

IT SOMETIMES SPEAKS TO US:  
DECOLONIZING EDUCATION

IT SOMETIMES SPEAKS TO US: DECOLONIZING EDUCATION BY UTILIZING  
OUR ELDERS' KNOWLEDGE

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## **Lay Abstract**

This thesis examines the insights of three Anishinaabe elders (knowledge holders) who had extensive experience in Anishinaabe on-reserve schools or in community Indigenous education programs. They were interviewed to learn their views on what had and had not worked in past attempts to integrate Anishinaabe language and cultural knowledge into on-reserve schools and programming. Their insights inform recommendations for five strategies to improve the engagement of Anishinaabe students through culture-based teachings.

## **Abstract**

Three Anishinaabe elders who had experience in Anishinaabe on-reserve schools and in community Indigenous education programs were interviewed to learn their views on what had worked and not worked in past attempts to integrate Anishinaabe language and cultural knowledge into curriculum and programming. Their views on curriculum content, pedagogical methods, and education policy were solicited to gain a better understanding of how to decolonize the current Eurocentric school system and provide more successful learning experiences for Anishinaabe children and youth.

The key findings were: 1) language and spiritual education must be at the core of the curriculum; 2) elders' knowledge and their oral stories and oral history had to be the key means of transferring knowledge to the younger generation; 3) land-based, hands-on experiential learning experiences that utilized the knowledge and skills of community members were essential to successfully engaging students in the learning process; 4) teachers needed to take responsibility for identifying and nurturing the learning spirit in each child; and 5) commitment from the government for adequate funding, support resources and class time was essential for the successful integration of Anishinaabe language and cultural knowledge into on-reserve school systems.

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this research project is to learn from elders what is and is not working in the current Eurocentric education system in my home community of Wikwemikong, Ontario. This thesis explores what in the elders' view needed to be changed to decolonize the education system. According to Indigenous scholars and educational experts Marie Battiste and Leroy Little Bear, the current Eurocentric education systems in Canada, despite ongoing efforts by the federal government in educational reform, are failing our Indigenous youth.

Based on the most recent census data, there is a significant gap in provincial secondary school graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Ontario. On-reserve Indigenous youth had a 44% graduation rate, and off-reserve Indigenous youth had a graduation rate of 64%, compared to a 78% rate for all Ontario (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario 2012). The rate in Wikwemikong is 39% (Statistics Canada National Household Survey 2011). The latest First Nations Regional Health Survey found significant levels of anxiety and depression in about half of on-reserve Indigenous people, compared to one third of the general population (FNIGC, 2012). The suicide rate among Indigenous youth is some five to seven times higher than that of the general population (Public Health Agency of Canada N.D.). However, this rate varies significantly among different groups, as will be examined later.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledged the widespread cultural destruction (an estimated 150,000 Indigenous students passed through the Indian

residential school system) and also issued a call for action to redress the harms resulting from the Indian residential school system, including loss of language and culture. Among the recommendations were funding for educating children in their own language and culture and addressing the discrepancy in funding between on-reserve and off-reserve schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

The federal government has conducted an abundance of research on Indigenous education in Canada. From the Hawthorne Report in the 1960s, to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the 1990s, these studies have all concluded that the dominant Eurocentric education system is failing Indigenous peoples in Canada. Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture have not been empowered within provincial curricula and have not thrived within schools in most of our Indigenous communities (Battiste 1998, 2002, 2005, 2013; Little Bear 2009; McCue 2011).

I wanted to examine how the current school curriculum might enhance its portrayal of Anishinaabe culture and history, based on the local knowledge of community members and elders within our communities. I wanted to explore the resiliency of our elders' knowledge in the face of forced assimilation and how that knowledge could be utilized within our school systems. I have experienced that one of the main strengths in Wikwemikong is the traditional knowledge that is carried within homes and families down generations through oral stories and history. I hoped to learn the elders' ways to utilize oral knowledge, such as how to bring this knowledge from the home into the classroom and how to engage Anishinaabe community members with curriculum content and teaching methods such as storytelling. Regular consultation with elders would result

in more Anishinaabe culture being integrated into our educational systems. Creating an educational system that is adaptive to change based on feedback would also allow input from other community members regarding the content and teaching methods used to educate their children.

This thesis is organized into six main sections: 1) introduction, 2) review of the literature, 3) research methodologies and design, 4) results of the research, 5) the discussion of findings and 6) conclusions. The literature review itself is guided by four main areas of inquiry within a historical timeline regarding the education of Indigenous peoples. The first is defining Indigenous knowledge and traditional educational systems within Indigenous communities prior to European contact. The second provides a definition of the oppression and cognitive assimilation of Indigenous peoples. The third is a review of how Indigenous scholars defined the liberation of oppressed educational systems, and the fourth analyzes ways in which innovative education reform can be applied within Indigenous communities when the curriculum reflects an Indigenous perspective.

The research methodologies and design section includes a description of the community of Wikwemikong, where this research was conducted, and examines cultural resources and strengths. The study summarizes the expertise and advice of the elders on how educational renewal initiatives might increase the academic success of Anishinaabe youth.

The research questions explored in this thesis include the issues of cultural loss and forced cultural assimilation through the Indian residential school system. The data

was gathered from three face-to-face interviews with Anishinaabe elders (knowledge holders) who have work experience within the education system. One problem addressed was defining how cultural loss and forced cognitive assimilation impacted the Anishinaabe of Manitoulin Island. Another research area was resiliency: how elders retained their cultural knowledge and overcame the destruction of traditional ways of knowledge transmission by the Eurocentric education systems. This research also examined how Anishinaabe people have attempted to revitalize their traditional educational systems through cultural resurgence and decolonization. The results are discussed within three thematic areas: language revitalization, spiritual knowledge, and reconnecting back to the land within an Anishinaabe knowledge framework.

The discussion includes the development of new educational policies, curriculum development, and how proper funding and staffing can have a positive impact on the educational experiences for Anishinaabe youth. The elders expressed concerns about how Anishinaabe youth are losing their connection to their elders, land, history, and cultural knowledge. The elders all emphasized that it is crucial to reinstitute the traditional methods of Anishinaabe knowledge transmission, in order to enhance the connection between elders and youth within the community. This type of education would prepare Anishinaabe youth for the challenges of the present day, especially the current environmental crisis. The elders felt that the Anishinaabe ways of teaching children, such as experiential learning and oral storytelling, would be more effective pedagogical methods, and that the lack of these methods is harmful to Anishinaabe students.

The concluding section of the thesis articulates the need for policies of self-determination through processes of curriculum control and development. It concentrates on the spiritual aspect of Anishinaabe education and how it is related to language, land, oral history, and personal knowledge by reconnecting back to the elders and utilizing the inherent knowledge that already exists within our Anishinaabe communities.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review will discuss the problems that the Canadian Eurocentric education system has created for Indigenous peoples and how the current educational system continues to fail them. In general, it has been unable to provide successful learning experiences for Indigenous youth. I will examine the literature on the impact on the educational experiences of Indigenous youth of environmental dispossession and cultural dissolution, particularly through the Indian residential school system, as well as the imposition of Eurocentric ideology in schools, and the loss of traditional knowledge and traditional modes of imparting knowledge. I will look at some ground-breaking theoretical authors such as Paulo Freire, Vine Deloria, and Leroy Little Bear, who published foundational material for how pedagogy and colonization have impacted oppressed peoples. These authors have enhanced my understanding of how Indigenous cultural resurgence can take place through our current Anishinaabek education systems. The collective work of Indigenous scholars such as Marlene Brant Castellano, Charles Menzies, Joanne Archibald, Marie Battiste, Sandy Grande, James Henderson, Neal McLeod, Donald Fixico, Nicole Bell, Keith Goulet, Aman Sium, and Euro-Canadian scholars such as Linda Goulet and Eric Ritskes has created a wide-ranging discourse on Indigenous knowledge that has contributed to the process of decolonization through education for Indigenous youth and adults. Other Indigenous authors such as Gregory Cajete, Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, Winona LaDuke, Dawn Martin-Hill, Leanne



Simpson, and Deborah McGregor have focused on the revitalization and resurgence of Indigenous culture, in particular conceptualization of what constitutes Indigenous knowledge, and how it can aid Indigenous peoples to survive and thrive within current educational systems. Basil Johnston, Edward Benton-Banai, James Dumont, and Theresa Smith have documented and discussed the traditional stories of the Anishinaabek. Their work is important in theories of decolonization of education and consequent promotion of community functioning and successful learning for Indigenous youth. The final section examines emerging theories on Indigenous research paradigms and methodologies. Authors such Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Margaret Kovach, Kassandra Kulmann, Kathleen Absolon, Shawn Wilson, Michael Hart, Jessica Ball, Lynn Gehl, John Hansen, and Rose Antsanen have published work on how the theorization of Indigenous knowledge and research methodologies can be applied within a community setting. Their work will be used to analyze and draw conclusions from the data gathered from my ethnographic work in the field.

### *Defining Indigenous Knowledge*

Indigenous knowledge is knowledge acquired over generations and held by Indigenous peoples about their local environment and their specific culture. It comprises “a specific way of knowing based upon oral tradition of sharing knowledge” (Kovach 2010, 41). It is difficult to create broad definitions of Indigenous knowledge, since Indigenous peoples have practiced traditional ecological knowledge for thousands of years. Indeed, a sentiment often repeated by Indigenous peoples is that Indigenous knowledge is an expression of the way Indigenous peoples live their lives. Indigenous

knowledge generally refers to a local knowledge system, shared orally, that informs a culturally specific worldview that can encompass everything from diet to astronomy to the nature of relationships with the environment. Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor states, “Indigenous peoples ask themselves what they can give to the environment and their relationship with it. . . . To be sustainable means to take responsibility and be spiritually connected to all of creation, all the time” (McGregor 2004, 76).

Mohawk professor Marlene Brant Castellano, who served as a researcher for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples from 1992 to 1996, discusses how personal Indigenous knowledge can be valued as a legitimate mode of knowledge transmission. Indigenous knowledge can also originate from individual interpretations. Indigenous peoples believe that there is value in personal knowledge, which can make a difference within society. Personal knowledge within Indigenous societies does not compromise its validity, because Indigenous knowledge does not claim to be universal. Indigenous knowledge also allows for the differing beliefs of individuals, where “contradictory perceptions can be accepted as valid because they are unique to the person” (Castellano 2000, 26). Personal beliefs, interpretations, and interactions within the world are respected within Indigenous cultures, since they can also enhance the community’s understanding of the world (Castellano 2000).

Indigenous anthropologist Charles Menzies, who has conducted ethnographic research on natural resource management based on Indigenous knowledge, discusses how the ecological component of Indigenous knowledge can be integrated into Western natural resource management systems. This ecological aspect of Indigenous knowledge is

referred to as traditional ecological knowledge or TEK. As Menzies elaborates, traditional ecological knowledge evolved over generations from the long-term habitation of Indigenous peoples within their specific ecosystems. Their security and survival as a people depended on their knowledge and skills appropriately applied to the use of their natural resources. Indigenous peoples learned to live in a reciprocal relationship with nature, to receive the plenteousness of the Earth, while simultaneously giving back to it. Reciprocal systems, such as agricultural practices which do not deplete soil minerals, and forestry harvesting practices which allow for the continual use of specific forests, have started to inform non-Indigenous long-term natural resource sustainability and conservation practices (Menzies 2006).

The original teachings of Indigenous peoples are their creation stories, which establish their spiritual connection to all of creation, and their accountability to help continue the natural sequences of the earth. The oral traditions and knowledge of Indigenous peoples have always contained a holistic relationship of high regard towards their specific natural environments. These teachings have remained important within Indigenous communities, but, more recently, Western knowledge has developed an interest in what is now defined as Indigenous knowledge (Menzies 2006). Indigenous knowledge (sometimes IK) for this study will encompass both the broader definition and the more delimited TEK definition, as TEK was defined by non-Indigenous scholars who were solely interested in the ecological component of Indigenous knowledge. After the introduction of the term TEK, Indigenous scholars reclaimed the concept, which they referred to as Indigenous knowledge, asserting that the concept was more holistic in

nature. Specifically, for this thesis, the Indigenous knowledge that I refer to is called Anishinaabe *kendaaswin*. This refers to forms of Anishinaabe knowledge that are passed on orally within Anishinaabe communities from generation to generation, and that teach us our values, history, and our spiritual understanding of the natural world.

### *Decolonizing Eurocentric Educational Experiences*

In 1970, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire published his foundational book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which became a leading text in the development of critical pedagogy. He espoused the liberation and reclamation of humanity through education. Although Freire is not an Indigenous scholar, his groundbreaking scholarship inspired a new paradigm for current Indigenous authors to work towards a decolonization process within our education systems. Freire frames many of his points through the terms “oppressor” and “oppressed,” which have many parallels to Indigenous experiences within colonization. Freire describes this liberation movement as having two steps, where a person first needs to reveal the world of oppression, in order to create pedagogy that “no longer belongs to the oppressed,” but then becomes the pedagogy of all men (Freire 1970, 40). As oppressed peoples become more aware of the sources of their condition, they do not allow themselves to accept this oppression.

Freire recognizes the complexity of decolonization, because oppressed peoples born within an oppressive society are both formed by the concepts of that system and in turn rebel against it. Recognizing the source of these conflicts helps to understand some of the imbalance within the societies of oppressed peoples. Freire states,

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be praxis (Freire 1970, 52).

In other words, action and philosophy are equally important in leading to cultural resurgence.

Freire describes what he calls “co-intentional education,” in which students are not passive recipients of knowledge, but co-investigators who are empowered to think critically alongside the teacher, thus themselves enacting the idea of self-liberation (Freire 1970, 56). He discusses the model of education where students are simply vessels that the teacher is filling with information that they can recite. This model of teaching permits no agency for students, nor does it allow for natural inquiry or free thinking. It reinforces the hierarchy of knowledge where the teachers are the superior experts, with absolute authorization to transmit whatever knowledge they choose (Freire 1970). This style of teaching, combined with the traditional Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledge, further reinforces the notion of superior Eurocentrism. It is typical of existing attitudes in Canadian educational institutions with Indigenous students.

#### *Historical Overview of Colonial Education*

Settler colonialism in Canada is founded on and maintained through policies of direct displacement and assimilation. Canada's colonialism historically was imposed to ensure that the traditions and philosophies of Indigenous peoples would disappear, and that Eurocentrism would ultimately replace their mentality. This Eurocentric system of ideological domination is the primary method used by the Canadian federal government

to maintain control and oppress Indigenous peoples. Canadian colonialism destroyed the political and economic systems of Indigenous peoples by undermining their knowledge of spirituality, kinship, and nutritional and educational systems. Indigenous methods of education, such as experiential learning, were seen as inferior and were replaced with Indian residential schools (Battiste 2013).

The destruction of the traditional Anishinaabe education system in Wikwemikong began prior to the 1867 confederation of Canada. During the mid-nineteenth century, the British colonial government established daytime and residential schools within the Province of Canada (Ontario) for Indigenous children. Egerton Ryerson, who was the Province of Canada's Educational Superintendent from mid 1840's to the mid 1870's, created an Indian educational policy in 1847 geared towards assimilating Indigenous children. The schools that he set up were part of the first pilot projects of the now infamous Indian residential school experience in Canada. In 1843, the Roman Catholic Jesuit mission in Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island encouraged the establishment of an Indigenous day school, with instruction by the missionaries. By 1856, two schools were in operation at Wikwemikong. One school was a day school for Anishinaabe children and the other was a residential school for other Indigenous children, who were transported to Wikwemikong by boat from other communities (Carney 1995). The Wikwemikong Indian Residential Schools operated until 1913, when they were destroyed by fires. The schools were then re-established on the nearby mainland in Spanish, Ontario, and were in operation there from 1913 to 1965 (Shanahan 2004).

As a consequence of the policy of forced assimilation and Indian residential schools in Canada, the traditional educational systems of Indigenous peoples were dismantled. Many Indigenous peoples were raised without knowledge of their history, culture, languages, and traditions, and they lost their connection to the land. Indigenous educator Marie Battiste states, “Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous peoples throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a Eurocentric education system that has taught them to distrust their Indigenous knowledge systems, their elder’s wisdom, and their own inner learning spirit” (Battiste 2013, 24). Indigenous knowledge was actively marginalized through Canadian assimilationist policies that denied the validity of Indigenous epistemologies. Battiste elaborates further by stating,

Cognitive imperialism is a form of cognitive manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values. Validated through one's knowledge base and empowered through public education, it has been the means by which whole groups of people have been denied existence and have had their wealth confiscated. Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference (Battiste 2005, 9).

Despite efforts made by the federal government to control Indigenous education on a national level, Indigenous students have the lowest secondary school retention rates in the country. They have high rates of social problems such as drug abuse, suicide, and alcoholism as well as low self-esteem and poor self-confidence (Regnier 1995; Chandler and Lalonde 1998 and 2008). The Indigenous Studies and History teacher at the Wikwemikong High School, Joyce Pitawanakwat, stated to me that the educational system at Wikwemikong is still dominated by the Eurocentric education mind-set, and that the “concept of decolonization is not really addressed in the community. There needs

to be more Anishinaabe knowledge and culture integrated into the school curriculum in Wikwemikong” (Joyce Pitawanakwat, personal communication, January 25, 2017).

The Eurocentric education system in Canada failed Indigenous peoples in the first half of the twentieth century and has met with little success within the latter half. The educational institutions in most Indigenous communities are still dominated by the Eurocentric education system, and Indigenous knowledge systems have yet to be acknowledged. Battiste states, “Decolonization of education needs to take place within the schools” (Battiste 2013, 24). Battiste sees decolonization of education as an issue for all Canadian schools.

Although there is growing evidence that infusing Indigenous content and perspectives into the curriculum can improve academic performance and increase attendance and retention rates, integration of IK content is still proceeding slowly (Little Bear 2009; Archibald 2008). Indigenous knowledge content is not treated as a priority, but instead is viewed as an interdisciplinary topic to be folded into multicultural studies. Battiste views Indigenous knowledge as separate from Eurocentric education, because it has its own ontology, methodology, and epistemology. Indigenous knowledge is often presented through a European lens, whereby scholars try to quantify and categorize it through their traditional classifications, which often present European knowledge as superior. Most studies fall short because they fail to see the holistic nature of Indigenous thinking. Battiste feels that focusing on what is similar between the two systems of thinking will ultimately be more productive for educational reform (Battiste 2005).



Over the last decades there has been increasing recognition within the Canadian government, as well as in a series of UN declarations and resolutions, that Indigenous knowledge is valuable for the common good of humankind and that it must be protected from further loss. Following publication in 1996 of the extensive report by the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, there was a significant increase in academic and governmental publications (Battiste 2005). As part of ongoing work, the United Nations in 1995 published *Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People* (United Nations Development Group 2009). This work affirmed the value of Indigenous knowledge and added that “diverse elements of an Indigenous people's heritage can be fully learned or understood only by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by these people themselves” (Battiste 2005, 4).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 also makes significant recommendations about Indigenous education. It states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (Article 14.1). It also states that Indigenous peoples have “the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (Article 13.1). They also have “the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestation of their sciences, technologies and cultures” (Article 31.1). It also makes the important point that states cannot discriminate against Indigenous people's

cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations in education (Articles 14.2 and 15.2).

Beyond nondiscrimination (Article 14.3),

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007; Battiste 2008, 89).

Battiste wishes to extend the successful defense of Aboriginal rights in Canadian courts to the educational field:

Canadian courts have responded to the issue of Aboriginal rights by drawing on constitutional principles to reaffirm the right of Aboriginal people to have their rights respected and protected. It is time that educators did the same. . . . If Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy are to be integrated effectively into the national and provincial curricula, educators must be made aware of the existing interpretative monopoly of Eurocentric education and learn how the fundamental political processes of Canada have been laced with racism (Battiste 2005, 5).

This is similar to Freire's idea about needing to expose racist and oppressive structures before any enhancement can take place. Indigenous academics are developing new ways to address all of these issues to decolonize themselves and their students, and to foster an educational inquiry. "The immediate challenge is how to balance colonial legitimacy, authority, and disciplinary capacity with Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies" (Battiste 2005).

Battiste also elaborates on the ways the philosophies and beliefs of Indigenous peoples are portrayed within our current educational system. In publicly funded schools in Canada, both textbooks and classrooms give a partial, distorted impression of Indigenous history and culture. These materials present Indigenous peoples as backward and primitive and in need of civilizing and saving. Battiste says it is another form of

assimilative cycles that reinforce Eurocentrism and result in lower levels of self-confidence for Indigenous youth. These lessons focus on powwows, art, museum objects, and things that place Indigenous peoples in a historic framework, ignoring their contemporary existence and demeaning their value towards a global contribution of knowledge and culture (Battiste 2008).

### *Language Revitalization*

The assimilation strategy of prohibiting use of Indigenous languages in educational institutions resulted in the loss of language for thousands of Indigenous peoples. The impact was devastating: more than just the loss of language, it resulted in the loss of knowledge, because language is so intimately connected to Indigenous concepts and knowledge systems. The worldviews of Indigenous peoples are embedded within their language. Battiste is one of many who say that one of the most important foundations for the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge is the restoration of Indigenous languages. Indigenous students who have the opportunity to learn within their languages, in a holistic learning environment, with elders, are able to thrive and nourish their mind and spirit at the same time (Battiste 2008).

Battiste and Henderson explain that culture is transmitted within Indigenous education systems through language. The logic, reason, and rationales of an Indigenous group are different from those of a European group because of the differences in their languages. Most European languages are noun-based, while Indigenous languages are based on verbs. This type of verb-oriented language for Indigenous peoples is based on their sacred and spiritual connection to their land and natural ecosystems. The fact that

language forms the foundation of Indigenous knowledge reinforces the concept that knowledge for Indigenous peoples originates through the experiential learning of oral tradition (Battiste and Henderson 2000).

Battiste concludes that the solution to the Indigenous educational conflict in Canada is to help Euro-Canadian educators acknowledge that Eurocentric practices continue to marginalize Indigenous youth. Educators need to create a fair and just educational system that equally values and builds upon Indigenous knowledge and Eurocentric knowledge. Educational policy advisors need to start working together to get Eurocentric educators to acknowledge the importance of placing Indigenous knowledge within mainstream school curricula, so that the relationships among science, humanities, and languages all are based in a specific location (Battiste 2008).

