

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES TODAY: *NIMKII BENESHII*
***MIGIZII KWE* -THUNDER BIRD EAGLE WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study used a narrative story-telling format to further current understanding of traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values. The impetus for this inquiry was the researcher's quest to seek answers to the following: (a) What are traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values? and (b) How can traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge be incorporated into today's schools? Both questions remain controversial because what comprises traditional knowledge and values is different for each individual and because there is no consensus on how traditional knowledge should be incorporated into Canada's school systems. This study began as an investigation into a *G'chi Anishinaube-kwe's (Great Wise Ojibwe woman's)* worldview by the researcher, who wanted to make sense of the past in the present for future generations. The researcher is of *Anishinaube* descent and was raised with understanding and comprehension in *Anishinaube-mowin* (natural conversation). *Anishinaube-mowin* and English were the languages used to collect the data. Guided and open-ended questions facilitated *G'chi Anishinaube Kwe's* responses as well as optimum exploration of the topic. The collected data were derived from conversations, interviews, recordings, note taking, listening, and observations in the participant's natural environment. Data analysis reflected a Eurocentric academic research standard as viewed from the perspective of a researcher who also was a cultural insider. Conclusions that have implications for research and program planning in Aboriginal education and thoughts for further investigation were identified.

DEDICATION

Aaniin. My name is Susan Clara Bebonang, the name given to me and shared with me by my late great-grandmother, Susan Wagosh, on my grandfather's side. My Spirit name is, *Maandaa-kwens* given to me by my Elders. In my Ojibwe culture it is customary to give thanks acknowledging our Spirit ancestors and all life, I say *Miigwech* to *M'nookmisuk mino Mishoomsuk. Miigwech G'chi-minidoo*. As I write this thesis, I give thanks to all my grandmother spirits and grandfather spirits for being with me on this journey. I acknowledge and give thanks to *G'chi-minidoo*, the Great Mystery for leading me the way to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe. Miigwech Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* for showing me patience, sharing, in the *mino-bimaadsowin* good way of life for the next generations yet unborn.



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Miigwech to my home community of M'Chigeeng First Nation, Elders, friends and ever-loving family.

Miigwech to all my all of my relations.

Glossary

Following are brief explanations of some of the key cultural words and Ojibwe (*Anishinaube-mowin*) terms I used in this study. The reader should note that all *Anishinaube-mowin* terms used in the thesis are bolded and italicized for easy identification. The spelling of words in *Anishinaube-mowin* varies from region to region throughout Ontario, Manitoba, Wisconsin, and Michigan. I have chosen spellings that closely resemble those of the area around Manitoulin Island.

A'ki: Refers to the Earth.

Aaniin/Booshoo: A greeting used in Ojibwe, or *Anishinaube-mowin*.

Aboriginal, Anishinaube, First Nation, Native: These terms are almost interchangeable.

Aboriginal is often used to be more inclusive of Status Indians, Inuit and Métis peoples and defined in the Canadian Constitution of Indigenous Peoples. The term Native and First Nation are used by other voices in this thesis, and I choose to use *Anishinaube*. *Anishinaube* describes my situation as a member of M'Chigeeng First Nation. There are varied spellings of *Anishinaube*.

Aboriginal Worldview: A traditional Indigenous worldview of universal reciprocity and respect for earth that is common to Aboriginal groups (Dufault, 2003).

Anishinaube-mowin: Verb form that means that someone is speaking in the Ojibwe language.

Anishinaube-kwe: The term used to refer to an Ojibwe woman. Translation is "a good being woman." *Anishinaube* is understood to mean that human beings derive their goodness from their intent (Johnston, 2001).

Debewin: To speak the truth.

Dodemok: Clan system, a system of roles in the Aboriginal social order, based on lineage, often consisting of a number of related groups and families. The ***Anishinaube Dodemok*** are modeled after our elder relatives, the animals, that have shown us how to live in harmonious balance with one another.

Gekaanik/Gchin-shinaabe: Among Aboriginal people, Elders are wise men and women of various ages who hold maintain a cultural lifestyle and knowledge base (Ellerby, 2001).

Gchin-shinaabe-kwe: A term often referred to an old Ojibwe woman and translated as “a great wise original man-woman.”

Kendaasowuk: A plural term used to speak about “ones who know” or “wise ones with knowledge.”

Kendaasoo-kwe: Translates as “woman with knowledge.”

Medicine Wheel: Has been of central use by the Aboriginal peoples of North and South America. Used by the Elders to pass on the teachings of the ***M’shoomsuk*** (*Grandfathers*) and ***M’nookmisuk*** (*Grandmothers*). The structure around which many teachings and instruction are used in First Nations schools (Dufault).

Miigwech: English translation of *thank you* in ***Anishinaube-mowin***.

Mino-bimaadsowin: Ojibwe translation of “living the good life or living well.”

M’nookmis: A word that represents grandmother in the Ojibwe worldview and an expression to describe the connection to the moon as our Spirit Grandmother.

Mother Earth: Indigenous peoples refer to the Earth as our “mother,” someone who nurtures and sustains life.

M'shoomsuk: Means grandfathers in both the physical and spiritual realms.

Ngii-naagdowendmigog: A term used in *Anishinaube-mowin* to demonstrate being raised and cared for.

Pipe Carrier/Poowaagan-bemwinat: One who is entrusted with the sacred responsibility of being keeper of the pipe and a carrier of its teachings.

Powwow: A cultural gathering consisting of traditional dancing to drumming, eating of traditional foods, telling of stories, participation in sacred teachings, and wearing of regalia.

Red Nation: According to the Elders, a term used by Aboriginal people to represent their skin colour. Red, Black, Yellow, and White are seemingly universal colours to represent the four nations of the human race.

Semaa: Tobacco.

Traditional: Term used broadly to refer to any practice or belief that has been in our culture for some time, generally prior to European contact, and has been passed on from one generation to the next.

Waabshkiiwed: A term used to refer to the White Nation in *Anishinaube-mowin*.

Zagidowin: To love.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

There is a longing in my heart of my people to reach out and grasp that which is needed for our survival.

There is a longing among the young of my nation to secure for themselves and their people the skills that will provide them with a sense of worth and purpose.

They will be our new warriors.

Their training will be much longer and more demanding than it was in the olden days.

The long years of study will demand more determination, separation from home and family will demand endurance.

But, they will emerge with their hand held forward, not to receive welfare, but to grasp the place in society that is rightly ours. (Chief Dan George, 1974)

Introduction

My inspiration to do this study comes from being born into a First Nations family and raised *Anishinaube*. It is our responsibility to share what we learn about who we are and to give it back. This study helped me to learn more about who I am as an *Anishinaube* woman. I wanted to know more about traditional knowledge and understand its meaning. I wanted to learn about its origins firsthand. What I learned in this study comes from *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe, Thunder Bird Eagle Woman*. My only hope is that this study with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* is shared and disseminated in a respectful way. It is the *Anishinaube* way.

The reader should note that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* understood the ethical guidelines requiring anonymity and confidentiality. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* waived that right and allowed this researcher to use her spirit name throughout this paper. In addition, I used my own orthography of *Anishinaube* words based on my life experiences.

My inspiration to undertake this study came from conversations I have had with Elders, particularly *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, whose perspective will be the focus of

this research. I noted her observations on the Circle of Life and the role of the Red Race (Aboriginal People) in it. Using the Medicine Wheel concept, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*'s teaching is on the four symbolic nations that make up the human race and the responsibility that each nation brings to the Wheel. Her astute observation was that the spiritual dimension is "dangling" from the Medicine Wheel. When asked what she meant by "dangling," *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* replied that the unique role of the Red Nation is to teach the spiritual aspect of life as it relates to human development and how it will restore balance to the Wheel of Life. She sees the Red Nation as suffering greatly and believes that the Red Nation will need to heal its own members' own spirits before it can help others.

