaching methodologies that have been supplemented with various courses in TESL training and linguistics. They also have a wide range of teaching experiences with adult learners.
The writing system used in Cree is different from English where capital letters are not utilized in the spelling. Capital letters are used in the title of certain books where respect and importance are accredited to Native elders, such as Ahenakew’s title of her book, “

KOHKOMINAWAK OTACIMOWINIWAWA: OUR GRANDMOTHERS’ LIVES AS TOLD IN THEIR OWN WORDS.”

Cree names are given to individuals in Cree society for various reasons, and the seasonal terms of Cree are often used. In Cree culture, “seasons are linked to native spirituality and the life cycle of man” and also “many nicknames given to children are related to weather conditions surrounding the day of their birth. A number of factors can contribute to the nicknaming of a child such as positive qualities, their appearances and / or behavioral attributes” (Hunter & Karpinski, 1994, p. 44). In this study, the Cree names given to each participant in the study mirror their professional attributes.

sikwan means it is spring in Cree. sikwan is a jubilant seasonal period of renewal and strolling on emerald carpets of mother earth. It is a time for the gentle rain to cleanse the earth, and a time to start over refreshed. The season of spring emits gentle breezes arousing mother nature to prepare for the budding season. It is a time for sikwan to relax and to discover new friends, and also to find new treasures of life. I feel that sikwan is diligently sowing seeds at this time to prepare for the fall semester in helping students to appreciate their mother tongue.

nipin means “leaf time” (Saskatoon Tribal Council, 1993, p. 286) or it is summer in Cree. It is time for the trees to clothe themselves in emerald jackets for protection from the sun and rain. nipin is a season of sharing and happiness. The
meticulous task of the budding process is over, and full blossoming has arrived. It is also a time for mother nature to share and to display its beauty. I feel that nipin has blossomed as a Cree teacher, and desires to share Cree ways of knowing and learning to help novice teachers in Cree language pedagogy.

kōna means snow in Cree. kōna is that gentle spirit representing purity and kindness. kōna cleanses and refreshes mother earth at every season. Treading through snow is sometimes soft or heavy, but still the snow provides a firm footing for one to move forward. I feel that kōna has acquired a foundation in Cree language to valiantly strive onward in rain or shine in accomplishing personal endeavors. I detected kindness and a caring spirit in kōna.

pipon means it is winter in Cree. I noted that pipon is a keeper of seasonal cycles and initiates the annual planning process to occur. pipon threads on solid ground in Cree language learning and teaching contexts, and labors diligently as a humanitarian in Cree language programming, and also pipon does not deviate from his mission and always gets things done. Like the harsh climate of winter, pipon is firm but is also very stable with regards to personal choices. Similar to the drastic weather changes on the prairies, pipon also has a gentle laughing spirit thriving on seeing the humorous side of life.

mispon means it is snowing in Cree. mispon has a cheerful, kindhearted spirit similar to cascading gentle snowflakes that permeate and elevate heavy hearts entering his path. Analogous to fresh snowflakes, mispon is gifted with innovative teaching techniques with adult learners in Cree language pedagogy. mispon is able to share cultural knowledge and life experiences with students openly in a humble

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manner, and I also observed that the soft snowflakes in mispon’s spirit melted the student barriers that existed in the classroom. The moccasin trail of mispon is also mingled with Cree humor and happiness and emancipation.

The five language teachers interviewed in this inquiry are all fluent speakers of the Cree language. The Cree language, with the largest number of speakers, is part of the Algonqoian language family in Canada, and according to Hutchinson, (1999) Cree is a player of the great national family of the Lenni Lenape. There are six First Nations cultural and linguistic groups in Saskatchewan: Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Assiniboine (Nakota), Métis (Michif) and the Dene. This study focuses on the three dialects of Cree that are spoken within the Saskatchewan boundaries. These dialects of Cree consist of first, the Plains Cree Y dialect which has the largest number of speakers and is utilized in central and southern Saskatchewan, and also in central Alberta; second, the Woodland Cree Th dialect which is used in the northern areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta; and third the Swampy Cree N dialect which is spoken at Cumberland House in Saskatchewan.

Early Experiences of Cree Teachers

The post-secondary teachers identified the context of close family relationships and traditional teachings as important in helping them to learn and retain Cree fluency during their early upbringing. They grew up within a monolingual environment of strong Cree speakers comprised of parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family and community members. This community
of fluent Cree speakers was conducive to learning and retaining Cree to a full extent as a toddler growing up within an Aboriginal community. One teacher, mispon, explicitly affirms this communal learning environment as helpful in retaining Cree by sharing, "I was raised with the language. I grew up speaking Cree. Language was a strong and definite influence in our lives and upbringing" (mispon, p. 2). Learning Cree also helped the teachers to develop a personal, holistic understanding of kinship and their family histories and societal relationships in general. pipon verified this learning experience by sharing, "my parents made a conscious effort to tell us about things like how we fit into our society, and about how we are related to everybody in the community, and also about our family histories" (pipon, p. 3). Equipped with this additional knowledge of First Nations people and about their experiences through the use of language, the teachers have been able to develop perspectives about their own entity, that this learning "puts things into perspective" (mispon, p. 5) for them. The teachers learned to develop a respect and an appreciation for the cultural components in the language, as well as their ways of learning and their ways of knowing and their "thought processes [that] were developed through the language" (sikwan, p. 4). For these teachers, the cultural knowledge attained through the language also helped to develop self-respect, to respect the language and to respect others who spoke it. Knowing the language helped to develop a strong self-identity in the teachers, which helped the understanding of where one came from and where one belongs. To know the language and to be able to communicate effectively in Cree helped to "instill pride" (mispon, p. 5) within the teachers that were interviewed. The teachers also shared their experiences that the language interlocked with mutual family
relationships. Within this environment of family interrelationships, “the community was closer, everybody was closer, everybody shared, everybody was always visiting” (kôna, p. 2).

The community laughed with one another, they learned to respect each other, and they also provided the moral support that was required for the growth of each individual. mispon, elated with high spirits of Cree humor, reminisced about a happy memory of learning and retaining pertinent Cree words as a toddler growing up at home. He shared a cherished memory by simply saying, “I remember being commended by my kohkom and my dad and my mom in my dad’s house for using the potty, the toilet in the slop pail. I remember being told that in Cree” (mispon, p. 3).

The teachers interviewed are in agreement that Cree cultural aspects were learned and seen in the language. Some aspects of Cree culture come with the language, and it is all part of the language teaching, but the specialized spiritual vocabulary is not theirs to teach (pipon, p. 11). The participants interviewed “know protocol;” they know what is “acceptable” and “what is unacceptable” (mispon, p. 23). Some of the teachers have personalized protocol and all the teachers interviewed adhere with great respect to the guidelines established by First Nations regarding the teachings of traditional knowledge. In fact, some teachers experience no conflict between Christian teachings and traditional teachings because they recognize that the virtues behind the teachings are the same. All the teachers maintain that it is not theirs to teach the spiritual components behind the Cree language, but that the task for teachers is to teach their students how to ask their own questions to community elders.
Three of the teachers interviewed attended day school on their home reserves for their first year of schooling. One teacher attended a provincial school, and two teachers attended residential schools from elementary to high school level. All five teachers interviewed succumbed to learning English when they started school. All the participants spoke only Cree at home before they began school, but were allowed to speak Cree within the school playgrounds. Four of the teachers began hearing and learning French at elementary level. None of the teachers interviewed took Cree language training at elementary level, and only one teacher interviewed began learning Cree grammar at high school level. An intriguing feature was that when Cree speakers in a school were the majority, the Cree students were not ashamed to speak their language, which entices the non-Aboriginal students to try hard to learn Cree.

These teachers were all fluent Cree speakers at an early age. Some of the teachers had lost some fluency while attending schools where Cree was not readily spoken, or had married a non-Native person where Cree was not spoken at home, but these teachers had also managed to retain and then regain most of their Cree fluency in their training and teaching experiences. These teachers interviewed are all highly qualified, with professional training in teaching methodology and in linguistics. They also have the knowledge and the experience in the cultural aspects that embody the Cree language. Some of the teachers trained on the job as teaching assistants while still in university training, and these teachers are the pioneers in Cree language curriculum development today. They have devoted their lives to the retention and revitalization of Cree language and are still very active doing the work that they love.
Most of the Cree teachers interviewed came to university as adult learners under special Aboriginal programs such as the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the University of Saskatchewan. These teachers acquired professional degrees and some have attained Master’s degrees. They also have specialized training in linguistics, as well as additional training in the methodology of teaching a second language (TESL courses). Some of the teachers have developed and published Cree texts used at the university level. All the teachers interviewed have developed, taught and pioneered new courses for the university such as, Teaching Methodologies of Indian Languages and Oral Traditions of Cree. Most of the teachers interviewed had no preconceptions about teaching Cree, but had acquired the desire to share their experiences and knowledge when they began learning Cree grammar and the historical perspective of Cree people at university level. Once they discovered that Cree was indeed “a beautiful language” (sikwan, p. 14) with a sophisticated grammatical structure and that it easily fell into place for them to learn it because of their own fluency and background, these teachers were captivated to learn more about the language, and they in turn wanted to teach it to the young generation. “I enjoyed and loved learning Cree. Language is foremost, it’s taken my whole life over” and “namôya aiyiwak nitipêyimison” (I am no longer my own boss) (mispon, p. 4-5). “I love doing what I am doing right now” (in working with adult learners) (mispon, p. 9). “I am nêhiyaw (a Cree person /a precise Cree speaker) first and foremost. I was raised nêhiyaw. I hauled water, chopped wood, used a slop pail where I remember hearing my first Cree words of being commended by my kohkom, my dad and mom. Who I am is where I come from” (mispon, p. 12).
Problems Experienced by Post-secondary Teachers

In the past, the shortage of Aboriginal language teacher graduates within post-secondary institutions created training-on-the-job situations where young teachers were compelled to go into a classroom situation prior to completing their professional training. In spite of experiencing this favorable employment opportunity as a novice teacher, pipon, who was steered into this dilemma, admitted that “the best way is still to go to school and learn how to do these things properly and then go into the classroom” (pipon, p. 7). This statement demonstrates that current Cree language teachers who are seasoned in teaching methodologies and concerned with pragmatics still favor professional training at university level for upcoming novice teachers majoring in language instruction. mispon openly stated that “there are many options available to me in administration or math” (p. 4). From this statement, it is evident that Aboriginal professional teachers today are gifted with talents, abilities and opportunities to compete in the academic world. In spite of alternative job prospects, all five language teachers interviewed chose linguistics because they loved their language, they are devoted to their work in the language, and each teacher has chosen to pursue a personal commitment in assisting to re-instill the language among the young generation of Cree people today. This expression of good will was strongly articulated by mispon who claims, “If these kids do not speak Cree, if our families or communities do not speak Cree, it is not their fault, it is our fault” (mispon, p. 21). The teachers in the study also feel very gratified when adult learners are able to accomplish the goals and objectives established within each course. mispon was very pleased when students on their own were able to identify
the grammatical concepts from selected passages in Ká-Nípitèhtèw's (man's name meaning Walks-Abreast) book (Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1998, p. 250). He stated that "students are able to identify having gone through grammatical forms concisely, timely and repetitively, they are able to identify those concepts in their own writing as well as in writing that I provide for them...It is really a reward for me because I have never had students do that before" (mispon, p. 19).

Some of the problems highlighted by the participants include the lack of teachers equipped with training in linguistics and who have the actual experience of teaching at university level. One teacher conveyed a message that the university programs currently available for Cree teachers are deficient, and there is room for more specialized Aboriginal language training programs. The teachers also shared that the university setting has rules and regulations concerning evaluation that hinder the teachers in their work. The "calendar itself sort of puts restrictions on the teachers," and "it is very difficult to teach for fluency" (sikwan, p. 11). The university "restrictions make it difficult to teach the language as a spoken language. It is too academic, so we teach it in different styles" (sikwan, p. 11). Cree teachers are obligated to incorporate various instructional methodologies to teach the components of the Cree language that entail the historical and cultural perspective, work on developing a positive attitude among students, develop and teach their syllabus and try to introduce the grammatical structure of the language all at the same time. In spite of the fact that Cree is an oral based language, it is still mandatory to cover the reading and writing of Cree at university level.
The university at the University of Regina established guidelines where 75% on written content covered in the course can be tested by an independent examiner in order to comply with student requests for reassessment on the work completed within a course. pipon explains that for evaluation purposes the "university administrators would like to see a situation where the students can be tested independent of the teacher" (pipon, p. 16).

The limitation on time was another problem shared explicitly by the teachers. "We are limited with time" (pipon, p. 12). "You don't have time to do those things (practical things) at university in an hour and a half, or three hours a week" (sikwan, p. 25). pipon also commented that certain teaching methodologies used at university do not meet the needs of Aboriginal students to become fluent speakers that "utilizing grammar and translation approach actually does not really guarantee them (students) to understand the language" (pipon, p. 19).