#### *Indigenous Education Philosophy*

Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. discusses the philosophical differences between Indigenous knowledge and Eurocentric knowledge. He says the dominance of Eurocentric education within Indigenous schools is based on the fact that Indigenous knowledge systems are not acknowledged as being on a level with Western ways of knowing. As well, Indigenous knowledge systems are not acknowledged because they challenge the way in which people with Eurocentric views interact with the world. Deloria says that the West focuses on an empirical approach which stresses the importance of objective and quantitative methods of gaining knowledge about the world. The Indigenous way of knowing focuses on creating a relational, spiritual connection to the world. These approaches to understanding the world bring about two very different

types of knowledge. Therefore, it is understandable why it has taken so long for Indigenous knowledge to become accepted in the Western world as a legitimate form of knowing. The Eurocentric education system is largely based on the ideology of the progress of modern science and secularism. This Eurocentric notion is rooted in the belief that everything in the natural world is materialistic, without spirit, and can thus be controlled using modern technology, while the Indigenous worldview believes that everything in the universe is interrelated and comprised of spirit (Deloria 1999).

Little Bear (2009) concurs that there are fundamental differences in knowledge paradigms between Indigenous and Eurocentric thinking: differences in the ontology, epistemology, and axiology in the acquisition of knowledge. For Indigenous people, reality is about relationships, “knowledge is validated through actual experiences, stories, songs, ceremonies, dreams, and observation” and “spirituality, relationships, language, songs, stories, ceremonies, and teachings learned from dreams form the axiology of Aboriginal knowledge” (p. 10).

Deloria also emphasizes the roles of elders within Indigenous communities. Elders alone did not master the full body of knowledge, as they specialized in one area, and passed it down within families. Within this framework, Indigenous science is a complex set of knowledge systems which specialize in the knowledge of plants, animals, energy, health, and nutrition. The elders within Indigenous societies function primarily as the scientists in the community. Traditionally, most elders specialized in an area of expertise and they usually gained this knowledge at a young age, which was passed on to them through visions, dreams, or by oral tradition (Deloria 1997).

Indigenous knowledge is sacred, personal, and also culturally specific, as the knowledge of one Indigenous nation does not universally apply to all Indigenous nations (Deloria 1997). As Deloria states, “Special knowledge regarding other forms of life, if revealed in visions or dreams, was made available to the larger community on a need to know basis, since it was generally regarded as personal knowledge” (Deloria 1997, 37). Indigenous elders who possess this information regard this as knowledge of the community, and not of the individual. One notable difference between Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems is that the knowledge is a relationship of respect, which is highly valued on a personal level for Indigenous peoples and usually impersonal for Eurocentric academics (Deloria 1997).

Anishinaabe elder James Dumont is a retired educator of the Indigenous Studies program at Laurentian University. In 2006, he presented a keynote lecture there titled “Indigenous Intelligence: Have We Lost Our Indigenous Mind?” Like Deloria, Dumont makes the connection of how our own personal knowledge and experiences can be utilized for gaining an enhanced awareness of Indigenous knowledge. Dumont elaborates on how he came up with this concept of Indigenous intelligence. About forty years ago, he was concerned with the way that Anishinaabek were learning about their culture. The majority of Indigenous students during this time were learning about their culture from the Western perspective of anthropology and ethnography, by reading and studying about it (Dumont 2006). Little Bear also discusses in detail how this Western approach to the acquisition of knowledge is not congruent with Indigenous ways of learning or with Indigenous goals for knowledge acquisition. Consequently, it does not result in

successful learning or contribute to positive ethnic identity development (Little Bear 2009).

When we learn about our own Anishinaabe culture, we must learn by speaking from the heart, by acting and living our own traditions. Anishinaabe knowledge is holistic, originating from our inner spirit. This is the piece that is missing from the education systems that are provided for our children – the same education system in which I was brought up in. As Dumont states, “Our way is the way of the circle, our way is the way of the four directions, our way is a holistic way of life, we are environmentally conscious” (Dumont 2006, 3). In the future, the next generations of Anishinaabe are going to ask us, what does this holistic way of life mean? Dumont does not have a rigid definition of Indigenous intelligence, but says it needs to be articulated during our present time, by our own Anishinaabe ways, through “our way of life, our way of spirit, and our way of knowledge” (Dumont 2006, 3).

Anishinaabe scholar Basil Johnston believes that in order to create positive change in Canada towards enhancing the settler–Indigenous relationship, we must educate all Canadians at a younger age about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples. Based on the good intentions and the recommendations made by the TRC Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), new educational philosophies must be reviewed and amended using an Indigenous perspective. According to Johnston, the only way to understand the Indigenous peoples of Canada is to gain more awareness about their oral traditions, songs, ceremonies, and dance, stemming from their genuine cultural heritage (Johnston 2011). In his book *Ojibway Heritage* (1976),

Johnston documents the ancient oral literature (orature) of the Anishinaabek. Johnston transcribes the creation story, touching on the relationship between humankind and animals. He also looks at the ancient wisdom of the elders by discussing the medicinal knowledge of plants. In *Ojibway Ceremonies*, Johnston elaborates on the spiritual significance of specific ceremonies, such as the vision quest, the spiritual value of dreams, and the Midewiwin Society (Johnston 1982).

In 1988 Anishinaabe elder Edward Benton-Banai published the *Mishomis Book*. This book is based on the foundational ceremonial teachings of the Midewiwin lodge (a sacred spiritual society) of the Anishinaabe. At the time, Benton-Banai saw the need to transcribe the *aadzookaan* (sacred stories) of the Anishinaabe into written form in order to preserve the knowledge for future generations. Prior to this publication, these teachings were only heard in the lodge via the oral language (*Anishinaabemowin*). This work will help in understanding how traditional Anishinaabe teachings can be used towards the circular educational philosophy of *bimaadiziwin* (the good life). The work of Benton-Banai is also a guide to the Anishinaabe stories of Nanabush, who is a spiritual being and the trickster of the Anishinaabe. These trickster stories teach us about how to maintain balance and humility in our lives. The Seven Grandfather teachings of the Anishinaabe can also be integrated into educational curriculum, including how they are related to the Anishinaabe prophecies of the Seven Fires (Benton-Banai 1988).

Leroy Little Bear, a retired Blackfoot educator and philosopher, is the former director of the Indigenous Studies Program at Harvard University and has a wealth of experience related to revitalizing Indigenous knowledge within Eurocentric education



(Battiste 2000). In 2009, Little Bear composed a report for the Canadian Council on Learning, which was published through the University of Saskatchewan. This report, *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge*, is based on the input of a large number of primarily Indigenous academics for the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. It aims to provide the best thinking on how to implement their ideas (Little Bear 2009). Little Bear's group identifies six main issues that need to be addressed within our current educational systems. These are 1) learning from place, 2) nourishing the learning spirit, 3) Aboriginal languages, 4) diverse educational systems of learning, 5) pedagogy of professionals, and 6) learning with technology (Little Bear 2009, 6).

Little Bear elaborates on the definition of an Indigenous educational paradigm. He uses the Indigenous concept "all my relations," which is short for an Indigenous worldview that believes that the whole universe is comprised of energy waves, also known as spirit. This form of energy is animate, is constantly in motion, and connects all the relationships between existence, time, and place. This Indigenous worldview conceptualizes this constant flux as a spider web of knowledge, which includes the traditional educational systems of songs, stories, dance, and ceremonies. This Indigenous paradigm defines the "ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological aspects" (Little Bear 2009, 10) of an individual's experiential and perceptual method of gaining knowledge.

Little Bear defines Indigenous education as the transfer of knowledge from elders to youth "through formal and informal institutional structures" (Little Bear 2009, 14). Little Bear lists seventeen Indigenous methodologies used by students to learn Blackfoot

ceremonies (Little Bear 2009, 12). These methods are similar to widespread Indigenous methodologies which are currently being used by researchers to validate Indigenous knowledge through the oral, experiential, or revealed tradition.

1) learning from visions and dreams, 2) learning from origin stories, 3) learning from elders, 4) rites of transfer, 5) experiential learning, 6) developmental learning, 7) holistic learning, 8) critical thinking, 9) environmental learning 10) protocols and taboos, 11) community involvement, 12) learning from symbols, 13) effects of oppression, 14) spirituality, 15) revitalization, 16) language, and 17) philosophy.

The main methodology for Indigenous learners is the process of experiential learning, as will be discussed in detail later.

Little Bear also addresses the issue of systemic racism within our current Canadian educational systems. This racism goes unacknowledged by the Canadian government, shifting blame to Indigenous students whenever they are considered to be performing poorly in school. Little Bear addresses the harsh reality of social conditions in Indigenous communities that also affect their ability to thrive within educational institutions. These disparities in social conditions result from a colonial history and current policies that continue to have a negative impact on contemporary Indigenous life. These problems could be addressed within new initiatives of enhancing teacher education training programs, where educators learn about the colonial history of Canada and the value of Indigenous knowledge (Little Bear 2009).

Like Battiste, Little Bear feels that Canadian court rulings should influence teacher education. A 1997 Supreme Court case (*Delgamuukw v British Columbia*) started to place Indigenous oral history on par with historical documents. Little Bear also

mentions that Indigenous peoples have rights protected under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, where it states that Aboriginal treaty rights are recognized and affirmed, including the right, based on earlier treaties, to Indigenous education. He notes that the recent United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes a statement supporting Indigenous education. Little Bear also cites the 1996 study known as the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The report found that most Indigenous peoples felt that there was little curriculum material that portrayed them in a positive light, and often they were omitted from Canadian history altogether. Schools and the wider culture also do not acknowledge the contributions that Indigenous knowledge has made towards Eurocentric culture and the larger Canadian society. This same report also stated that there had been few efforts to involve Indigenous peoples in creating educational materials that would share their linguistic and Indigenous cultural knowledge (Little Bear 2009).

#### *Land in Education and Cultural Resurgence*

Little Bear also talks about the importance of connecting land to education, describing the development of the inner learning spirit for Indigenous peoples as inseparable from their relationship to the land. He also mentions language as integral to Indigenous knowledge, stating that loss of language is equivalent to loss of spirit. The knowledge of the land is deeply embedded in the language, which holds key information regarding their interconnectedness to the land. Little Bear also emphasizes involving the community with this aspect of Indigenous education, because “just as a person would

suffer from absences from friends, parents, and other relatives, Aboriginal people suffer when absent from the land” (Little Bear 2009, 21).

Kassandra Kulmann's master's thesis *We Should be Listening to Our Elders* focuses on knowledge transfer between elders and youth within the Anishinaabe community of Pic River, Ontario. Her research concerns how the knowledge of elders can lead to cultural resurgence for Anishinaabe youth. Kulmann notes that environmental dispossession, separation from traditional lands due to colonial policies of removal to reservations and residential schools, as well as forced assimilation, have led to the breakdown of cultural beliefs and values and a loss of language, identity, and self-esteem. The breakdown contributed to a sense of instability and hopelessness, which in turn led to high rates of depression and suicide, particularly among Indigenous youth. On the other hand, a resurgence of traditional culture, a sense of cultural continuity, including access to traditional land, self-governance, Indigenous language and identity, and control over education, health, child protection, police, and preservation of cultural artifacts and traditions were associated with lower rates of depression and suicide (Kulmann 2012).

Sandy Grande, an Indigenous educator who works in the US, stresses the importance of connecting back to the stories of Indigenous ancestors. She says that one important way to teach the youth their language and Indigenous knowledge is by learning from the elders. Grande explains that, through their ancient stories, we could “feel connected to the immense journey of all our souls as children of this earth.” Grande also states that Indigenous children today in our educational systems experience a “dual consciousness of ancient and modern, tradition and innovation, which has both plagued

and enriched their educational experience” (Grande 2004, 159). Eurocentric education systems exclude Indigenous knowledge. Most contemporary educational systems regard sophisticated Indigenous American civilizations as relics of the past, as if the knowledge of these ancient civilizations no longer exists (Grande 2004). It seems probable that teaching about the cultures of these advanced civilizations to Indigenous youth would help to give a more accurate account of the history of Indigenous peoples and increase their self-esteem.

Grande explains how the Eurocentric education system also teaches Indigenous children that they must attend college or university in order to learn how to act and behave a certain way, undermining the value of Indigenous knowledge that exists within the community. When Indigenous children are educated in a Eurocentric educational system, they learn to value individuality and independence over co-operation and teamwork. Children are expected to work independently in order to achieve personal success. This leads to children becoming competitive, undermining the Indigenous value of humility (Grande 2004). Indigenous children also learn that secularization and Western scientific technology are the essential truths for our modern existence. They are taught to believe that everybody creates their own destiny, which undermines the spiritual aspect of Indigenous knowledge. This characteristic of Eurocentric education rejects Indigenous ways of knowing and the notion of being in touch with one's intuition, inner spirit, or personal knowledge. It does not acknowledge that people are related to their local environment and the knowledge of other beings, such as animals, plants, and Mother Earth (Grande 2004).

Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete, who published *Look to the Mountain* in 1994 and *Native Science* in 2000, has made significant contributions towards the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge within modern educational systems. Cajete focuses on the spiritual aspect of Indigenous knowledge by promoting the decolonization of diet in order to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle. When Indigenous peoples hunted and harvested their medicines, they did so by the laws of nature, the animals, and the universe. They used sustainable methods of harvesting plants, medicines, and food. Indigenous peoples followed the seasons to reflect their diet in order to maintain the balance and their reciprocal relationship within their environment (Cajete 2000).

Cajete also elaborates on how Indigenous peoples have a special relationship with animals through their sacred connections to the spirits within specific animals. These special relationships were united in Indigenous worldviews. Animals helped humans to find water, food, medicines and shelter, and it is also believed that humans could communicate with animals. Indigenous peoples regarded the spirits of the animals as guardians and masters of their food supply, and shared a connection with them through spirit, dreams, and visions. "Each animal was seen to possess certain special qualities and powers that they could share with humans if they were treated properly" (Cajete 2000, 151). Almost every Indigenous culture in North America respected their sacred understandings about the treatment of animals before they were hunted. Animals were the necessary source for the survival of Indigenous peoples, and they were treated with the utmost respect. The "Hunter of the Good Heart" was a code of ethics and proper behavior about the teachings and relationship towards animals that all hunters followed. They did

not waste meat or talk bad and play with animals after they were killed. There were also the proper treatment of animal's remains and the sharing of meat with the community at ritual feasts (Cajete 2000).

Health and well-being for Indigenous peoples were based on a complex system, involving various plants and different types of foods. Since Indigenous peoples believed that all the plants and animals were imbued with spirit, they considered this spiritual connection to be comprised of positive energy, which could then be passed on to the people. According to Cajete, when the Earth was created, Indigenous peoples believed the plants and medicines were created first, to provide a medicinal system for all the other life forms on Earth. The plants and animals that Indigenous peoples relied on for their well-being were the essential foundation for their interconnected spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health (Cajete 2000). These are the four main elements of the human body, which are interconnected to the holistic health of Indigenous societies. As Gregory Cajete states, "Food combined with physical lifestyle and spiritual orientation formed an interactive triad that was the cornerstone of health" (Cajete 2000, 115).

Mohawk anthropologist Dawn Martin-Hill, who holds the MacPherson Chair in Indigenous Studies at McMaster University, emphasizes how the holistic aspect of Indigenous knowledge must also be taught within Indigenous school curricula. The holistic understanding that Indigenous peoples have towards their surroundings within the universe reflects their perspectives regarding their overall health and well-being, which are connected to spirit and rooted in the land. Indigenous peoples believed that every life form on Earth has a spirit, including the rocks, animals, air, water and plants. This belief

is not considered mythology, but is regarded as a way of life. Indigenous consciousness is complex, as it includes a spiritual foundation that guides the behavior and social structures about the everyday actions within an Indigenous society. The beliefs that establish this relationship vary between Indigenous communities, creating a plurality of knowledge, meaning that Indigenous nations respect the knowledge of other nations, as they also believe their knowledge to be valid. This Indigenous discourse guides the political, social, economic, and social structures within Indigenous societies on a holistic level, as the past, present, and future reflect the most important decisions made within their respective societies (Martin-Hill 2008).

#### *Gender Roles of Indigenous Women*

Anishinaabe *kwe* (female) scholar Winona LaDuke has published extensively on environmental issues and food sovereignty for the Anishinaabek and other Indigenous peoples. She also has been an advocate for the traditional roles of Anishinaabe *kweok* (women). LaDuke claims that agricultural restoration will enhance the community's health and well-being, and it will also assert their Indigenous sovereignty through their connection back to the land. The natural properties and physical components of foods provided a medical system for Indigenous peoples. This relationship within their natural environment of plants, animals, and foods was implanted in ideologies of Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. As LaDuke states, "The traditional practices of gardening, harvesting, fishing, and hunting provided for most Native American communities not only essential nutrition but also the essential physical activities for good health" (LaDuke 2005, 191).



The sacred power of Anishinaabe kweok and knowledge of other Indigenous women have been excluded from the Eurocentric educational systems. In the past, Eurocentric researchers have focused most of their attention on the roles of men within Indigenous societies (Martin-Hill 2008). The traditional roles of Anishinaabe kweok are not taught within secondary schools but in traditional ceremonies within the community. Therefore, if a child wants to learn the traditional roles of women in Wikwemikong, they usually have to attend traditional Anishinaabe ceremonies. This means that children from the Christian segment of the population will not receive those teachings (Pitawanakwat, personal communication, January 25, 2017). From this perspective, the role of women in Indigenous cultures needs to be included in an Indigenous curriculum.

Indigenous women acknowledge their sacred connection to water. Indigenous women have influenced other women to stand up for the protection of the land and water. The Anishinaabek, who live within the area surrounding the Great Lakes, hold a strong spiritual connection to the rivers, lakes, streams, bays, and natural springs. All children benefit from learning about the importance of water and how access to clean drinking water is vital for our survival as human beings. Though not often viewed as an in-depth area of study for grade school students, water can be related to mathematics, biology, geography, and even literature, making it an ideal topic for interdisciplinary study. LaDuke elaborates on how women's lives are spiritually connected to water through tides, moon cycles, and seasons. This concept of cyclical thinking among Indigenous peoples explains how they perceive the flow of cycles in the world. In Anishinaabe culture, women are considered the "keepers of the water" because of its intimate

connection to pregnancy and birth. When women carry life in their wombs, it is the babies who are carried in that water, and when it is time for birth, it is the water that comes out first. Women are considered to hold a special place and responsibility as givers of life and protectors of the water. Water is the “life of Mother Earth,” and it continues to be crucial for the health, politics, culture, economy, spirituality and the overall well-being within Anishinaabe communities (LaDuke 2002).

*Indigenous Resurgence and Revitalization*

Taiiaki Alfred and Jeff Corntassel in the article “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism” examine strategies to resist contemporary colonialism by the Canadian state towards Indigenous peoples. They look at how multinational organizations, which are involved with the state, inflict further colonialism on Indigenous peoples. Alfred and Corntassel focus on how Indigenous communities in Canada can revitalize authentic Indigenous ways of being through traditional governmental systems. They ask the question, “how can we resist further dispossession and disconnection when the effects of colonial assaults on our own existence are so pronounced and still so present in the lives of all Indigenous peoples?” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 599).

Alfred and Corntassel state that “Indigeness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005). This claim, that there is a struggle to be Indigenous in Canada today, fits within the context of “a form of post-modern imperialism” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 597), where the colonizer still dominates the Canadian state. The main theme in

this article is the idea of an Indigenous identity as defined by the state, as opposed to an authentic identity connected to language, ceremony, and community. This idea of the encroachment of the state plays a role in how we define ourselves today as Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples cannot allow the legacy of colonialism to be the only story of Indigenous peoples. We must recognize our traditional forms of government and educational systems by revitalizing the ceremonies, songs, and stories of our ancestral homelands and free ourselves from the legacy of colonialism through the process of decolonization (Alfred and Corntassel 2005).

According to Alfred and Corntassel, the first steps in the process of decolonization start with the individual. Decolonization is the change in the way that Indigenous peoples think and feel about resisting and challenging contemporary colonialism. Indigenous peoples must be willing to free themselves from further colonization. These are based on the original teachings given to us by the Creator and we must go back to their original instructions. There is no direct universal model for decolonization, there are only political and critical educational movements of resurgence that are taking place for Indigenous peoples as a guide towards further action. For Indigenous peoples in Canada, this process starts with “a strength that soon reverberates outward from the self to family, clan, community and into all of the broader relationships that form an Indigenous existence” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 612).

Alfred and Corntassel define five mantras for an Indigenous resurgence: 1) Land is life, 2) Language is power, 3) Freedom is the other side of fear, 4) Decolonize your diet, and 5) Change happens one warrior at a time (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 613).

Each Indigenous person and community will decolonize themselves through the process differently and at a different pace. In order to revitalize our Indigenousness, we must educate the next generation to do the same. We have to be fully committed as individuals to revitalize our Indigeneity. We need to heal and strengthen our bodies through discipline and refuse the damaging culture of mainstream society, while revitalizing our traditional medicines and diet (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 614).

Joyce Pitawanakwat stated to me that true reconciliation in Canada cannot be possible without Settler society coming to terms with its historic and contemporary role in disempowering Indigenous youth through failed educational policies. She feels that good curriculum is crucial to countering well-established ideas about power within treaty relationships between Settler and Indigenous societies. One entry point that she has successfully used to indigenize the provincial curriculum within her classroom is teaching about historic treaty relationships through wampum belts. By using the physical manifestation of treaties honored by Indigenous peoples as the basis for her lessons, students gain an understanding that Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples have negotiated with Settler society on their own terms since contact. As students learn about sovereignty as expressed through wampum belts like the 1613 Two Row and the 1764 Treaty of Niagara (to name just two examples) they can see that their ancestors laid a foundation of thinking that would define peaceful coexistence between these two groups. The complexities of history have not demonstrated a relationship that is immune from exploitation, corruption, and other interferences across the “parallel paths of the Two

Row.” Educating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth on the history of these relationships, however, can well serve us to strive for more fair dealings in the present.