Friesen and Friesen (2002) asserted that the resources needed to develop healthy First Nations rest in the hands of Natives and non-Natives, but it is up to the Native people to critically examine their own hearts and be willing to put their houses in order first, even if it means enduring more pain than they have already experienced since European colonization. Battiste (2000) suggested that the remedy for creating an Aboriginal revitalization is the construction of a postcolonial framework that will allow Indigenous peoples to renew and reconstruct the principles underlying their own worldviews.

Background of the Study

This study begins with a story about an *Anishinaube-kwe*'s recollections regarding teaching moments with children in a school setting. The teacher in this story is the researcher. The story takes place in a small, close-knit northern *Anishinaube-mowin*-, English-, and French-speaking community. The story is about a time when the teacher

and her Grade 3 students went outdoors to find a tree suitable for the festive Christmas season. The teacher seized every opportunity throughout the school year to utilize the outdoors as a natural classroom.

It was a beautiful day, and the ground was covered with fresh snow. The teacher and her students followed a trail into the woods. Some students took turns leading, and others brought up the end of the line. They stopped at places along the trail to listen carefully and observe the winter activity around them, hoping for a chance to see or hear wildlife activity. They continued along as they searched for the perfect Christmas tree. Finally, they found a tree that everyone agreed was perfect for their classroom. The teacher took out her axe and chopped the tree down.

Before they headed back to the school, the teacher had the students gather around the fallen tree. The teacher shared a story with her students about what her grandparents had shown to her when she was a little girl. She told them how her grandparents used to put down *semaa*, or *tobacco*, and said *miigwech*, which means *thank you*. The gesture of offering *semaa* and *miigwech* showed respect for life and was an exchange for taking something alive from *a'ki*, the *Earth*.

The teacher wanted to make sure that her students understood the importance of this reciprocal relationship. She explained to them that because the tree had given itself freely for their use, in exchange, they had to leave something behind. Then the teacher reached into her pocket and took out a drawstring pouch. The students watched the teacher as she carefully took out a pinch of *semaa*, placed it gently on the freshly cut tree stump, and uttered *miigwech*.

The teacher stepped back and asked the students if they wanted to leave something of their own behind. The children quickly searched their pockets and stopped when one student shouted excitedly that she had three brightly coloured jellybeans. The teacher smiled and was pleased. She asked the student to place the jellybeans carefully on the tree stump alongside the *semaa*. The students watched silently as she did this. The teacher held out her hands again and asked the children to join hands with her and make a circle. Together, with their hands held, they looked at the tree stump now laden with *semaa* and three brightly coloured jellybeans. Together, the teacher and the students said *miigwech*.

This kind gesture of reciprocity to honour all life forms had been demonstrated in the very early years of the teacher's childhood. It had been a way of life she understood; in return, she was demonstrating to her students what she learned from her grandparents.

Importance of the Study

The inspiration for this study began early in my teaching career and became galvanized when I attended my very first Native education conference. In 1988, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) hosted a national convention on First Nations education. Individuals, groups, and First Nations people from across Canada and the United States attended. Being a new teacher of First Nations origin, I was privileged to be with other Aboriginal educators who addressed a range of topics relevant to Native education. Many delegates spoke at the conference, and one speech in particular had a profound effect on me. It was made by Ovide Mercredi, who later became Grand Chief of the AFN. He talked about what education means to First Nations people, the need for a balanced education, and the challenge to reform the education that First Nations people

receive. Mercredi's message was that First Nations people who have academic knowledge and experience, as well as traditional knowledge, should be in the forefront of educational reform. His vision was that Native people want an education that will produce individuals who will have the strength to be themselves; to succeed in life; and to meet any challenge, not just in their communities, but anywhere in the world.

His message to the conference participants was a reminder of our responsibility never to allow ourselves to despair. By helping ourselves, we will then be able to help many more people in our communities. I have since attended many other education conferences for Aboriginal peoples, and Mercredi's message is repeated time and again. It will be up to the Aboriginal peoples in Canada to create a balanced education for First Nations.

This study is important to me as a First Nations educator seeking a balanced form of education that utilizes and teaches *Anishinaube* culture, heritage, language, and traditional skills in a contemporary setting. As a First Nations woman and educator, my own consciousness has been shaped by *Anishinaube* cultural knowledge transmitted primarily through *Anishinaube-mowin*, the Ojibwe-speaking language, and influenced by interactions with Western society's realities.

My early life's teachings were taught to me by my first teachers, *Mishoomis*, my grandfather, and *Minookmis*, my grandmother, in *Anishinaube-mowin*. I observed the ways that *Anishinaube-mowin* was used to build and support relationships between and among family and community members. Those earliest memories are embedded in my first language. The traditional cultural upbringing that I received from my extended

family has had the greatest influence in providing me with the ethical beliefs that are fundamental for someone entering the teaching profession.

It is through the guidance of *kendaasoowuk*, *the wise ones with knowledge*, often referred to as the **Elders**, that I have been able to recognize traditional knowledge and values. Traditional values that retain and incorporate the principles of wholeness, order, balance, and respect for the spiritual and natural world are the primary factors in *Anishinaube* people's own development. First Nations Elders say that if we educate ourselves and our children about traditional ways, we can begin to educate the rest of the world and help to make it a better place. This study sought to heighten awareness of inherent traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values that have been forgotten or overlooked in Canada's school systems.

Fitznor (2002) documented the experiences of Aboriginal peoples within mainstream education and explained that what those experiences mean to us should be shared in a way that grounds our voices in Aboriginal knowings and processes. First Nations students need to feel proud of their heritage, learn cultural content in their studies, and be supported in the development of their self-worth (Fitznor).

Toulouse (2001), an Ojibwe researcher who discussed the teachings of the people of Sagamok, explained what drives her to seek out meaning in the life experiences and traditions of *Anishinaube* people. She stated that the *Anishinaube-kwe* researcher looks at familiar places in her life (i.e., as an insider) from an outsider's perspective, that is, she looks at things as strange, peculiar, and unexplained. Researching one's own community provides the opportunity for detailed descriptions and insights into what *bimaadsowin*, an *Ojibwe good life*, means (Toulouse).

Therefore, my hope is that this study, which was conducted from my interpretation and meaning as an *Anishinaube-kwe* educational researcher and as an insider, will provide deeper insight into knowledge that is traditionally transmitted orally in *Anishinaube-mowin*. It is the goal of this study to explore a new approach to education that incorporates the components of traditional knowledge and values into academic curricula in a modern context. The following research questions guided this study: (a) What are *Anishinaube* traditional knowledge and values? and (b) How can these be incorporated into today's schools?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to listen to, dialogue with, record, and document how one Elder, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, perceives the survival of traditional knowledge and values. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* is from an Ojibwe community in a particular geographical area and is a well-known and respected Elder in Canada and the United States. She often is referred to in *Anishinaube-mowin* as *kendaasoo-kwe*, *woman with knowledge*.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe is referred to in this study by her traditional Spirit name, which translates in *Anishinaube-mowin* as *Thunder-Bird Eagle Woman*. She is a member of the Whitefish River Ojibwe First Nation located in the Robinson-Huron Treaty area. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, who was raised in the Thunderbird Clan society, is a traditional Fire-Keeper's daughter, spiritual advisor, sweat-lodge keeper, pipe carrier, and counsellor on the cycle of life. She is fluent in English and *Anishinaube-mowin*. Recording and documenting oral traditional knowledge based on the personal experiences of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was my attempt to convey her

narrative, that is, her worldview. It was in no way intended to homogenize the many views embraced by Aboriginal peoples on traditional knowledge and values.