Another concern revealed by teachers in this study is the acknowledgment that attaining a teaching degree at university supplemented with a few TESL courses is still not sufficient to teach an Aboriginal language in order to produce fluent Cree speakers. Higher learning institutions need to place more emphasis on "methodology and also look at different kinds of programming" (kôna, p. 10) and "the whole language approach of language instruction itself needs to be overhauled" (mispon, p. 14) in order to produce more graduates specializing in language instruction who will become effective teachers. pipon, trained in linguistics, explained that "there are language universals and there's two of them that we can cover, the verbs and nouns, those two things exist in the languages in the world, and how the verbs go into tenses
is different in other languages” (pipon, p. 10). He is saying that language-teaching graduates benefit from professional training in linguistics. As a result of a background in linguistics, pipon is able to utilize different writing systems of Cree literature available on the market and to modify them in accordance with what is being used in the language classroom (pipon, p. 7). Training in linguistics also helped pipon to develop a wider perspective about other languages in the world. pipon is able to compare Cree with other languages and share these things with the students in the classroom. To demonstrate this perspective, pipon explains about the structure of Cree language:

We have all of them (future tenses and past tenses in Cree). We have two future tenses. Basically one intentional which is one that we use most. But the idea of the future definite tense, ‘I will go to the store’ as a future definite tense. ‘Nikā-itōhtān atāwēkamikohk’ we can say that, but a natural Cree speaker won’t leave it at that. They will end saying, ‘I will go to the store maybe.’ That’s a way with a will in there, ‘nikā-itōhtān atāwēkamikohk māskōc.’ And the idea behind that is our idea of life being given now and if you enjoy it now. We are not sure. We are not guaranteed our next moments, we are not guaranteed the next day. So it is reflected right in the language. (pipon, p. 10)

The teachers are in agreement that collaborative work is needed between the universities which offer Cree language programs, that there is not enough reinforcement for students to become actually functional with their mother tongue. Aboriginal students are “bombarded with other course work” (sikwan, p. 7) and have difficulty retaining the Cree concepts that they learn at the university. Some of the comments expressed by the participants who teach Cree at post-secondary level include, “they [students] don’t have anywhere to go to practice their Cree...We have
the lab but that’s not enough... The university setting is not the place to teach fluency... It is very difficult [and] one does not have a classroom to themselves” (sikwan, p. 13).

The five participants also agree that traditional knowledge and teachings are not theirs to teach within a classroom setting at university. Some of the strong statements regarding Cree cultural aspects that emerged from this study include:

I am not qualified to teach that. I’m not qualified and it is also, e-metawakataman (I am showing disrespect). That’s an elder’s job. I won’t touch it in my classroom. I won’t even bring sweetgrass in to start a class that way. The best we can hope for is give our students the fundamentals of learning to speak the language of asking questions, and they should go to their sweatlodges and they could go ahead and ask the questions (pipon, p. 11).

mison suggests, “to seek elders for good guidance, but maintain and respect an understanding of protocol” (p. 23) that was established by First Nations.

Standardization of a Cree language syllabus, on the content, on the teaching methodologies and on the evaluation process are all concerns articulated by the Cree teachers in the teaching field today. “There isn’t really a curriculum to follow at university” was disclosed by kona (p. 9). Other experiences shared by the teachers reflected the inconsistency of the writing system in Cree material currently being utilized at university level. Engaged in the planning stage of a university course, one teacher found “that there are glitches and errors” in some of the material available for Cree teachers who teach at university. mison agreed that the material selected for this particular course was “excellent quality” but that in other parts of the same text it explained “concepts very vaguely”. Sometimes, this problem with inconsistencies in
the writing system of Cree texts and other resources compels teachers to resort to a
wide variety of textbooks in order for students to fully comprehend the difficult
concepts being covered in a classroom. "We need standardization and we try to
make sure that we have a standard. This is an idea that we have been trying to
reinforce. People who are teaching are not all being consistent with their spelling"
(pipon, p. 11) was another comment expressed by pipon. mispon expressed
frustration due to these inconsistencies and stated, "when they (students) come into
the university, we do not need to teach grade six, and let's improve the standard of
quality of language instruction utilizing approaches for different contexts geared for
adult learners. Our language approach of our language instruction itself needs to be
overhauled". Expressing disappointment over the incongruity of some Cree courses
at post-secondary level, mispon shared this experience: "I am doing an intermediate
level class and the majority of students do not know this stuff. I find myself that I
have to go back to stuff that should have been carried from the introductory level
class. What is needed is a concerted effort by all who teach, to teach normally and to
teach the same way, a standard way of teaching the language and what to cover, that
is what is needed".

Other problems that post-secondary Cree teachers experienced which
emerged in the study include the loss of their own fluency during a period in their life
when the chance to utilize their language was not there, because they had no one to
speak to at home. This loss occurred because some of the teachers interviewed had
married non-Cree speakers, so English became the dominant language within their
home environment. These teachers disclosed the fact that their Cree fluency was
strained during this period, but that once they understood the importance of their language, they worked diligently to revive it. A number of the teachers interviewed agreed that Cree fluency is indeed mandatory to survive at post-secondary level due to the diversity and influx of Aboriginal students sitting in the classrooms. mispon was amazed to find sitting in his classroom were students where each one was “fluent from (either of the) three different dialects of Cree: Plains Cree Y dialect, Swampy N dialect and Woodlands Th dialect” (mispon, p. 7). The teachers also admitted that the economic benefits for Cree teachers today are few and far between. mispon understood his position as a Cree instructor and stated clearly, “there are better economic benefits sitting behind a desk today than there is in teaching”. Lack of support for language teachers was another dilemma that was disclosed in the interviews by the educators of Cree language. “Many times we see ourselves working in isolation. It only hinders and limits all of us” (mispon, p. 21). Some of the teachers also said that establishing a professional rapport with the students is sometimes not that easy. mispon confessed that “the majority of the time, I am way younger than my students” (mispon, p. 12).

Another delightful narrative followed this disclosure on age where mispon inherited a typical kohkom as a student in a Cree class. This kohkom was an “academic seventy-two year old who (had) lived a full rounded life, (and who was) active in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal settings” (p. 12). This particular teacher also disclosed the initial thoughts that were experienced during that time and confessed, “I was so intimidated by this woman, wow! you are seventy-two years old and I am twenty some years old, what am I doing teaching you?” (p. 13). Not only
did this teacher feel threatened but he had to succumb humbly to accept corrections and teachings from this kohkom in the classroom. The teacher explains, “ëkwa (and) she taught me as well while I was teaching. She taught me nâmôya êkosişânîma ë-itwêhk, (that is not how it is said) êkosîsôma, (this is the way)...She was always helpful. She was a typical kohkom in a classroom or any setting. She had such a strong eager motivation, a personal motivation to learn and complete what she had set herself up to do” (p. 13). The end result of this story is that once kohkom understood the syllabus, she changed and assumed a supportive role by actually becoming a helper to the teacher. This teacher shares this unique little story,

I just explained to her what I was teaching...What I am going to be teaching, how I am going to be teaching it and what time period we have to learn this. Once that was made clear to her, she came on side with me.... She brought me bannock every day that I loved. (mispon, p. 13)

The adult learners are “inquisitive [and the] worse ones that you can teach are teachers themselves who know about learning styles [and] they put you through your paces” (sikwan, p. 10). mispon shared this comment, “I have to utilize a lot of visual because I find that I know who I am communicating with. You looked at the learning styles of students, you are able to assess and evaluate whether or not knowledge is comprehended or not...through eye contact and by scanning the room”. It is apparent that language teachers may experience problems if they are not aware of the learning styles or ways of learning with regards to Aboriginal students at university level. The importance of maintaining professional attributes was also mentioned by the teachers and may become problematic for teacher novices if they disregard these qualities. These educators shared that teaching adults requires patience, cheerfulness,
creativeness and flexibility. Some of the more sincere comments that emerged from the teachers include,

you have to be on your toes... be ready with a new way of explaining something (sikwan, p. 17)... students get very bored... be ready to handle ‘balky’ or ‘argumentative’ (p. 18) students...It takes a certain kind of person and a personality to the do the TPR to the full extent... (p. 21)...Allow others to correct you...Don’t be afraid to take risks. Don’t be afraid to laugh at yourself. (mispon, p. 13)

Problems for Students

In their narratives, the participants acknowledged that Aboriginal post-secondary students experience numerous problems in learning the Cree language. mispon asserted that “adult learners in a university setting is totally foreign to most of them [that] the intimidation to reading and writing [of Cree language], [and] the literary perspective of Cree is a barrier to overcome. They are really reluctant when they first initially start writing and reading it... probably because moving language from an oral based culture to a literally based perspective now...It is only now we are actually expecting our adult learners to read and write Cree... I think the most difficult task for an Aboriginal learner is to read and write Cree” (mispon, pp. 13-14). The setting, the literary Cree perspective and the linguistic terminology are totally foreign to Aboriginal students such as macrons, animate verbs and inanimate verbs. One teacher simply said, “I find many of my students are scolded” in Cree within their home situations and that they do not get a chance to practice what they learn at school. Based on this revelation, it is evident that teachers need to focus more on encouraging and strengthening self-esteem among adult students in
their classrooms. mispon narrated a detailed analysis concerning the cognitive learning behaviors of Aboriginal adult students in the classroom by stating,

an adult is so bombarded with the day’s activities, already the knowledge that they bring and that when more knowledge is added on a daily basis it is stress to them if not comprehended. It becomes and acts like stress yet their analytical theoretical framework of their mind adds to that stress because of the fact that they are able to analyze it and see it from different perspectives from different disciplines that they are studying at university... they are drawing on their own personal experiences. They acknowledge what they have already to comprehend what is being taught to them, in order to utilize it in a natural setting. So you have to diversify your teaching strategies, your approaches, your communication style with the adult learners. I find that when I am teaching, and I have students that I know do not grasp concept, I am on the board drawing pictures making relations. I am constantly filling up my blackboard, and I walk home some days full of chalk all over me. (mispon, p. 10)

This teacher is saying that Aboriginal adult learners draw on their background knowledge and personal experiences to analyze and to learn new concepts, and that teachers must be willing and ready to diversify their instructional approaches in order to meet the learning styles of these students. pipon explained that,

Sometimes adult learners have a hard time too. I find my experience that most of the adult learners who come to SIFC have never gone to high school. They’re just coming from experiential programs, and they have never gone to high school, and some of them don’t know what a verb is. Some of them don’t know what a noun is. You forget that they never got taught that, they just never got that far in school. So these are some of the things that we have to teach them (p. 8).

Based on this story by an experienced teacher, it is also evident that Aboriginal language teachers are compelled to teach some English grammar. sikwan commented that certain adult students “don’t have that basic knowledge” and that
some are unable to “tell the difference between their, there and they’re”. An interesting remark made by mispon is that students get “drawn into and share the same values and experiences of the teacher” (p. 12). What is important is the cultural background and experiences of the teacher in order to share that knowledge with students who either had similar experiences, or to transfer that knowledge to students who did not have those experiences during their upbringing. pipon commented that Aboriginal students arrive into the classroom with “preconceived notions of how Cree is spoken in their community” and that these “preconceived problems will get into their way of learning” (pipon, p. 8). He admitted experiencing similar preconceptions upon arrival at a university Cree class confessing that “being a fluent speaker, I never paid attention to grammar” (pipon, p. 6).

Instilling a positive attitude toward learning their mother tongue is another problem that teachers have to deal with in their classrooms. pipon commented that “attitude is so important with average students and with Cree speakers.” Students “have to change their attitude to Cree and to each other. They have to learn to respect the language and respect themselves in the process, and once they do that, they are fine” (pipon, p. 9).

Some other difficulties that non-Cree speakers experience in learning Cree pertain to the different sound system of Cree such as “the aspirations of ‘h’ s” (mispon, p. 14). “There are certain sounds in Cree that are not used in English, for example, ‘c’. The writing system is different too; we have no, ‘sh,’ ‘ch’ blends” (kôna, p. 8) and seemingly Aboriginal students “expect Cree to have the same rules and sound as the English language. They compare it to English but it is totally
different from English or French” (kôna, p. 8). kôna attempted to clarify this problem further and shared the following comments,

I think a lot of them have problems with the pronunciation. It is almost as if they hear something else. The one sound that they have a lot of problems with is that ‘ci,’ ‘ci’. There is no equivalent Cree sound in English. So you are always trying to find that equivalent sound, and they just cannot seem to grasp it, and all of them have a hard time with that. So, I think a lot of the difficulties are in the pronunciation. I have come to this conclusion, and I don’t know whether I’m right, but if you are not fluent then, I don’t know if you ever can ever get that precise Cree pronunciation. It may take a long time. (kona, p. 19)

Mispon summarized what is needed at university level in Aboriginal language programming by stating,

collaborative work throughout the institutions across western Canada, and sound language educators that do have linguistic training and do have teaching pedagogues behind them. That together with materials, you are going to have ongoing development and you are going to have shared collaborative energies that work institutionally across western Canada. (p. 21)

Sikwan found that university students with learning disabilities are easily detected in the Cree classes. This teacher explains that such a student “will just stare at you really blank, really blank. They will listen to you intently and yet when they try to say the word, they won’t say it properly, and they also have a difficult time with their writing. They have to memorize. They will close their eyes and memorize how it is spelled” (p. 15). Sikwan explained that the teaching styles and expectations concerning assignments need to be altered to accommodate students with learning disabilities. Some of the teaching approaches that she utilized for students with learning disabilities included one-to-one conferences for support or assistance, the
use of visual materials, and modifying or simplifying assignments, and also providing
more time to complete the oral fluency tests.