Anishinaabe kwe Leanne Simpson uses the traditional teachings of her people and also refers to the concept of bimaadiziwin (living spiritually). Simpson uses Anishinaabe knowledge to elaborate on the process of Indigenous people's resurgence by revitalizing their ancient ideologies and philosophies within their natural Indigenous context. She emphasizes that humankind within our current era has a responsibility to protect Mother Earth. In order for Anishinaabe peoples to reclaim their ancient knowledge, they must reclaim “the holistic well-being of Anishinaabe people, through a series of cultural and political manifestations, including government, education, and restorative justice” (Simpson 2011, 20). Indigenous peoples learned from their creation stories, where they were given the original instructions from the Creator. In Anishinaabe teachings, humans were the last creature to be created within the world, and they must maintain a reciprocal relationship with all of creation (Simpson 2008). Simpson wants to motivate other Indigenous peoples to reclaim their individual resurgence through their traditional teachings, languages, and stories by utilizing the knowledge of their elders. She says that Indigenous resurgence must start within the individual inner spirit, and then move outwards to their families and communities in order to build strength within their nations. Indigenous knowledge is embedded within their ancestral language “which carries rich meanings, theory, and philosophies within their structures” (Simpson 2011, 49).

Simpson also states that the treaties that were signed between Canada and its Indigenous peoples must be honored not just by the federal government, but by all

Canadian citizens. This is how our current society can become an effective decolonizing force and truly move towards reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the descendants of settlers. All Canadians must support Indigenous peoples as they move towards the resurgence of their languages, oral traditions, and traditional government systems, which were disrupted by the Indian residential schools and colonialism. Indigenous peoples must revitalize their ancestral languages so they can generate more fluent speakers within their communities (Simpson 2011).

Anishinaabe kwe scholar and educator Nicole Bell considers the emphasis in the traditional Anishinaabek education system on spirituality that is gained by learning from and maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the land. Like Simpson, Bell also focuses on the Anishinaabe philosophy of bimaadiziwin, which reminds us that the way to return to a spiritual way of life is to connect our individual spirits back to the essential spirit within the land. Every Indigenous group has teachings that are specific to their region, but this core philosophy of land-based spirituality recurs in many other Indigenous nations (Bell 2013). Another commonality is that this connection typically values elders' knowledge, and is taught through oral history, connecting land, stories, and knowledge in a circular philosophy of education.

#### *Oral Tradition in Indigenous Research*

Indigenous professor Donald Fixico of Arizona State University has written about the intellectual knowledge of Indigenous peoples using the oral tradition. For many Indigenous communities, the oral tradition is an essential method for sustaining the educational systems within the community. The community is bound together through

oral tradition, which gives the people a common understanding of family values, experience, and a community ideology. Unity within the community is the most important aspect of the social relations within any Indigenous society. Donald Fixico states, "Community is central to Indigenous societies and holds more importance than individual status within the community" (Fixico 2003, 29).

This oral tradition is the core foundation for sharing, teaching, and passing down stories of traditional knowledge from one generation to another. This knowledge is shared in order to provide lessons about identity, ethics, and morals, and sometimes it is also used to predict the future. The concept of time is not imprisoned within Indigenous orature. The difference between oral tradition and oral history is that oral tradition is the experiential process of passing down stories through the generations from storyteller to listeners, while oral history is the retelling of a specific past event (Fixico 2003, 22).

Fixico states that "instead of writing about Indian people from the window of a library or archives using historical documents, oral tradition and listening to stories allows people to feel and become a part of the past and sharing a sense of time and place with the people" (Fixico 2003, 29).

Cree author and scholar Neal McLeod examines the resiliency of the Plains Cree in Western Canada by connecting back to the spirit of the land as told through their oral narratives and memory. McLeod (2007) emphasizes that the restoration of narrative memory is essential for undoing the destructive patterns of living that were responses to environmental dispossession and forced assimilation. McLeod emphasizes the need to respect our Indigenous elders and storytellers within our communities. Stories provide a

map for living a good life. They weave the past and present and connect the individual and the collective. He asserts that

While we cannot live in the past, we can draw upon the memories of the past to make sense of our experience today. . . . Cree narrative memory is more than simply an academic exercise in archiving information and sounds. Cree narrative memory is an ongoing attempt to find solutions to problems that we face today such as breakdown of families, loss of language and a general loss of respect for ourselves and others (McLeod 2000, 38).

Learning narrative memory from elders would provide a much needed grounding for Anishinaabe youth and would help them establish a secure identity and sense of place in society.

Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel describes how the oral narratives of Indigenous people's culture can be used towards making steps of reconciliation with the Canadian government. His article "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation" was published in 2009, shortly after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed in Canada in 2008. In order to repair the damage done by the Indian residential school system, Canadians must reconcile with Indigenous peoples in Canada. As Corntassel states,

The nation-state of Canada offers a very different version of history than those of Indigenous nations – one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous peoples from their families and homelands when enforcing assimilation policies, all of which were intended to eradicate Indigenous nations (Corntassel 2009, 138).

Corntassel elaborates on how Indigenous oral stories can be used within "decolonizing spaces." These spaces, where counter-narratives are articulated, can be used to voice an accurate portrayal of how colonization in Canada has impacted Indigenous peoples, written and told from an Indigenous perspective. Oral stories can be seen as a form of



truth-telling or resistance writing, told by Indigenous peoples through their own experiential living histories. When history becomes rewritten from an Indigenous perspective, it reunifies Indigenous communities while simultaneously working towards reconciliation with other Canadians (Corntassel 2009).

Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, who are both doctoral students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, see Indigenous storytelling as an act of resurgence and living resistance. Indigenous stories “challenge the colonial epistemic frame, which is propped up by Eurocentric claims to ‘objectivity’” (Sium and Ritskes 2013, III). Western research has placed the highest value on objectivity and quantitative research methodology, whereas Indigenous research emphasizes personal, relational, experiential knowledge. The focus on narrative and storytelling research is in their view inherently decolonizing because it puts Indigenous people at the center of the research process and its consequences (Sium and Ritskes 2013).

In 1995, Theresa Smith, a professor of religious studies, collected stories of the Anishinaabe of Manitoulin Island in the book *The Island of the Anishnaabeg*. These stories, gathered through conversations with the Anishinaabe elders of my home community, are the same ones that I learned from my elders while growing up on Manitoulin Island. This book is considered a foundational work within the field of Anishinaabe knowledge and spirituality. *The Island of the Anishnaabeg* can be used to help me appreciate the validity of my own Anishinaabe knowledge, in order to enhance my understanding of how I can use my own people's worldview in our traditional stories to transform the thinking of Anishinaabe youth.

*Indigenous Research Methodologies*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar, wrote the ground-breaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith 1999). In this work Smith laid the foundation of how research conducted within Indigenous communities should be overseen by Indigenous leaders. She demonstrates how use of critical educational theory can be an act of Indigenous resurgence and resistance towards ongoing oppression and colonialism. Smith asserts that the conventional concept of “research” originated from the Western scientific method, which in the social sciences was inseparable from Eurocentric racial biases. Although Indigenous research methodologies to some extent follow qualitative Western research methods, Indigenous research becomes very distinctive when it is embedded within an Indigenous language. Indigenous research methods should be considered as separate schools of thought, and should be accepted and acknowledged as parallel epistemologies on par with conventional Eurocentric research methods (Smith 1999).

Anishinaabe kwe scholar Kathleen Absolon re-examines research methodologies within our current Canadian university institutions. She elaborates on how an Anishinaabe research paradigm can be used by other Anishinaabe scholars. Absolon says that our Indigenous research methodologies must become fully accepted within the academy. Indigenous scholars must not view their methodologies as alternative but as legitimate. She states, “Compromising who we are, what we know and where we come from is unacceptable” (Absolon 2011, 47). Indigenous researchers, particularly graduate students, must learn to educate non-Indigenous researchers in order for Indigenous methodologies to become accepted as on par with Western research methodologies.

Absolon further states, “The sooner the academy recognizes the existence and vitality of Indigenous methodologies, the closer the academy comes to creating a welcoming environment for Indigenous scholars, who can then focus their energy on all areas of Indigenous knowledge production” (Absolon 2011, 47).

Like Absolon, Shawn Wilson, who is also an Anishinaabe academic, studied research within an Indigenous research paradigm. He emphasizes the importance for an Indigenous researcher to have a strong sense of self-identity before conducting research within Indigenous communities. His work directly impacted the way I want to conduct research within my own community by prompting me to reflect on my own cultural identity as an Anishinaabe. It also made me critically reflect on how I would conduct research amongst my people, not only as an academic, but as a member of the community. Although Wilson explains some of the difficulties that Indigenous researchers endure within academia, he also emphasizes that if Indigenous scholars develop their own research paradigm, they can determine what is ethical and validate the research being conducted within their own Indigenous communities (Wilson 2008).

Leanne Simpson asks us to claim the Anishinaabe word *biskaabiiyang*, which means “returning to ourselves” (Simpson 2011, 49). This is the process that can guide Indigenous researchers and academics, through a form of decolonization, to look back at the ways colonialism has affected their traditional ways of knowledge. This is the way in which Indigenous peoples revitalize their traditional values, ethics, morals, and philosophies. In order for Indigenous individuals to decolonize, they must have the support of their community. There should be accommodation between both the

community collective and individual commitment. Biskaabiiyang means to look back, to recreate the theoretical foundations of the past through the flourishing of cultural and political activities that heal the people of Indigenous communities. This works through the visioning, self-determination, and commitment of individuals within nations to start a new Indigenous “intellectual renaissance within the larger political and cultural resurgence” (Simpson 2011, 51).

Anishinaabe scholar Michael Hart influenced my thinking on how to use an Indigenous research paradigm to narrow my research focus. Like Wilson, Hart describes how worldviews can influence the ways in which Indigenous scholars conduct their research within their communities. As Hart says,

Worldviews are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek. They are developed throughout a person's lifetime through socialization and social interaction (Hart 2010, 2).

Within contemporary societies there is always a dominant worldview. Since Eurocentric education systems dominate our current provincial school curriculum, my education too was dominated by Eurocentric thinking. Before I decided to conduct research amongst my people, I had to analyze my own bi-cultural worldviews. I must understand my own Anishinaabe worldview before I can conduct my research, otherwise I might cause more harm than good. Analyzing, respecting, and learning worldviews from other Indigenous nations has been very beneficial to my research. Hart defines this as a relational worldview. As Hart states, “Key within a relational worldview is the

emphasis on spirit and spirituality and in turn, a sense of community and respectful individualism” (Hart 2010, 3).

Professor Margaret Kovach emphasizes the need to use Indigenous research methods to support Indigenous curriculum development. In making a case for the validity of using a dialogic, personal, collaborative research method that she terms “conversational,” Kovach asserts that Indigenous research methodology must derive from an Indigenous research paradigm. That is, methods used for research with Indigenous communities must be congruent with that group's particular Indigenous knowledge paradigm. In contrast to Western research paradigms, where relational research methods are not used in order to avoid bias, Indigenous researchers embrace relational methodologies, because this approach flows from an “Indigenous belief system that has at its core a relational understanding and accountability to the world” (Kovach 2010, 42).

This Indigenous research paradigm centers on theories of what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. Oral history and storytelling are the means of maintaining knowledge and transferring it to others. The Indigenous research paradigm also guides the methods of inquiry. Since oral history and storytelling are the primary means for sharing and transferring knowledge to future generations, and because knowledge is understood to be acquired and co-created within a relational dynamic, relational story-telling methods are appropriate ways of data collection (McLeod 2007). As Kovach states, “An Indigenous paradigm welcomes a decolonizing perspective. . . . Interrogating the power relationships found within the Indigenous-settler dynamic

enables a form of praxis that seeks out Indigenous voice and representation with research that has historically marginalized and silenced Indigenous peoples” (Kovach 2010, 42).

Anishinaabe kwe scholar Lynn Gehl writes about her *debwewin journey* as an Anishinaabe research methodology. *Debwewin* in Anishinaabemowin translates to *truth* (Gehl 2012). This work by Gehl validated the Anishinaabe research methodology I was trying to articulate and utilize before and during my research process. I critically looked at my own concepts of truth and honesty and what constitutes research that would be ethical and beneficial to my own community members. Using Anishinaabe *kendaaswin* (knowledge), this *debwewin* research methodology helped identify what was speaking to my heart and spirit as I went further into my research. As Anishinaabe researchers who work with our own communities, we have to remain truthful, honest, and respectful towards our culture and knowledge during our research journey.

In Kulmann's research regarding knowledge transfer between elders and youth, she identifies the community-based participatory research approach as essential to overcoming the negative view of research held by most Indigenous communities. The negative view is a result of a past history of research that extracted information for the benefit of Western academia but was of little or no benefit to (and sometimes harmful to) Indigenous peoples. The continuous involvement of the research participants during the data analysis phase, for example, greatly enhanced the quality of information gathered and the understanding of community issues (Kulmann 2012).

*Anishinaabe Educational Curriculum Development*

Jo-Ann Archibald, the Associate Dean for Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia, has documented the oral stories of Indigenous elders in British Columbia. These stories were integrated into educational curricula. Archibald describes how oral stories can be used as “heart knowledge” by connecting them to the inner learning spirit of Indigenous students through their emotions and intuition. She uses the ancient trickster stories of her people to connect the past, present, and future. Archibald attempts to narrow the gap between colonization and reconciliation in Canada, by using education as a site of mediation, a space where Indigenous knowledge and Western education can interact.

Archibald focuses on the knowledge of Indigenous elders from her community and emphasizes that if we take the time to listen patiently to the stories of our elders, it will transform our Indigenous thought and action. As Archibald states, “I believe that the Elders’ reminder to us to take time to talk in order to ensure correct representation of their Indigenous knowledge is an example of engaging in both decolonization and transformative-action processes” (Archibald 2008, 90). The work of Archibald has influenced me to utilize my own elders’ knowledge, by going back to my own Anishinaabe trickster stories. These trickster stories are relevant for contemporary education, as they provide life lessons of healing and reconciliation. Some Anishinaabe trickster stories will be discussed later.

Like Archibald, Anishinaabe educators Keith Goulet and Linda Goulet also conduct research on how the knowledge of elders can be recognized and utilized within

our education systems. In *Teaching Each Other* (Goulet and Goulet 2014) they focus on how elders who are fluent language speakers can be used to develop and design educational curricula for Indigenous students. They elaborate on how the revitalization of Indigenous languages is crucial in order to integrate Anishinaabe knowledge into the curriculum for Indigenous students. Goulet and Goulet also show how Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers can work together in Indigenous communities by being respectful of the culture. As they say,

Successful Indigenous teachers use the Indigenous languages and their cultural knowledge to build classroom relationships that encourage children to express themselves in culturally responsive ways. Successful non-Indigenous teachers bring culture into the classroom in a way that shows respect and encourages children to value current culture and learn about past traditions. Both view Indigenous cultures as rich, vibrant, and diverse (Goulet and Goulet 2014, 25).

They emphasize how teachers can become more effective by bringing elders into their classrooms. All members of an Indigenous community are teachers. Anishinaabe education can become a space where students, community members, and elders can all learn from each other as a collective (Goulet and Goulet 2014).

John Hansen and Rose Antsanen have both done research within Cree and Dene communities in Northern Manitoba. Their recent article, "Elders' Teachings About Resilience and Its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities," focuses on enhancing the resiliency of these communities by utilizing the traditional values of Indigenous elders and educators (Hansen and Antsanen 2016). This article made me realize the potential of the Elders Council on Manitoulin Island and how their knowledge



can be disseminated within our current education systems. As Hansen and Antsanen argue,

There is a growing awareness that decolonization of Indigenous education and culture is linked to Indigenous resilience. . . . Indigenous knowledge is not a relic of the past, but rather it still exists as an adaptation to life in a changing world (Hansen and Antsanen 2016, 3).

Indigenous peoples have always been resilient within modern education systems. This resiliency among Indigenous students and educators has been taking shape since the 1972 publication of the report *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations 1972). Hansen and Antsanen use their Indigenous knowledge to define what this resiliency means within our modern education systems and demonstrate how their research can be applied to other Indigenous communities in Canada (Hansen and Antsanen 2016).

An example of how academic institutions are partnering with Indigenous communities in Canada via community-based education is the work of Jessica Ball. Ball, a professor at the University of Victoria, has conducted research projects on integrating Indigenous knowledge with Western educational theory using a “generative curriculum model” (Ball 2004, 454). This curriculum model uses the specific Indigenous knowledge of individual communities through their language, values, culturally based traditional activities, and worldviews, by involving the elders and other members of the community. As Ball writes, “Many First Nations in Canada are actively moving toward a vision of improved community health and social and economic development that includes a substantial measure of control over health, education, and social services” (Ball 2004,

455). Ball describes how health, education, and social services should all be utilized together, through community partnerships, in order to train Indigenous community members, so that the whole community is involved with the education of their children and students (Ball 2004).

Most curricula developed for Indigenous students on reserves are based on a Western theory of educational development. Often, such curricula are developed by Eurocentric academics, who usually design a “standardized, one-size-fits-all” curriculum for Indigenous students (Ball 2004). This method often fits within an ongoing colonial mindset because it is not relevant to the socioeconomic conditions of specific rural Indigenous communities. Specific cultural curriculum development needs to match the unique visions of the communities themselves. According to Ball,

Education and training programs that offer pan-Aboriginal curriculum content in an effort to be culturally sensitive are flawed because they fail to appreciate the heterogeneity of over 605 different First Nations in Canada, each with their own particular history, language dialect, culture, and social organization (Ball 2004, 458).

The establishment of new educational curriculum development within Indigenous communities needs to be initiated by Indigenous academics. There are an increasing number of Indigenous scholars within academia today, but community support is still crucial for the success of Indigenous curriculum development. Anishinaabe students who leave their rural communities to pursue a university education sometimes do not return home after they finish, or feel out of place if they do. As an Anishinaabe, I want to return home, using the tools from a Eurocentric education system, to become involved with ongoing community research initiatives.

The work of Indigenous scholars provides a theoretical framework for an Indigenous research methodology for uncovering the ideology, assumptions and beliefs that have influenced the nature and quality of educational experiences for Indigenous students. The Indigenous research paradigm is a critical ethnographic approach because it emphasizes reflexivity and seeks to reduce the biases that were inherent in past traditional ethnographic studies, by centering studies on the voice of the research participants through a storytelling, oral tradition methodology, adherence to cultural protocols for conducting conversations, and emphasis on benefiting the community. The decolonization theoretical perspective in an Indigenous research model insures that attention will be paid to the social injustices that Indigenous peoples continue to experience. Therefore, in this research study an Anishinaabe research model will be employed with the goal of demonstrating the utility of the model for insuring that the Wikwemikong community will benefit from the research.

## **Research Methodologies and Design**

### Research Purpose and Theoretical Framework

Indigenous communities across Canada have experienced the devastating impacts of culture loss as a result of European settler colonialism. Many Indigenous youths are raised without knowing their history, culture, languages, and traditions and have lost their connection to the land. Today, Indigenous youth have lost respect for themselves, their community and their elders. The effects of these aspects of cultural malaise are shown by high rates of high school dropping out, substance abuse, and suicide, as reported in newspapers around the world and in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

There is a growing recognition among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians that revitalization of traditional Indigenous teachings is needed to restore pride and respect in Indigenous communities. Recent research on revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and integrating it into the educational systems supports the idea that such educational reforms can result in greater academic success and more positive personality development (Chandler and Lalonde 1998; 2008). Little Bear, in a synthesis paper for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre summarizing input from a diversity of Indigenous academics, stressed that there is a need for a “dialog with Aboriginal people to define successful learning” from their perspectives. He noted that there are gaps in our understanding of what “Aboriginal Peoples aspire to and need to succeed in their learning endeavors” (Little Bear 2009, 2-3). Kovach states that success in integration of Indigenous knowledge into curriculum and teaching methods, as measured by

improvement in high school graduation rates, “requires an anti-racist, decolonizing knowledge of Indigenous worldviews, community, and cultural norms” (Kovach 2010, 44).

This thesis also seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Anishinaabe elders about previous and proposed attempts to decolonize the educational experiences of Indigenous youth and to integrate Anishinaabe culture and ways of learning into the Wikwemikong educational system. The interview questions and method of interviewing were guided by an Indigenous research model and a decolonization perspective. The discussions specifically addressed the need to improve and develop elementary and secondary curriculum content used by Anishinaabek students. The overall philosophy of the research process was based on Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, which asserts that innovative education curriculum, when a process of decolonization is taking place, can resist existing settler colonialism only if it is proposed and applied by the oppressed.

The following decolonizing educational principles also guided the interviewing process with Anishinaabe elders about the educational experiences of Anishinaabe youth:

- 1) The need for Anishinaabe knowledge to be acknowledged as a valid knowledge system worthy of study in order to be integrated into the current provincial curriculum.
- 2) The need for educators today to redefine education as not solely a practice that takes place in the classroom, but that can also utilize experiential work done with Anishinaabe elders while spending time within natural surroundings.
- 3) In order to experience and foster a true cultural resurgence, the need for Anishinaabe teachers and students to embrace their own Anishinaabe knowledge systems through learning and sharing their teachings of food, philosophy, songs, stories, culture, and language.

The intent of this thesis is to increase our understanding of what constitutes successful learning and positive personal outcomes in the acquisition of knowledge. The research method involves dialogues with three Anishinaabe elders who both hold traditional cultural knowledge and have experience in the Canadian educational system. The ethnographic case studies focused on how Anishinaabe knowledge systems such as contemporary Manitoulin Island history, orature, and decolonized diet might be effectively integrated into the educational curriculum. The research relates to a process of decolonization for my own community, specifically within educational curriculum designed for Anishinaabek youth. My motivation to conduct research within my own community stems from my cultural affiliation with my Anishinaabek kin. The Anishinaabek of Manitoulin Island have always demonstrated resiliency towards Eurocentric education. I want to focus on the resiliency of the elders and how this project can also be applied to other Anishinaabek communities.

During the period when I was conducting my research, I gave conference presentations on my theory and methods for this thesis. Afterward, I was invariably approached by non-Indigenous educators, mostly from Ontario school boards, both private and public, who were interested in obtaining relevant curriculum. I let them know that I could not provide such materials but directed them to the work of other Indigenous scholars who have conducted research in this field to obtain Indigenous curriculum content. These experiences increased my motivation to pursue this type of research.

In addition, for my research I reviewed archival historic and cultural documents at the Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, the Wikwemikong Historical Society, and the

Ojibwe Cultural Foundation. Participation in community events and document reviews also served as validity checks to the analysis and interpretation of the case study interviews. In these informal settings, my role as a researcher was always disclosed to anyone with whom I was communicating regarding project topics.