This study may serve as a guide for Aboriginal teachers to begin to revitalize traditional knowledge and values, and teach from that perspective. It may also help non-Aboriginal educators become better acquainted with one Aboriginal worldview. Sefa Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, and Zine (2000) suggested that one way to rethink education in Canada is to focus on Indigenous knowledge, which acknowledges that there are different ways of interpreting the world.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study, in an academic sense, reflects one worldview of one individual from one *Anishinaube* area. It is prudent to state that this study will not be generalized to all *Anishinaubec*, but may reflect some general notions common to Aboriginal people. My translations, interpretations, and personal meaning of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* responses during the interview, as well as my analysis of the data, may be subject to other interpretations that were not considered during this study.

A limitation of the study was the paucity of literature on this topic and this research method. As noted by Makokis (2000), there is limited Aboriginal educational school research that is based on teachings/studies from Aboriginal Elders' perspectives. One strength of the research is that it may precipitate the acknowledgement of traditional knowledge and sustain its survival. Though the study illustrated the contributions that one elder can make to the modern education system in Canada, it is not appropriate to make generalizations from this initial study. However, the findings may encourage more in-depth studies of a similar nature. In the discussion that follows this chapter, I discuss the

literature that I was able to find in support of the purposes of my study. That literature focuses primarily on discussions about the effects of colonialism on Aboriginal education processes and the need for cultural revitalization. I was also able to find literature that suggested research methodologies appropriate for use by Aboriginal researchers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The primary objective of this literature review was to identify current scholarly work that situates the significance of traditional knowledge from our *Gekaanik, old wise ones*, the Elders. I examined the role of traditional knowledge and Elders in current literature from the perspective of the capacity of traditional literature to ensure the survival of Aboriginal peoples. In the first chapter, I described how *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* asserted that the absence of spirit that is transpiring within the Medicine Wheel threatens the well-being of Aboriginal people. There has never been a more urgent time than now to revive the traditional ways of knowing and learning that the old ones can teach us (Anderson, 2000; Battiste, 2000; Fitznor, 2002; Hampton, 1995; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Makokis, 2000; Smith, 1999). In a later chapter, I discuss how *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* explained that the role of the Red Nation is the spiritual dimension required for human development. She added that without spirituality, the human race will not survive. Because of the educational impact of colonialism, it is time for Aboriginal people to rekindle Aboriginal knowings and processes that are embedded in the knowledge of elders (Fitznor). What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the literature that I was able to locate and examine for utility in my study of traditional knowledge.

Literature Review

Alfred (2005), a *Kahnawake* Mohawk, argued that Aboriginal children have been affected by an educational philosophy that is alien and unhealthy. He defined *unhealthy* as a time of darkness that descended on our people when we as Indigenous people

became disconnected from our lands and our traditional ways of life. Alfred wrote that we are divided among ourselves and are confused in our minds about who we are and what kind of life we should be living. Alfred reminded Indigenous peoples that we are the prophetic Seventh Generation. He commented, "If we do not find a way out of the crises, we will be consumed by darkness, whether it is self-destruction or assimilation, we will not survive" (p. 29). He proposed new strategies and challenges for cultural and spiritual resurgence, and in doing so, to remember the qualities of our ancestors and act on those remembrances.

Brown (2004) commented on the low levels of educational accomplishments; high dropout rates; and high rates of incarceration, suicide, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse that constitute the litany of statistics issued by various government agencies regarding Aboriginal children. Brown developed a theory of educational transformation based on educational principles that support affective development founded on Aboriginal knowledge, learning identity, values, competencies, ideals, and vision. Brown stated that this is the time foretold long ago by the *Gekaanik*, *old wise ones*, when we as a people "will rise from the ashes of colonialism and awake to the reality of the divine, sacred and spiritual gift. This is the prophesied time when we will once again make the classroom a healthy place for our children" (p. 239).

Anderson (2000), a Métis, wrote that the lives of all Native people intersect at the point in time of state-sanctioned assimilationist policies and genocidal attack. She stated that "we do not need to work at discovering Western culture because it is all around us, and increasingly all around the world. As Aboriginal peoples, we need to explore a

Native identity” (p. 29). The purpose of undertaking this narrative was to relearn my Native culture from an Elder who has maintained her heritage.

Smith (1999), a researcher of Maori descent, referred to cultural survival as an approach in which events and accounts that focus on the positive are important not just because they speak to our survival but also because they celebrate our resistance at an ordinary human level, and because they affirm our identities as Indigenous people. Smith argued that the time has come to reclaim and rekindle what was almost lost through a process that speaks to self-determination, decolonization, and social justice for Aboriginal people.

According to Dufault (2003), a Euro-settler, Canadians should have the option of hearing the ancient wisdoms of *Anishinaube* peoples because diverse *Anishinaube* communities have rich, valuable stories to tell. Dufault encouraged educators to consider Native worldviews so that they can become better informed and more open to exploring the possible benefits of diverse traditional First Nations knowledge for the good of all students.

Friesen (1991) emphasized the roles of Native people and their contributions to the development of Canada. His book, *The Cultural Maze*, based on a Native writer’s experiences and expertise, provided a new dimension for interpreting Canadian, including Native, history. It was an attempt to understand traditional Native ways of thinking and was about incorporating the process and the content of the pathway into interpreting Canada’s past. The two suggestions proffered by Friesen to maintain cultural survival in Aboriginal communities are local control of First Nations schools and the development of Native language programs. Friesen argued that traditionally, government policy toward

First Nations schools has been blatant or subtle assimilation. The assimilation trend has slowed as Aboriginal people have made their wishes known. For example, parents now want to be included in the administration and operation of their children's schools.

Friesen (1991) also documented future perspectives. He argued that Aboriginal people must continue to reflect on the cost that the cultural clash with Europeans continues to have on the Native way of life. He argued that this introspection will facilitate the reemergence of many traditional ways and that this renaissance will strengthen the role of Elders. Once again, respected Aboriginal men and women who offer guidance and wisdom for the future of their tribe are being sought out and consulted, much as this researcher sought out one Elder to complete this study. Couture, an individual of Cree descent from Western Canada, wrote about the vital role of Elders:

There are those who say the Native way holds a key, if not the key, to the future survival of [hu]mankind. They say that it is in the nature of the Native's relationship to the cosmos, the land, to all life forms, to himself, manifest in ritual and ceremony. They say that to learn the "how and why" of the traditional Native stance is to find the key, to discover a "saving grace" of insights and a creative power beyond any rationality, all crucial to human continuance. (as cited in Friesen, p. 201)

According to Couture, central to the discovery and primacy of Native existential positioning is the presence and role of Elders.

At the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda symposium, Wotherspoon and Schissel (1999) addressed the causes and implications of, and possible solutions to, the education gap between Aboriginal people and the mainstream population in Canada. Their analysis highlighted how the structures and processes of the Canadian education system have interacted alternately as barriers and contributing factors to the success of Aboriginal students. Wotherspoon and Schissel's understanding of culture was

commendable, but they also needed to take into account the diversity of indigenous cultures and experiences. Even where broadly shared worldviews and orientations to knowledge and social relations are apparent among Aboriginal groups, important differences in experiences and orientations prevail among diverse Aboriginal people as well as individuals within single communities.

Wotherspoon and Schissel (1999) examined the key determinants of educational success and failure among Aboriginal people in relation to five themes: culture, personnel, resources, governance, and community linkages. They reported that students who feel the safest, the most comfortable, and the most enthusiastic are those who receive some form of cultural education in school. Whether cultural studies are a validation of the cultural lives of the students, or whether they engender pride and interest in community, they seem to foster individual empowerment among students. In addition, students often say that Elders, when present, help them obtain and maintain a sense of balance inside and outside of school and that the work of Elders enhances their acquisition of an informal and a formal education.

Similarly, Brown (2004) noted that the current research focus is on the factors that have created the educational gap rather than on ways to reduce deficits within Native peoples and cultures. Battiste (2000) argued that the teaching of Aboriginal culture and language will remain superficial and disconnected if it is not based on a complete understanding of how indigenous knowledge is deeply rooted in people's lives and consciousness.