Based on the narratives expressed by the Cree teachers, collaborative work
among educational institutions, among administrators and teachers and the
Aboriginal community is needed in order to instill functional skills in the Cree
language among the adult learners today at university level. If the graduates that
emerge from the universities become fluent Cree speakers and are trained
appropriately in teaching methodologies to become language specialists, the First
Nations' vision of reviving Cree language among the Aboriginal communities may
become a reality.

Teaching Approaches of Post-secondary Cree Language Teachers

A major focus of this study is to describe teaching approaches currently
utilized by Cree language teachers who teach post-secondary adult learners. Based
on the experiences shared by Cree teachers in their narratives, this part of the
discussion will highlight the teaching strategies that were successful with Aboriginal
adult students, and also describe what the teachers say is needed with regards to Cree
language programming at the post-secondary level.

The teaching approaches conducive to Cree pedagogy applied by the
participants in their classrooms were multidimensional in that experiential pragmatic
learning, inter cultural understanding, initiation and the implementation of successful
Cree programs, and strategic competencies were incorporated into their Cree courses.
Research shows that English is the first spoken language for 81% of the Aboriginal
students registered at the University of Saskatchewan, so only approximately 20% of Aboriginal students are fluent in their mother tongue. (Biro, Ravichander, & Hockley, 1998, p. 16) Because Cree is a second language for the majority of Aboriginal students at the U of S, references to the teaching methods of English as a second language are applied in this study. The teaching methods and programs recognized within the academic field of teaching English as a second language (TESL) that were employed by the Cree teachers included the grammar translation method, the direct/oral/natural approach, the audio-lingual method, the natural approach, whole language approach, communicative teaching, narrative and research-based community approach, Cree adult immersion, and the supervision of language labs. The five teachers interviewed reported that combinations of teaching approaches were utilized in their classrooms in fulfilling the goals and objectives that they established in their syllabus. One teacher was explicit that a mixture of methodologies in a Cree language classroom is necessary and stated,

I have taught Cree in several contexts. First of all introductory Cree is primarily what I focus on. When I teach, I utilize a variety of methodologies. First and foremost is the linguistic component of language, and you cannot step away from that. With that comes the grammar translation. With that approach in itself, you cannot separate that from any academic institution. An approach that really instills comprehension among students I find is the total physical response utilizing the natural approach. (mispon, p. 6)

The pedagogy used by these participants is multidisciplinary, where they are not only Cree language teachers, but also interpreters of Cree traditions, as well as translators of Cree language. These teachers have firsthand experience living in a First Nation community, and they can share these experiences with students who
were raised in an urban setting. All the teachers interviewed are seasoned post-secondary language teachers with professional training as language teacher specialists. They are completely bilingual, using Cree and English simultaneously, and some also have a good understanding of the French language. These language instructors are also endowed with a rich intercultural understanding, having experienced a lifestyle within an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal context. As they told their stories, these teachers also displayed unique personalities and aesthetic skills that they have used in their classrooms. They have to be ready to ignite or suppress the humor that is prevalent in the language and may suddenly emerge within a classroom situation. They are artists in drama because they have to model the body language in the TPR activities, as well as writing the actual scripts concerning drama activities. They are also not afraid to stretch their vocal chords to teach Cree songs that students enjoy. At times, the teachers have to develop their own curricula from scratch and actually pilot these new courses. They write creative stories that are unique and full of humor, and they are also excellent story tellers. As well, some of the teachers are good artists, where they do their own drawings or illustrations to reinforce concepts in their classrooms. These teachers claim professional rapport and aesthetic skills that are essential today for upcoming language teachers, in order to instill and maintain the motivation that is required in a Cree classroom.

The University of Saskatchewan (U of S) offers two full accredited Cree courses available in the College of Arts & Sciences. Introductory Cree 101.6 and Intermediate Cree 120.6 are offered through the Department of Native Studies. The Department of Indian Languages, Literature and Linguistics at The Saskatchewan
Indian Federated College (SIFC), affiliated with the University of Regina, offers a wide variety of accredited courses on indigenous languages where students are able to attain majors in specialized training such as Cree language, Saulteaux language or linguistics. All first year students who register for Cree at the U. of S. have no option but to register in Introductory Cree 101.6, whereas there are two introductory courses available for first year students at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, University of Regina. The Introductory Cree 100.3 is designed for non-fluent Cree speakers and Cree 102.3 is geared for fluent speakers at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, University of Regina. All first year Aboriginal students who register in the Cree courses at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College are tested for fluency, and depending on the results of their oral test, these students are assigned to an appropriate course. The instructors who teach at the university level design Cree courses according to the knowledge and oral skills of the students, whether they are all fluent or non-fluent speakers. These Cree language instructors also shared that they have to be versatile in their teaching strategies in order to assess the context of what is needed in each course that they teach. Mispon was specific with regards to competence in using relevant teaching styles and recounted his experience:

Various methods incorporate various different levels in which a course is taught. I have taught a course where there was no need for a vocabulary development because I taught a streamlined fluent Cree class, an introductory Cree class where nothing but the grammar was taught. But the context of the students, them being fluent speakers lead to that whole TPR, that whole audio lingual approach, that whole direct method approach because they became part of the teaching. It put them in context situations, scenarios, and they shared and
developed their vocabulary as groups. Their knowledge of writing and reading came after the fact because they were functionally fluent. That was a real interesting class. (p. 7)

Some of the teachers acquired unique teaching experiences with regard to the oral traditions of Cree. What made this university course successful was the teachers’ knowledge of the variety of literature that was available for this course. Other factors that enhanced the development of this course stemmed from the teachers’ knowledge concerning First Nations’ community research protocol.

mispon told this story,

I used situations where students themselves identify different types of discourse and then were challenged to go out and find their contemporary or traditional family stories of their situations, having them transcribed and analyzed.... That was a research based approach. (p. 7)

In order for this research-based course to be successful and effective, it is evident that this Cree language teacher was able to attain moral support, the flexibility and the freedom to break away from the norms established within that particular university context.

All the language teachers interviewed clearly stated that total physical response (TPR) through the natural approach was the most effective teaching method that they utilized throughout their teaching experiences with adults. This teaching method focuses on listening skills where students respond in body language and actions to commands given by the teacher. Students learn more Cree vocabulary as the series of commands is increased in the activity. Most of the teachers apply TPR activities at the beginning of each class to reinforce the terminology covered in a
previous class. pipon gave a concise description why TPR is effective in a classroom:

The teaching approach I like best is the natural approach which tries to capture the process of language acquisition in the home, where a kid takes years about three or four years to begin to talk. You have to try to capture that same space of time in a classroom in much less time than that. And you do things like input where they hear the language all the time, but it’s very selective input where you gear your lessons to such a format where the only thing that you do is the thing that you want them to learn. You go into teacher talk, it goes into very simplified Cree sentences, and it decides when the student starts to understand the language. So in this natural approach we try to put in a lot of input, we use a lot of total physical response where students are expected to understand what is being said by the actions of the instructor, and being encouraged to do the actions along with the instructor. (pipon, pp. 12-13)

Another Cree language teacher explained why TPR was productive and why it was appropriate to use with Aboriginal adult learners within a higher learning academic institution. mispon eloquently explains:

I find that TPR is most effective in all variety of contexts...most effective in Aboriginal First Nations context... They [Students] become part of the teaching process. They use their histories, their backgrounds and identify that with context of language sentences, phrases, words, etc. But then you are able to draw on just general past First Nations experience, commonalties that we all have with each other from reserve to reserve. They take ownership by identifying it to an action based stimulus or context. They are able to develop their own context of TPR situations, totally motivated. (p. 6)

The grammar translation method was also used by the teachers interviewed. This traditional teaching approach entails rigidly teaching the grammatical structure
of a second language, reading comprehension, meticulous writing, translation exercises, along with memorization of rules and vocabulary lists. But clearly communicative teaching is not emphasized in this method. A Language Master learning center was developed by kona in order to reinforce the grammatical concepts covered in the Cree course. The students were divided into small groups and assigned work corners to do specific tasks in the classroom. Each working station in the classroom is set up with a specific activity such as a games station where students are engaged in various game activities such as snake and ladder games, cross word puzzles or word search games. This particular teacher utilized sound bingo activities to reinforce the phonology of Cree, and vocabulary bingo games were used to reinforce the content covered in the course. A story corner was also set up by this teacher where students listened to and followed Cree stories narrated from cassette tapes. The teacher’s role was to facilitate, guide and supervise all these activities within the language master center. This teacher mentioned that the students really enjoyed these hands-on activities, and that it gave students a chance to share in collaborative work. Finally, it provided students some breathing space from a rigorous study of learning Cree grammar.

mispon suggested that teachers need to “draw away from the grammar translation approach to include comprehension of traditional protocol related to Cree knowledge that we [Cree teachers] can use. But you cannot take away the grammar translation approach of Cree because Cree is a verb based language” (mispon, p. 19). For example, kona explains, “the Cree noun, ‘tehtapiwin’ (chair), comes from the verb ‘api’ (sit), and ‘mici’ (eat) and ‘micasowinahtik’ (table) and ‘micasowikamik’
(restaurant) are all associated, and all come from the verb” (kona, p. 11). pipon explained that when teachers are using the grammar translation approach, “the old standby of language teaching...it does not really guarantee them to understand the language, whereas the natural approach, the TPR, the picture files, that is going toward understanding the language, whereas people can do grammar translation approaches and do fine on an exam or quiz” (pipon, p. 19). pipon continued to disclose why the structural linguistic method is currently used by language teachers. The grammar translation approach fulfills the requirement in acquiring the language credential in certain academies. pipon related the following narrative:

There’s two streams of thinking, I think. I believe for a PhD, and you can use judgment in Canada and in North America anywhere, you are required to have a working vocabulary, a reading knowledge of that language other than English. So theoretically you can enter your PhD and have a working knowledge of French, let’s say. You can read French, you can see the grammar translation approaches of things you have been working with. You can read it and understand what you are reading and get away with that. Now if you go out try to speak it, you can’t do it. (pipon, p. 19)

For the students who are in the Introductory Cree courses, some of the teachers placed more emphasis on students learning the reading and writing of Cree during the latter part of the semester where, “they are reading everyday” (kōna, p. 13) from different passages of text carefully selected by the teacher. Spelling dictations are used to complement many writing activities, and one teacher combined dictation with TPR activities, where students write down the action word that was demonstrated by the teacher. Songs are an enjoyable activity that reinforce the grammatical patterns for adult learners. kona experienced success with song
activities in her classroom. She shared, “I find that adults do not feel silly if you
teach them a children’s song... when you teach them a song, they remember it [the
Cree vocabulary] longer” (kôna, p. 8). nipin used songs to introduce the daily
weather terms to the students. She simply sang out the question, “tânisi è-isi-kisikâk
anohc” (what is the weather like today) (nipin, p. 11), and the students were able to
reply using a song. It is evident that music is an important element in Cree language
instruction among post-secondary adult learners. Adult learners simply “love
singing” (kôna, p. 17) and they take great pleasure in singing Cree songs. At the
same time, the music helps to reinforce the Cree vocabulary that is covered in class,
and it also strengthens the reading and writing of Cree.

Language laboratories are compulsory for students at SIFC, whereas the
facilities are unavailable for Aboriginal students at the U of S. Students at SIFC are
required to spend two hours a week in the labs where the grammatical structure of
Cree is reinforced and practiced. mispon announced that language labs are good and
complement any Cree program in helping students achieve Cree fluency. mispon
deliberately assumed the extra work of tutoring language labs and explained:

I’m always there to do it because in that setting, where students
are not controlled and directed by my instruction, I am able to
take and assess the program where I identify whether they
comprehend what is going on. I am constantly doing
evaluations without them knowing it. So I prefer to do my own
language labs...it is really time consuming but it is for a short
period of time. I am guaranteed that I know my students’
learning. (mispon, p. 18)

The Direct Method / Oral or Natural Method of language teaching focuses on
good pronunciation and on speaking skills using the target language within a realistic
setting, and it steers away from learning the formal rules of grammar. This approach worked well for one of the teachers interviewed who acquired all fluent Cree speakers in his class. The students actually participated in their learning through collaborative work where they developed their own vocabulary targeted for that level, and where they practiced their oral skills with each other in drama related activities. The reading and writing of Cree emerged spontaneously in line with the progression of the course. mispon found that the direct teaching approach worked well for Aboriginal students who were fluent in Cree and explained his experience,

They, [students] became part of the teaching. It put them in context situations, scenarios, and they shared and developed their vocabulary as groups. Their knowledge of writing and reading came after the fact because they were functionally fluent (mispon, p. 7).