*Research Questions:*

- How do the elders view the impacts of loss of Anishinaabe culture and Eurocentric education on Manitoulin Island and the Wikwemikong community?
- What were their educational experiences, and how do they view the educational experiences of Anishinaabe students, in elementary and secondary educational systems that do not provide educational opportunities informed by Anishinaabe knowledge systems?
- What do they see as essential traditional knowledge for Anishinaabe youth, and what are their views on appropriate instructional methods and training for teachers?
- What is their experience with integrating Anishinaabe traditional knowledge into the curriculum, and what are their views on how this can be done effectively and positively?
- What supports and curricula would need to be provided for such integration to be a successful educational experience?
- What are their views on integrating contemporary Wikwemikong history, orature, and decolonized diets into the curriculum?

*Rationale*

The implications for Indigenous research which have been derived from the imperatives inside the struggles of the 1970s seem to be clear and straightforward: the survival of peoples, cultures and languages; the struggle to become self-determining, the need to take back control of our destinies. These imperatives have demanded more than rhetoric and acts of defiance. The acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting indigenous cultures and languages have required the mounting of an ambitious research programme, one that is very strategic in its purpose and activities and relentless in its pursuit of social justice (Smith 1999, 142).

For nearly two centuries, Indigenous peoples in North America have been “over-researched” within academic settings through the lens of Eurocentric ideology. As Smith states, “The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith 1999, 1). If Indigenous academics want to use their research as a form of resistance to ongoing settler colonialism, then the conventional methods of research within Indigenous communities must be decolonized.

Modern, innovative decolonizing research methods being applied by Indigenous scholars originate within specific epistemologies of cultural traditions. The traditional values instilled in these research methods aim to enhance the social needs and interests of Indigenous communities (Kovach 2009). As Indigenous communities have assumed greater control of their educational institutions, they have increased their ability to determine the research methodologies used within them. These methodologies can contribute to a better understanding of the educational challenges faced by Indigenous communities, so that community leaders can formulate more effective educational policies. Indigenous scholars trained in both Western and Indigenous research methodologies can assist communities in evaluating and modifying non-Indigenous educational research findings to select programs and policies that will best fit their educational needs (Little Bear 2009).

As Cajete emphasizes this means that educational research needs to be tailored to the specific needs and traditions of each community. He states:

Educational research provides tools essential to the survival of Indigenous people and communities, but this educational research must be contextualized as part of a greater whole. Every community must learn to integrate the learning that occurs



through modern education with the cultural bases of knowledge and value orientations essential to the perpetuation of a community and its way of life. For educational research to be deemed useful by Indigenous people, research must be based in their communities and must be an intimate part of their lives (Cajete 2008, 205).

Anishinaabe scholars and students working within the academy are often restricted to using Eurocentric research methods, sometimes setting aside Anishinaabe knowledge, in order to make their work more understandable to non-Indigenous associates. In the past two decades, Anishinaabe scholars have cleared pathways for other Anishinaabe academics to utilize their traditional culture, Anishinaabe ways of knowing, and Anishinaabemowin as a legitimate research methodology. Margaret Kovach, Shawn Wilson, Deborah McGregor, Leanne Simpson, and Kathleen Absolon are among the Anishinaabek scholars who are laying these foundations for other Anishinaabe researchers. They are also looking for ways to decolonize our diet and revitalize our traditional agricultural systems, while utilizing the knowledge of our elders through Anishinaabemowin and Bimaadiziwin, meaning “The Good Life” (Bell 2013).

In this thesis, I use language and culture as a methodological approach through Anishinaabe oral stories (*dibaajimowin*) as a way to convey an Anishinaabe epistemology based on the specific culture of the Anishinaabek. The two main methods I use are the conversations with elders and the autoethnography method from my inner reflection. As Kovach explains, “The conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge

based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm” (Kovach 2010, 40).

Euro-Canadian academics often emphasize the ecological component of Indigenous knowledge rather than its spiritual foundations. This knowledge was always passed down orally by elders, and often came through observation of the plants and animals within their surrounding environment. It can also come to humankind through dreams, experimentation, or by participating in ceremonies. Spirituality was not isolated to a specific time or place; it was embedded within all aspects of daily life, and needed to be reaffirmed regularly through Indigenous people's language, which has a strong connection to the land and the other elements within the natural environment (Simpson 2001). Kovach elaborates on how Indigenous languages can become the core foundation of Indigenous research methodologies when working with fluent language speakers, and how validity becomes compromised within Western research. She states,

Indigenous knowledges have a fluidity and motion that is manifested in the distinctive structure of tribal languages. They resist the culturally imbued constructs of the English language, and from this perspective alone Western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far. This is a significant difficulty for all those, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who do not speak a tribal language yet are inquiring into the nature of tribal knowledges (Kovach 2009, 30).

The autoethnography method inspired me to reflect on my own inner knowledge. Other sources of information were through participation in traditional Anishinaabe knowledge gatherings such as medicinal workshops and historical teachings. Taking part in these community activities allowed my own inner spiritual knowledge to become revitalized during the research process. Shawn Wilson emphasizes how an Indigenous

research paradigm can become very effective when the researcher also takes on the role of a storyteller based on their personal knowledge. The author becomes a storyteller/researcher and applies their own life experiences into their findings. The audience can relate to this information to make it more relevant to their own life experiences. As Wilson states, “When listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story fits into the storyteller’s life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge that much easier” (Wilson 2008, 32). For the purpose of my research and study, my own story can be applied to an audience of Anishinaabe youth and how the wisdom of the elders can be utilized in their daily lives.

An Indigenous research paradigm is inherently a decolonization perspective, because of its emphasis on specific contextual knowledge and on Indigenous voices and representation (Kovach, 2010). Decolonization of research methodologies requires the discarding of old discourses and agendas embedded in settler–Indigenous dynamics and a movement towards cultural resurgence, community-relevant research, and social justice. In order to decolonize, we must get rid of the old discourses embedded within settler colonialism and move towards a process of cultural resurgence. Indigenization and Anishinaabe cultural resurgence is grounded within an Indigenous research methodology. My Anishinaabe research methodology utilizes the stories of the Anishinaabe, and also originates from my own reflection on my cultural knowledge. Anishinaabe stories need to be told and interpreted from an Anishinaabe perspective.

*Research Site and Community Context*

My home community is located on the traditional homelands of the Odawa people, who are a part of the larger traditional Anishinaabek Nation. The focus of this study is the Anishinaabe community of Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation (or Unceded Indian Reserve) on Manitoulin Island, which is one of the larger Indigenous communities in Ontario and one of the largest Indigenous communities in Canada by land area (425 square kilometers). Wikwemikong has a total band membership of 7,500, with about 3,200 band members living within the First Nation's boundaries, while the remaining 4,300 members live in cities or other communities. About 19% of the 3,200 band members living in Wikwemikong are youth between 12 and 24 years of age (2009 data: Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve N.D.).

The Anishinaabek Nation of Wikwemikong originates from the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi peoples as part of the Three Fires Confederacy. Since time immemorial, the Odawa lived on Manitoulin Island. Following the American Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Potawatomi fled the United States and arrived in Ontario. In 1836, the British Crown established Manitoulin Island as a sovereign territory, to which some Potawatomi peoples relocated. The Manitoulin Island Treaty of 1862 resulted in European settlement on the island, but Wikwemikong leaders refused to sign and surrender their lands, establishing Wikwemikong as Unceded territory (Greene 2005).

In a recent study on the health and well-being of the Wikwemikong community, an association was found between poor health outcomes with lower socioeconomic status and a history of colonialism and cultural dissolution (Jacklin 2009). Previous research

found that there is a direct link between poor health within Indigenous communities and culture denigration by the dominant Canadian Eurocentric culture (Regnier 1995; Chandler and Lalonde 1998; 2008). This Eurocentric dominance in Canada is a form of ongoing colonialism, mainly because Indigenous communities such as Wikwemikong are still controlled by systemic racist policies, like the Indian Act, which defines how education, health, and justice systems are implemented in Indigenous communities (Alfred 2009; Corntassel 2009). Although Wikwemikong has recently made progress towards strengthening their own governance structures, the community's governing body, the Wikwemikong Band Council, must follow the guidelines within the Indian Act (Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve N.D.). The research results reported in this thesis support the idea that cultural strength in Wikwemikong could be enhanced through teaching traditional cultural values, language, and identity, leading towards greater autonomy, self-empowerment, and self-determination.

#### *Researcher Positionality and Identity*

I am an Anishinaabe from the Bear Clan and was born and raised in the community of Wikwemikong, Ontario. The Anishinaabe are an Indigenous group extending beyond Manitoulin Island who share a common culture and language. The *Anishinaabek* (plural) in Wikwemikong are comprised of the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi peoples who reside on Manitoulin Island near the north shore of Lake Huron in Northern Ontario. I use the term Indigenous to refer to all First Nations, Metis, or Inuit people in Canada. Indigenous peoples generally prefer their traditional identity names, so I will use Anishinaabe when referring to the specific community on Manitoulin Island.

When Indigenous researchers conduct research within their home communities, they often describe themselves within an insider/outsider researcher duality. For example, for this study I would fit into this insider category because I was born and raised within the Anishinaabek culture. I have been surrounded by the language and traditions all of my life, and I have also experienced the socioeconomic challenges that many Indigenous communities face.

As an insider, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating effects that European colonialism and the Indian residential school system have had on Indigenous peoples. I have witnessed the effects of cultural loss within my own family and the high rate of substance abuse among the youth in my community. By using my home community of Wikwemikong as a case study, I will examine how these issues specifically affect one community and how Anishinaabe knowledge could be applied there.

Although I am considered a part of the community, as an academic, I might be considered an outsider if I use academic words or concepts that some community members are not familiar with. Being an outsider researcher means that I left the community to attend university and I am now conducting research within my community through a Western academic theoretical lens. Since history indicates that many Indigenous peoples do not trust Western research methods, Indigenous researchers must apply their own research methods when working within Indigenous communities (Kovach 2009; Smith 1999). As Smith suggests,

insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. . . .

insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities (Smith 1999, 137).

For this study, I have attempted to use a mixed qualitative research methodological approach by infusing Anishinaabe knowledge within a Western qualitative research method. At times, it was challenging because Indigenous research methodologies are not yet fully accepted in the academy. Kovach comments on this dynamic:

There is a desire to give voice to Indigenous epistemologies within qualitative research, yet those who attempt to fit tribal epistemology into Western cultural conceptual rubrics are destined to feel the squirm. From my perspective, Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research at best form an insider/outsider relationship (Kovach 2009, 31).

Indigenous insider/outsider researchers maintain a decolonization approach by being respectful of their culture and exhibiting honesty, trustworthiness, and humility. In addition, their research should be beneficial to their communities. I was originally drawn to the topic of Indigenous knowledge in educational curricula because of the emerging evidence that a positive cultural identity could be protective against school failure and substance abuse. This was part of my rationale for employing Anishinaabe epistemologies in the structuring of my research methods.

### *Participants and Recruitment*

The participants were recruited for their expertise in traditional Anishinaabe culture and their involvement with the Wikwemikong school system. I have known Joyce Pitawanakwat all my life because she is my aunt. As a child, I traveled with her to Anishinaabe ceremonies and cultural gatherings. Later in life she encouraged me to complete my graduate studies at McMaster University. Pitawanakwat is both a former

university professor and a secondary school educator, who retired in 2015. Over the past five years, she started to tell me about challenges she witnessed during her years as an educator within the Ontario provincial education system. During her career as a professor and also as an educator employed at the Wikwemikong High School, Pitawanakwat told me about how she decolonized her classes by designing her own Anishinaabe-centered curriculum. She would ask elders from the community to come into her classroom and share their knowledge of local culture and history. She found the Indigenous Studies curriculum at the secondary school level to be broad enough that she was able to meet the required learning objectives. It was at this time I had asked her to advise me with my project and to take part in some formal interviews regarding my thesis structure.

To address my research questions, I needed information from people who had a lifelong acquaintance with Anishinaabe culture and with both formal and informal education. I also was looking for experience in resisting settler colonial attitudes and with implementing the use of traditional cultural practices and philosophies in varied settings, including public education. I was able to approach three Anishinaabe knowledge holders who have influenced my thinking and who I hoped could directly contribute to my research project. All three had a large impact on my research process and my conclusions of how a decolonization framework could be applied to the Wikwemikong educational system. All have a wealth of experience working with public education and Anishinaabe knowledge and are actively involved within local Anishinaabek communities. Joyce Pitawanakwat is a woman from Wikwemikong, ON, age mid-60s. Lewis Debassige is a man from M'Chigeeng, ON, who is in his early 70s. Isaac Murdoch is a man from Cutler,



ON, who is in his mid-40s. Although less of an “elder” in age than the first two, he was raised learning the orature of the Anishinaabe and currently lives a traditional life style.

All three maintain and transmit Anishinaabek traditions through education, and the first two are fluent in the Anishinaabe language, Anishinaabemowin. The Anishinaabek in Wikwemikong speak a distinct Anishinaabemowin dialect due to their unique history of the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi peoples, who have resided there together since the mid-nineteenth century. This dialect has evolved since then and it is the only version spoken in Wikwemikong. It is also the language in which my parents, relatives, and elders are fluent. The oral tradition derived from this dialect will be the data collected for this study. There will be interview questions that explore how the use of Anishinaabemowin can help in understanding an Anishinaabe worldview and how it might be utilized in educational curricula. I will use the oral tradition from this dialect for the transmission of Anishinaabe knowledge within my specific research. When Anishinaabe scholars use the oral language, it can open up a new range of knowledge and insight even when it is translated into English. Working with Anishinaabe educators who are fluent in Anishinaabemowin will allow me to acquire this mode of knowledge transmission from its source.

Each elder whom I recruited for my research process was asked respectfully, according to Anishinaabek protocols. Within our Anishinaabek culture, it is appropriate to visit and listen respectfully and attentively prior to conducting any formal interviews. These initial visits establish trust between the researcher and participant so that there is a mutual understanding that the research being conducted is with good intentions. When

conducting research within Anishinaabek communities, one should keep in mind their Seven Grandfather Teachings, namely honesty, truth, love, humility, wisdom, respect, and courage (Benton-Banai 1988). These teachings encompass and acknowledge the spiritual and ethical aspects of Anishinaabe ways of knowing. Each elder was also given a gift, while tobacco was also offered to the Creator as part of the acknowledgement to the elders. The Seven Grandfather Teachings were also incorporated into the research process using the methods of autoethnography.

I first met Isaac Murdoch in May of 2015, when he was speaking to some youth about Anishinaabe star knowledge at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation. After his presentation, we talked. Murdoch is an artist, educator, and traditional knowledge holder who has devoted himself to learning, preserving, and transmitting traditional Ojibwe culture and practices. The following year he was the keynote speaker at the annual Ojibwe Cultural Foundation Conference, where I also gave a presentation. At this time, I asked Murdoch if he could help me with my thesis by guiding me in some oral history of the Anishinaabe peoples. I conducted one formal interview with him. He also mentioned that he, under the name Isaac Day, had published an article that in part touched on related issues and provided it to me. On the day that I interviewed him, he was visited by Christi Belcourt, a Metis visual artist who has collaborated with him on projects that were related to my research questions. She joined in our conversation at times, and some of her responses were incorporated in my results section.

I first met Lewis Debassige in August 2015 through a mutual friend. Debassige's involvement with Indigenous education issues goes back some 45 years, when he helped

draft the report *Indian Control of Indian Education*, the Indigenous response to the Canadian government's assimilationist policy of 1969 (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations 1972). When I told Debassige about my research, he volunteered to assist me with my research project. He invited me to present at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation Conference in February 2016. I formally asked Lewis Debassige to become a participant in my project as a former educator and Anishinaabe elder.

#### *Data Collection*

The data collection focused on the participants' experience and thinking about how Anishinaabe knowledge (and education) systems could be introduced into the educational curriculum. The data were collected through face to face interviews, using the conversational research method within an Indigenous paradigm (Kovach 2010). All the interviews took place in Wikwemikong and the nearby Manitoulin Island area. The conversational method was appropriate in order to obtain knowledge from Anishinaabe elders through the transmission of Indigenous oral stories and history. I recorded the participant's responses initially through handwritten notes and then I asked if I could make an audio recording as well. All participants agreed to the recordings. These two-hour interviews took place during the winter of 2017.

#### *Data Analysis*

The main objective of this thesis was to examine critical insights, acquired from the elders, on contemporary issues in education within Anishinaabe communities. This examination is based on analysis of the data obtained from the three interviews of

Anishinaabe knowledge holders. Joyce Pitawanakwat returned her responses to my questions as a Word document. The interview recordings were transcribed by a commercial service (scribie.com) and printed. I listened to all of the interviews several times prior to the detailed reading of the text. In addition to correcting minor errors, this allowed me to become attuned to the spiritual significance of what the interviewees said and the relationship between the researcher/listener and the interviewee/elder, based on the Anishinaabe oral tradition. I then read through all of the interviews several times before I began the coding of the data.

During the coding, I felt conflicts between the need to group similar ideas to draw conclusions about the interviewees' thinking and the realization that many important Anishinaabe ideas are so multifaceted that compartmentalizing the data oversimplifies the richness of the ideas. Some of the themes were so interwoven that they could not be neatly fitted into the list of research questions. This reinforced the holistic perspective of Anishinaabe thinking. These interwoven themes will be elaborated on in Appendix 3.

#### *Consent*

On May 16, 2016, I negotiated an oral agreement with the Chief of Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation, Chief Duke Peltier, about my research project. Chief Peltier supported my research completely and advised me at that time to submit a research proposal to the Manitoulin Anishinaabek Research Review Committee (MARRC). I did this and received clearance from MARRC on February 28, 2017. I also received approval for ethics clearance from McMaster University on January 5, 2017.

## **Results of the Research**

The following section describes the results stemming from the qualitative interviews conducted during the winter of 2017 in Wikwemikong and elsewhere on Manitoulin Island with the three Anishinaabe elders Joyce Pitawanakwat, Lewis Debassige, and Isaac Murdoch, with some additional discussion during the interview with Murdoch offered by Christi Belcourt, a Metis artist and collaborator with him. The section also includes auto ethnographic material of the author that is relevant to the research questions. The results have been organized into themes and subthemes as they address the research objectives. The main themes are:

- I. Loss of traditional language, culture, and ways of transmitting knowledge;
- II. Problems with education for Indigenous children and youth
- III. Changes sought in educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogical methods

### **I. Loss of Traditional Language, Culture, and Ways of Transmitting Knowledge**

All three interviewees recognized without need for explanation that loss of culture is a core factor in the current Indigenous situation. They went on to discuss a number of specific concerns.

#### *A. Colonization*

The interviewees saw decolonization as an important component of the reform of educational policies and practices for Indigenous students. Joyce Pitawanakwat asserted that before decolonization of education can be instituted, it is important to understand what the impact of colonization has been on Anishinaabe people.

Traditional Anishinaabe education was disrupted by the now well-documented history of European/Anishinaabe relations. The arrival of the Europeans and their subsequent control and domination over the indigenous people of this land has resulted in the almost total destruction of the Anishinaabe education system. During this era of violence directed at indigenous peoples, Anishinaabe land and cultural based learning practices were outlawed to accommodate the British and subsequently Canadian policy of assimilation – this was to be accomplished by “taking the Indian out of the child.”

This goal was achieved by preventing the parents and grandparents from transferring their values, wisdom and language to their children and grandchildren; children as young as 6 years old were forcibly removed from their homes and communities and placed in residential schools. The strings of lives that connected the children to their ancestors for centuries were severed; clearly, the deliberate squashing of Anishinaabek systems has taken a severe toll on the lives of the indigenous peoples of this land now called Canada. The Anishinaabe were no longer able to control their own educational and cultural development. Their identity as members of their families, clans and communities became a clouded memory. Closely related to identity is relationship to spirit. Who am I? What is my relationship to the Creator? What is my relationship to the Earth Mother? The institutions that had provided the people with purpose and spirit were outlawed. Some of the people had to go underground – or hold ceremonies, e.g., sweat lodges, under the cover of darkness. This was essentially the “breaking of the spirit” of the people.

The main objective of the British government in entering into treaties was to extinguish indigenous rights to the land to make way for settlement and resource development. The settlers wanted the land and resources; thus, began the removal of the Anishinaabek from their traditional territories which has continued unabated since the European settlers set foot in North America. The latest development are the tar sands using hydraulic fracturing on the traditional territories of the Cree people in northern Alberta. (See *Tipping Point* documentary, CBC TV, The Nature of Things.)

Disconnecting indigenous people from their traditional land bases has resulted in the discontinuation of land-based subsistence practices such as hunting, fishing and the harvesting of natural medicines for wellness. Parents and grandparents lost their roles as caretakers and teachers of their children and grandchildren. The people were rendered powerless; they had no control over their own children; they were not asked if they wanted their children to attend school elsewhere. The people became increasingly dependent on the government in order to survive.

### *B. Learning Spirit*

Debassige introduces the concept of learning spirit, as he examines why the Canadian education system has not worked well for Indigenous children. He identifies a lack of integration in the education of Indigenous children that inhibits the development of the learning spirit:

The way it used to be explained, integration did not work because it was a one-way road, one-way street. They wanted us to stop being Anishinaabe, and to become white and get mainstreamed into Canadian society. But integration, they didn't understand the word, even the Latin word "integral," an integer, to be whole, to be one. The child has to be one whole, and wholesome, first, before it can expand outward. That's the true meaning of integration. And they missed that in the '60s and '50s. So, you have to go back to, again, the philosophy – our philosophy is to be whole. It says we have holistic learning, it's this kind of a catch-all word that was banging around in the '80s, '90s. But, again, it wasn't, it wasn't wholesome; it wasn't whole, and all this. They were denying some parts of it; they were denying the damage done by the residential school system. They denied the role of the churches in it, right from declaration, what do you call that? The Doctrine of Discovery and all that.

Pitawanakwat told me about a story that was intended to teach children life skills, in particular the need to discover one's own "learning spirit" and for teachers to accept that children have different sorts of learning spirits:

transmission of values, history and teachings of life occurs during spiritual ceremonies in the traditional lodges. In these lodges such as the Midewiwin, knowledge is passed down orally because it is considered important that sacred teachings be conveyed using the "breath of life." In this way, the stories become alive and thus remain within the hearts and minds of the listeners.