Simpson (2002), an *Anishinaube-kwe*, with training in both *Anishinaubec* knowledge and Western science, has developed curricula and programs to deliver

indigenous environmental postsecondary programs. She commented that what is paramount for Aboriginal cultures to flourish is the protection of traditional territories. Simpson stated that the sustenance of *Anishinaubec* wisdom, worldviews, philosophies, and values originate from the land. Simpson attempted to expose students to issues relevant to indigenous knowledge in academic and environmental management by employing indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Simpson credited her own experiences as a program/curriculum developer and her interactions with Elders as major components of her successful postsecondary indigenous environmental education model.

Simpson (2002) stated that she views Elders as the keepers of tradition, the guardians of culture, the wise people, and the teachers. Elders safeguard the knowledge that constitutes the unique inheritance in Aboriginal societies. Simpson commented that Elders must be included, supported, and looked upon to provide guidance and directions for faculty and students in postsecondary, indigenous, environmental education programs. Simpson acknowledged that for this implementation to happen, programs must consider Elders as “valuable/gifts” to their programs, not as “extras” or “guest speakers” (p. 17).

A major milestone for First Nations in Ontario was the development of the Chiefs of Ontario (2005) Education Manifesto. It expresses the fundamental importance and urgency of First Nations to truly control and have exclusive jurisdiction over the education of their children. The manifesto states that all aspects of First Nations well-being and the full enjoyment of basic human rights are linked to a culturally appropriate and complete education. Therefore, the uniqueness and beauty of the values of First Nations ancestors must not be lost. The future existence of First Nations as distinct

peoples in North America, often referred to as Turtle Island by Aboriginal people, depends on it.

The Chiefs of Ontario (2005) Education Manifesto identified some of the underlying values and strategies needed for consideration in the development of a more comprehensive First Nations philosophy of education. There are questions pertaining to how well educational services are promoting good First Nations citizenship when the harsh reality is that First Nations education follows the jurisdiction of a foreign system, namely, the Ontario curriculum. The provincial government's educational guidelines and standards are aimed at informing *their* citizens about *their* history; *their* civic responsibilities; and *their* concepts of wealth, business, and success. The manifesto describes a second harsh reality for First Nations, that is, they are still allowing their children to be colonized. First Nations in Ontario appear to have their children believe in someone else's cultural worldview, ways of expression, and system of being.

What is the culture of education that First Nations want to foster for their children? Is it an educational system that reflects First Nations values in the way it is organized and the way in which it operates? Is there a need for an educational philosophy and educational practices that will help First Nations people understand what it means to be citizens of a First Nations community and the importance of maintaining that identity? The Chiefs of Ontario (2005) Education Manifesto acknowledged that traditional education can serve as a model for assessing what First Nations want for their children. However, what the actual educational experiences are will depend on the local culture and the abilities of the teachers. First Nations must spend time with culturally experienced Elders in their communities to talk about how people learned in the past.

The manifesto consists of 18 research and discussion papers completed entirely by First Nations advisors, Elders, Band leaders, teachers, and policymakers on the key areas of First Nations education in Ontario. The summary of the key recommendations asserted that research is necessary to recover some of the practices, that is, to reconnect some of the oral traditions, to ensure the survival of traditional knowledge.

Bell et al. (2004) presented their research in one report describing 10 case studies of Aboriginal schooling. Archibald (2004) wrote in the introduction of Bell et al.'s report that she found the report inspirational because it was based on research about success stories and successful experiences from the perspectives of those most intimately involved in Aboriginal schooling: students, parents, community members, teachers, principals, and school boards or education authorities.

Bell et al.'s (2004) report presented thoughtful case studies of Aboriginal schools that are producing tangible progress for their students. The report identified best practices in 10 First Nations schools in Western Canada that contribute to school successes. They concluded that despite the rich diversity in approaches and circumstances across the schools, the following characteristics distinguished the elements of success in these 10 schools:

1. Strong leadership and governance structures.
2. High expectations for students.
3. Focus on academic achievement and long-term success.
4. Secure and welcoming climates for children and families.
5. Respect for Aboriginal culture and traditions to make learning relevant.
6. Quality staff development.

7. Provision of a wide range of programs/support for learning.

Bell et al. noted that deep respect was shown toward the local Aboriginal culture and traditions. Most schools accorded a special place of honour to Elders and language/culture teachers, who were treasured as rich and scarce resources of local wisdom and knowledge. Conversely, within the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), very little mention was made of the few postsecondary educational programs in Canada that base their curriculum on Aboriginal languages, content, processes, perspectives, philosophies, knowledge, and indigenous methods of teaching and learning.

Summary

I examined literature related to Indigenous research mainly by Indigenous researchers to gain a better understanding of existing approaches to the study of traditional knowledge. Much of the extant literature has pointed to a need for the reemergence of traditional ways to support cultural survival. Critical to cultural survival is the need for Elders' knowledge and the importance of this knowledge for the children of today and for several generations into the future.

To remain focused on the intent of this research, I reviewed those aspects of the literature that documented traditional knowledge and discussed its role and importance. Recent publications have attended to Elder knowledge and have discussed the importance of Elders as a vital resource for Aboriginal people in modern times. For example, Couture (2002) believed the more one enters traditional sources, the more one perceives their worldview, concepts, and values as foundational, that is, able to incite and guide an entire continuum of Aboriginal development and learning needs.

The literature guided me to Makokis (2000), who believed that that to understand traditional knowledge, one must listen to the voices of the people who know it directly and who have experienced the processes that have allowed them to acquire traditional knowledge. This study was an exploration of traditional knowledge and values from the experiential perspective of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*.

What follows in chapter 3 is an explanation of how I gathered this traditional knowledge from *Nimkii-Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I begin with a description of my own personal and cultural background to establish a basis for situating myself in the study. Because subjectivity is always present, and some argue that it is a strength in qualitative research, I mediated that subjectivity by clearly stating my warrant as an Indigenous researcher and *Anishinaube-kwe*. I also thoroughly discussed *Nimkii-Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* personal and cultural background and her situation in the study.

Because my study was a narrative that focused on a single Elder *Anishinaube-kwe*, I was careful, almost to the extreme, to select an Elder whose knowledge, values, and worldview was well regarded. That was certainly the case with *Nimkii-Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. In the following chapter, I discuss my research design, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction: What Did I Do?

In this chapter, I provide a methodological context for this study, which includes my personal and cultural introduction and a discussion of myself in the study. I also include a discussion of the research design and procedures, background and profile of the study participant, data collection process, and data analysis strategy.

In my lifetime, which includes 24 years of teaching, I have experienced three vastly different environments as a learner and an educator. I discuss these environments in more detail in this chapter. It was an honour to experience the Aboriginal perspective of schooling as a child; it also was my great privilege to be able to offer an Aboriginal perspective to students in Grades K to 12 in my capacity as an educator. In addition, my roles as guidance counsellor and administrator with the Lakehead Board of Education, representative of the Ontario Teachers Federation from 1984 to 1998, curriculum consultant for the Ontario Ministry of Education, and coordinator of Lakehead University's Native Teachers Education Program (NTEP) from 1999 to 2008 have allowed me to infuse an Aboriginal perspective into work conducted at dominant culture institutions.

I want the reader to know that I did not come to this study as a newcomer to the Aboriginal worldview. I am, however, a newcomer to academic research that occurs within the definitions and constraints of dominant culture institutions. Therefore, it is important that I fully disclose significant elements of my personal and culture background as I situate myself as a researcher.

Once I began this study, I was determined that it should contribute something of value to the *Anishinaube* community and that the *Anishinaube* voice and ways of knowing should be honoured throughout the research process. In respectful ways, special care was taken with the Elder who participated in the study. A more in-depth description of the selection of this Elder follows later in this chapter. Where I cited the Elder research participant's words, I took great care not to alter the meaning of those words as they were articulated in the *Anishinaube-mowin* language and interpreted by me. In addition, where I have used words in the *Anishinaube-mowin* language as headings, captions or for emphasis, these words have been familiar to me since infancy. I use *Anishinaube-mowin* and English thoughtfully, affectionately, and with careful consideration.