The aim of the audio-lingual method / aural-oral method or the communicative teaching approach is to produce fluent speakers by listening, practicing, repeating and memorizing conversational dialogues. The grammatical rules of the language being studied are avoided in this approach. Some of the participants in the study utilized some components of the audio-lingual language teaching approach in their Cree classes by using “dialogues,” “drills” and oral practice, and “some conversational Cree” (kôna, p. 8). A profusion of auditory teaching techniques where students are constantly hearing the language being spoken and where opportunities for student interaction are provided to promote oral communication were some of the crucial elements in Cree language pedagogy that were repeatedly articulated by the participants in the study. Most of the language
educators also suggested that a mixture of Cree fluent speakers and non-fluent speakers in the classroom is sometimes beneficial to the instructor. Several of the teachers stated that “an ideal classroom to have is some students who have the language and some who do not...the fluent people would help the non-fluent with the oral...the non-fluent people would help the oral people with the written...so that just worked out perfect” (kôna, p. 28). Some of the teachers used narratives to provide students with oral practice in the literacy of “collection of student stories written by Dr. Freda Ahenakew” (mispon, p. 22). sikwan explains that narratives are sometimes used to evaluate the literacy of students in the orthography that they have learned. She explains that collections of picture files were useful resources to get students into groups or pairs where they have the opportunity to talk about the pictures. In this situation the role of the teacher involves both facilitating and being a resource person to help out with the pronunciation.

kôna disclosed that “students are very attentive when I tell them stories” (p. 17). The sharing of narratives within a classroom definitely sharpens the listening skills and adds to the comprehension among adult learners. Most of the teachers interviewed incorporate conversational Cree into their syllabus. Teacher talk is initiated in large-group and small-group class discussion, and question and answer activities. Simple dialogues are used and repeated daily, guest speakers are invited where they initiate open discussions in Cree, or they engage in composing Cree songs with the students. Some instructors draw on an environment that is conducive to learning the language, such as nature walks and other outdoor activities, and students are given opportunities to tell what they see outside the classroom window.
Simulation games are developed cooperatively by the teacher and students within the classroom such as a reserve setting, “where students have to give directions in Cree how to get to a particular place” (sikwan, p. 19). The most successful communicative methods of teaching Cree entail the full language immersion programs. SIFC is the only post-secondary institution that offers immersion programs every summer at Stanley Mission where nothing but Cree is spoken. Some teachers in the study are experienced both with the teaching and administration of Cree immersion programs. Mispon described the planning stages of an immersion program:

I had to go there and use nothing but Cree, and first and foremost in Cree, no English whatsoever. So I find that approach taught me a lot. It was also the most challenging approach to take because of the fact that: one, you have no supplementary materials; two, you have to complement the content that is linguistically grammatically taught to them; three, you have to develop scenarios and contexts where language can be learned. I was working night and day at that time but using Cree effectively, wow! Incorporating traditional approaches, let’s say the talking circle for example. Sitting around and sharing our experiences or writing about them, just talking about them, using our body actions, our facial gestures, how you are feeling today, ‘tânisi è-itamahcihoyan’ (how are you feeling?) That is hands-on, and I can’t really say whether that can be linked to one approach or a variety of approaches because you become a reflective teacher. You have to be able to assess whether or not what I have just done directly affects a student’s learning, or what I have done does not affect a student’s learning. So you are constantly on the go reflecting what works, what does not work. It is risk taking.” (p. 16-17)

All the post-secondary Cree language teachers abide by the academic evaluation rules and regulations established by the universities. However, Cree teachers utilized 30% of the grading system to initiate their own evaluation process. Mispon who teaches higher level Cree courses suggested, “any language instructor
should draw upon all material available and to make a correlation between one
textbook approach and discussion of concepts with that of another. Put them
together” (mispon, p. 20). sikwan uses pictures to do a component of the fluency test
required at SIFC where “students get to choose the picture” that they want to discuss
orally, and also “they have to be ready to answer additional questions about the
pictures they have chosen” (sikwan, p. 18). Other unique endeavors that the teachers
used to evaluate students include the development of numerous projects such as
“posters, songs, games or a classroom activity, puppet shows and drama, calendars,
little story books where they displayed their work on campus” (kôna, p. 15). One
Cree class presented a puppet show for a local high school where students wrote their
own skits and performed for the community, and also post-secondary adult learners
have performed and participated in Cree language festivals held in various locations
in Saskatchewan. One teacher added an evaluation component to the syllabus using
the natural approach where students developed their own story boards and where they
presented their narratives to the class. pipon explained,

you tell a little story using the picture files, and then, you go
into the questions and answers with the ‘ci’ questions because
that is a simple question for yes and no, and people start to
understand. And then you encourage students to do their own
pictures (p. 15)... that is using the language in a fun
way...students do their own stories...students get other students
involved in their own stories...they could act out the
stories...they reinforce their input, the integration of the
language into themselves because they are doing the actions
while somebody is telling the story... (pipon, p. 16)

Cree humor appeared spontaneously throughout this whole inquiry. mispon
stated explicitly that “humor is part of the Cree context” (mispon, p. 11) and that
teachers who come from a Cree context are able to utilize humor effectively.

Teachers brought up within a Cree speaking community can easily cue into Cree humor which ultimately enriches the language learning context. One particular interview was indeed a pleasant experience for both parties concerned in the research, where mispon laughed 14 times during the interview while sharing numerous funny teaching experiences. Both the researcher and mispon roared with laughter 11 times together during the whole interview process. mispon told these amusing stories about learning languages and teaching experiences:

What I remember about learning French is that if we were fooling around we got rapped on our knuckles with a chalk holder... I was on the blackboard and I drew pictures about my life and what I went through. I drew my first earliest memory...I was being commended for using the potty, the toilet in the slop pail... I am constantly filling up my blackboard, and I walk home some days full of chalk all over me... But I'm not suited for elementary level. I cannot be wiping noses and tying those shoelaces... First of all their attitudes, behaviors and their hormones are kicking in all at once especially at that age [junior high school level]... There was no way that we could survive solely within a stuffy classroom environment... pâh-pisí-píciwêpinawak nêhiyaw itwêwina (they are accidentally throwing in new Cree sayings) (mispon, p. 3 - 24).

The language teachers interviewed found that Aboriginal adult students are propelled into learning Cree faster when the TPR activities are used in a classroom. mispon found that students themselves recognize that “they can comprehend a vocabulary, a wide vast of vocabulary in such a short period of time” (mispon, p. 6) through TPR teaching activities. Elated with the TPR teaching approach, mispon explained:

They [students] are totally motivated. You see them out of their desks outside the context of a student and an academic institution where they are sitting down reading and writing.
They are putting action into play interacting with one another. And it really adds as a very good ice breaker in the initial part of the course because students get to meet each other and know each other on a personal level, but at the same time, from a student to student perspective in a learning capacity. (mispon, p. 6)

sikwan found that students who enjoy the Cree classes will try to show their gratitude to the instructor with a gift such as “an apple or something just like elementary school kids, and these are university students” (sikwan, p. 14). This demonstrates that adult learners at university level do appreciate fun activities in their Cree classes. The use of active teaching approaches utilized by Cree teachers also helps to foster learning and comprehension within a Cree language classroom.

Recognizing and learning about the legitimacy of Cree structure changes the attitude of Aboriginal university students toward their mother tongue. From this study, it is apparent that many Aboriginal students are skeptical about the legitimacy of Cree when they arrive at university. sikwan shared this narrative:

We also need to let the students know the richness of their culture through the language. As a matter of fact, I think that is what changes them. They recognize it, they sit up straight, and they say, ‘oh wow, this is a legitimate language, it’s legitimate and it’s full of culture’ (p. 13). As soon as they realize that there is form and that there are legitimate grammatical terms to talk about in the beginning, they just sort of perk up. You can just see it in their eyes and their attitude; otherwise, they sit with their heads down, they don’t want to look at anybody. Then, something catches their attention and you just see their faces light up, and they start sitting up straight. It’s really strange but you see it and since you are the teacher standing up in front you see that. (p. 12)

Cree teachers who teach at university level need to elucidate the richness of Cree structure, and be able to transfer this knowledge to students. sikwan touched
on the differences between Cree and English. The English term for 'you' is used for both singular form and plural form, but the Cree counterpart intrigued students where Cree has two different forms, 'kiya' singular form and 'kiyawâw' for plural form. This teacher also shared that in Cree “our third person singular, doesn’t differentiate between a 'he,' 'she,' or 'it' because of our belief that we are all equal with nature” (sîkwan, p. 14).

My Teaching Approaches in Cree Language

Most of my students in the Cree courses which I have taught simply do not speak Cree, or are partly fluent since Cree has become their second language. For these students, second language acquisition teaching approaches are applicable. A lot of these students have acquired their education through the provincial school systems, and they have been trained to learn from academic teaching approaches, and continue to expect to learn this way.

The Aboriginal students who make it to the university level often come with personal problems and some difficulties with academic skills, and often they do not have the economic support, or financial and moral support from home. Aboriginal students find university training a challenge, partly because the teaching and learning contexts are foreign to Native students. Because of their background, I feel Aboriginal students who come to university need more support, and that language teachers have to be willing to help Aboriginal students and spend the time to help them. Cree teachers definitely need to take an interest and consider the background of Aboriginal students and their experiences. As a Cree teacher, I have always gone
the “extra mile” to help my students, and Cantor (1992) assures adult educators that “a learner appreciates an instructor who makes the extra effort to help” (p. 155). I have special empathy for these students because I know how difficult it was for me to acquire my professional training after being out of school for fifteen years, and raising my family, and also having to maintain a good academic standing. Aboriginal students will recognize a teacher who cares for their well being, and they appreciate teachers who are caring and sincere and honest. When language teachers demonstrate empathy in the classroom, Aboriginal students are encouraged and motivated to work harder in learning Cree.

I feel Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were all given the same intelligence and same abilities from our Creator. In many ways we learn the same way. The only difference is our culture and language and environment. In the past, Aboriginal people learned from their environment and from people around them, like I did when I was a little girl. I felt safe and protected within my home environment. I developed a special bond of affection and understanding with my mother and my grandmother early in my life. I developed fluency in Cree by listening closely to immediate family members. In the same way, Aboriginal students learn Cree within the university setting to a certain degree. They need to feel secure and to experience a friendly learning environment where they hear the Cree language being spoken consistently. At the same time, Aboriginal students need the experience of working within professional educational settings if they want to acquire professional teaching positions. Like non-Aboriginal adult learners, Aboriginal mature students “need to be shown respect” and “they need to be free to direct themselves” because “adults
have accumulated a base of life experiences and knowledge from their work activities, family life, personal hobbies and interests, and previous training and education" (Cantor, 1992, p. 37). I consistently try to praise students in my Cree classes for their efforts, and as a Cree instructor, I always strive to promote constructive criticism to accept my own mistakes gracefully, or to handle students’ errors politely, or to check inappropriate behavior in the classroom. Over the years of teaching, I have learned to handle negative feedback tactfully, and also I kept in mind not to direct negative feedback at individual students in the classroom. In the Cree adult courses that I teach, I usually try to refrain from creating any negative feedback to directly correct students’ mispronunciations; rather I teach the correct pronunciation by demonstrating how the word is said. Some motivating teaching elements that I utilized with Aboriginal adult learners were rewards for good attendance, and gifts for the high academic achievers, and sometimes I also provide small prizes such as pens for the winners in games and activities initiated in the classroom. The students in my Cree classes are really enthusiastic when they perform well, and when they are successful in the Cree games “because success is what creates motivation” (Cantor, 1992, p. 157).

Cree teachers need to learn appropriate teaching methods that are compatible with Aboriginal ways of learning at the post-secondary level. This means that Cree teachers need to be aware of the various language teaching approaches and be able to apply them successfully because “ineffective learning by students of a second language tends to result more from a lack of learning strategies rather than from such factors as inherent storage or capacity deficits” (Fagan, 1983, p. 115). In my teaching
experiences at post-secondary level, I have always utilized various teaching strategies
which were well articulated by the participants in the study. I structured and
organized my Cree courses according to the university guidelines, and with the
extensive content that needs to be covered at university level, I feel that it is
imperative that a language teacher needs to be well organized. I also feel very
confident in the classroom when I am well prepared with adult students. In order to
help the self-confidence of Aboriginal students, I usually allow some flexibility in
my syllabus for student input. I believe that allowing students input into Cree courses
helps to make Aboriginal adult learners feel important in sharing their talents and
their experiences.

The Cree courses at university level are varied because the post-secondary
students who register in the Cree courses come from diverse backgrounds. For
example, recently, I taught an accredited summer Introductory Cree course with
mostly all Chinese students. With these students, I had to alter my course and my
teaching approaches to suit their ways of learning applicable to an academic setting.
I adopted the communicative language teaching approach mingled with the direct
approach and the grammar translation and also the audio-lingual teaching approach,
where emphasis rested on oral practice and on repetition, and also on reinforcement
strategies. To teach the Cree concepts, I utilized a lot of visual material through the
use of overhead transparencies to demonstrate and to explain major Cree concepts.
Like the other teachers in my study, I also used story boards to “display visual
pictures and related audio script simultaneously” (Cantor, 1992, p. 186) to compose
short Cree narratives with the students, and to initiate class interaction. These stories
that we developed during class are relevant to the experiences of Aboriginal students.