Debassige passed along a story he heard from Dan Pine that illuminates two styles of traditional learning. (The following is condensed from the full original, which is given in Appendix 2.)

There was this old man at the foot of a mountain and he was getting up in age. He was 80, so he let it be known that he would welcome a helper, a young man, 12,

13 years old, to help him with the little chores around his camp. ... And then one morning, a very spry young man, full of energy and showing that he was more physically advanced than most kids his age, showed up – and all this, very early in the morning. And he knocks on the door and says, he says, “My grandfather sent me. My dad and my grandfather sent me to learn from you.” ...

Another young man shows up. And he's got his head down, and he's not as spry as the earlier boy and all this, he says, “My grandfather sent me to learn from you, but I see that you already have a young person in your charge and all this and he seems a lot better than I am.” ... “Okay, each of you, I'm gonna put a challenge before you and all this.” He says, “See that mountain?” He says, “A good healthy man takes half a day to get up top of that and back down.” He says, “But I'm gonna give you 'til tomorrow morning.” He says, “On top of that mountain, there are some worn pine trees.” And he says, “On those worn pine trees are eagle nests. I want you to climb that mountain, get on top of the trees, and get some eagle plumes down, eaglet feather down, and bring it back. ... So, night came, next morning came, sure enough, the first boy shows up right away; as soon as the sun was clear of the horizon. ...

And the young boy was so excited. He says, “I got on top of the mountain. I got my eaglet feather.” He says, “And looked at the other side of the mountain.” And he says, “You could see other mountains further away.” And now he says, “I asked myself, I wonder who lives there and what good medicine they must be practicing? Maybe I should go and learn their medicine and bring it back.” He says, “I really like to see who those people are that live on the other side of the mountain.” And the old man, caught in this boy's excitement, says, “That you shall.” ... So, off the boy went.

Close to noon, second boy shows up, his head down. And he says, “You'll have to excuse me,” he says, “I didn't even get on top of the mountain. I didn't even get half-way up the mountain.” He says, “When I left you across the creek, out of your sight, and I was marveled at what's underneath my feet, the bugs, the plants and all this, and all this, what medicine they must have.” He says, “So, I just sat there and looking and observed everything and all this.” He says, “I didn't realize that night had come and all this, so I just slept there. I got up this morning and I was still with the same wonder what's underneath my feet.” He says, “I'm still amazed.” So, he says, “Dismiss me as you should.” He says, “I didn't make it to the mountain.” And the old man laughed. He says, “70 years ago, I came to see an old man to learn from him the medicine that he had known, he had practiced. He sent me up the mountain, and I didn't make it because I was amazed at what was underneath my feet.” He says, “Therefore, since you did the same as I did, you shall be my student.”



See, some of us are chosen to go and see the other side of the mountain and learn from that. Some of us are right here. What we must learn is right here, and that's what we have to follow is right here. Each child is born with closed fists. In each fist is what the Creator wants the child to deliver to this place. That's Creator's investment. Our duty is to find out what that innate purpose is. That's traditional education.

### *C. Experiential Learning*

#### *Experiential Learning Through Nature*

One of the themes that emerged strongly through my interviews was the importance of experiential learning in its various forms, meaning acquiring knowledge or skills through experiences, as opposed to textbook learning. One form of experiential learning that was repeatedly mentioned was the observation of nature. For example, Joyce Pitawanakwat talked about how Anishinaabe children would traditionally have been instructed to learn this way:

Children would be asked to go out and observe nature, to find out how animals did things. If they needed to learn patience, they may be asked to observe a flower. To learn how to build things, they may observe how beavers built structures. In this way, children also learned how to respect nature and to look upon animals as relatives.

Lewis Debassige describes a series of traditional teachings that connect back to observing nature to see the lessons that it has to offer us and our children:

The first responsibility and duty we have is to make our tools so we can provide nourishment for ourselves. Where does that come from? From Mother Earth. Mother Earth tells us, "Look at the animals and see how they feed themselves, what they eat."

The second responsibility and duty is to build our shelters. And Mother Earth again says, "See how the animals build shelters, provide shelter for themselves." And then to teach each other, teach our young. Teach each other, that's the third responsibility and duty. Mother Earth says again, "Look at the animals, look and see how they teach each other, their young and all this."

The fourth responsibility is to heal ourselves, heal each other. Again, it comes from Mother Nature; it comes from the animals, the plants. It tells us to look at the animals, which plants they prefer when they are out of sorts. Look how they heal each other and heal themselves. A wounded bear will look for the most polluted puddle and bathe in it. It picks up bacteria to fight other bacteria.

Joyce Pitawanakwat described how the location where education takes place is of critical importance when trying to make nature a key teacher for students:

Students can learn in different locations in the community, including out on the land. Some of these sites could eventually be permanent structures, i.e., a teaching lodge outside of the main village.

Isaac Murdoch connects all of his educational practices to the land, and is actively involved in creating an outdoor education camp known as Nimkii Aazhibikong on reclaimed crown land in northern Ontario. He often speaks of the responsibility to help nurture future generations who are informed about traditional ways, which he directly connects back to learning from the land:

If we want elders that know how to speak the language, that know the land, that know about colors and clay and paint and traditional tattooing, then we have to actually take them out in the bush and live like that with them. ... How do we produce heroes? Of course, we all know that it is going back to the land, going back to the sacred teachings of Mother Earth because that is what sustained everything for so long.

He goes on to describe the land-based camps that he is actively involved in:

We actually have art camps on the land, where we create art in the bush, prospector tents. We have elders there and language. It is just so chill and relaxing. You have a wood stove, and you have soup cooking there. You have this cool art stuff happening there. You have beautiful elders that are just the most amazing ever. You have children running around. It is just perfect.

### *Experiential Learning from Elders*

All of the participants emphasized the importance of intergenerational learning, meaning lessons taught directly from elders to youth. This is not separate from learning

through nature; in fact, the two often are mentioned as aspects of the same activity. Joyce

Pitawanakwat specifically talks about how observation plays into these relationships:

Children are taught indirectly through play, role modeling and observation. Children learned traditional skills and knowledge such as hunting/fishing skills, arts, crafts, snowshoe-making and making other items needed to survive by observing and assisting skilled craftsmen, hunters, artists, carvers etc.

Isaac Murdoch echoes this thinking, specifically mentioning the intergenerational learning that goes on within families:

I think that education was often something that was taught to us by our grandparents. So, I think that there was a strong student/teacher relationship that we had with the older people in the village. . . . Our oral history, our traditions, our customs are all geared towards, "What can we learn from the older people in the village or tribe?"

Lewis Debassige shared his personal experience with intergenerational learning:

I got to see the tail end of the traditional system. Since we were a family here, close knit, we learned from working. We learned from working with our grandparents, our parents, our siblings, our cousins, and relatives. You build relationships with that too, and then you are given responsibility.

### *Experiential Learning Through Doing*

It is worth repeating that these themes within experiential learning emerged independently, but all of them overlap, and none are mutually exclusive. Many of the examples of the actual activities that were connected to learning from elders and learning through nature emphasized a hands-on approach, where students were actually constructing, building, performing, or otherwise creating something. Joyce listed examples of the types of hands-on activities she had facilitated within her classroom at the Wikwemikong High School and how they could utilize the expertise of those in other

organizations and government departments throughout Wikwemikong, as well as elders and experts from within the community.

Wikwemikong Heritage Organization: wampum belt making; water drum making; medicine picking and preparation; some in school, other times outdoors.

Lands Department: trapping, snaring on one of the trapper's trap lines, fishing, cleaning fish outdoors by the lake or on the ice during the winter.

Murdoch gave specific examples of the work that he and Christi Belcourt had done to engage students through their involvement in an arts program in Toronto:

Right from the start, I think that I would tell a story and then Christi would somehow create the story through art.... It turned out really amazing ... so we did mural projects where I would tell the story, and then Christi would of course do the story and paint it, which was good because a lot of the stories that we tell are regarding Mother Earth and those types of things, so it was really a gateway to look at the environmental issues.

Many of the examples of nature-based learning projects that Joyce Pitawanakwat listed fall into the category of learning through doing:

- Traditional lodges: Midewiwin Lodge, Rain Dance Lodge, Sun Dance Lodge – lodge building, assisting in the ceremonies re fire keeping, smudging, singing etc. Hands-on learning.
- In the community, usually outdoors; teachers are the lodge teachers.
- Hunting camps: fall moose hunt camps; community-driven; students are taken by their parents; students apply to go on cultural leave.
- Crafts: art, Native Studies classes, birch bark canoe building, Anishinaabe Art; in classroom or outdoors.
- Medicine picking: Joe Pitawanakwat; outdoors, usually accompanied by teacher.
- Planting: community members/teacher.
- Attending and participating in conferences, meetings.

- Oratory.
- Guest speakers: elders, different topics.

These sorts of projects combine the values of learning through elders in an outdoor setting where values are transmitted from both teachers and nature to child.

### *Experiential Learning and Values Transmission*

One of the reasons that our consultants repeatedly mentioned the importance of experiential learning, whether through observation of nature or learning from elders, was that, beyond knowledge, in this process values also were transmitted. Joyce Pitawanakwat talks about the earliest form of this, with the observational learning that comes through being carried in a cradleboard:

Cradleboards, wrapping, and carrying babies in shawls close to the mother provided security for the child. As well, they were one of the first ways that a child learned about self-discipline and focus. In my community, up until very recently, babies were wrapped to help them sleep better. The flailing of little arms sometimes causes the child to startle themselves awake. In the cradleboard, they also learned how to observe life around them.

Isaac also talks about the cradleboard (*tikinaagan*) teachings and the values imbued through starting life with that experience:

And so even when you go back to the *tikinaagan* teachings or the cradleboard teachings, you were actually tied in your *tikinaagan* and you had to watch people work, and it taught you patience, it taught you discipline. And so, it was hands-on. It was a very different style of learning than what we're doing now. So, for example, now our young people, they spend their complete lives in a box trying to learn. As before, it was from the land. People migrated, they moved. They were moving with the natural cycles of the Earth, of course the stars, and so there was a different style of learning.

Isaac offers a contemporary example of value transmission through experiential learning with elders when he talks of his grandmother and the jobs he used to do for her, thus passing on values of resourcefulness and thrift.

My grandmother used to have something like this. So, she'd have a piece of material... and she would completely take all of the thread out of something because it was good thread. It was strong, she wanted it for some particular reason.... So, we'd have to sit there for hours and just take the thread out of something because they had seen the value in that. And I want my daughter to know the value in that, 'cause we live in such a world where we don't see the value in anything.

Lewis Debassige talks about the role of education to teach children their duties, which then have values that are implicit within those roles.

There is no word in our language for "rights." You do not have rights. You have responsibilities and duties, and you have satisfied those responsibilities and duties or completed them. Dr. [John] Borrows says then the right appears, reveals itself. I am a believer of that. That right to enjoy sound relationships because you are identified as responsible, honest and you performed your duties. That is the right you enjoy, is this being recognized with those ideals. So that's part of teaching. It says everything comes from Mother Earth.

#### *D. Oral History and Story Telling*

The interviews emphasized the importance of the oral tradition and oral history as a means of preserving the traditional culture of the Anishinaabe and to transmit to future generations the knowledge, values, and beliefs that define the Anishinaabe people. They also saw the transmission of oral history as a way to correct or augment Canadian history so that Anishinaabe stories and perspectives are included in that history.

Pitawanakwat described the functions of oral history as follows:

Knowledge, responsibilities and ways of relating to the world are passed down orally from the ancestors through the strings of lives that go all the way back to the beginning – to the Creator and the creation of the world.

...

Storytelling plays a major role in the transmission of knowledge, skills and values needed to live. Traditionally, [some] stories were told at night time during the winter. Others can be told anytime, and still others only in spiritual ceremonies. Stories speak of the origins of life, animals, plants, geographical formations, proper relationship to various forms of life on the planet and personal life experiences. The sharing of one's life story and experiences is a well-established method of sharing and therefore teaching. Stories act as mirrors wherein the learner is allowed to view him/herself and thus gain valuable insight and understanding to help him/her along the road of life.

...

Pitawanakwat cited Edward Benton Banai:

The history of my people the Ojibway speaking Anishinaabe and all of the indigenous people of this part of the world – our history goes back many thousands of years. Our oral history puts us at the moment of Creation.... The creation story indicates that the Creator placed his children in this part of the Earth; which means that we have absolutely no belief or lend any credibility to the Bering Strait idea. The true history of our people has never been written or recorded, but the true history is recorded in our genetic memories and is acted out via our songs, our stories, our rituals...In the lodge Original teachings are kept in the lodge. The key to it is the language.

Lewis explained how Anishinaabe oral history can be at odds with Canadian history as it is taught today.

So, stories that debunk history, or stories that enrich us, our history, and Canadian history. Those stories have to be woven into that Canadian history. Plus, our stories are a lot richer than the way history text is being written. Tales of Niibaakquam [Niibaakhom] having 10 wives and only one liked him, but it leaves it there. That's what the archival text states. But, Niibaakquam, being a Grand Chief, had other community's chiefs below him. He got his force from the best of all those communities to help in the War of 1812.

So those men died, some of his men died. He lost some of his men. So, when he came back, there were Ndakwemak, we say, "my women," he became responsible for those women and those families. And each place you visit after the War of 1812, was to arrange for Zhenweh. Zhenweh is an aid in the camp for that community, and usually a chief messenger. But also, he picked somebody that would provide for that woman and that family, a young person or a good provider,

follow in the clan system, and usually became involved, became family. Zhenweh is a root word from Zhenwehmaan, those who are made to be relatives to those women. So, he went around to all the communities where he lost men, because that was his civil duty, is to keep providing for those women and children. They weren't his, they weren't his women for procreation, it was for a civil duty. So that's a type of things you need to clarify with our stories, and the history that's written in our texts that's being taught. So, you have to debunk some of the history. A lot of work to be done....

Pitawanakwat, citing a video interview with Edward Benton-Banai, head teacher of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, discussed ancient prophecies that served as guidelines for understanding and conducting relationships with other Indigenous nations and later with Europeans:

Relations with other indigenous Nations:

The Ojibway people were given 7 major prophecies probably about 500 years prior to 1492. At that time, around 850-900 AD, we as a nation were still principally on the eastern seaboard. Around that same period of time, we were part of a large spiritual confederacy; the Algonkian nations had a spiritual confederacy and through this confederacy had trading relationships with many other nations, the Seneca, the Iroquois peoples. In our oral history, it's stated very clearly that the Midewiwin stood side by side with the Longhouse and neither the Longhouse nor the Midewiwin Lodge incurred into the other but that there was mutual respect.

Of prophecies regarding the light-skinned race:

For 500 plus years we have lived side by side. . . . someday our white brothers are going to come and ask how we can live in peace? I for one can articulate the message that was given to us. The spirit that spoke to the people said to the people:

*Goding ezhwebak maa kiing damaanaadat nbi miinwaa giigoonh aggaanshkaaasii da mwat.*

*You shall know the truth of these teachings and the truth of these prophecies when the time shall come about when the rivers are filled with poison and the fish become unfit to eat (Benton-Banai 2000).*



Lewis Debassige spoke about how storytelling can reveal errors in the received (school-taught and published) history.

Dibaajimowin is storytelling that unveils history. It has to be done in a way I heard it. Because a lot of the history that we learn in school needs to be debunked by our own stories about our history. Alan [Corbiere] has done a very credible job on debunking the Anishinaabe involvement in the War of 1812. Most of it is credited as Mohawk warriors, but that was us over here, something like 1,600 strong left here to . . . first of all beat the Americans out of Michilimackinac and then went on straight to Detroit, helped with the siege of Detroit and eventually General Hull leaving Detroit.

So, history has to be told in our stories, according to our stories. And that's where he got that. I shared that story of Niibaakquam with him years ago. And then he [Alan Corbiere] came back home after he did his Master's and he taped my Uncle Johnny and got another version, and then went to the archives and found documents that proved that the man [Niibaakquam] was alive and was involved in the war of 1812 from start to finish. Most of the principals that were involved in the war used to come home in the winter time, to make sure that their families are taken care of.

It's always difficult to balance. We are faced with a reality since we have to know about the non-Anishinaabe world. That's the reality. We have to know, learn about internet, social media, television, sports, and what we enjoy. We have to know about those things. My uncles, they were very involved in history, First World War history, Second World War history. We have a tradition, Debassige tradition, from the war of 1812 fighting for our people, and all this. And it's a source of pride for us. So, that type of histories, but not in the context of history as it is taught in schools today. Why did we volunteer with the British? To honor the treaties, the agreements, 1764 agreement. Now this goes back, and all this. So, we have to include, we have to blend in our Anishinaabe, Anishinaabe aadzii and Anishinaabe dibaajimowin in our education.

#### *E. Vision Questing and Traditional Healing*

Anishinaabe methods of acquiring knowledge are quite different from Western texts and classroom teacher learning. Traditional Anishinaabe education is centered on and evolves from spirituality. All of the elders and knowledge holders in this study emphasized spiritual learning based on vision questing. Vision questing, meditation,

intuition, and dreaming are all valid learning methods. Vision questing is very important during the rites of passage stage for Anishinaabe youth. This establishes the importance of gender, through the learning of different methods where each of the youth learns their specific gender roles. Joyce Pitawanakwat elaborates:

Young men go out to seek their vision, their life purpose. Young women, as well, partake in a similar exercise designed to teach them about womanhood and motherhood, as well as to celebrate this passage. This is also the time that young men and women strengthen their relationship with the Earth and the spirit world.

Joyce also stresses the importance of how Anishinaabe youth during their vision questing depended on their natural surroundings. She states,

They have to because they are all alone out there; they have to rely on the natural elements, the trees and spirits. These types of activities were guided by elders, parents, aunts, uncles as well as others knowledgeable in these areas.

Debassige talked about the spiritual healing practices involved in vision questing as he states,

We have to repatriate that, these types of healing technologies and methods, our old healing ways; we have to bring that back. The simplest thing in healing was fasting and praying, purging or detoxifying your body. Medical profession now says you have to fast before surgery, at least 12 hours, or 24 hours. Our people knew that. That was our way years ago. So, this whole medical field is a field that has been kind of abandoned by our people, but not forgotten.

Lewis Debassige also talks about how this type of traditional Anishinaabe medical knowledge can become integrated into the subject of science within educational curricula. He explained how Anishinaabe knowledge is immersed within the environment and nature:

Science should be a natural fit for us, and it is not. We are underrepresented in those sciences that are related to the environment, our well-being, and the future. What is going to happen 20 years from now? Some scientists believe that we are past the tipping point on the environment and the global warming crisis, but that

is what they said about acid rain, 35 years ago, that we are past the tipping point. We have recovered from that and I think we underestimated Mother Nature, how resilient she is, and how capable she is of healing herself. We have to believe in that, or else we might as well start the clock for the ding dong of doom.

Isaac Murdoch also stressed the importance of healing the environment and our Mother Earth by envisioning the future through Anishinaabe knowledge and resurgence:

So, we can continue on with the way that the government had planned for us, but at the same time, it is not going to benefit the Anishinaabek Nation if we continue with it. And you know what? That was the whole plan, 150 years ago; we were deemed the Indian problem. Get all of the Anishinaabek off the land and get them separated and on the Indian reserves. Get them re-educated so that they can start to believe in something else, so that there could be a complete free-for-all in resource extraction from the land. And that resource extraction free-for-all took place for 150 years of devastating the environment. Now we cannot drink the water. All of the land has been bought, sold, and parceled up, and we are, like, what the hell happened? So now we are stuck on our Indian reserves thinking, well the only way to become successful is to have a university degree to try and learn their system so that we can resist the government. But as I get older in age and wiser, it is like there is more education in that coin of that Anishinaabe War of 1812 veteran hanging up on that wall or a piece of wampum. There is knowledge about the earth that is so sacred, and it is the medicine that needs to be pushed forward. So, during our time of climate change and global warming, they are saying we are 1.8% above normal and that 4% is a global killer. This mostly happened within the last 40 years. So, in our current time what is valuable? In my mind, of course, it is the wampum, the medicines and the corn from the earth. It is the stars. It is the teachings that sustained our people in harmony for so many generations.

#### *F. Spirituality*

Another important theme which came up during the interviews was the importance of spirituality. There was a spiritual relationship to the earth, which came with rules, laws, and responsibilities. Joyce Pitawanakwat in her responses to my questions agrees:

Traditional Anishinaabe education is grounded on spirituality. Anishinaabe methods of learning are based on natural law. We believe that each nation of people has a special relationship to the Creator and that this relationship requires

certain responsibilities and obedience to specific laws. These laws were given to us as our original instructions from the Creator. These are unique ways of relating to Mother Earth, which is based on the principles of respect, balance and acknowledgement of all life.

Pitawanakwat also emphasized the importance of nourishing a person's unique talents and gifts. Within a holistic Anishinaabe belief is the idea that each person is born with a unique gift, given to us by the Creator, which must be nourished in order for us to realize it. As Joyce explained,

Central to Anishinaabe pedagogy is the nurturing of the individual's unique gifts, talents and abilities, so a person may be able to share his or her special gifts within their communities. The development of the whole person is encouraged; thus spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional growth is encouraged. Each of these areas is addressed as learning continues throughout the stages of life.

Isaac Murdoch also explained what is different about how we learn today, within the confines of Eurocentric institutions. He stated that the earth is our teacher – a non-western concept. He elaborated on how Anishinaabek people learned through the observation of nature and elders. For example,

They were moving with the natural cycles of the Earth, of course the stars, and so there was a different style of learning, and of course it produced a different style of a human being. Human beings treasured the earth because that was their teacher. Mother Earth was their teacher, so of course they would respect their mother. But today, because we are learning in boxes, we have been severed from the land. We can certainly see that we are producing a different type of a human being. But certainly, there is no doubt that the Indigenous peoples prior to European contact were learning from their elders and learning from the land, and of course it would have been like that all over the world.

Murdoch also emphasizes how spirituality was encompassed within his traditional Anishinaabe educational upbringing. He states,

I was introduced to fasting at age five. Fasting is a learning process of meditation, prayer, of thought and analysis. Anishinaabek people had developed a very keen educational system within their own culture.

Lewis Debassige explains from his personal experience how spirituality transcends any one faith or space:

Colonization really hit us hard through the churches, to change us into good Christians, and we became that. I still practice the Catholic Church as my grandfather taught me. I also practice and understand the Anishinaabe value teachings about our spirit. I still have to keep reminding myself of that. It is always going back. What is our spiritual being?