Personal and Cultural Introduction

My educational background begins in my home community of M'Chigeeng, formerly the West Bay First Nation Reserve on Manitoulin Island in the province of Ontario. I attended elementary school on my reserve, and was taught by Native and non-Native teachers. My first *Anishinaube* teachers were Mrs. Miigwaans, Mrs. Peltier, and Mr. Johnston. I heard them speak in *Anishinaube-mowin* and English. Their treatment of me was different from that of my non-Native teachers. The *Anishinaubec* teachers smiled a lot. To them, my family's low economic status, my lack of fashionable clothing, my limited English-speaking skills, and the contents of my lunch bag were not important.

My *Anishinaubec* teachers spoke to me in a language and used nonverbal cues that I understood and followed. I saw them eating the same kinds of food that I brought for lunch. Mrs. Miigwaans set up parent-teacher meetings and made visits to my grandparents' home. In *Anishinaube-mowin*, she spoke about how my aunts, cousins,

and I were doing in school. Mrs. Miigwaans was my teacher in Grades 6, 7, and 8. Each year in school, Mrs. Miigwaans encouraged me to enter both the *Anishinaube-mowin* and the English public-speaking contests. Thinking back on those last 3 years in elementary school, I recall being scared to speak at any public gatherings or on stage. However, Mrs. Miigwaans worked patiently with me to improve my public speaking and practice my speeches. Mrs. Miigwaans gave me the confidence to speak *Anishinaube-mowin* and English in public.

My memories about secondary school recall teachers and counsellors who were *Anishinaube* and *Waabshkiiwed*. Our school was located in M'Chigeeng First Nation territory. However to this day, the school building and grounds are situated on land that is not designated reserve status. Native and Non-Native students from all over Manitoulin Island attended the high school. It is operated as a public (provincial) secondary school. In addition to the regular mainstream provincial curriculum instruction, the school also offers instruction in Native studies, Native languages, and Native art. When I took these classes, I was taught by teachers who shared my *Anishinaubec* culture and heritage. Our guidance department office provided counsellors who were *Anishinaube* and *Waabshkiiwed*. I talked with both for guidance and counselling support.

My *Waabshkiiwed* teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Bremer and Mr. and Mrs. Miller, were great sources of inspiration. They taught me about and developed my confidence in their White world. My *Anishinaubec* teachers, Ms. Debassige and Mr. Webkamigad, showed me acceptance and recognition, which boosted my pride as an *Anishinaube* person. Mrs. Wagosh, my guidance counsellor, teacher, Elder, and mentor, encouraged me to pursue a higher education and to consider my future options.

Immediately after receiving my secondary school diploma, I pursued postsecondary studies. My first attempt was at a community college located 100 miles from my home. I enrolled in a 4-year social work program. It was my first time away from home and away from Manitoulin Island. College was new to me, and I found myself in strange and uncomfortable situations inside and outside the college setting. There were no other Native students in my program, I saw no Aboriginal teachers or other Aboriginal staff at the college, and the teachers whom I met took very little interest in me or my studies. I managed to stay in the program for the fall and winter, but overcome with feelings of rejection, isolation, and loneliness, I went home after the first year.

Even as a young woman, I knew that getting an education was very important because it meant survival. In my high school Native studies classes, I learned about our treaties and their significance. They were explained to us as legacies left by our ancestors. That summer, after an unsuccessful attempt at college, I applied to Lakehead University. In 1977, I was accepted into NTEP. What had first attracted me to NTEP was the information that I read in a brochure that had been posted in the Band office:

The purpose of the Native Teacher Education Program is to increase the number of qualified Native teachers through an alternative program which will prepare them to meet the special social and cultural needs of Native communities, taking into account such factors as heritage and language. Native teachers who have an intimate understanding of Native traditions, psychology, way of life, and language are best able to create a learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Native child.

The program will prepare teachers to provide educational programs that will assist Native people to sustain their culture and language while at the same time teach school pupils the skills necessary to pursue further education if they so desire. In addition to educational methodology and theory, it will include courses in Native culture, traditions and language. Students will also be required to do some student teaching in Native schools. Students who successfully complete the program will be eligible for an Ontario Teacher's Certificate. (Lakehead University, 1976, n.p.)

I could not believe my eyes. This was the program for me. NTEP provided me with professional teacher training while never losing sight of my Aboriginal identity. Soon after graduation, my dream of teaching Aboriginal children began in predominantly schools in *Anishinaube-mowin*- and English-speaking communities that followed the mainstream provincial curriculum and instruction. Being a newly certified teacher with Ojibwe roots who was beginning her career as a teacher in Ontario, I felt prepared to meet the schools' mandate to meet the social and cultural needs of the communities. I came into the classroom with attitudes and behaviours that had a profound effect on First Nations children, who traditionally learn by seeing, talking, and doing.

Situating Myself in the Study

It is essential that I situate myself in this study and acknowledge that perspective so that the reader can appreciate some of my biases. As an Aboriginal educator for more than 24 years whose life has been grounded in *Anishinaube* knowledge and values, I have come to appreciate their significance, and I want to see them incorporated into Canada's school systems. One way to do this is to introduce the Aboriginal worldview to preservice teachers, who may then take this cultural knowledge with them and utilize it to enhance and complement all students' learning

In my role as an administrator involved in a university-level teacher training program for Aboriginal students, I hear firsthand from students why they want to become certified teachers. They too, want to make a difference in the lives of children, especially Aboriginal children. In addition, they want to help all children succeed in school and learn about who they are and who their classmates are. Hampton (1995) stated, "The second standard of Indian education is service. Education is to serve the people. Its

purpose is not individual advancement or status, but it is to serve the people” (p. 21).

Personal conversations with preservice Aboriginal students revealed why they chose to enter NTEP. They stated that they chose to continue their studies through NTEP to gain the skills necessary to teach Native children and to learn about their own Native identity and ancestry.

It is important to let the reader know that I approached this study as an *Anishinaube-kwe* researcher with training in *Anishinaubec* and Western Canadian education in formal and informal settings. I am of *Anishinaube* descent, I was raised with the *Anishinaube* cultural ways of knowing, and I have fluency in the *Anishinaube-mowin* and English languages. I personally identify with Hampton’s (1995) assertion that even though he values his Anglo education and respects its place in Western society, he acknowledges and accepts that his deepest values and worldview are framed by his Aboriginal ancestry.

I began this study in an effort to serve the people, and for individual advancement or status in the academic community. As understood by our *Gekaanik*, *old wise ones*, it is crucial that we *Anishinaubec* understand where we come from and who we are before we can begin to know where we are going. To adhere to and be respectful of my culture, I had to begin this research process by participating in a culturally appropriate ceremony. I also visited and held conversations with various community members, family, and friends. I spoke with them about leaving my community again and following my dream of pursuing graduate studies.

My career has spanned the responsibilities of classroom teacher, guidance counsellor, and principal in provincial and First Nations schools for First Nations

children. These schools followed the mainstream curriculum. Event though I made the attempt to incorporate perspectives from my Indigenous roots, I experienced firsthand that an Aboriginal component in the curriculum did not exist. Being **ngii-naagdowendmigog** (*cared for*) by *Anishinaube-mowin*-speaking grandparents, and having received a balanced education from *Anishinaube* and Euro-Canadian teachers in school, I adopted a distinct vision and view of the world. I learned to appreciate the knowledge gleaned from and the values of both *Anishinaubec* and Western education. Even though the values of other groups in Canada often conflicted with my own First Nations values, I learned to appreciate and respect them. Thus, when I had the opportunity to pursue a master's of education degree, I originally chose to conduct my research on Aboriginal education.