I utilized the communicative teaching approaches where we covered narratives relevant to the daily activities of a university student. I incorporated Cree vocabulary applicable within a university setting such as “niwê-itohêñ kihci-kiskinwahamâtowikamik” (I will go to the university). I reinforced the concepts through teacher talk by using pictures, flip charts and posters and card games. Other times, I used puppets, and props or real objects as models in the classroom to teach and to reinforce the Cree concepts which I am teaching. The use of models provides students with “three-dimensional representations of real things...to show structure, appearance, or how the object works” (Cantor, 1992, p.187). I used the natural teaching approach with total physical response using body language to teach verbs, and I incorporated music and various games to reinforce concepts that were covered in the course. Students were grouped in large groups where I introduced Cree dialogues, and then I applied “micro teaching” (Ur, 1996, p. 2) where students worked in pairs or where they chose to work individually.

Narrative teaching was incorporated into the course as part of the evaluation process, where students developed their own stories and shared them with students in the classrooms. The students also engaged in projects and other students developed games that were shared in the classroom. I also emphasized Cree family relationships where students learned kinship terminology and protocol. I feel that it is important for all students in the Cree courses to learn the basics of First Nations protocol such as the respect given to sweetgrass, and whenever students demonstrated an interest in knowing about Cree culture, I found that my cultural knowledge behind
Cree language indeed became very useful. This course was a challenge for me because of the academic qualities of the students who took the Cree language course seriously, and who worked diligently to maintain a good academic standing.

In my teaching experiences, I found that adult learners in my Cree courses indeed demonstrated unique talents and creative abilities in aesthetic arts. Aboriginal adult students love various forms of aesthetic arts that include music, drama, creative writing, drawing and painting. Miller stated that “the arts have been a medium to express who we are and what we know about ourselves” and also, “art is essential to the unfolding of the inner person” (Miller, 2000, p. 75). By utilizing the aesthetic arts as teaching contexts to teach Cree, Aboriginal students are provided with opportunities and given the freedom to express the inner essences of their culture. All Aboriginal teachers need to include components of aesthetic arts into their courses because “the study of the arts actually increases the growth of neural pathways, aids in improving memory, and promotes creative problem solving” (Miller, 2000, p. 5). I have also found that utilizing a lot of visual colorful teaching material with Aboriginal students ignites their interest to learn Cree. In the classroom I used a lot of overhead transparencies, the chalkboard, and printed media and also real objects, or the use of outdoor environment to teach the nature terms in Cree, or simply discussing the weather conditions to teach Cree weather concepts. I developed diagrams or concept maps to explain certain grammatical concepts of Cree, and sometimes I give these diagrams to the students as handouts because Aboriginal students are holistic learners where they need to see the whole picture first, before I proceed to explain the smaller concepts of Cree which are being
covered in the class. I encouraged students to utilize colors and also to integrate their artistic skills into their assignments, especially when they are studying for exams, such as colors, and concept or mind maps. I encouraged students to use mnemonic devices (Cantor, 1992, p. 52) which are helping devices for student "to associate the to-be-learned material with familiar information in LTM (long term memory)." (p. 52) For example, I suggested to students to use green to color code the Cree terms that are associated with the surroundings of nature, and yellow and orange are associated to Cree cosmos terminology.

In respect to Cree protocol, I agree with the participants in my study that Cree teachers need to avoid deep discussions on the sacred topics of Cree spirituality at university level. There is protocol concerning sacred stories and songs, and also in sacred objects. Things considered sacred by First Nations people, like sweetgrass, should not be brought into a classroom and utilized by just anyone. That is the role of Native elders at the community level. Cree teachers have the freedom to bring in guest speakers into the classrooms which I have done numerous times. But I know that it is also my job as a Cree teacher to explain about cultural aspects such as where Cree colors come from.

Ur adopted Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model and discussed enriched reflection where the "sources of knowledge may be either personal experience and thought or input from outside" (Ur, 1996, p. 7) the classroom such as learning from experienced teachers or learning from community elders. My teaching experiences agree with the enriched reflection teaching model which included real experiences with elders where students listened, observed and reflected on the elders' stories, and
where students were able to identify the principles or moral implications in the stories shared by the elders, and then students experienced or abided by those truths learned from the discourse. Dr’s suggestion agrees with the teaching approaches of Cree teachers in the study who are enriching their teaching strategies through continual reflection and revision. I feel that the classroom environment is very important where one can put up visual material as teaching tools for the teacher in order to motivate Aboriginal students. Also, I feel that Cree teachers need their own classrooms at university level to set up learning centers or language masters to help reinforce the Cree concepts covered in the class. Language labs are also effective teaching tools that reinforce concepts covered within a classroom. However, I feel that the Cree content covered in language labs also needs to correlate with the vocabulary that is under study within each course.

Research shows that complete immersion language programs are the most effective ways to initiate fluency among students. I feel that the universities who offer Cree programs need to incorporate mini Cree immersion camps in order to instill a positive language learning environment for Cree teachers, and for administrators and also for students. Rehyner (1988) claimed that “if the language is not used in school to continue the enculturation process, or if it is taught in a mechanical or demeaning fashion disregarding the culture it transmits, then the student has no positive way of identifying with schooling. Because the student identifies language with culture, language rejection is considered cultural rejection” (Rehyner, 1988, p. 9). I feel that universities in western Canada need to accommodate more Aboriginal language programs in order for Aboriginal students to
feel that they have a place in the higher learning institutions, and that they are treated fairly, and that they are contributors to the higher learning institutions. The culture and the language of Aboriginal students and professional graduates need to be respected and considered in order to continue cooperative work in learning and teaching contexts. "Keeping in mind Battiste’s argument of cognitive assimilation (Battiste, 1987, 1993)… language teachers must be trained in their language of instruction" (Hebert, 1994, p.93).

Summary

This chapter has described the multidimensional teaching approaches utilized by the five Cree teachers interviewed in the study, and also, this description is supplemented by my teaching experiences that I shared. These five Cree teachers interviewed are emancipators in the pedagogy of Cree language for higher learning institutions in Saskatchewan. They have shared information describing their teaching experiences with adult learners. By combining their knowledge in Cree traditions and their experiences living within a First Nation context, plus attaining professional training in linguistics and in language teaching methodology, these Cree language teachers have demonstrated that success can be attained through diligence. However, these post-secondary Cree language teachers are continuing to diversify and refine their teaching techniques, and they are also strengthening their teaching styles to revitalize the Cree language to resonate on a wider scale. The use of effective teaching strategies helps to produce university graduates to attain fluent
skills in the mother tongue, and it is professional First Nations language teachers who will emerge into Aboriginal communities and into urban educational systems to transfer their knowledge and skills to their own people.
CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter provides an interpretative analysis of the data collected from the Cree language teachers interviewed in the study. The overarching, recurring theme in the narratives of Cree teachers describing language pedagogy with adult learners focused on what I describe as “islands of culture,” which are authentic cultural settings created by Cree teachers within post-secondary classrooms.

Within the islands of culture, the Cree teachers described six themes from their narratives. The first theme centered on teachers’ identity that was developed within family teaching contexts during childhood. The Cree teachers shared that they developed Cree identity by learning their mother language within traditional learning and teaching contexts at home, and also this cultural understanding instilled deep respect and love for their mother tongue. The second theme that appeared in the inquiry rested on the legitimacy of Cree language. Apathy toward adult Cree language programming has created problems for administrators, teachers and students in the study. These concerns shared by Cree teachers were clarified and interpreted accordingly. The third theme resonating from the teachers’ descriptions focused on the qualities of Cree teachers. It became evident that teaching adult learners at post-secondary level requires personal, professional attributes and specialized
training in order for the teachers to survive and to become effective language teachers. The fourth theme that emanated from the teachers' narratives focuses on multidimensional teaching strategies that are conducive to Aboriginal adult learners at the post-secondary level. The fifth theme supporting islands of culture involved sowing mutual trust and honesty in Cree language pedagogy. The sixth theme that became apparent calls for application of aesthetic arts into Cree programs such as music and story telling activities. Finally, as a participant in this study, I will also share my own narrative of how I became a Cree teacher and why I engaged in this research.

**Islands of Culture**

These islands of culture are expanding spirally on pathways of lifelong learning, and are also in harmony with the cultural maturity of the teachers. The teachers themselves had learned Cree within cultural learning and teaching contexts. The cultural learning contexts included developing listening skills within family settings where the teachers attained language concepts prior to speaking the language. The learning was carried into the next phase of learning to begin to talk, and finally attaining fluency in Cree. The teachers were able to ascend and descend the spiral path of learning, either to retrieve or reinforce Cree fluency, or to acquire cultural teachings, or to incorporate academic knowledge to empower their inner knowledge or islands of culture. The participants in this study were able to create islands of culture because they grew up within "family-based" (Henderson, 1995, p. 246)
teaching contexts consisting of fluent Cree speakers. Their linguistic skills and traditional knowledge were refined within that circle of family interrelationships. Through cultural teaching contexts, these teachers also learned about Cree epistemology: Cree ways of thinking and Cree ways of learning. The teachers learned about the sacredness of their language through community elders, and this knowledge helped to instill a profound respect for their mother tongue. The personal identity of the teachers became firmly rooted once they understood their origins and their place in society. Academic training at university helped the Cree teachers to acquire a greater understanding about the history of First Nations, and they also attained a greater knowledge of the significant role that Cree language played during the settlement of western Canada. It is this rich cultural background, supplemented with professional training, which has empowered the Cree language teachers in this study to transfer their linguistic skills, and their traditional knowledge, and also their personal experiences to adult students, by creating islands of culture within their classrooms.

To fully comprehend the key overarching theme in this study, my concept of islands of culture utilized by the participants in Cree pedagogy, a full description of the components of its setting is required. I will describe how Cree teachers create cultural teaching contexts, and the teaching methods that they apply, and also what these islands of culture offer to Aboriginal adult learners.

The Cree language teachers within a university classroom were able to re-create family learning contexts by sharing their personal beliefs and cultural values, and the experiences that they encountered early in their lives, and to teach
connections between language and culture. The teachers communicated interactively and repetitively with students, and they also engaged students in the writing and sharing of narratives in the classroom. The teaching techniques utilized by the teachers mirror the Aboriginal learning and teaching contexts of First Nations communities where everyone spoke fluent Cree. The post-secondary students in their classrooms heard the language being spoken consistently and repetitively.

**Teachers' Identity**

The development of Cree identity is the first theme articulated by the teachers in the study. The teachers believed that acquiring the Cree language along with the cultural knowledge during their childhood within traditional learning and teachings contexts in family relationships established their identities. The study shows that the mother language and traditions, that include beliefs, and values and identity among Cree teachers, were closely connected. Welshman Gegeo argued that "the foundation of a people’s identity and cultural authenticity is their culturally shared indigenous epistemology (cultural ways of thinking and of creating and reformulating knowledge, p. 32), embodied in and expressed through their heritage language" (Gegeo, 1999, p. 22). Kirkness (1998), a Cree language scholar, reaffirms that language is tied to culture:

Language is culture and culture is language [and that], language expresses the uniqueness of a group’s world view. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared, and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to the identification with and the retention
of culture is one’s ancestral language. Languages reflect fundamental differences in culture, in ways that specific language groups perceive their world, their family relationships, kinship structures, relationships to other cultures, and to the land. (p. 82)

Kirkness created cultural awareness regarding the languages of First Nations. In the following passage, she describes the significance of the mother language with reference to its uniqueness:

Most of culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Language is best able to express most easily, most accurately and most richly, the values, customs and overall interests of the culture. If you take language away from the culture, you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. You are losing those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and a particular human reality. (Kirkness, 1998, p. 123)

The circle of family relationships at home provided opportunities for the Cree language teachers to attain traditional knowledge and to learn Cree language effectively. They also gained fuller understanding of the intrinsic role of language which supported the Cree teachers as “socio-cultural agents and as technical educators” (Stairs, 1993, p. 93). The teachers helped the students to develop their own identities by sharing their experiences and showing respect to their language. They assumed the role of Cree translators and cultural educators to students in a classroom, and to non-Native speakers of Cree within their workplace, or within the urban communities. The teachers knew and observed Cree protocol regarding the sacredness of songs and stories. Some of the Cree teachers have adapted to modern technology, and have experience teaching Cree courses through satellite systems;
they are currently teaching other language teachers this technology. The Cree teachers shared their cultural knowledge and life experiences with students within the university institution, and they are currently Cree language experts to some extent within the academic field.

Some of the Cree teachers in the study openly acknowledged their belief that language is a gift from the Creator. Fundamental within Cree traditional society is the spiritual faith or belief in a supreme Creator, kohtâwinaw (Our Father), who created the universe. For the other teachers, belief in the Creator was implicitly expressed because it is embedded in the Cree culture and language. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) official Language Policy Act, which is currently being considered for provincial legislation, explicitly affirms Aboriginal belief in The Creator. The document states,

> We believe that God the Creator sustains the eternal cycles of creation. We believe that all life is sacred. We believe that there are four distinct dimensions to every human being, spiritual, physical, emotional and moral (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1982, Introduction Beliefs).