We give thanks every day and that is why we put down tobacco, we say our morning prayer, our evening prayer, first thing in the morning, first thing at night – and I got to see that. My grandfather, my grandmother, although they were making the sign of the cross and praying in a format of the Catholic Church, they still prayed. They believed there is one God for everybody in this world. So, it is all about learning. Our whole life here on earth is about learning, and that is the traditional way. We can never exhaust our capacity for knowledge. If you think so, then you got to start all over, because the perfect generosity the Creator gave us, well, we have not even discovered a fraction of what we are supposed to know.

Decolonization is a big word, but it does not offer you any process, any defined path, and the only way I can see it happening to me personally is to leave all things behind, what I learned, and begin to re-learn who I am as Anishinaabe. Anishinaabe, as a spirit first. We are dual beings. We have our spiritual being, and we have our carbon form being, our human being. You have to go back to the spirit first, and that is what our ancestors did. They always went back to being, finding out, and reconnecting with our divine source. That is what the spirit is, is a divine source. This carbon form will eventually run its course, but we will still continue to be a spirit.

## II. Problems with Education for Indigenous Children and Youth

### *A. What Is Not Working*

All of the interviewees expressed concern that the current educational system was not adequately preparing Indigenous youth to be knowledgeable and skilled in their Anishinaabe language and culture so that they would grow up to be elders who could one day pass on their knowledge. Isaac Murdoch said that,

now we have a whole generation of people that do not speak their language. They do not know the land. They do not know what it's like to live a hunting and gathering life on the land. So that's been taken away because of the education system, so where's the balance? Is it possible that we can produce fluent speakers that are familiar with the land and also attain some sort of technological information from these educational institutions?

So, years ago, when I was younger, they always said that education is the new buffalo, and that, in order to be successful in today's society, that I must go to school, I must get a university degree in order to be successful. And so, there is a whole wave of people in my generation that really worked hard and they struggled to be able to achieve that. And so now that we look at the end result of what happened, now we have a whole generation of people that do not speak their language.

Christi Belcourt echoed this concern and attributed the failure in part to the limited amount of time given to teaching Indigenous language and culture. She states,

We need to be producing elders who are going to be immersed in the land and immersed in the language. We're not going to be able to do that if the school system eats up 40 hours a week. We only get our kids after school or on weekends. That's not enough time to impart traditions and language and all the things that make a person an expert at that by the time they reach 70. That's a lifetime's worth of knowledge. We have a lot of educated people now. That's good. We're good there. But what we don't have are the elders of the future that we're gonna need. I'm at the point where I actually think ... I was telling Josh before that Wilfred Pelletier, he has this great article. He's an elder who is from – he's passed on now. But he's from Wiky. I used to spend a lot of time with him. He said, "The education system is killing our kids in the cradle." That's what he said. He said, "We need to completely change, completely go back to the way that it was." And we have to reject their systems – reject them full on. Just we're not going to be part of that, no!

Joyce Pitawanakwat noted that:

For the last four decades or so, indigenous people in Canada have been talking about the importance of preserving indigenous languages. Yet it appears that there are less and less indigenous people that are fluent in their language as each decade goes by. Clearly, giving the education system sole responsibility to teach indigenous languages has not worked. At best students have 20 minutes per class devoted to language learning. At the secondary school level, this increases to 75-78 minutes.

Lewis Debassige also reported that the Anishinaabe have

a long history of making our position clear in education, a leadership chain going back to 1827 now, earliest record I've found so far. So yes, we need to. And all the chiefs have been in support of Anishinaabemowin in our school system, it's our fourth attempt at immersion program – fourth. The chief was one of the second groups that showed up. It's always money, running short of money always, and then closing shop because you're gonna run into a deficit.

Christi Belcourt questioned whether a better balance of European and Indigenous educational approaches would be sufficient, because she sees the European model as failing the whole planet:

It's so unnatural. And it's only been such a short period of time since that's been happening. That system was imported from Europe. So, we have to look at that as well. That English/British system of education was imported over here and then imposed on our people. Now we've adopted it full on. It's no wonder that it doesn't fit right. It doesn't feel right. It's no wonder that it doesn't feel satisfying. I think that we're brilliant, and we manage through it. And a lot of people come out the other end really well educated. But that whole system is failing the Earth in general. So, we need to rethink the entire thing, not, "How can we fit ourselves into those boxes?" Not, "How can we make this square less square, with rounded corners?" You know, it's, "How can we get the hell out of those boxes? Completely out, not even a little bit. How can we turn the whole thing upside down on its head, get totally out of it?"

Lewis Debassige identified cultural differences in communicating, disciplining, and learning styles as contributing to the unsuccessful learning experiences for Indigenous youth:

When our children leave elementary school to go to high school, they're under-supervised over there, and they don't know how to ask for help. They really don't know how to ask for help. And I was a counselor, I was a teacher, and once you learn how to read a child that's having problems, you don't take them in your office, slap them on a leather couch. Says, "Come in here," and says, "Come with me, come with me. This is how it is, the old people. I need your help here in this thing." And then that's when you talk about the problem. Not straight down across the table from each other, "I'm gonna write this down on a report." That's not how you counsel. Students will just turn themselves off if you do that, and I've seen too many good students that turn themselves off because they've been

dragged into the office, and somebody yells at them, "I don't have to take this crap." Can I say that? [chuckle]

Christi Belcourt also commented on how a less hierarchical teaching approach and experiential learning experiences were preferred instruction methods:

Helping them.... They teach us and we teach them, so that it's not like a top-down scenario. Where we found that it doesn't work is when we have large groups of students funneling through on a classroom schedule. And even better, though, is when we can actually – when we have our language houses, so it's not even going into schools. When we have our language houses. The last one we had, Renee Dillard, who's a really renowned Anishinaabe bulrush weaver, came, and she was teaching us how to do that, and it was all in the language. So, when we're able to do that, be on the land doing things with bulrush with our hands, in the language, it was the whole package. And that's something that is with you your whole life.

Lewis Debassige explained why a storytelling teaching method could be successful with Indigenous youth:

That is an issue. That is an issue since you only have 300 minutes a day to teach a child, to teach a child to learn, not to retain and recite what you say they should. I mean we have to get away from it. In this age of information explosion, we have to have the child learn after they leave school, learn the good things at least, and not just come back the next day and sound like one of the violent characters they saw on TV or video games. So, to use storytelling is the only way. It worked in the past, it worked with other cultures. If you look at Aesop fables or whatever, it's a form of storytelling, teaching moral values, and all of this. The Bible is full of it. So is ours. Ours is storytellers, the stories I give you, I talked about dibaajimowin as a way of conveying certain knowledge and understanding.

Debassige emphasized how there has to be trust and respect between Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe teachers, with concerns about the fair distribution of resources and assistance handled as they arise.

And so, it has to be a good mix, a workable mix, and there has to be trust. And a basis for ... and respect for the basis of your shop or your school, or it will not work. 'Cause when there's issues taking place, they have to be resolved right away. And there's a way that Anishinaabe did and that was talk out the problems, not personalities. Talk out and be honest enough to say, "I'm having an issue with this." Says, "Go to the principal," says, "You're paying more attention to that



teacher, and I need help.” So those are honest questions, and children see that teachers helping each other, principal helping the teachers, and so on. And they start helping each other, too.

All of the interviewees agreed that more consultation and collaboration with Anishinaabe people and greater control over Indigenous educational policy were essential for improving the educational experience of their children. Joyce Pitawanakwat states clearly that there needs to be,

incorporation of Anishinaabe culture, history and modes of learning into existing related courses. [Therefore] Anishinaabek should be involved in the planning of the education system.

Lewis Debassige reiterates the need for Anishinaabe to be in control of the educational policies that affect their children:

But right now, it's the governments that are controlling what people are learning. And we have to be a little bit stronger as indigenous people, and say, “Hey, we teach our kids what we wanna teach them and you're not the boss of us. And we know what's right for our kids.” And, of course, language, and the teachings from the earth would be critical. And I think trying to develop a good person.

Or, as an elder told him,

“You think outside of a box, there's no damn box. We're a circle.” [chuckle] “Try to think outside of a circle, the circle keeps expanding and all this.” That's what an elder told me, “There's no box for Indians. It's a circle.”

### *B. Colonization and Decolonization*

For Isaac Murdoch, decolonization was a confusing concept because it was hard to know what the traditional beliefs and practices were since the impact of colonization was so catastrophic:

I don't know. It's so hard because when you hear about how the Anishinaabe were before, from the elders and from the stories that have passed down, it's so different than how we are today.

...

So, for me, decolonizing is confusing at times because, what does it mean? Because if we don't have an accurate picture of who we were before, then how do we know what we're trying to achieve? And so, I think that the stories and the legends, they help us understand that. And some of it is quite shocking.

For Lewis Debassige, decolonization requires critical thinking about the values people hold today.

Decolonization is unburdening yourself of those things that we were made to believe to be important – wealth and accumulation, the value of accumulation of property. We don't need all that property. Grandfather used to say that. He said, "You shouldn't own that. All you need is a 4x6 plot at the end anyway. That's it. It's the only real estate you really need."

Joyce considers the "disconnecting of Indigenous people from their traditional land base" and the loss of "land-based subsistence practices such as hunting, fishing, and the harvesting of natural medicines for wellness" as central issues to be addressed. She states:

For decolonization to occur, the colonizer would have to discontinue the illegal development and continued control and disrespect of indigenous peoples, lands and resources.

As in any relationship, both parties involved have to agree to cease harms that they may have been inflicted on the other party. If the colonizing nation continues to harm the colonized, even though they may have apologized, then decolonization is not possible, because colonization is still happening. An effort needs to be made by the Canadian government to return land to the First Nations and to honor the treaties.

Decolonization of the educational system requires, in the view of Lewis Debassige, a redefinition of what education is for Anishinaabe children:

There are teachers out there that just dispense curricula, turning the old crank, producing the same old thing, and all this. Marking papers with already set answers and looking for those answers. I used to do that. But that's not education, that's schooling. That's bringing a group together like a school of fish, and

containing them and all this to behave one way or think one way. That's not education, that's schooling. And if you look at section 114 to 121 of the Indian Act, it's all about schooling, it's about truancy. It's not about quality education or instruction.

Joyce suggests that the decolonization of education systems must start with non-

Indigenous students learning about the negative impact of colonization on Indigenous people:

It is important that Canadians become educated on the damaging effects of colonization in general and depth of the pain suffered by the residential school survivors and their families, as well as on its intergenerational effects. Acknowledgement of the pain endured by First Nations by Canadians in general would help First Nations on their healing path.

Most Canadians are not aware of this chapter of Canadian history because it is not covered in the Canadian History required courses in most Canadian secondary schools. There is a tendency to minimize the impact of many of the negative effects of European colonization on the indigenous peoples of Canada. This is in part due to the intellectual nature of the educational discourse in schools in general. A more effective strategy might be the use of novel studies by and about indigenous people. There are many books on, e.g., the residential school experience, by excellent indigenous authors such as the late Richard Wagamese. However way this is approached, it is important that it is in the voices of the people affected. These are their stories. There are also Anishinaabe people available that are willing to go into the schools to speak about their experience in residential school.

### III. Changes Sought in Educational Policy, Curriculum, and Pedagogical Methods

#### A. *Cultural Resurgence*

Resurgence of traditional culture and language is a component or end goal of the decolonization process for Indigenous children. Pitawanakwat defines resurgence as follows:

Anishinaabe resurgence is the relearning and restoration of First Nations/Anishinaabe culture and identity, including language, worldview, songs, dances, relationship to the land – reconnecting to the land, relearning and renewing the proper relationship to animals, plants, etc., hunting, fishing, as well

as restoration of government systems and the economy. It means regaining power and control over our own lives and having the resources to control our own economies.

For Anishinaabek, the first necessary step is the healing process. Anishinaabek across Canada are in different stages in their healing paths in terms of decolonization.

To an extent, individual Anishinaabe can try to revitalize many elements of their culture, but connection to the land, to the animals, plants and natural elements, is necessary for full restoration of the lifeways of Anishinaabe people. Thus, access to land is key.

One of the key principles is *odebawewewin*. *Ode* is the heart; *odebawewe* – “I can hear the heart of the Creator where I am.” *Odebawewe* [also] means “he is truthful” or “he speaks the truth.” It also means “I hear the heartbeat at the centre” – “I can hear it where I am.” *Odebawewewin* talks about truth or honesty. It talks about the relationship to spirit, to the Creator. This relationship carries with it certain responsibilities. The responsibility to take care of the Earth – the land.

Murdoch focused on the responsibility to care for the land in his discussion of resurgence:

Let's see if we can envision what the world's going to be like in 40 years. Okay, so in the last 40 years, almost half of the world's trees have been cut down. So, we can only assume that in another 40 years the other half. Not just that, but climate. So, climate is rising as well. So, if it's rose 1.8% in the last 40 years because of human beings and because of the acceleration of the human population, so this thing has snowballed out of control. So, what's it going to be like in 40 years? And who's going to be the leaders? And who are the humans going to be dependent on? Of course, it's going to be the elders. So, wouldn't it be critical now to completely immerse our kids, to prepare them for that very sacred time when shit's going down? Wouldn't it be so critical to say, “Okay, yes, we need our kids well versed in the land, well versed with astrology, well versed with the stories and the legends and the teachings?”

Lewis Debassige provided some history of the movement toward cultural resurgence and a blueprint for how the movement can continue:

We've come a long way, we've been involved in teaching the language, we've been involved in designing curriculum outlines, and we've been involved in

teacher training. We've been involved in counselor training. We've been involved in post-secondary education, and content at post-secondary education.

### *B. Language Revitalization*

One of the strongest components for the resurgence of Anishinaabe knowledge is through the revitalization of the Anishinaabe language, Anishinaabemowin. Within the area of Manitoulin Island and the North Shore, we have a fairly good number of elders who are fluent in Anishinaabemowin. During the interviews, it was frequently emphasized that we can maintain our culture and identity through our language. On the other hand, Isaac Murdoch says that even though his child, age three, goes to school in Anishinaabemowin immersion, it is still inevitable that she is going to speak English. As Murdoch states,

If we do not get Anishinaabemowin immersion schools happening, and completely immerse our children in the language, we are going to lose it. All of that knowledge that the language carries will be lost. So, I would say that, for now, that our reserve schools should be immersion, but of course, you cannot get away from English. My daughter is always in Ojibwe immersion, but she speaks English. She sees cartoons on television, so she knows English. So, it can be difficult when you have your children in immersion because they are still going to speak English, but that is the way our society is.

When you look at society, when you look at Canadian society, for example, you have mass amounts of people that are going to university. You have mass amounts of Anishinaabe people that are going through the Western style of education because that is their thing, and they are producing amazing people out of that system as well. For Anishinaabe children, because of the impacts of residential schools and colonialism, because of the loss of languages, I do not think we can afford a whole lot of that right now. I think we need to really focus on building up our languages, to getting our fluency back up to a healthy place. It is just the fear that if we do not produce any fluent speakers, the language is going to die. Fluency is needed. Immersion is needed. How else can we possibly get our languages back? Because right now, when you look at the reserves, the school systems on the reserves now, they are not producing any fluent speakers. There is the odd good program here and there, but the vast majority are not producing fluent speakers.

Murdoch elaborates on how the language is interwoven through the land, stories and ceremony:

Well, I think the language and the stories both come from the spirituality of the land. So, I think that it needs to stay there. So, we are always trying to bring indigeneity into the classroom, but we need to bring the indigeneity onto the land – that is always the conflict. So, I think that definitely language on the land is critical because that is where the stories come from. They are all tied together. You can learn about sacred sites in the classroom, but to learn about it by being there, by being put out there to fast and pray by your grandmother, it becomes a different method of learning. When you do it in the language it provides a different space altogether. It is funny because years ago they always used to talk about the educated people and the stories, but what they meant by that was a person obtained education through fasting. You know how today you see a child, they have a grade five or they have a grade six? Back in the old days it was not like that. There was no ranking system for education. What they did say was that we got educated at these sacred places. This is where we got our knowledge from, was from the spirits. It is the stories and the language that carries the strength for our people. So, I believe in feasting the stories and the language. When I do storytelling, we do it ceremonially. We have ceremonies and we will actually feast the different characters in the stories that we are telling as we are telling them. We also feast the language too, so that it can be there for the next generation, for it to remain strong. This type of learning is critical for our young people, to learn in ceremony, to learn about sacred sites while being on the land.

Joyce Pitawanakwat stresses the importance of connecting the Anishinaabemowin language to governance and how it can help our ability to fully understand our history and culture. She states,

I believe that, at this stage, increased effort on all fronts in the community is necessary if we are to maintain our languages. Language learning needs to occur in the homes, in the work places, at council meetings, in the traditional lodges, out on the land and the forests, in the community.

Immersion programs have been successful; one case is the kindergarten immersion program on the M'Chigeeng First Nation. These children are slightly older; the optimum time to begin teaching the language is probably age 2 or earlier, when the child begins speaking.

Mike Mitchell, a Mohawk from Akwesasne, in speaking about language at a conference, expressed that “It is something great to pass on to the next generation

of leaders; because your leaders need to learn to speak the language in order to truly feel their culture.... It comes from our original teachings. We cannot let something as valuable as that die.”

In a similar vein, Wikwemikong *G'chi Naaknigewin* [Great Law] states that: “Our first language is Anishinaabemowin.... All community members must make an effort to use it every day, at work, at home, at school, by our children, teachers, parents, elders and fluent speakers.”

To strengthen community commitment to language restoration and retention, necessary further steps in the implementation of the above standard could be to declare Anishinaabemowin as the official language of Wikwemikong, and that fluency in Anishinaabemowin should be made mandatory for individuals who want to run for Chief or Council, and that all council meetings are conducted in the Anishinaabe language. The Chief and Council then become leaders and role models for the community members.

Lewis Debassige reiterates how Anishinaabemowin is a spiritual language, which is connected to the spirit of the land. He states,

Anishinaabemowin is also the utterance of a spirit, everything comes from the heart. It is more akin to communicating the things of spirit. The English language is a very commercial language. It is amazing that the great poets and authors from England wrote so well in that language because it is such a commercial language, and it is not the same with our language.

We are exporting teachers now from Manitoulin Island, to other parts of Canada, and the United States, that is a big export, most of the language teachers that teach in Michigan and Wisconsin come from Manitoulin Island, most of them from Wiky [Wikwemikong].... So, Anishinaabe aadzii [thinking] has to be the core for our education, for educating the world about the importance of environmental sciences through Anishinaabemowin.

We cannot understand all of Anishinaabe kendaaswin [knowledge] without the language. Maybe that is why the world is having such trouble respecting the environment, Mother Nature, because they do not understand her language, the language of the land.

*C. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Teacher Staffing*

Another important issue which was articulated during the interview process was how we find the best way to utilize non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers in our current education systems within our Indigenous communities. As Pitawanakwat states,

I think that Anishinaabe children can be taught by both Euro-Canadians and Anishinaabe educators; however, it is important that Anishinaabe history, culture and Anishinaabe language courses are taught by Anishinaabe educators. Further, Euro-Canadian educators teaching in First Nation communities should have an understanding of the First Nations/British/Canadian historical relationship. Teachers lacking a background in First Nation history should be required to take First Nation history courses.

Lewis Debassige also spoke on this issue and stressed the importance of balance:

You have to have a balance; we have to be realistic here. There is a big outside world over there we have to influence, especially at our time with the environment. The reality that our students are going to be taught by non-Anishinaabe teachers is a reality, so you might as well get the best non-Anishinaabe teachers on your staff, too. And have our students have that experience early, to cope with that. There is also a factor there, I have to admit, and say, we too have some bad Anishinaabe teachers that should not be in that profession, and so they should remove themselves.

I think they should be taught by both, and I said earlier that reality is that they are going to be. They are going to come into contact with non-Anishinaabe teachers because we are a feeder system to the high schools, colleges, and universities, and we are under-represented in those schools. So, they have to learn how to deal and cope with those teachers, but those non-Anishinaabe teachers – get the best teachers you can, and I have experience in retaining the best non-Anishinaabe teachers here. They are not hard to identify when you have an interview with them. And of course, the staff should be able to deal with each other too. Not based on race, but as human and spiritual beings first. And if they cannot, then there are problems there. I have had the good fortune of having good staff who worked well with each other, and I have been in situations where teachers did not want to be in our schools more than the 300 minutes a day which is required.



### Autoethnography

All of the elders spoke about the necessity of including spiritual teachings in the curriculum. Spiritual knowledge was seen as an essential component of a holistic education to prepare Anishinaabe youth to live successfully in both cultures. In my youth, I experienced the benefits of the transfer of knowledge known as the vision quest.

During this research project, working with elders has evoked my childhood memories of stories I heard. I want to tell my own story and give an example of the difference between Zhaaganashii aadzii (when an Anishinaabe thinks from a Eurocentric perspective) and Anishinaabe aadzii (Anishinaabe thinking) through my own life experiences and my own learning journey. The very first time I had ever heard of Mishebeshu (Great Lynx), the water monster or water spirit, I was nine or ten years old. My parents used to take me and my younger sister to church every Sunday. There was an elder who came to church by the name of Eli Lewis. Eli lived over on Lakeshore road, which has a view of Manitowaning Bay. Manitowaning was traditionally spelled *Mnidoowhashing*, meaning the “den of the water spirit.” There is a sudden increase in the depth of the water not far from the shore of Manitowaning and an underwater cave in the middle of the bay, where it is said this water monster dwells (Smith 1995). Eli asked my parents for a ride home after church, so my parents gave him a ride and he invited us inside to visit. My parents visited away with this elder, all in Anishinaabemowin. He told a story of when he was a child:

from his house overlooking the bay one evening during a severe thunderstorm he had seen a big sea serpent come out of the water. He said that the lightning struck

the serpent's head and the snake fell back down into the water. He said this serpent had died, as it was killed by the Thunderbirds (*Nimkii Bineshii*).

The Thunderbirds are part of the sky world. There are tunnels under Manitoulin Island, and the serpents travel in the underworld, where they are meant to stay (Smith 1995).