Situating *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* in the Study

Data were collected from one traditional ceremonial leader, *Anishinaube-kwe Gegaanik*, Elder *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. At a traditional gathering place following an annual spring fast ceremony, I introduced the concept of the study. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* sat quietly and listened as I shared my vision for my graduate work. I spoke of my belief of the importance of maintaining and strengthening the *Anishinaube* ways of knowing. I talked about my teaching experiences and explained that teachers are central to understanding and improving the teaching and learning process. My experiences included my uncertainties about the impact of the values and ways of knowing that teachers of First Nations children are bringing into their classrooms. I explained the intention of undertaking this study is to gain a better understanding of inherent *Anishinaubec* traditional knowledge and values.

I presented *semaa* as I asked *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* if she would work with me on my study. I also explained what the project would entail and how she would be involved. With no further words exchanged, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* reached across to me and accepted the *semaa*, which was her way of agreeing to be my research participant.

As noted by Toulouse (2001), all research begins with a question that drives us to explore ways to illuminate or explicate the answer. The questions that drove this study were the following: (a) What are traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values? and (b) How can traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge be incorporated into today's schools? This study was primarily an exploratory listening and learn-by-doing journey into traditional cultural knowledge, as shared and experienced by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. Interviewing, listening, observing *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, and writing anecdotes on recorded observations guided this research.

Ethical traditions around informed consent were observed carefully, as were the Native traditional concerns about the possession of knowledge within the cultural context (Government of Canada, 2005). *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* involvement was crucial in the development of the study proposal. Upon acceptance of *semaa*, she also became involved in reading the proposal, transcripts, and field notes, and she signed a consent form giving me permission to use the knowledge that she shared in the development of this study. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was informed of her right to privacy through anonymity or to claim her contributions outright, depending on her choice, on the consent form. This research followed the considerations of Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996):

In our journeys as educators, we search for respectful ways to bring First Nations context and ethnographic research together: perhaps to create an appropriate

meeting place. We seek ways for our research motives and methods to honour, or at least are compatible with, First Nations ways. (p. 1)

The interview was recorded on audiotape and videotape. At the same time, I took anecdotal notes during and following observations, experiences, and interview as appropriate during the cultural setting. The audio and videotapes were transcribed and submitted for reading and editing to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I also delivered copies of the tapes and transcripts to her. The approved transcripts, which were the foundation of this data collection process, and the tapes will be stored at Lakehead University for 7 years.

Opportunities for further collaboration with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to review and discuss the findings of the research were made. Working in collaboration with her throughout this study fulfilled the requirements of respectful and reciprocal research.

I carried out my research in stages. I had visited with members of my community to discuss this research. The members I spoke with, the old people in particular, were in favour of my investigation into Aboriginal education. It was following one of the spring ceremonies that I approached *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* with *semaa*. Her acceptance of my *semaa* became a contract, that is, an agreement between researcher and research participant.

The next stage was receiving approval of my study from Lakehead University's Ethics Committee. After receiving this approval, I began the process of conducting the study, but not without first providing a personal copy of the proposal and consent form to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*.

I followed up with a telephone call to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to determine a time that would be suitable to begin the interview with her. I assured her that all

information would be presented in a way that would be respectful. She informed me that the ideal time to begin would follow a cleansing ceremony to ground me for the research. We arranged a time to meet, and I began my preparations for travel. It was at the onset of my first meeting with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* that I read the research proposal, letter of invitation, and consent form with her for clarification purposes (see Appendices A & B).

My first visit during the research process with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* began in a First Nations community. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was the invited Elder and Medicine person for her work in traditional healing and wellness practices. I felt privileged and yet humbled to be in that “space.” The space allowed for a settling-in period that allowed me to cultivate a proper attitude and respectful relationship with the Elder. Respectful relationships are a part of my cultural and traditional teachings. The first days for me while settling in and developing my relationship with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* consisted mainly of just sitting, watching, quietly listening, and watching for any cues from her. Following each day’s work, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* routinely initiated a debriefing with her that gave me an opportunity to share my personal experiences, reflections, and groundedness with her. It was near the end of the first week that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was free to share her knowledge and stories in a recorded interview.

Other traditional and social events followed that first week that facilitated more face-to-face experiences with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. As an Ontario Native Education Counselling Association member (ONECA), I attended the annual conference. ONECA sought out Aboriginal Elders and Medicine people and included them as

workshops presenters for their wisdom, counsel, and spiritual knowledge. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was the invited guest Elder for this conference, so as an ONECA member, I was designated to be the Elder helper. It was a position I undertook with great honour and respect.

Immediately following the ONECA conference *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and I headed out together to attend a 2-day Aboriginal Woman's Ceremony in Maine, United States of America. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* had been invited for work in traditional healing. My role was accompanying *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* as her helper.

Four days later, we were in Ottawa for a 1-week stay at Iskotew Healing Lodge. I learned that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was regularly invited to the lodge as the Elder, spiritual advisor, and counsellor. Again, as the Elder's helper, I assisted with preparations for the ceremonies. When *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* went about her work, I sat quietly, watched, and listened to firsthand teachings told in the lodge by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*.

The data were collected when it was suitable and convenient for *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. Data were collected through personal observations and notes, conversations, discussions, and an interview guided by a series of semistructured questions (see Appendix C). The tape-recorded interview was conducted privately with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* in her natural settings. Interviews were not conducted in a classroom or a clinical setting. The setting of the interviews was not separate from the context of her work in the lodge as a spiritual advisor. Multiple face-to-face meetings at various locations occurred over a 3-week period at times convenient to her. The interview was

conducted primarily in the English language, but *Anishinaube-mowin* was used when appropriate or desired by both participant and researcher.

Later, I transcribed the data from all my sources: initial personal observations, personal reflective notes, and interview responses. I read the transcriptions to identify themes, read them again many times, consulted and discussed with various cultural teachers in different settings, and then sorted and began to organize the data.

Being an indigenous researcher in an indigenous setting is a relatively infrequent phenomenon that often raises issues of objectivity, validity, and reliability because of insider issues and the closeness of the researcher to the individuals or the community under scrutiny (Toulouse, 2001). I am a First Nations teacher in an Ontario education system that has not fully recognized Aboriginal people's place in it.

The method for this study was to listen attentively and respectfully, record, gather personal perceptions, and listen again to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* voice as she explained her worldview and her perspectives about traditional knowledge and values. I worked respectfully and collaboratively with her to gather information through our conversations, and I used a series of semistructured questions to guide the interview process and to later explore themes in the research analysis that emerged from the discussions. In addition, other questions were asked as they emerged in the interview to provide deeper insight into and the development of those themes. My goal in using semistructured questions in all instances was to explore traditional knowledge more openly and to give *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* a voice to speak her truth in her own words.

Background of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe, whose perspective was the focus of this study, was born and raised in the *Anishinaube* community of Whitefish River First Nation, Birch Island, Ontario. At birth, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* grandmother gave her the Spirit name *Shawanong-kwi-doh-kwe*, *Granddaughter of Thunder Woman from the South*, and from the *Nimkii Beneshiik dodemok*, known as the *Thunderbird clan*. *Granddaughter of Thunder Woman from the South* was the youngest of her 12 siblings, 3 sisters and 8 brothers. *Granddaughter of Thunder Woman from the South* received another name later in her life. Others grew to know her as *Migiziins-kwesehns*, *Young Eagle Woman*. Many years have passed, and *Young Eagle Woman* still walks with the name familiar to those who walked with her at the time. As she moved along on her journey toward growth, another quality was recognized in her, so she was given the name that she now carries: *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, *Thunder Bird Eagle Woman*.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe an *Anishinaube Gegaanik (Ojibwe Elder)* is highly respected throughout Canada and the United States as a cultural traditional ceremony person, spiritual warrior and mentor, healer, sweat-lodge keeper, Elder advisor, counsellor on the circle of life, and one who gives great importance to ceremony involving daily rituals. She is sought by agencies, organizations, communities, and private individuals for her ancestral teachings, cultural *Anishinaube* knowledge, counselling, ceremonies, and traditional healing. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* also is a mother to 3 children. She has 15 grandchildren, and by traditional customs and practices, she has adopted many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Design of the Study: Qualitative Research

The method of inquiry in this study was qualitative. I used a narrative approach to explore *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* worldview and her experience in traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values. Creswell (1998) stated that a topic needs to be explored when theories are unavailable to explain it. Because there were few literary resources and no theoretical frameworks that appeared appropriate to me as I planned the study, my design for the study was guided largely by my desire to pursue answers to the two research questions within a narrative approach to data collection. Therefore, the qualitative method of listening to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* stories and words seemed appropriate to me.