The Grade Ten Saskatchewan Native Studies Curriculum Guide Indian and Métis Education (1991) developed by Saskatchewan Education endorses the Aboriginal belief that The Creator is the heart of the Aboriginal culture wheel of learning (p. 25), which upholds the four specific Aboriginal spiritual dimensions of human development. The curriculum guide embraced the following Aboriginal cultural concepts to be integrated into the pedagogy for Indian and Métis students within the provincial school systems. The curriculum guide includes,
the capacity to have and to respond to dreams, visions, ideas, spiritual teaching, goals and theories, the capacity to accept these as reflection of our known or potential; the capacity to express these using symbols in speech, art or mathematics; the capacity to use this symbolic expression towards making the possible a reality. (Saskatchewan Education, 1991, p. 26)

The Saskatchewan Education Grade Ten Saskatchewan Native Studies Curriculum Guide endorsed by the University of Saskatchewan presents the view that the cultural teachings enhances academic theoretical thinking, and helps to establish oratorical skills and aesthetic arts. Understanding these spiritual dimensions of human development helped the Cree teachers in the study to establish strong personal identities.

Research shows that spiritual beliefs in a 'Creator' or 'The Great Spirit' (Goodwill & Sluman, 1984, p. 12) were fundamental within tribal societies and also with many current Aboriginal professional teachers. Hampton initiated a study in 1989 with Native graduate students in order to develop an Indian theory of education. He conducted interviews with American Indian and Alaskan Native students at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Hampton concluded in his study that “the first standard of Indian education is spirituality” (Hampton, 1995, p. 19). This study suggests that an Aboriginal educational program, such as post-secondary Cree language, needs to consider the beliefs and cultural aspects of the people it serves. Some of the Cree teachers in this study who currently teach at university level openly maintained a high regard for their Creator. Their knowledge of Cree protocol is rooted, but because of their respect for their elders who are the true teachers of
tradition, they also feel that teaching explicitly spiritual aspects of culture within their classrooms (islands of culture) would definitely violate this Cree protocol.

It is apparent that Aboriginal students are able to establish their personal identities through their ancestral language. Kirkness (1998) explains that language and culture “defines who you are” (p. 123) or are “the essence of who we are” (p. 124). Kirkness is saying that Cree culture and language are intertwined, and that Cree identity is connected to the knowledge of tradition and to language. The Cree language teachers in the study were creating traditional learning contexts within their classrooms by helping Aboriginal students link the relationships between language and culture, which ultimately helped Aboriginal students to develop their personal identities. Research shows that 81 per cent of the Aboriginal students who enter the University of Saskatchewan speak English as a first language, which means that they are not likely to have the ancestral cultural teachings. It is therefore imperative that Cree adult learners registered within various academic disciplines at universities have the opportunity to take Cree language programs in order to gain fluency, and to retain “nêhiyawiwin” (being Cree, Cree identity, Creeness) (Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1998, p. 299) and, “nêhiyawihtwâwin” (Cree way, Cree culture) (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1993, p. 115), as well as, “nêhiyawi-wîhtamawâkan” (Cree etymology, Cree teaching) (Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1998, p. 371) to gain a better understanding of the essence of their ancestral roots. This study shows that Cree Aboriginal students would benefit from attaining better understanding of their spiritual beliefs, and comprehending the cultural aspects embedded in the mother tongue. Aboriginal students enrolled in post-secondary institutions who do not have access to Aboriginal
cultural teachings, and who do not speak their mother tongue, also need to develop their own authentic Aboriginal identity.

It was the traditional teachings acquired from their parents, and their grandparents and also from their community elders, which helped the teachers develop a genuine respect for the cultural aspects underlying the Cree language. Cree First Nations people have a high regard for their language because they believe that The Creator bestowed nêhiyawewin (The Cree Language) to nêhiyawak (The Cree People). Kirkness (1998) reaffirmed Cree spiritual beliefs by claiming that “language expresses our unique relationships with our Creator; our attitude; our beliefs and our values” (p. 75). Kirkness goes on to say that “it is a unique gift from the Creator, therefore it is the mind, spirit and soul of the people” (p. 124). Some of the teachers interviewed attained this understanding early in their lives, while others enriched their cultural and linguistic knowledge through academic training where they studied the grammatical structure and historical perspective of Cree language. Once the teachers interviewed in the study understood the spiritual meanings behind the language and studied the Cree linguistic structure, their respect and passion for their mother tongue intensified, and they wanted to share their knowledge zealously with Aboriginal students within their classrooms, the islands of culture. The study demonstrated that the second theme of respect and love for the Cree language that underlies islands of culture is also tied to the traditional knowledge in Cree society.

One problem that the Cree teachers experienced in the classroom was the disrespect and poor attitude of some students toward their Cree teacher and to their language. The Cree language teachers in my study helped the Aboriginal students to
develop a First Nations’ identity. When the Cree teachers shared their traditional knowledge with students, modeled Cree protocol, demonstrated respect and expressed their love for the Cree language, and displayed the unique spiritual and cultural richness of Cree, these cultural aspects were reciprocated by the students, and learning occurred within the classrooms in this study. This study shows that Aboriginal adult students at university level need to continue building up their First Nations’ identity. Aboriginal students need to develop a greater respect for their mother tongue and to their Cree teacher, and ultimately, they will develop a sincere desire to learn it.

Legitimacy of Cree

The second theme centers on the legitimacy of Cree language. The lack of federal recognition of First Nations’ languages such as nēhiyawēwin, the Cree language, created many problems for educational institutions and for First Nations’ language teachers and also for students. Aboriginal people revere their languages as sacred, and the academic institutions who continue to disregard or suppress Cree language programs are silently violating First Nations’ protocol because of this, and because Aboriginal languages supersede history or native studies and also because “knowledge of the language was [and is] key to understanding the culture” (Lobe, 1995, p. 95). Administrators implementing Aboriginal adult programs in languages and history would benefit greatly in knowing and speaking the indigenous language of the speakers they serve. No’eau Warner (1999) claims that the “culture belongs to
that indigenous or minority people from whom the language evolved” (p. 89), and, “majority-language /culture academics often obscure the identities and silence the very voices of the people for whom they claim to express concern” (p. 69).

Choosing an academic, specialized profession as a post-secondary Cree language teacher is currently unattractive and the work is extremely difficult. Teachers who choose to teach within post-secondary institutions indirectly experience political, economic and socio-cultural problems with regards to Cree language programming because of funding restraints by federal and provincial governments. Because Cree is not fully recognized as a legitimate language in this country, funding for Cree programs is restricted within the post-secondary educational system. The federal government recently provided some funding for Cree programs at elementary school and high school level, but the financial support for university Cree courses is limited. Funding constraints by federal and provincial bodies lead to deficiencies in post-secondary Aboriginal language programs. An example is the lack of Saulteaux, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota and Dene language courses at the University of Saskatchewan. Kirkness (1998) claims that “the protection of our languages is an inherent right, a treaty right, an Aboriginal right and a constitutional right” (p. 14), and the “ability of Aboriginal peoples to assert their inherent right to determine the status of Aboriginal languages in self-governing nations on their own territory is a first step in halting the erosion of Aboriginal languages” (Kirkness, 1998, p. 21).

University budget allocations at the University of Saskatchewan are reserved for certain programs and not specifically for Cree, which creates difficulties for
administrators at the Department of Native Studies to expand accredited Cree language courses. The Cree teachers in this Department are continuously hired on a contract basis. The Department of Native Studies would prefer to see Cree language programs offered and administered through the Department of Languages within the institution. The Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), within the same institution, operates on an independent budget, and this program offers 24 credit units of Cree language courses along with Ed Indian 375.3, a course on language teaching methods. The Cree teacher within the ITEP program is hired on a full-time basis to teach Cree courses and also to counsel Aboriginal students within the program. The Extension Department at the University of Saskatchewan also offers Cree language programs where teachers are hired on a contract basis and travel to remote areas in Saskatchewan. One example is the recent pilot project offered through satellite where accredited Cree 100.6 was taught by a Cree teacher out of the Regina campus and televised to students at the University of Saskatchewan. The Centre for Second Languages at the University of Saskatchewan periodically offers non-credited conversational Cree courses on a contract basis as well. However, recent budget constraints have resulted in the reduction of Cree programs at this Centre. This study shows that the University of Saskatchewan offers sufficient number of Cree courses to justify hiring full-time Cree instructors within the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Native Literature at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), affiliated with the University of Regina, operates independently and allocates sufficient funding for various
indigenous language programs such as Cree, Ojibway, Dene and Siouan languages. The Department hires its own language instructors and administers its own programs. Aboriginal students at this institution are provided with ample opportunities to specialize in Indian languages where linguistic training and teaching methodology are available. The SIFC are currently producing Aboriginal language teacher specialists who are emerging into the elementary and secondary school systems, but the demand for language teachers who can teach adult learners is still needed.

Not all academic teaching methodologies are compatible with Aboriginal traditional teaching contexts, where a solo language teaching method such as grammar translation would be monotonous to Aboriginal adult learners. Aboriginal traditional teaching approaches definitely do not follow a formal evaluation process such as written exams. Rather, Aboriginal students are pragmatic learners; practice and experience are appropriate ways in teaching Aboriginal contexts. The rigid academic university setting and atmosphere is foreign to Aboriginal ways of learning, and also the requisites in Cree literacy intimidate many students. The entree to traditional teaching contexts among Aboriginal students within a university setting is the Cree language teacher specialist who speaks the language fluently, and who is the walking “library” geared with knowledge of Aboriginal culture.

Qualities of Successful Cree Teachers

The need for good professional qualities is the third theme that was articulated from the hearts of the Cree teachers in the study. Cree language teachers
who currently teach at the post-secondary level are unique language specialists and cultural brokers. Stairs (1995) explains that:

The dual role of teachers, as socio-cultural agents and as technical educators (Pidding 1951) is evident at several levels in culture-based native education programs. The teacher is first of all a culture broker between native and non-native, selecting and transmitting to students her or his personal synthesis of knowledge, values, and human relationships gleaned from cultures in contact. (Stairs, 1995, p. 93)

Cree language teachers have to be professionally trained with teaching methodologies in order to be effective, and also they need to be informed and model Aboriginal protocol and traditions. They have to handle the poor attitude of some Aboriginal students toward their language, and try to instill the cultural aspects of respect and love for the mother tongue. Instructional material and supplies and resources are not readily available at university level. Cree teachers have to develop their own teaching material on the job, which is very time consuming and costly. They have to follow tight budget constraints within the departments, and develop other teaching materials that they require that are unavailable on the market. They have to be ready to work with students who speak different Cree dialects within the classroom, and accommodate both non-Cree speakers and fluent speakers. They have to be supportive and encouraging to Aboriginal students. All Cree teachers need to be dynamic story tellers. They have to incorporate humor and music as part of the pedagogy. They need to be caring, patient, empathetic, loyal, creative, flexible, energetic and diligent. This study shows that Cree teachers definitely need to be fluent speakers to survive in the higher level Cree courses. They also have to assist Aboriginal students who have problems with the basic forms of English grammar.
The study shows that all these skills and abilities are required by Cree teachers today in order to survive and to maintain their positions as effective language teachers. In retrospect, the fruits of recognition and personal benefits as an effective Cree teacher today are not abundant. The study also confirms that current political and economic issues discussed in this study, such as questioning of the validity of Cree language, suppresses Cree programs at post-secondary institutions from flourishing, and the effects hinder Cree teachers from doing effective work, and students are also curbed from reaching their potential to learn Cree. Recognizing Cree language as one of the legitimate Aboriginal languages in this country may help to solve the numerous problems experienced by Cree teachers within post-secondary institutions on the prairie.

Their reasons for choosing to be Cree teachers were also critical choices. First and foremost the choice was cultural and emancipatory, where the grandmothers, grandfathers and parents inspired them to learn Cree fluently and to learn the Cree syllabic writing system. Once they learned about the richness of their mother tongue, understood the cultural background behind the language and acquired the historical perspective, the choices of the teachers to teach Cree became emancipatory because of the desire to uplift Aboriginal students in regaining their language. These Cree teachers wanted to share their knowledge and experiences with the young people, and they wanted to rejuvenate Cree language programs within the school systems. For example, "I use my energy and time for people's needs for things to guide me" (mispon, p. 5) was one of the sincere statements expressed by one of the teachers. These choices were also political because some of the teachers
accepted teaching positions within a university setting and trained on the job.

University settings are political entities and a teacher assumes this political realm when the choice to teach at this level is made. The participants also made educational choices. Once they attained a university degree, the teachers pursued two degrees and some have continued on to acquire masters degrees. The desire to obtain a PhD in Cree and to develop courses for parents on how to teach their children Cree was also evident in the data. One teacher made this inspiring acclamation:

First, I want to get a PhD in Cree and written solely in Cree, secondly, my biggest wish is to teach a parents class. I want to teach parents how to teach their kids Cree. In a natural family situation, in a context of a personalized family, where ownership of language becomes a family responsibility, and it extends itself to a larger community responsibility and then to all of us at a western Canadian national international responsibility. We start from the home from the parents in an urban setting and in an non-urban setting, in a reserve situation as long as the parents are there, and the parents are giving the mechanisms and tools to teach their children how to speak Cree. We have the means of keeping validity. We have the energies. If we work at this collaboratively, can you imagine the numbers we can educate, the language that we can re-instill in the communities and in our families? (mispon, p. 22)

The choices made by the teachers to learn and teach Cree at post-secondary level were cultural, emancipatory, educational and political. However, reasons to teach are not largely economic or political. The participants chose teaching because of their commitment which is reflected in their thoughtful approaches to teaching Cree language.
Multidimensional Teaching Strategies

The fourth theme that appeared under islands of culture shared by Cree language teachers in the study focused on multidimensional teaching approaches. Since Cree is the second language for most students in university Cree courses, innovative teaching material and resources using audiovisual technology are needed at the higher learning institutions to accelerate the communicative proficiency of adult learners because "it takes from five to seven years for most ESL students to acquire native-like proficiency" (Reyhner, 1988, p. 7).