One time my aunt Joyce Pitawanakwat took me to visit an Ojibwe elder who was visiting near us. His name was Peter O'Chiese and he originated from the Rocky Mountains. O'Chiese talked about the Thunderbirds and said that they are actual birds who live high in the Rocky Mountains. In the spring time they come out east, bringing rain and thunderstorms, and they also go around looking for sea serpents. O'Chiese said that after they arrive from the west during the spring these Thunderbirds will fly around during the summer looking for serpents. He said the job of the Thunderbirds is to keep the serpents underground because the serpents are a part of the underworld.

Another job of the Thunderbirds is to bring water; they bring rain in the spring and replenish the bays, rivers, lakes, and streams. The job of the Mishebeshu (Water spirit) is to keep the water clean. Women have a special relationship to water as mentioned previously. Water spirits can also come into dreams and give messages to women regarding the importance of praying for our water. Due to the extreme pollution that humankind has inflicted within the waters, it is extremely important that our women, who are leading our water walks today, keep praying for the water. Water is the sustenance for all life on our planet, and Euro-Canadians and all humankind need to be reminded of the importance of keeping water clean. It is also the job of the men to support our women as they take the lead in praying for our water.

As a young man, in high school, one of my favourite school subjects was geography. In geography, we learned from a scientific Eurocentric point of view how lightning and thunder happen: an energy force produces lightning, and when the lightning strikes it splits the air in two. When the air comes back together it makes the loud sound and the rumble, otherwise known as thunder. One time when I was traveling with my aunt Joyce Pitawanakwat we were having a debate. I told her what I was learning in my class about thunder and she said “No, that is not what makes thunder. It comes from Thunderbirds. There are actual birds in the sky who fly around above the clouds and shoot the lightning down. They make the lightning.” Because I was thinking from a Eurocentric perspective, I did not believe her and told her “no, those are just legends.” She persisted, “no, they are real birds that are flying high above the clouds, and you just cannot see them because they are too high.” Since I was exposed to the Western education system, I was skeptical of the validity of this belief.

*Nanabush and the Thunderbirds*

Nanabush, a trickster in Anishinaabe stories who is part human and part spirit, plays a central role in many tales that have been told and retold an endless number of times in my community. My aunt Joyce told me the story of Nanabush and how he travelled with the Thunderbirds when he was a young boy. She said:

There were elder Thunderbirds and other younger Thunderbirds who were getting ready to go on a journey. Nanabush wanted to go with them, but they did not want to take him. They told him he was too young. Nanabush begged the elders that he wanted to come, so they told him, you can come but you have to promise that you will listen to us about everything we tell you to do. Nanabush agreed, and so they all went on this journey. During this journey, the elders used their spiritual power to make a gentle sound that we would call thunder. They said that this was how it

was done, nice and gentle, making the sound over the people. The younger Thunderbirds used this power in the same way. Nanabush said he wanted to try too, but they said "no, you are too young, you are here to observe and learn how it is done, plus you might scare the people." Nanabush promised that he would do as they had done and use the power gently. They gave him the spiritual power and he started using it, but he was doing it too fast. Nanabush was getting carried away, having fun and using the power to make the sound over the people. The elders said "stop, no you are scaring the people, you are not supposed to do it like that"

This is a story of Nanabush when he was traveling with the Thunderbirds, who were making the sound of thunder over the people by breathing fire down as lightning. To this day, when you hear a storm approaching, those are the elder Thunderbirds who make the nice and gentle rumble of thunder. When the storm gets closer, as it gets louder, those are the younger Thunderbirds. Then there are times when we get frightened by a sudden crack of lightening, as it strikes just above us – this is the young Nanabush, who got carried away with the power of the lightning.

The difference between the perspectives of Anishinaabe aadzii and Zhaaganashii aadzii provides an example of two knowledge systems when Anishinaabemowin speakers refer to thunder and lightning and Thunderbirds. In Anishinaabemowin, the language assumes that Thunderbirds are actual living beings. Thunderbirds are referred to as *people* when they are spoken about by an Anishinaabe language speaker. There are various ways to speak about thunderstorms in Anishinaabemowin, but Thunderbirds are referred to as people who are alive and active.

The word *Biidowedamook* means “when you hear Thunderbirds from a distance.” *Biid dwekomook* means “they are coming.” *Shpimiing gwa midenewedamook* translates as “I can hear them right above me.” When we suddenly are startled by a really loud,

sharp clap of thunder, we say *G'Chi baashkamook*. The word *aabidaaskwanse* means "Thunderbirds are breathing red fire down," which describes lightning strikes.

*Nimiwedamook* means "they went by already." *Oode nimmaweh komook* translates into "they are going that way." All of these phrases assume that Thunderbirds are living beings.

### *My Personal Vision*

When Lewis Debassige told me the story of the two young men who were sent up the mountain by the elder medicine man, it made me think of myself in the context of the story. When I was a young man alone in the woods, surrounded by nature, I received a vision. It felt as if the spiritual energy in the woods was telling me that someday I would seek knowledge from other Indigenous communities and be able to bring some of that knowledge back to my own people, and that we and other Indigenous nations would be in a reciprocal "harvesting knowledge" relationship by learning from each other. I felt this story to be connected with the youths in Debassige's story, as some are meant to stay in their own communities and work, while others are meant to explore other nations and gain new knowledge to bring back into the community.

### *Dreams*

Lewis Debassige once told me that a person can have a spiritual vision come to them at any time during their life, whether it is through a dream or a spiritual ceremony. When I was twenty-six years old I had a dream of a large Anishinaabe dance drum. The drum I saw in my dream was laced with a bright white hide, and it was in the night-time sky surrounded by lightning and thunder during a severe thunderstorm. After my dream, I

knew that the spirit of the Anishinaabe dance drum was calling me back to become a singer once again. There are various forms of traditional musical instruments amongst the Anishinaabe, such as the water drum (*mitigwakik dewegan*), flute (*bibigwan*), rattle (*zhiishiigwan*), the smaller hand drum, and the larger dance drum known as *dewegan*. These musical instruments are all used in a spiritual way to connect with our Creator during prayer.

The drum contains all that is necessary for life; it represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth (*Shkagamik Kwe*), the water (*nibi*), the life-blood of the earth, the Seven Grandfather teachings, as well as the overall physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of the Anishinaabe. The hides represent the animals, and the wood used for the shells represents the plants and trees of the earth (Benton-Banai 1988; Vennum 2009). The larger Anishinaabe dance drum was given to the people by an Anishinaabe kwe through a dream sometime around 1870 in central Minnesota. It was given to the Anishinaabek as protection medicine from the genocide which was devastating them at this time. The large drum was given for the men to sing on, with the women singing while standing at the back, representing the harmony and balance within life (Vennum 2009). Today, the Anishinaabek dance drum is used to unite all Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (*Shiike Mnis*) through song and dance during cultural celebrations. I am humbly grateful to have been given the opportunity and the gift from the Creator as a singer to sit on the drum, as it has brought me on a good path in life through the use of its good strong medicine.

*Reclaiming Connection to Land and Traditional Diet*

In recent years, other North American Indigenous groups are revitalizing and restoring their traditional knowledge related to land use and diet. Their ideas and policies about reconnecting to the land and traditional food practices appear to be important to include in Anishinaabe curricula because they address health problems afflicting Anishinaabe people such as the current diabetes epidemic.

*Reclaiming Wellness*

I also see the traditional Anishinaabe perspective as essential knowledge to be added to curricula. Traditional Anishinaabek hunting, agricultural and ethnobotanical practices necessarily followed the seasons. When the Anishinaabek hunted animals and harvested their medicines, they did so by the laws of nature, the animals, and the universe. Although one of the main foods for the Anishinaabek was fish, and people fished all year around, much of the diet was seasonal and thus led to a balanced, reciprocal relationship within their environment. They used sustainable methods of harvesting plants for food and medicines. During the early months of spring, the Thunderbirds would arrive from the west and bring the thunderstorms that were needed for rain. This would allow the earth to prepare itself, and the Anishinaabek would prepare for their planting season. Summer was the time to pick medicines and berries; autumn was the time to harvest crops, hunt wild game, and to use their medicines if needed to get through the winter (Murdoch, personal communication 2016). Winter was the time for rest and telling stories (dibaajimowin). As Lewis Debassige said, winter was the time

when Nanabush stories were told. The uses of traditional medicines, diet, and stories could be all integrated into the educational curriculum at Wikwemikong.

When Isaac Murdoch spoke about how corn sustained the people, it made me think about the various types of corn (*maandaamiin*) that the Anishinaabek raised prior to European contact. Corn, of course, is indigenous to North America, and most Indigenous peoples of the Americas have their own stories of how corn came to them. *Maandaamiin* in Anishinaabemowin literally means “amazing seed” (*maandaa* means amazement, *miin* means seed) (Joyce Pitawanakwat and Agnes Manitowabi, personal communications, 2016 and 2017 respectively). Debassige told me that three main types of corn were planted on Manitoulin Island: yellow corn, also known as sweet corn, white corn, and red corn. The white corn came from the Haudenosaunee peoples. The red corn came from the Mandan people, an Indigenous nation who once lived in the upper Mississippi River valley. Both of these types of corn were brought to the Anishinaabek through trade, as the Odawa people of Manitoulin Island were also known as “people of trade.” But the earliest, yellow corn, has its own origin stories. This story is about how yellow corn came to the Anishinaabek after Nanabush fought a great warrior by the name of Mandamin.

*The Story of Nanabush and Mandamin*

Wikwemikong artist Daphne Odjig has retold many stories of Nanabush in books (Odjig 2009a and 2009b). In one of her stories, Nanabush was told by his grandmother Nokomis that he is destined to do something wonderful for his people. His grandmother would not provide any details to a curious Nanabush, but simply said that it will involve a



large warrior dressed in green that he will eventually meet, and it will bring great fortune to his people if Nanabush does as he says.

He traveled across a lake as his grandmother instructed, and when he reached the shore, he saw walking towards him a tall warrior that matched Nokomis's description of a man dressed in green and yellow. He introduced himself as Mandamin, and said that he had been sent there by the Great Spirit, "who knows that you wish to do good for your people." Mandamin told him that they will have to wrestle, and that only through defeating him will he be able to learn what will help his people.

Nanabush summoned the courage to fight, and attacked Mandamin, who gave him a good fight, but seeing that Nanabush was tiring, decided to postpone the rest of the fight until the next day. The next day they fought again, but once again Nanabush grew tired and Mandamin delayed the fight so they could continue the next day. That third day, Mandamin prepared Nanabush for his victory, instructing him on how, when he has defeated Mandamin, he must remove his garments, bury him in clean soil, and keep weeds from his grave. Nanabush won this third round of wrestling and followed the instructions for how to tend to Mandamin's remains.

Nanabush returned across the lake to tell his grandmother the news, where she reminded him to follow through with all that the warrior had told him to do. He returned to the grave site regularly to clear away weeds and keep the soil moist and soft. Eventually from the ground grew green plumes, which he excitedly told his grandmother about. A few months later he brought friends and his grandmother to the gravesite, where a tall stalk of corn had grown. When he saw the majestic plant, he exclaimed that he now

knew how to help his people. Later his friends and family feasted on the ears of yellow corn, this amazing new food that Nanabush had helped bring to his people to sustain them forever after.

## **Discussion of Research Results**

This section summarizes the findings from the interviews and autoethnography as they relate to the six research questions. It is followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for reform in educational policies, curriculum, staffing, and funding for schools serving Anishinaabe children and youth.

### *1. Elders' Views on Impact of Loss of Traditional Culture and Language on Education of Anishinaabe Youth*

The elders all expressed concern about the continuing loss of Indigenous language speakers and about Anishinaabe youth losing their connection to their land, history, and cultural knowledge. They worried that youth today were not receiving the education they need to eventually become elders, the holders and transmitters of the values, beliefs, ecological knowledge, oral history, and language. They attributed the complete destruction of the traditional Anishinaabe educational system to the period of colonization and forced assimilation. They saw the need to reinstitute the traditional methods of transmitting knowledge to provide a more holistic education, one that might better prepare Anishinaabe youth for the particular challenges they face and the more general challenges of our ecological crisis.

The elders felt that the traditional methods of teaching children – experiential learning and storytelling – were more effective pedagogical techniques and that the lack of these techniques is detrimental to Anishinaabe students. They also expressed regret about the loss of the traditional goal of education: to develop a good person. They saw

the revitalization and restoration of Anishinaabe values, worldviews, and stewardship of the land, spiritual knowledge, and language as necessary for meeting this goal.

## *2. Elders' Experiences with the Education System*

In their own experiences as students, these elders had come of age when there was little or no acknowledgment of the value or contribution of Anishinaabe cultural knowledge and little inclusion of this knowledge in their curricula. They had to seek out on their own information about their history and culture. All of the elders have been involved since finishing school in efforts to decolonize education for Anishinaabe youth through advocacy for the inclusion of Anishinaabe culture and history in the curriculum, for the adoption of traditional teaching methods, and for sufficient time and resources to effectively transmit this knowledge. Lewis Debassige participated in the push for cultural renewal through the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, which advocated for cultural renewal programs. He stated that they began with language classes and then became involved in designing curriculum outlines, teacher training, counselor training, and secondary education curriculum content. Isaac Murdoch formed his cultural resurgence school, and Joyce Pitawanakwat has been a strong advocate for returning control of education for their children to the Anishinaabe people. Joyce also asserted that the histories of colonization, forced assimilation, unfair treaties, and assimilating Indian residential schools have been inadequately covered in the past and present in the curriculum.

## *3. Essential Traditional Knowledge Content and Teaching Methods*

The elders all placed emphasis on the students reconnecting to the land and learning the Anishinaabe traditional relationship to the land. This essential knowledge

would include the history of land dispossession, a reconnecting to subsistence from the land, education about Indigenous diets, and a return to stewardship of the land. They also emphasized that elders should be included in the teaching about the land, because they could provide land-based experiential learning, recount the oral history of their land, and retell stories of the proper relationships to plants and animals. Storytelling was considered an essential teaching method, as was identifying and engaging each child's learning spirit. The elders spoke of the need for non-Indigenous teachers to develop more cultural awareness on issues like taking the time to engage a child's learning spirit and to learn less authoritarian methods of communicating with or disciplining Anishinaabe children. Storytelling was also considered essential to the transfer of knowledge about values and rules guiding relationships and moral behavior.

Language and spiritual knowledge were also considered by the elders to be essential components of a holistic education. They wanted the teaching of the Anishinaabe language to be given higher status in the curriculum, so that adequate time would be given for children to become fluent. Spiritual knowledge and, in particular, the vision quest was seen as necessary for providing the guidance and direction that Anishinaabe youth today are missing.

#### *4. Elders' Experiences with Integrating Anishinaabe Cultural Knowledge into Curriculum*

Lewis Debassige reported on successful programs at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, but his experiences with lack of funding and resources matched those of Joyce and Isaac. Good intentions and good programs did not result in adequate funding

and, in the case of the Wikwemikong school system, in adequate time for teaching language and culture. The elders wanted to see traditional knowledge as integral to the curriculum and not just as an add on. Joyce did not foresee adequate funding, time, and support occurring until Anishinaabe people have control over educational policies, funding, and curriculum affecting their children and youth.

#### *5. Supports and Resources Needed*

Sufficient time for immersion, adequate funding, adequate staffing, and flexibility in teaching sites and methods were all seen as necessary conditions for a successful learning experience. Community-based education is engaging and empowering for students to be learning material directly relevant to where they live.

#### *6. Views on Successfully Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Curriculum*

Community control and involvement in planning and implementation are considered to be the most important factors in successfully integrating Indigenous language and cultural content.

#### Listening to Elders: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to learn from the perspectives of Anishinaabe elders who had experience with integrating Anishinaabe Kendaaswin into the provincial or on-reserve schools in their roles as teachers and administrators and/or had experience in teaching community-based education programs on the integration of Indigenous knowledge in Anishinaabe communities. Their first-hand experiences could provide the kind of practical knowledge that can be applied as guidance for the effective implementation of the educational reforms proposed in the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission Calls to Action (2015) and in the United Nation Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the Canadian federal government in 2016. The interviews of the elders provided valuable insights into what Anishinaabe knowledge content should be included, how the content should be taught, and the policies needed to support and sustain an integrated curriculum. The findings in this research were consistent with the curriculum content and pedagogical methods proposed by Indigenous scholars such as Deloria (2001), Battiste (2000), Little Bear (2009), and Thomas-Hill (2014), as will be demonstrated in the following discussion. My own lived experiences with Indigenous knowledge education and reflective responses have been added to the elders' insights.

*Content Area: Language*

Language revitalization has been at the core of Indigenous education reform proposals since the Indian Control of Indian Education report was initiated in 1972. Little Bear (2009) sees language as integral to Indigenous knowledge and that the loss of language as equivalent to loss of spirit. Spiritual knowledge, knowledge about the land, belief systems and worldview are embedded in the language. Knowledge keeper Isaac Murdoch, one of the interviewees, told me, "The greatest resurgence we can do is to rekindle our languages. Nothing is stronger" (Murdoch, personal communication 2017).

Wikwemikong is at a crucial point in language survival as fluent speakers are dying and the current education programs are not graduating students with language fluency. Joyce Pitawanakwat noted in her interview that language revitalization has been a critical topic of discussion for decades, but little progress has been made, because there

have been insufficient funding, insufficient school time, and a lack of support for a language immersion program. Elder Lewis Debassige participated in a cultural resurgence community-based program that had successful Anishinaabe language immersion and language teacher training programs. He emphasized the need for Anishinaabemowin immersion schools to be funded now in order for Anishinaabemowin to not become extinct.

Successful Indigenous language programs exist that could be studied to evaluate their effectiveness and budgetary needs. Mohawk parents in Kahnawake Territory in 1988 established a Mohawk language immersion school for preschool and early elementary school children that has produced children whose first language is Mohawk. A related program focuses on training adults to speak Mohawk. However, like the program that Debassige described, they suffer from insufficient funding (Lee, 2012). Program evaluation research on effective language immersion programs such as the Mohawk ones could help bolster the case for adequate funding and resource support for language programs within Anishinaabe schools.

*Content Area: Spiritual Knowledge*

Lewis Debassige expressed his conviction that core foundation of curriculum for Anishinaabe students should be based on the spiritual aspect of education. As he said to me,

The spiritual way should be the lead. The spiritual component is missing within our education systems for our Anishinaabe children today. Spirit should be the most dominant, and then all the others will fall into balance, the emotional, physical, and mental aspects of education” (Debassige, personal communication 2016).



Debassige's views are in accord with Dumont (2006), who asserts that the concept of spiritual education originates with the Anishinaabe creation story. Dumont states that when the Creator first created the universe, the first "seed thought" sent out into the darkness formed the stars. The next seed thought of the Creator, the "seed thought" of knowledge, originated from the Creator's heart, thus connecting the heart and mind into one for the first time (Dumont 2006).

Little Bear (2009) also placed spiritual knowledge as integral part of the educational process. His formulation of an Indigenous educational paradigm is based on the Indigenous worldview that the universe is comprised of energy waves or spirit that connects all relationships and all knowledge.

Debassige's view is also accord with Deloria's (1999) viewpoint that Indigenous knowledge is centered upon an understanding of the interconnectedness and spiritual nature of everything in the world and that knowledge acquisition involves the creation of relational, spiritual connections to the world. Cajete (2000), who has been a long-time advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in school curricula, emphasized, like Murdoch, the necessity of gaining spiritual knowledge so as to learn how to live a good life in harmony with the earth. Murdoch also stated that the Anishinaabe recognized the great influence that spirituality had within their lives and recognized the importance of visions, dreams, and communication with other spiritual entities. Deloria expressed a similar view when he wrote, "Deeper knowledge than what had been originally allotted to human beings was possible only if the spirits, through meditation of other creatures, shared some of their knowledge with us" (Deloria 2006, 16). This type of knowledge

transfer is known as the vision quest. Basil Johnston (1976) and elder Joyce Pitawanakwat saw the quest for spiritual knowledge as a key developmental task. Traditionally, young men would seek their vision as a guide to their purpose in life. As Johnston explains,

Men were required to seek vision; moreover, they had to live out and give expression to their visions, it was through vision that a man found purpose and meaning to life and to his being. There was another aspect to the nature of man. In scope and depth and breadth, every man was very different; some were gifted; others possessed lesser powers. Still each was obligated to seek his own capacity, his purpose not outside himself, but within his innermost being. And because each man was differently endowed, every man attained a different vision; each fulfilled his vision as he and not someone understood it (Johnston 1976, 119).

Visions and dreams are considered to be of the utmost importance for individuals to connect with their inner being as well as the outside world. Indigenous societies had dream interpreters, who taught children at a young age to honor their significant dreams. Children learned about their artistic expression through dreams, where they would create ceremonies, rituals, poetry, artwork, dances, and songs (Cajete 1994).

Joyce Pitawanakwat recommended a return to the traditional education that was grounded on spirituality. She noted that the Anishinaabe believe that each nation of people has a special relationship to the Creator that demand certain responsibilities and obedience to specific laws. These laws require a specific way of relating to the earth that are based on the principles of respect, balance, and acknowledgement of all life.

*Content Area: Land and Traditional Ecological Perspectives*

All of the elders stressed the importance of reconnecting Anishinaabe children with their land. Joyce Pitawanakwat described the nature-based learning projects she conducted at the Wikwemikong High School which included medicinal plant gathering,

and planting Indigenous foods as means of reconnecting students to the land and to a healthier life style. This is similar to what LaDuke (2002) and Martin-Hill (2008) have proposed: that restoring the traditional relationship to the land and learning traditional animal and plant usage could improve physical, emotional, and spiritual sense of well-being. Joyce Pitawanakwat and Isaac Murdoch also saw land-based educational experiences that included the teaching of TEK and Anishinaabe ecological knowledge to be essential components of a holistic Indigenous educational program.

Simpson (2011) and McGregor (2013) both advocated the teaching of Anishinaabe creation stories and ancient prophecies such as the Seven Fires or Seven Generations Ahead in Anishinaabe educational programs to teach children their responsibilities for protecting the earth for future generations. Research on the long-term efficacy of using Anishinaabe ecological knowledge for sustained commitment to environmental stewardship would be useful to environmental education programs in general, where questions about how enduring changed attitudes and behaviors are after a program ends.