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as

An inquiry process of understanding based on the distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Qualitative investigation provides a systematic procedure for inquiry that allows an in-depth exploration of the available knowledge, including the following:

- a. A systematic procedure for inquiry.
- b. Access to natural cultural settings.
- c. Collection of a variety of resources, including:
 - Personal experience.
 - Interviews.
 - Introspection.
 - Observation in a cultural context.
 - Historical, interactional, and visual texts.

The selection of a qualitative narrative approach depends on participant receptivity and comfort with the investigation process (Creswell).

Brown (2004) discussed the need to incorporate and utilize the four Rs, namely, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, as defined by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991). Young (1997) also stated:

Respectful, reciprocal, relational, research affirms liberation, trans-formation and facilitates healing. It restores wholeness and self-determination process. The researchers examine their own intentions and move beyond the historical methodologies that, for the most part decontextualised, individually biased, self serving, approaches to research. (p. 13)

Following Brown's example, my study was conducted with *respect* for the research participant, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. In addition to being interviewed, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was observed in the total cultural matrix in which she exists. This study is *relevant* because it seeks to organize traditional *Anishinaubec* knowledge and values that are useful in contemporary educators. This study provides the opportunity for *reciprocity* by using the data analysis to elicit knowledge that may offer recommendations and implications for curriculum implementation to First Nations communities and educational institutions. This study demanded that I take *responsibility* for ensuring that appropriate conduct and protocol were maintained in an Aboriginal cultural setting.

Dufault (2003) asserted that a face-to-face conversational interview is initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. Makokis (2000) pointed out that at the heart of the interview process is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. She concluded that there is limited educational school research based on studies from an Elder's perspective.

Data Analysis

The data were gained through the interview questions, participant observations, personal anecdotes, field notes, and audio recordings. I transcribed pages of text from these sources. Esterberg (2002) suggested caution when analyzing narratives. The goal of the researcher is to interpret the possible meanings of the narrative in terms of whether they (a) are persuasive, (b) correspond to the participant's understanding of the events, (c) are coherent, and (d) are useful. He recommended presenting the analysis to the participant to ensure that the individual also finds the researcher's interpretations plausible. I consistently shared my findings and conclusions with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to ensure that my interpretations of the data were in accordance with her thinking and were not influenced by whatever researcher preconceptions that I might have held.

Creswell (2005) highlighted seven characteristics of research often found in narrative reports:

1. Focus on individual experiences.
2. Reporting chronology of the experiences.
3. Collecting the individual stories to be told to the researcher or gathered through field texts.
4. Restorying the stories for themes.
5. Coding the stories for themes.
6. Describing the context or setting of the individual's stories.
7. Collaborating throughout the process of research with the individual whose stories are being reported.

I used these characteristics as the foundation for my analysis and coding of themes based on the responses that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* gave to the interview questions.

I used narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) to explore and organize the content and meaning of the stories related to me by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* during the time I spent with her. Narrative analysis processes provided me with a way to examine how language articulated in English and *Anishinaube-mowin* might reveal aspects of her practice that would inform answers to my research question regarding the nature and utility of *Anishinaube* knowledge and values.

The narrative construction of stories told by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* may have different, less formal, characteristics than stories as they are recognized from a more structuralist perspective (Riessman, 1993). In some cases, stories were told in segments in response to questions that I posed during conversation. I then identified units of text that represented themes that occurred and recurred in *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* discourse. Sorted and refined, then sorted and refined again, those themes serve as the platform from which I am now able to present evidence regarding the present and future of traditional knowledge according to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* worldview. The stories articulated by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* primarily represent assertions of her personal and cultural identity and her belief system. What follows in chapter 4 is a discussion of my findings. I include extensive audiotaped and videotaped quotations provided by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I discuss the four major themes that I identified within the data, including Beliefs, Values, Ceremony, and Teachings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction: What Did I Hear, and What Did I See?

Together with the wisdom of our ancestors, the ancient teachings and the knowledge and experience we have acquired from the involvement in the mainstream educational frameworks, we have the potential to reclaim the responsibility to help our children acquire the original value we placed on our families, culture and life. (Fitznor, 2002)

Aaniin. Booshoo. Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk, Miigwech dikit M'nookmisuk, Miigwech dikit Dawenmaagnag. This greeting in *Anishinaube-mowin* acknowledging the role of the ancestors and all the relations in sharing what was heard and what was seen as I followed my quest for insight into traditional knowledge and the role of such knowledge in schools. The most significant findings I heard and saw during this investigation were the acknowledgment and honour given to our ancestors by ***Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*** in her own language. Therefore, it was important to begin this section of the chapter with this greeting in *Anishinaube-mowin* to the ancestors. I will elaborate on this greeting later in the chapter when I introduce the topic of sharing of oneself within the theme of Ceremony.

The themes and subthemes categorized from the findings are discussed in this chapter. The themes were derived from an analysis of the recorded interview audiotapes and videotapes; transcriptions and field notes, dialogue between the teacher as the research participant and the learner as researcher; and encounters with the learner's coworkers, thesis committee, postsecondary students, family members, and friends.

The main questions undergirding this study guided the analysis of the findings, that is, traditional knowledge as viewed by ***Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe***. Recall the research questions: (a) What are traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge and values? and

(b) How can traditional *Anishinaube* knowledge be incorporated into today's schools?

The data revealed aspects of a personal worldview narrated by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to teach the researcher, who was her student. This study was an attempt to share those experiences coded as four main themes: beliefs, values, ceremony, and teachings.

I selected the theme of Beliefs from listening and observing *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. She presented a view of her worldview based on a specific set of beliefs. Beliefs are foundational to the values that I will discuss next. Beliefs influence our values, and our values influence how we behave in the world.

Values influence how we relate to one another and the natural world based on our belief system. For example, if we believe that life is sacred, as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* does, then we will value ways of being that conserve life. We will avoid, if at all possible, making enemies because if we believe that all life is sacred, we understand that the one with whom we disagree is a sacred being, that is, one of God's creations.

I selected the theme of Ceremony because it was the primary means through which *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* demonstrated her beliefs and values. During ceremony, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* practiced her belief that all of life is sacred. She acknowledged her ancestors; all living creatures, including two-legged and four-legged beings, winged creatures, and those that crawl and swim; and she always acknowledged plant life. She called upon the wisdom of plants in her healing ceremonies. Ceremony is central to her daily existence.

I selected the theme of Teachings in addition to Ceremony because *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* transmits her knowledge as life teachings of the *Anishinaube* ways of being. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* life experiences are the basis of all of her

teachings. The strong oral traditions that are common to Aboriginal societies require that people listen intently and respectfully to Elders and teachers. Even though Elder *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* did not identify these headings directly in her stories, the themes discussed in this chapter are the outcomes of my analytical processes in which recurring themes from stories shared by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* were identified.

Graveline (1998) stated that the philosophical foundations underlying ancestral cultural practices are the common sense of traditional societies and are considered inseparable from ordinary, daily lived experiences. Because the information was presented orally, there is a special regard in this study for speech and truth. I used the themes as a framework to allow the reader to share *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* worldview (see Table 1).