The initial discussion on multidimensional teaching approaches will illustrate varied Aboriginal teaching methods that helped constitute islands of culture. The second part of the discussion will focus on traditional learning and teaching contexts mingled with multidimensional teaching strategies. Teaching strategies that surfaced in the study which supported islands of culture include refining or cultivating First Nations identities, and sowing mutual trust and honesty within the Cree classroom, and also upholding the dynamics of Cree humor in a professional manner, as well as adding enjoyment and appreciation to Cree learning by adding the ingredients of the arts such as music and creative narrative writing. The reasons why Aboriginal adult students need a review of English grammar will be highlighted, and also this part of the discussion will demonstrate that sanctioning students' input into the senior Cree courses benefits both the teacher and the students. The Cree language teachers shaped the islands of culture by blending First Nations' culture into the narratives that they shared in the classrooms. They used narratives to share their traditional knowledge and their socio-cultural experiences with students, and also they skillfully
channeled narrative teaching contexts into the multidimensional language teaching approaches to complement their teaching strategies and to enhance learning.

These teachers understood that the heart of Cree cultural learning contexts centered on listening comprehension to narrative teachings from elders, and also in the context of “meaningful language experiences” (Fox, 1988, p. 99) which are derived from their home community environment. Because “Cree customs and traditions are embodied in the language of the people” (Bighead, 1996, p. 156), the teachers learned Cree and the traditional teachings at home by listening to stories within their circle of family relationships. As educators, they transferred the respect and the high regard for the Cree language through narrative instruction within various educational settings, and are currently helping to instill those same cultural beliefs and values to Aboriginal students at post-secondary level. According to Duquette (1995), “a target language needs to be first understood in the target context and culture in which it will be used” and in order to develop literacy in the target language such as the Cree language, “context cues and cultural norms” are required “to respond appropriately to its expectations” (Duquette, 1995, p. 35). Identifying with the Cree cultural norms and idioms in context also prompts adult learners to learn and remember Cree vocabulary.

“The new Natural Approach” or the, “natural, direct method rediscovered” (Krashen & Terrell, 1988, p. 17) was applied through total physical response, where body language movements were practiced daily to reinforce Cree vocabulary and communication. “Using TPR involves saying the word plus doing the hand motions to accompany the word” (Ratt, 1994, p. 49). An example of total physical response
entails giving a command in Cree such as “pahpi!” (laugh!), where the teacher first gives the command orally using body language and smiling from ear to ear. At the same time, the instructor nods his head repeatedly in acting out a good laugh. Initially, the students just listen to the command and do the action. Then later, the students listen to the command, repeat the word, and demonstrate the action. This process is repeated till the students have comprehended and learnt the Cree verb. “The words are introduced in units of four, moving on to the next set of words only after all the students understand the previous words” (Ratt, 1984, p. 49). The instructor is able to test the students for comprehension by having them perform the actions with eyes closed.

A wide variety of visual materials were also employed to arouse sensory perceptions where students viewed picture files or creative narratives that were illustrated on overhead transparencies, and where ample opportunities were allowed for students to provide input into the stories. The stories were based on personal life experiences, and on the unique lifestyles of First Nations communities, and also the cultural knowledge gained from elders that the teachers shared in the classroom was transmitted to students.

**Mutual Trust and Honesty**

The fifth aspect of islands of culture in the study was the importance of developing mutual trust and honesty between the educator and the learner. The study shows that Aboriginal adult learners were more receptive to learning Cree and
participated more eagerly within a non-threatening classroom environment. First of all, Aboriginal students at the post-secondary level identified with the Aboriginal language teachers because students recognized that the Aboriginal teachers were genuine cultural catalysts promoting cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in the classroom through their narratives. By openly intermingling humor into their narratives and sharing personal life experiences with Aboriginal students, the Cree teachers modeled the society that exists within First Nations communities, and simultaneously they generated a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Garcia explained that "classroom experiences should be compatible with the student's life style. This requires understanding the student's culture and life style and understanding how life style affects motivation" (Garcia, 1988, p. 4). Krashen (1982) explains that "lowering of the affective filter" or "anxiety levels" among students helps to generate their "ideas, opinions, desires, emotions and feelings" (p. 21) in the language acquisition activities. The study shows that Cree humor utilized within low anxiety situations embraced by the teachers through their narratives motivated Aboriginal adult learners to learn Cree, where the students were prompted into developing creative narratives in Cree, and they willingly shared those stories in the classrooms.

Krashen and Terrel argue that language acquisition is a subconscious mental activity where "students are not forced to speak before they are ready" and that "speech errors which do not interfere with communication are not corrected" (Krashen & Terrel, 1988, p. 20). The Cree teachers were able to lower the "affective filter of the students" (Krashen & Terrell, p. 21) where students are opened to "comprehension input in order to fully utilize it for acquisition" (p. 19). The Cree
teachers exhibited patience and utilized humor to wait for the readiness of students to provide input into the narratives that were developed jointly in the classroom. Students in the Cree language classrooms under the instruction of the participants were not compelled to speak the target language; rather the Cree teachers encouraged and motivated students into positive learning orientations utilizing varied language teaching approaches.

Cree humor is an integral part of Cree learning and teaching contexts. My study shows that utilizing humor effectively and appropriately within Cree learning contexts is paramount in breaking down barriers and creating harmony in the classroom. Humor motivates adult learners to learn Cree, and it also helps to maintain student retention-rate within Cree classrooms. Cree instructors aware of Cree cultural contexts assume delicate positions of ascertaining appropriate or inappropriate contexts of humor in the classroom, especially in contexts where students, “pah-pisci-piciwepamwak nehiyaw itwewina (are accidentally throwing in new Cree sayings)” (mispon, p. 23). In order to generate a pleasant relaxed classroom atmosphere, new teachers diligently need to train students to be cautious about laughing at mistakes in the classroom because some Aboriginal students may be reserved and self-conscious, and it is necessary for teachers to maintain respect for individual students. The teachers also have to be prepared to admit and laugh at their own mistakes that they make in the classroom such as admitting, “nipê-mâh-mâhkitonêpayin (I am consistently coming with big messages)” (mispon, p. 24). Teachers also need “to listen to the humor of students” (Gilliland, 1988, p. 34), and show their appreciation for student participation. On the whole, humor is a
good ice breaker within educational institutions, and it draws administrators and teachers and students to work in harmony.

Aesthetic Activities

The study shows that post-secondary institutions need to incorporate new courses that entail Native cultural arts into the teacher training programs, and promote aesthetic activities such as songs and drama into the Cree classrooms. Aboriginal students are holistic learners who utilize “multisensory” (Reyhner, 1988, p. 86) approaches of teaching and learning contexts such as artistry and drama and narrative writing. Aesthetic skills serve as “memory anchors” (p. 86) to Aboriginal students in a classroom. “Songs have been used by cultures to transmit customs and values” (Miller, 2000, p. 88) and also, the “epic song” sung by the Delawares in the Red Record were used to record and to teach their ancient history (McCutchen, 1993, p. 4). In-class activities which motivate Aboriginal adult learners include language learning centers, body movement to music and game activities such as simulations.

The post-secondary Cree language teachers in the study utilized a lot of outdoor activities, and engaged in community-based research, and they also initiated Cree immersion camps held yearly at Stanley Mission in northern Saskatchewan. Special community projects initiated recently by post-secondary Cree language teachers through The Cree Language Retention Committee is the promotion of Cree language festivals throughout the First Nations’ communities. Post-secondary Cree language teachers who belong in this committee work on a volunteer basis.
specifically to promote and revitalize Cree language throughout Saskatchewan. Cree language is utilized at the language festivals, and the aesthetic arts are incorporated into the presentations such as music and drama. In order to promote Cree language, and to provide post-secondary students with practical experiences within the school systems, some post-secondary language teachers have taken their students into the provincial school systems for performances in Cree drama and Cree song presentations. As well, some post-secondary Cree language teachers have utilized the satellite with Saskatchewan Communication Network to teach Cree courses, while others have promoted Cree language by participating in television performances and also with radio technology. The post-secondary Cree teachers at the Indian Federated College published their own Cree teaching material and textbooks. Despite the constraints on Cree language programs at post-secondary level and limited funding, post-secondary Cree teachers are striving ahead on their own and generating new waves of language revitalization in the province, and the incorporation of aesthetic arts into adult Cree language programming has created enthusiasm and new energy in learning Cree.

One problem expressed by post-secondary Cree teachers was teaching or reviewing English grammar to adult learners in order to explain fully Cree concepts. Many adult Aboriginal students entered post-secondary training as mature students who had been away from school for many years; consequently these students have weak literary skills in the English language. Some of the adult students who are fluent in Cree also experienced difficulties with academic writing because Cree grammatical structure is different from the English form such as “ni-pimoo’ t-an,
I am walking I am, meaning that it is I, (not someone else) who am walking” (Logan, 1958, p. 10). According to Logan,

the proper way to understand Cree, or to try to speak properly in Cree, is to think always in the terms of the stage Irishman who is supposed to say, “Tis walking I am” or “Twill be thinking of you I am, when it is after leaving you tomorrow, I am.” (Logan, 1958, p. 7)

English is the first language to the majority of Aboriginal university students, and the Cree structure and sound system is foreign to them. Aboriginal students raised within urban centers experienced problems with Cree phonology because English is spoken at home, but facilities and resources at post-secondary level are not in place for these students to practice their oral skills in Cree. The Cree teachers in the study felt obligated to teach basic forms of English grammar in order to demonstrate the differences between Cree and English. Because of tight schedules to cover content at university level, teaching English grammar is limiting and is an extra task for Cree teachers.

Another aspect of multidimensional teaching is accommodation of students’ input into the Cree syllabus, especially for the senior Cree courses. Aboriginal students feel important when they are provided with ample room to develop their initiatives, especially with assignments, as part of the evaluation process. Some of the Cree teachers explained that in the higher level Cree courses, the Cree teachers were the resource and took on the role as facilitators in developing the syllabus. The adult students established their syllabus and assumed their own learning strategies and also developed their own evaluation process. The students developed critical thinking strategies on their own within appropriate Cree teaching and learning
contexts. This study shows that Cree adult learners at university level can generate cooperative learning coherently, and they are able to achieve the goals and objectives that they established for themselves. Martin (1993) suggests the use of “an interactive model of instructional design that allows student input into the planning of specific educational activities and encourages participation in these activities” (p. 174). According to Martin the interactive model “facilitates the creation of a mutually supportive community within the classroom where all members of the class are united in learning” (p. 171).

Summary

In conclusion, this study shows that multidimensional teaching strategies utilized within islands of culture can inspire post-secondary adult learners to learn Cree. The most important issue facing Aboriginal adult learners at the post-secondary level disclosed in the study is the loss of identity. Establishing a strong First Nations identity is the first step for adult learners to acquire respect and love for their mother tongue. The Cree teachers in the study bonded with immediate family members in learning Cree where they experienced love and inspiration from their parents and grandparents. This bond of close affection within families instilled personal trust, and the secure learning environment strengthened the oral skills for the teachers to become competent Cree speakers. The teachers began sowing the initial seeds within islands of culture at home with family members where they learned their
first Cree words, and where their identities began to evolve. The participants disclosed that during their upbringing, their families devoted ample time to talk to them at home. The Cree teachers reminisced about precious childhood memories in learning Cree, where parents and grandparents provided adequate time for oral practice, and where they were heartened to speak within safe monolingual cultural learning contexts.

The components of First Nations cultural learning contexts are needed for post-secondary students to learn Cree where they are able to experience care and trust, and also assurance from instructors and from the educational institutions. Recognizing and supporting Cree language programming would help Aboriginal students to see the importance of their language, and this recognition may help them to develop greater regard for post-secondary training, and they may learn to respect themselves, and also to respect their language, as well as respect their language teachers. Instructors who teach Aboriginal students at post-secondary level also need to be aware that some Aboriginal students raised within urban areas need help in developing or reinforcing their identity as First Nations people. In order to instill fluency among teacher graduates, and to revitalize Cree language at post-secondary level, and also within the school systems and First Nations communities, the study shows that professional training is mandatory in order to produce Cree language teacher specialists who will emerge into the provincial educational school systems.

The heart of this inquiry centered on Cree language pedagogy with adult learners. The study shows that islands of culture, built with multidimensional teaching strategies in Cree language pedagogy, agreed with the learning styles of
Aboriginal adult learners at post-secondary level. The teachers employed islands of culture in sharing their cultural teachings and experiences, and they also incorporated their linguistic and academic knowledge to teach Cree. Their traditional knowledge and their life experiences, and also their academic training in teaching methodology equipped the Cree teachers to use relevant teaching strategies conducive to Aboriginal adult learners.