#### *Teaching Methods: Use of Elders*

The participants in this study stressed the importance of restoring intergenerational learning in the classrooms and in the community. They were concerned about the loss of language and of spiritual, environmental, and cultural knowledge, as elders died and children were not being educated in Indigenous knowledge so as to one day become elders. The participants cited experiential learning experiences and story-telling as techniques that could recognize and utilize the knowledge of elders in the

school system and that these teaching methods were more effective with Indigenous youth than Western based educational techniques. These experiential strategies are consistent with the research studies that Goulet and Goulet (2014) and Archibald (2008) conducted on how to integrate the knowledge of elders into the educational system for successful learning experiences for Indigenous students.

Debassige recognized that utilizing elders in the classroom might involve a reorientation from the more hierarchical student-teacher relationship in the Eurocentric teaching model to one that is a more interactional and reciprocal learning experience. Freire (1970) advocated for a “co-intentional education” as a means of decolonizing education. Students would be treated as “co-investigators” rather than as passive recipients of knowledge. Debassige also reflected on how powerful his intergenerational learning experiences had been, because they were relational and relevant. How to replicate this natural learning experience in the classroom will require reflection. For example, it might be effective to have fluent Anishinaabe elders participate in Anishinaabemowin language classes, where they have real conversations with each other and students listen and ask them questions.

*Teaching Methods: Experiential Learning and Personal Learning*

The participants noted that experiential learning experiences with elders often involved experiential learning from doing and that this hands-on approach was an effective method of learning for Anishinaabe students. The land-based educational program that Joyce Pitawanakwat directed emphasized hands-on learning. Students were involved in building, gardening, hunting, crafting, and assisting in lodge ceremonies.

Experts in these areas and local government agencies were involved in teaching students' skills for these nature-based projects. Little Bear (2009) identified three primary methods of transferring Indigenous knowledge: oral, experiential, and revealed.

In her book *Kaandossiwin*, Kathleen Absolon elaborates on this Anishinaabe word and concept. Kaandossiwin is her pronunciation of kendaaswin, which is the pronunciation used in Wikwemikong. Kaandossiwin translates to "how we come to acquire knowledge," referring to the spiritual process of gaining knowledge. Revealed knowledge transmission is considered to be spiritual learning, which is one of the methods for acquiring Anishinaabe knowledge. Michael Hart elaborates on this concept:

Through inward exploration tapping into creative forces that run through all life, individuals come to subjectively experience a sense of wholeness. This exploration is an experience in context, where the context is the self in connection with happenings, and the findings from such experience is knowledge. Happenings may be facilitated through rituals or ceremonies that incorporate dreaming, visioning, meditation, and prayer (Hart 2010, 8).

*Teaching Methods: Oral History and Storytelling*

The elders told stories to convey key Anishinaabe values and beliefs about child development; how each person discovers their own unique gift from the Creator, their own purpose in life. These stories conveyed beliefs about how children's interest in learning can be engaged, which if adopted could lead to more successful learning experiences for Anishinaabe youth. They also told stories that had come down through oral history that provided a different perspective on historical events; stories that corrected the negative or inaccurate portrayals of Indigenous peoples still found in social studies and history textbooks. The oral history of Indigenous peoples may go back to ancient times. As Goulet and Goulet state:

The social history of people and the environment is carried through story, memory, cognitive devices and structures, cultural creations, the land, and the universe. . . . Stories, practices, and ceremonies carry knowledge through multiple and countless generations. Indigenous oral history documents the past events of people and the environment going back thousands of years (Goulet and Goulet 2014, 63).

The elder's views were in agreement with Battiste (2000), Grande (2004), and Little Bear (2009), among others, that story-telling and oral history are essential methods of teaching values, skills and cultural knowledge that should be incorporated into Indigenous knowledge education programs.

*Policy: Indigenous Peoples Control of Indigenous Education*

Debassige recounted his experiences dating back to 1972 with attempts to gain community control over education for Indigenous students. He joined the efforts of the National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) to improve schools serving Indigenous students. The Brotherhood sought local community control, more Indigenous teachers, culturally relevant curricula and teaching resources, language instruction, and the incorporation of Indigenous values in the educational system. He noted that while there have been changes in the educational system – there are more Indigenous teachers and language classes and Indigenous knowledge content has been added – but a true commitment to local community control and to adequate funding and resources has not yet happened.

Provincial schools receive more funding than on-reserve schools, so it is difficult for Indigenous schools “to develop on a par with provincial schools” (Battiste 2013, 168). School funding increases within Indigenous communities are capped at 2% annually, while provincial schools receive 4.1% (Assembly of First Nations N.D.). New and

innovative educational models designed and developed by Anishinaabe educators and knowledge holders receive little to no government funding. This includes summer educational institutes that teach Anishinaabe knowledge and offer Anishinaabemowin language immersion.

Anishinaabek education is both an “Aboriginal Right” and a “Treaty Right,” which are both protected under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. Anishinaabek educators and leaders must be part of all stages of planning, implementation, and governance. This will allow their communities to have full control of the content taught in their schools. Anishinaabek knowledge would fall under “Aboriginal Rights,” which are among our inherent rights that are protected in our treaties within a nation-to-nation relationship between the British Crown and the Anishinaabek Nation. These Aboriginal and Treaty Rights were legally documented in the 1764 Treaty of Niagara Wampum Belt, the 1836 Manitoulin agreement, the 1850 Robinson Huron Treaty, and the 1862 Manitoulin Treaty (Greene 2005).

Joyce Pitawanakwat stressed, as Battiste had, that the resolution of land claims and adequate funding for on-reserve schools were essential conditions for the Anishinaabe community to gain control over the education of their children. As Marie Battiste says,

Canada, its provinces, and territories should recognize and affirm that Indigenous knowledge requires the protection of the lifestyles that permit intergenerational use of the lands, traditional ecological practices, and the maintenance of cycles of interaction with species and land forms in a traditional lifestyle of hunting, fishing, trapping, planting, and gathering foods and medicinal plants (Battiste 2013, 171).

### *Learning Spirit*

One of the significant findings in this research related to the elders' views on the teacher-student relationship and of the teacher's responsibilities in the learning process. All the elders spoke of the necessity of the teacher understanding that each child has a unique learning spirit. Joyce Pitawanakwat emphasized the teacher's responsibility of recognizing and nourishing each student's unique talents and gifts. The Anishinaabe belief is the idea that each person is born with a unique gift, given to us by the Creator, which must be nourished. As Joyce explained, "the nurturing of the individual's unique gifts, talents and abilities" is central to Anishinaabe pedagogy "so a person may be able to share his or her special gifts within their communities." Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) is an educator who also focused on the necessity of nurturing the learning spirit of each student. She suggested that the oral stories of elders be integrated into the curricula as they could be used as "heart knowledge" by connecting to the inner learning spirit of Indigenous students through their emotions and intuition.

Educators need to make their curriculum come to life. Educators can achieve this by finding their passion or gift as a teacher, which can ignite their own "teaching spirit." This encourages a spiritual, reciprocal relationship between the student and the teacher. When curriculum seems to come to life for students, it nourishes their own "learning spirit." It is as if the curriculum is speaking to their spirit, through their hearts (Goulet and Goulet 2014).

My recommendation would be that the oral stories of the Anishinaabe elders be introduced into the Wikwemikong curricula. The learning spirit for Anishinaabe students



can be nourished through Anishinaabe aadzookaan, *aansookaan*, *miimgwenziwin* and *dibaajimowin*. Aadzookaan means the sacred teachings that remain the same and cannot be changed. Aansookaan means to tell a story where the story line can be changed, while *dibaajimowin* is everyday storytelling. *Miimgwenziwin* are our unique gifts given to us by our Creator. These categories are discussed further in Appendix 3.

The inclusion of material on nurturing the learning spirit in teacher training programs might increase the level of teacher expectations for achievement for Indigenous students. Studies dating back to the 1960s have found a strong association between teachers' high expectations for students and student achievement levels (Lawrence 2012). It is unknown how the low expectations of students during the Indian residential schools era have impacted the long-term success of students who went there, as well as how that translates to the success of future generations.

#### *Reflections; My Personal Journey*

It sometimes speaks to us, our inner individual learning spirit, which must be nourished because we have been impacted by colonization – “it” being the spiritual component of education and “sometimes” being indicative of the bicultural cognitive assimilation of Indigenous peoples. In the present time, it is as if we Anishinaabek are living in two worlds, one influenced by Eurocentric thinking and the other by our Anishinaabe *kendaaswin*. When we connect back to the spirit of the language, land and the universe, we allow spiritual knowledge to speak to us. Our learning spirit speaks to us through our Anishinaabe worldviews. It speaks to us through the water, sky, trees, rocks,

animals, medicines, plants, and through our ancestors. Sometimes this spirit gets distorted from past traumas of colonization and also gets distracted by modern technology.

As a young boy growing up in my Anishinaabe community, I spent most of my time playing in the woods, amongst the trees, plants, medicines, animals, and nature. I always felt some sort of energy, as if something spiritual was trying to connect or speak to me, but at that time I did not know what it was or how to convey feelings about that energy. I know now that there is energy within nature, out on the land amongst the water, trees, plants, and medicines, called spirit, which is interconnected throughout the universe. The Anishinaabe can get back to a spiritual way of life through bimaadiziwin, by connecting our individual spirit back with the spirit of the land, through a reciprocal relationship. Before I started this research journey, I wondered how our Anishinaabek would be living a hundred years from now. Will there still be Anishinaabek? I had a vision of how we as educators or academic scholars can help to ensure that our Anishinaabek culture will survive into the next century. After we heal from the intergenerational trauma of the Indian residential school system, I hope the Anishinaabek of the future can discover “It *always* speaks to us,” our inner spirit, connecting our heart with our mind. We must plant our seed thoughts of learning within our learning spirit.

One of the original purposes of this thesis was to influence the thinking of Anishinaabe students and to increase their investment in their education, with the hope of getting more to stay in school. I knew that honoring our elders' knowledge would be integral to that process, so I chose to follow that thinking within my research by focusing on local elders from the community with specialized experience in this area. In an act of

reciprocity for them sharing their insights, I created this thesis to help pass on their thoughts to educators who will work directly with our youth. These interviewees helped me to understand a basic truth, that this change would only be possible if curricula are centered around traditional Anishinaabe knowledge. If this could become an ongoing process, renewed every few years, it would allow the curriculum to evolve and reflect the changing needs of the Anishinaabek community.

What I also gathered through my research and the interviews with the elders was that Anishinaabe youth must learn their ancestral philosophies, political, social, and economic systems in order to become effective leaders for their communities while simultaneously contributing to the social, economic and political well-being of Canadian society. Building from the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (2015), the elders' knowledge gained from the interviews validated the educational calls to action in the final TRC report. Although reconciliation is discussed in terms of balancing our current Eurocentric education systems with our Anishinaabe knowledge, it is also about educating non-Indigenous peoples on what it truly means to be Indigenous in Canada. We can accomplish this when we are immersed in the teachings of our ancestors, nurtured by the stories of our community's elders, and encouraged to find our own voices as we craft the stories of the future.

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## Appendix 1

### Anishinaabemowin Words and Their Principal Meanings

Here are collected a few words from the thesis. No attempt was made to impose uniform spelling of Anishinaabe words used by different speakers or writers. This short glossary merely attempts to provide a primary meaning for some words used repeatedly in the thesis. Like most languages, Anishinaabemowin has layers of connotation and association that provide deeper meaning to one acquainted with the language and culture. Capitalization generally follows English conventions.

Aadzookaan, sacred stories which always remain the same

Aansookaan, oral teachings which can be changed with a new storyline

Anishinaabe or Anishinabe or Nishnaabe, an Algonquian Nation, here particularly the union of Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi on Manitoulin Island, and specifically the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve.

Anishinaabek, pl. of Anishinaabe groups

Anishinaabe kwe, kweok, Anishinaabe woman, women

Anishinaabemowin, Anishinaabe language

Anishinaabe aadzii, Anishinaabe way of thinking

Bimaadiziwin, "The Good Life," life lived spiritually and holistically

Biskaabiiyang, "returning to ourselves"

Debwewin, truth

Dibaajimowin, everyday stories or storytelling

Kaandossiwin or Kendaaswin, knowledge, learning, how to learn, including through vision or meditation. Two words with similar meanings, but with different regional pronunciations of dialect

Mandamin or Maandaamiin, corn, maize, or "amazing seed"

Miimgwenziwin, our natural talents or unique gifts from the Creator

## Appendix 2

The story of the two learners, full version.

There was this old man at the foot of a mountain and he was getting up in age. He was 80, so he let it be known that he would welcome a helper, a young man, 12, 13 years old, to help him with the little chores around his camp. So, quite a few showed up for that. And nobody, nobody took his challenge. And then one morning, a very spry young man, full of energy and showing that he was more physically advanced than most kids his age, showed up and all this, very early in the morning. And he knocks on the door and says, he says, "My grandfather sent me. My dad and my grandfather sent me to learn from you."

He says, "I can do most of the work that's required, that requires what you need. I can hunt for small game. I can cut wood. I can bring in the water. I can run errands for you, long distance." He says, "I'm ready to start." So, the old man says, "Well, let's have breakfast." So, they're having breakfast and they go [not transcribed]. So, the young man is right beside him and he says, "Help me cut the wood now." So, they go back up for lunch. Another young man shows up. And he's got his head down, and he's not as spry as the earlier boy and all this, he says, "My grandfather sent me to learn from you, but I see that you already have a young person in your charge and all this and he seems a lot better than I am." He's got his head down. "Okay, let's have lunch, all together." So, they had lunch, and after lunch, he said, "Okay, each of you, I'm gonna put a challenge before you and all this." He says, "See that mountain?" He says, "A good healthy man takes half a day to get up top of that and back down." He says, "But I'm gonna give you 'til tomorrow morning." He says, "On top of that mountain, there are some worn pine trees." And he says, "On those worn pine trees are eagle nests. I want you to climb that mountain, get on top of the trees, and get some eagle down, eaglet down, and bring it back. Spend a night at the foot of the mountain," he says, "And come back tomorrow morning."

So off they went, two boys. Right away, the old man saw that the first boy was already way ahead of the second boy. You never know the sight. So, night came, next morning came, sure enough, the first boy shows up right away; as soon as the sun was clear of the horizon. And he had a fire going and he had the tea going and all this. Found out that the old man preferred the tea that was brewed outside, so the first boy did all this favor. So, they sat down and had biscuits and tea for breakfast.

And the young boy was so excited. He says, "I got on top of the mountain. I got my eaglet feather." He says, "And looked at the other side of the mountain." And he says, "You could see other mountains further away." And now, he says, "I asked myself, I wonder who lives there and what good medicine they must be practicing? Maybe I should go and learn their medicine and bring it back." He says, "I really like to see who those people are that live on the other side of the mountain." And the old man caught in this boy's excitement, says, "That you shall." He says, "What about my grandfather?" He says, "Let him know that you have to go and discover what's on the other side, and tell him I give you my blessing." So, off the boy went.

Close to noon, second boy shows up, his head down. And he says, "You'll have to excuse me," he says, "I didn't even get on top of the mountain. I didn't even get half-way up the mountain." He says, "When I left you across the creek, out of your sight, and I was marveled at what's underneath my feet, the bugs, the plants and all this, and all this, what medicine they must have." He says, "So, I just sat there and looking and observed everything and all this." He says, "I didn't realize that night had come and all this, so I just slept there. I got up this morning and I was still with the same wonder what's underneath my feet." He says, "I'm still amazed." So, he says, "Dismiss me as you should." He says, "I didn't make it to the mountain." And the old man laughed. He says, "70 years ago, I came to see an old man to learn from him the medicine that he had known, he had practiced. He sent me up the mountain, and I didn't make it because I was amazed at what was underneath my feet." He says, "Therefore, since you did the same as I did, you shall be my student."

See, some of us are chosen to go and see the other side of the mountain and learn from that. Some of us are right here. What we must learn is right here, and that's what we have to follow is right here. Each child is born with closed fists. In each fist is what the Creator wants the child to deliver to this place. That's Creator's investment. Our duty is to find out what that innate purpose is. That's traditional education.

### **Appendix 3**

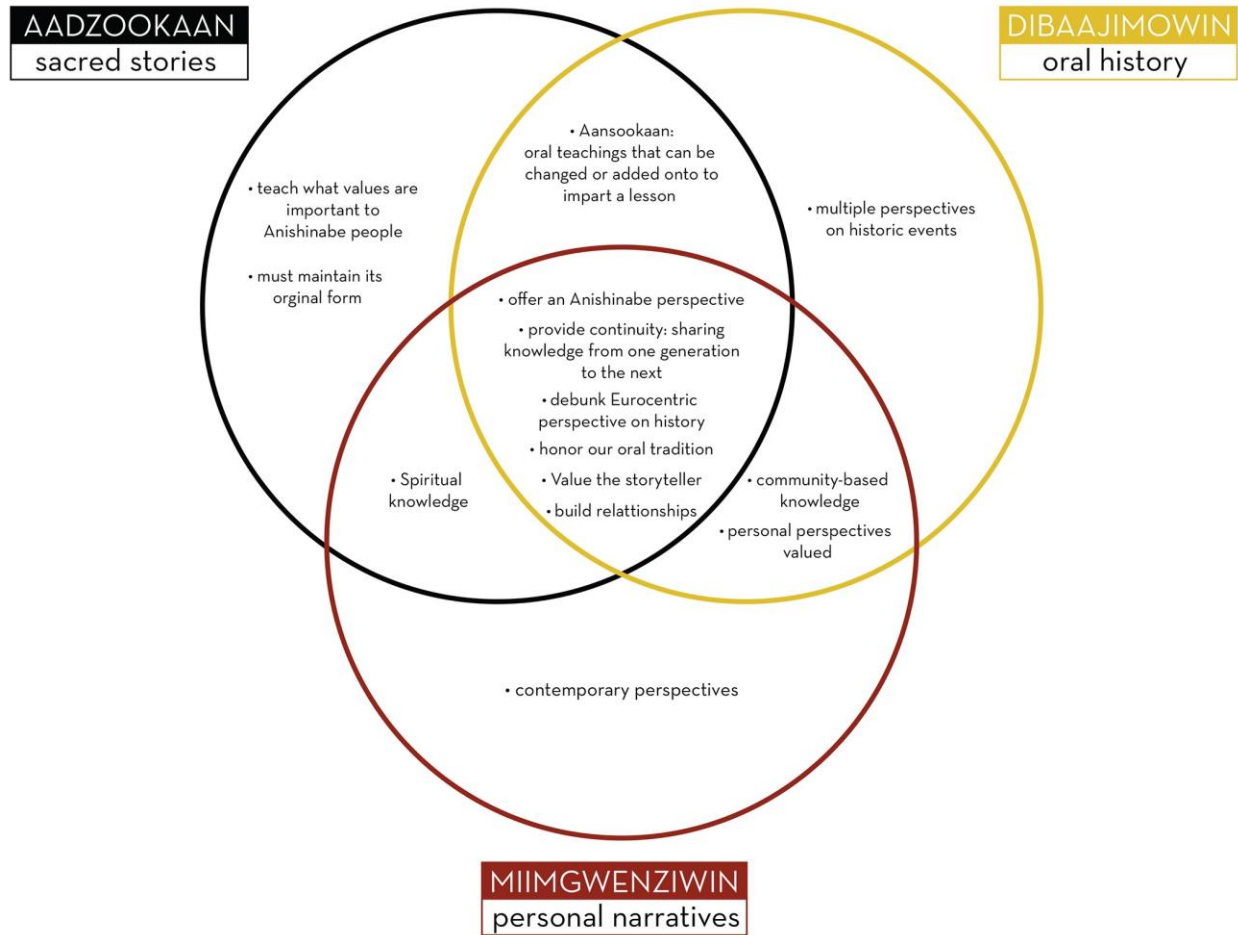
#### Types of storytelling in Anishinaabemowin.

One of the themes that emerged from both the interviews and the literature review was the importance and complexity of oral storytelling as it is passed down through Anishinaabe culture, values, and history. Anishinaabemowin reveals the depth of the oral tradition's significance with the words used to describe different types of stories. The categories in English are roughly sacred stories such as origin stories, stories pointing out a moral, stories about historical events, and personal stories. The Anishinaabe terms are aadzookaan, aansookaan, dibaajimowin, and miimgwenziwin.

Aadzookaan are sacred stories, which always have to remain the same when they are told. These are passed on through ceremonies in an Anishinaabe lodge, whether they are held publicly or within private settings. Ceremonies are always conducted within a circular format, where individuals sit within a circle setting. The symbol of the circle is considered sacred to the Anishinaabek, as all of life encompasses cycles. A related type of story is aansookaan, which are teachings that can be changed or a different story line can be added onto metaphorically. Unlike the strict adherence to tradition followed in aadzookaan, aansookaan allows for the voice and interpretation of the speaker. It is significant that both concepts exist, because the former emphasizes the continuity with traditional teachings, while the latter allows for flexibility of the individual speaker to adapt the story to changing times. Aansookaan are a melding of oral history and sacred story.

Dibaajimowin is the term for stories in which the Anishinaabek told about specific historical events, also known as oral history. Miimgwenziwin refers to the products of a person's natural talents and abilities, their gifts from the Creator. These types of stories can be expressed through other mediums such as visual art, music, or dance. This can also be expressed through personal narratives or life experiences. These two concepts overlap where the stories can be used for building relationships within a community. When we find that a person has a specific skill or source of knowledge, it can be enjoyed and utilized by listening to that person tell her/his story. It can also be stimulating for elders because when they get to tell their stories, it keeps their brains vital through active memory.

The circles in the Venn diagram below represent three of these key concepts, while aansookaan is within the intersection of the first two. All four concepts are useful in thinking about both formal and informal stories, meaning those that are taught in the schools and those which are shared within the home. Telling Anishinaabe history from a uniquely Indigenous perspective involves melding all four of these forms of storytelling, or drawing from each of the different traditions to tell different aspects of events in history. Anishinaabemowin opens up a different realm of knowledge when the spiritual significance of these concepts is interwoven together and integrated into educational curriculum.



The connection between aadzookaan and miimgwenziwin is that it ignites the spiritual connection we have within ourselves. One example of using miimgwenziwin through personal narratives as a form of art is the print by Isaac Murdoch shown below. This is a picture of a female sea serpent who is protecting her eggs, which are buried underground. Isaac Murdoch expresses aadzookaan, aansookaan, and dibaajimowin through his miimgwenziwin, via visual art. The other two figures are known as the *paayensak* (little people), who are also protected by the serpent. The serpent protects the water, which is the sustenance of all life, which is also connected to the land and animals.





A/p

The Serpent

M7