Based on the study, the Cree teachers stored essences of cultural understandings and academic knowledge within islands of culture. These inner cultural insights include a firm understanding of Cree spiritual beliefs and Cree cultural values, and also knowledge of the historical background and linguistic structure of Cree. In the same way, Aboriginal adult learners at post-secondary level will acquire their identity as First Nations’ people in knowing their language and understanding their cultural roots. Knowing the richness of the mother tongue will enhance the identity of Aboriginal students, and this knowledge will help them to develop respect and interest toward the Cree language.

The study shows that the Cree instructors are productive language specialists, and they are sincere in their endeavor to revitalize Cree communicative competency among post-secondary adult learners. Their devotion and dedication will resonate into upcoming Cree language teacher novices as current role models in Cree language pedagogy, and āhkamēyimōwin (perseverance) will empower a fresh generation of Aboriginal teachers in language teaching methodology who will then emerge into the educational school systems. Other Cree language teachers who teach at post-secondary level may need to build islands of culture, and strengthen their
cultural knowledge, and also, they may need to refine their instructional skills in language pedagogy.

Stern (1983) asserts that a “good language teaching theory” helps to “meet the conditions and needs of learners in the best possible ways” (p. 21). He argues for a language teaching theory based on concepts derived from the fields of social sciences such as psychology, and sociology, and anthropology. Chastain (1988) explains that “language and culture are inseparably bound; therefore, complete comprehension during any type of intercultural communication depends upon the participants’ awareness of the social and cultural significance of the words and expression employed” (p. 298). The participants in the study found that the cultural aspects were reflected in the Cree language. When the cultural meanings embedded in the language were explained to students, the informants found that the personal pride of students was greatly enhanced. sikwan confirms this and advises teachers that there is “a need to let the students know the richness of their culture through the language...I think that is what changes them...and they say, Oh wow! This is a legitimate language...and it is full of culture” (sikwan, p. 13). The study shows that it is important for students to understand the deep meanings behind the Cree terms. For example, to a Cree speaker, kiskinahamâkêwin means, “the act of teaching” and comes from the verb kiskinwahamâkê (to teach). Within Cree learning and teaching contexts, a teacher is one who shares his or her knowledge and experiences with students. kiskinwahamâtowin encompasses a holistic meaning that conveys reciprocal learning. The teacher and the learner and community are sharing and learning together from the environment. It conveys a nurturing and a real learning
process. In reality, this learning process requires the Creator’s spiritual guidance in order to achieve success. Within Cree traditional learning and teaching contexts, the teacher and student, and the family, and also the community were all involved in the learning process, which was multidimensional within its socio-cultural contexts.

The Cree language teachers in the study began building islands of culture during childhood as they learned their first Cree words. As they matured in Cree language pedagogy, the islands of culture began to flourish, and also these teachers know that blossoming in Cree cultural ways of learning and knowing is a lifetime endeavor.

âhkamêyimo! to persist in one’s will, persevere!
Recommendations

The findings in this study demonstrate the need to build Cree identity among post-secondary Aboriginal students. An authentic First Nations identity links Aboriginal students to their culture in respecting their spiritual beliefs and their cultural values, and also opens windows of warmth to learn their mother tongue. The post-secondary adult learners who chose to learn their mother tongue are also able to establish Cree identities. The Cree teachers in the study created islands of culture to teach Aboriginal students Cree ways of knowing and Cree ways of learning their mother tongue. The islands of culture are inner "treasure islands" of Cree spiritual beliefs and cultural values. The Cree language and the life experiences of the teachers are also part of this treasure, as well as the linguistic knowledge and the teaching experiences. In order to entrench appropriate ways of teaching Aboriginal adult learners to learn Cree, and to suggest a positive learning environment, and also to address problems experienced by Cree teachers at post-secondary level, this study presents recommendations as guidelines to deal with the findings that emerged in the study. Based on the study the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations for Cree Language Teaching and Learning

1. It is recommended that post-secondary instructors who teach university courses in Cree language or who direct or teach Aboriginal programs such as Native Studies and Cross-cultural studies be encouraged to take training or studies concerning the First Nation language that is prevalently spoken within that area. The study shows that Cree language and culture are connected, and
instructors who speak an Aboriginal language are able to interpret the meanings embedded in the language, and Aboriginal instructors also have a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultural issues, including the historical perspectives of First Nations.

2. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions enhance the learning environment for Cree language instruction by offering a Cree classroom and providing access to language laboratories. One suggestion would be to offer some Cree courses and some Native Studies courses in First Nations communities such as the urban reserve, Muskeg Lake First Nation. Another alternative would be to offer intersession or summer Cree courses within First Nations communities where instructors travel to the Aboriginal communities instead of students traveling to the urban centers. The First Nations communities do provide an ideal learning environment for Cree fluency and also First Nations communities would offer true cultural learning experiences.

3. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions provide more specialized language training programs for Cree language teachers. The study shows that instructors who teach Aboriginal languages require knowledge of Cree protocol and an understanding on the culture of Cree First Nations. Cree teachers require specialized training to teach within First Nations teaching and learning contexts. Cree language teachers need to be fluent speakers to survive in the senior courses, and also they need to be solidly grounded in
Cree grammar and on linguistics, as well as to attain teaching experiences at post-secondary level using multidimensional teaching strategies.

4. It is recommended that post-secondary institutions include Cree language more prominately in its programming. Universities are independent entities with jurisdiction to help in removing racism, apathy and disrespect to Aboriginal languages within their boundaries. Universities in Saskatchewan need to provide more financial support and offer different Cree language programs that are compatible to Aboriginal ways of learning. The University of Saskatchewan needs to amalgamate with Saskatchewan Indian Federated College or develop their own Cree syllabus in order to provide Cree teachers with clear direction. Aesthetic arts need to be fully incorporated into Cree language pedagogy. The universities need to support language and music festivals as part of language teaching, and also provide support to publish Cree language teaching material such as Cree stories, songs and computer games. The universities need to develop and promote annual post-secondary Aboriginal language conferences, and offer mini Cree immersion camps, as well as mentorship programs for novice Cree teachers. The universities need to initiate true islands of culture where Aboriginal students are exposed to Cree language within a multisensory learning environment or a theater such as the interpretative centre at Wanuskewin theatre where they hear Cree being spoken with audiovisual presentations, and where this learning context would be mingled with ample opportunities for students to practice speaking.
Cree. The universities are well equipped to provide islands of culture learning.

5. It is recommended that universities initiate a networking system of Cree language programs with other universities who offer Cree courses, and also initiate a networking system to share Cree language resources with Aboriginal agencies and groups, and also with schools as well as with Aboriginal communities. Universities are equipped with networking technology, and the higher learning institutions which are publicly funded need to share this technology with the people they serve to help promote Cree language programs in this province.

6. It is recommended that the University of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Saskatchewan initiate working strategies with Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Center to implement plans towards the standardization of post-secondary Cree language programs. A working committee comprised of Cree language teachers, professional linguists and Cree community members is needed to initiate the plan of action. The study shows that standardization in Cree content and the evaluation process, and the writing orthography and also the teaching methodologies with post-secondary Cree language programs is urgently needed.
Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that universities in Saskatchewan initiate more qualitative studies on the First Nations language programs offered in order to obtain the voice of students, and the Aboriginal community and Native elders, for the purpose of improving and strengthening post-secondary First Nations language programming.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

Information Letter to Participants
Velma Baptiste Willett
1214-10th Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7H OH9
May 17, 1999

Dear

I am a graduate student enrolled in a Master's program at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. My teaching experiences have motivated me to become interested in studying Cree language methodology with adult learners. I would like to invite you to participate in the research study that is required to complete my degree.

My plan is to conduct interviews with Aboriginal instructors who have teaching experiences in Cree language at the post-secondary level. In my study, I will investigate teaching strategies used to assist adult learners to become more fluent in the Cree language. Instructors with teaching experience in the Cree language are being invited to participate in the study. The interviews will take one to two hours and with permission will be recorded on audio cassette tapes. I will transcribe the data, analyze and code the responses accordingly. The concept relationships will determine the themes of discussion in the study. I will ask you to sign a transcript release form. The recordings, notes and transcriptions will be held in a secure place for 5 years at the U of S with my supervisor after the completion of the study. The name and location of the participants in the study will be kept confidential, and participants will be free to withdraw from the study at their discretion. I hope you will be able to participate in the study and contribute your valuable knowledge and experiences as an Aboriginal teacher.

Please fill out the attached form, keeping one copy for yourself and returning one to me as soon as possible. I anticipate scheduling the interviews during May, 1998. I will be contacting you as to the exact time and location of the interview process.

Yours sincerely,

Velma Baptiste Willett
Ph: H (306) 664-9440
APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Forms
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Learning and Teaching Cree Language: Narratives from post-secondary teachers. Please read the following guidelines which are designed to safeguard the interests of everyone taking part in the study.

1. You will be participating in an interview process lasting one to two hours.
2. If selected, you will participate in the second interview process lasting one to two hours.
3. With permission the interview process will be tape recorded. You may turn off the tape recorder at any time. The researcher will transcribe the tapes.
4. After the interview process, you may be contacted to clarify certain answers on the transcriptions which may be unclear to the researcher. You have the right to withdraw any or all of your responses.
5. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcriptions taken during your interview. You will check the accuracy of the transcriptions or delete information that you want withheld from citation in the study.
6. The tape recordings and other data will be held in a secure place by Angela Ward at the University of Saskatchewan for five years after the completion of the study.
7. Your name and your location will not be utilized in the thesis. Neither will there be any reference made to your name and location in articles or presentations based on the study without your prior approval.
8. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. If you voluntarily withdraw, your contribution to the taped interview will destroyed.
9. Any questions that you may have concerning the study are to be directed to Velma Baptiste Willett (306) 664-9440 or to the Study Supervisor Angela Ward at 966-7585, or to the Office of Research Services at 966-9576

I ____________________________, understand the guidelines above (please print your name) and agree to participate in Velma Baptiste Willett’s study, “Learning and Teaching Cree Language: Narratives from post-secondary teachers”. I have retained a copy of this form for my own records.

__________________________________
(sign your name)
As an active participant in this study, the benefits of the participants are:

1. You will get an opportunity to share your ideas, and you will receive a copy of the thesis. You will benefit from other people's experiences and ideas. The thesis may help to widen your scope with teaching strategies in Cree language with adult learners.

2. You will be given recognition in the thesis acknowledgments if you wish.

3. You will benefit from the self-reflection on the successes of your teaching experiences.

4. You will be a participant to share in promoting relevant teaching strategies of the Cree language among adult learners at university level.

5. You will have a share in providing other indigenous peoples input with regards to the teaching strategies of the Cree language at post-secondary level.
CONSENT FORM:

I agree to participate in Velma Baptiste Willett’s study, titled “Learning and Teaching Cree Language: Narratives from post-secondary teachers”. I understand that the tape recording of interviews will be stored at the University of Saskatchewan in a secure place by Angela Ward for five years after the completion of the study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, and that all data pertaining to me will be destroyed if I withdraw. I have kept a copy of this form for my records.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Print Name: ___________________________

If you require further information, please call me at (306) 253-3332 or Angela Ward at (306) 966-7585

Velma Baptiste Willett: ___________________________

Date: ___________________________
APPENDIX C

Transcript Release Form
Transcript Release Form

I, ___________________ have read my transcripts and agree to release them. I have had the opportunity to read the transcripts to clarify, add or delete information so it will accurately represent my words. The procedure and its possible risk have been explained to me by ________________, and I understand them. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, that I may to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I also understand that although the data from this study may be published, and/or presented at seminars and/or conferences, and that my identity will be kept completely confidential.

_________________________   __________________________
Signature                      Date

_________________________
Researcher

I have retained a copy of this form for my records.

If you have any questions concerning the study, you may call me (306) 664-9440 at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, my supervisor (306) 966-7585 at the College of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies, or the Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan at 966-4053 for more information.
Interview Questions for Cree Language Teachers

The main research underlying question is:

What are the experiences of post-secondary Cree teachers in learning and in teaching the Cree language?

Research Question:

1. Tell me, how did you learn Cree?

Probing Question

What are your experiences in learning Cree?
How did you attain fluency in Cree?

Research Questions:

2. How did you come to be a Cree teacher?
   How do you teach Cree to adult learners?

Probing Questions:

What made you decide to teach Cree?
What made you decide to teach Cree to adult learners?

Research Question:

3. What problems do adult students experience in learning Cree?

Probing Question:

What things hinder Aboriginal students from learning and attaining Cree fluency at post-secondary level?

What changes are needed at post-secondary level with regards to Cree language programming?
Research Question:

4. What teaching approaches motivate Aboriginal adult students to learn the Cree language more effectively?

Probing Question:

What teaching approaches have worked for you with adult learners?
What would you change in your teaching style with adult learners?
APPENDIX E

Ethics Committee Approval
The University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "Learning and Teaching Cree Language: Narratives from post-secondary teachers" (99-122).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.

2. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.

3. The term of this approval is for 3 years.

4. I wish you a successful and informative study.

Daryl Lindley, Chair
University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research

DL/bjk