Table 1

Relevant Themes

Beliefs	Values	Ceremony	Teachings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is sacred • Balance • Respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving and sharing • Learning is Inherent • Learning by example • Learning by watching and listening respectfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smudging • Prayer • Sema • Sharing of oneself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories • Elders • Ceremony

The first theme, Beliefs, had three main subsections: a child is sacred, balance, and respect. The second theme, Values, revealed characteristics that fell into the four subsections of giving and sharing, learning is inherent, learn by example, and learn by watching and listening respectfully. The third theme, Ceremony, emerged from my initial observations and personal interview. This theme had the four subsections of smudge,

prayer, *semaa*, and sharing of oneself. The last theme, Teachings, had three main subsections in relevance of stories, elders, and ceremony.

Theme 1: Beliefs

Child Is Sacred

To honour the ancestral knowledge that shared in the data collection process is to pay proper attention to beliefs. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* concern for accuracy and her truth were embedded in her actual experiences. To an Elder, the truth has multiple interpretations of the same story or experience. This is a permissible occurrence because each storyteller understands the facts from his or her own location and the addition of new experience (Graveline, 1998).

A major belief of the *Anishinaube* is that all creation has a spirit and that all life is sacred. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, in her role as a Medicine person, relies on the Medicine Wheel metaphor to understand and respect the interconnectedness of all life, including the sacredness of the child. Beginning with the first quadrant on the Medicine Wheel, spoke of the child's journey, even before the child becomes disconnected from the mother and begins his or her journey around the Medicine Wheel of Life:

We're going to take one quadrant today, the quadrant of the child. The child is on a journey, from the time that the umbilical cord is cut, the child becomes disconnected with mother and has to walk this road alone from the east to the west and the first seven years of that child's life is when they gain knowledge for the rest of their lives. In the beginning everything comes from Spirit, those are oral teachings that have been passed down about natural law and in spirit world the Spirit needs to explain to self, what is meant to experience life at the physical level. So the Spirit goes before Creator and says, "I want to go and learn about a few things on this earthly journey. Can I go"? Creator says, "Sure I allow you four gifts. He says the gift of picking and choosing your mother, your father, the way you are going to be born and the way you're going to die. Those are all yours. So you go out and look for Spirit mom and Spirit dad and come back when you have found them." So we go out into the spirit world and search for those Spirits that will help us walk the journey of experience. Finally, after much

searching, we find Spirit mom and we ask that spirit, “Can you be my vehicle to go to the physical world? The Spirit mom says, “What a great honor that you would consider me your first teacher.” We thank them...and...then we go to search for our Spirit dad.

Again after much searching, Spirit approaches that Spirit and says, “Will you be my vehicle to go to the physical world?” The Spirit says, “Yes, I am greatly honoured that you would ask me to be your first teacher. So after that is said we go back to Creator and say I have found my Spirit mom and Spirit dad. Creator brings those two people together, consummation takes place, conception and the child becomes physical. The Spirit becomes a physical child. For nine months the mother carries this *ssspppeeccciiiaalll* Spirit in her womb space.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe spoke the word “special” very slowly, articulating each sound in the word, to emphasize the degree to which the spirit of a child is truly special as she continued to tell her story:

The first sweat lodge that every child goes through [is the womb]. After 9 months, the grandmother, the water spirit, who has watched over us, in that sacred womb space is ready, knows us and will continue to walk with us in our journey. When we are ready to come out, water breaks, and out we come into the river of life. Ceremony is done, to welcome us into the physical world, that’s the way it used to be like.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe continued her teaching about the child and explained the sacredness of the child in circle of life:

Our first teachers our parents greet us with love and warmth and say to us “Welcome to our world. Thank you for coming to visit us to bring us teachings to remind us of our responsibility to the sacredness of life. And when ceremony is done, the aunties the uncles, the grandmas, the grandpas, show that child, show us that unconditional love. It is not spoiling, but its mere discipline, with love, and that could be done and was done without any physical violence towards the child. When the child experiences *zagidowin* that love, they begin to be nurtured in a Spirit way, a safe way, because the Spirit is the one that motivates all life. The Spirit is the one that is going through an experience, a physical experience. That is why it’s on this journey. When a child is born, it is in its purest form of Spirit in a physical sense.

Knowing where Spirit originates ensures the sacredness of children while they are in the physical world. The belief that the child is sacred secures the interconnectedness between spirit and child, which allows individuals to see themselves as children and

spirits in every way. Nurturing the child also means nurturing the Spirit, and that is everyone's responsibility, according to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*:

When we teach our children, our children excel, and we acknowledge that of them. Where we nurture their spirit, it doesn't take long for that child to trust. It doesn't take long also when mistrust begins to grow, then, the child will never trust for a long time. So we as teachers need to recognize what is my truth. So I could share my truth with that child, the sacred aspect of that child, and they can continue to grow in, always, mentally, physically, spiritually [and] emotionally.

I was intrigued with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* story about the child as sacred. I witnessed firsthand other students' reactions when *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* told them the story in a similar fashion. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and I visited with some high school students during my first week with her. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* demonstrated to the students what she means by Spirit: She gave each student a small candle and asked them to keep it lit during her story sharing with them. The light from the candle was her way of making connections for her students to gain a better understanding of Spirit. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared:

The child is more Spirit than they are physical, and [children] are more in tune with their spirit because their Spirit is their guide. The [child] is so in tune with their spirit. That is why when little kids, when they look at you, they look at you as if they're looking right through you. They [children] are coming into the Spirit world. Spirit world is very much a spirit [child] yet crossing into the physical world. That's our belief. Soon as conception takes place the child begins to learn at a physical level. Mother makes sure she feeds herself right so she nurtures the baby physically and that her thinking is clean, positive, so she feeds her baby positive thoughts. Her emotional level has to be stable in order to nurture the emotionality of that child within her womb and physically she's responsible for all. Spiritually she has that opportunity to help that Spirit grow into the contract that we talked about before, the contract, that I [child] have a purpose and meaning on this life's journey. So the beginner, the teacher is the mother, and the father and the sister and the grandparents, the extended family becomes involved. And when that happens, then they speak for that child. Then that child has a good solid introduction into the physical world, so there begins the sacred knowledge.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's worldview sees the child is sacred because the child comes from the Spirit.

Balance

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe believed that the knowledge necessary to achieve balance is found in the Medicine Wheel. Each aspect of Creation is made up of four elements, and learning consists of these elements: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual.

And so when us as teachers are blessed with these children, to have the opportunity, to nurture the minds, to nurture the emotional part, to nurture the physical part, to nurture the spiritual part, those are all quadrants that are used in the Medicine Wheel and everyone of those need to be in balance. And if I don't have balance as a teacher how can I pass on the teaching?

To develop the proper relationship that people of a nation must have with other living things is to develop harmonious self-discipline. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* described her role in the Medicine Wheel of Life as only as good as how balanced she is:

To be the best mentor [I] can be and the responsibility comes from only how balanced an individual is. I want to be the best mentor you can be, and your best can only come with how balanced you are within.

When *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was asked how a person, a teacher, can achieve balance, she replied:

By sharing those resourcefulness, if their resources are in balance within, if I know what my gifts are, where my strengths are, then I can work with that, I can share my strengths with the children. The way that I address that sometimes differs from the mainstream addressing. It goes back to the first circle on the Medicine Wheel of Life, the individual. If the individual loves himself enough to share *zagidowin*, called *love*, then my perfection of that inner circle is very important.

I asked *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* how teachers can help *Anishinaube* children if they do not know *Anishinaube* culture. She said that it should be up to the

school boards to help them learn about it, but before that can happen, school board members need to be in balance first. She shared her experiences with one school board.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe had been invited to be the cultural teacher for the students in the classroom. However, some parents and board members were not familiar with *Anishinaube* culture. Instead of asking for *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* input, the school board elected to cancel the program. She commented:

I think the school boards because when there's a good program on, school boards will sit on it, negate it, and throw it out the window eventually. I've seen it happen where some programs are just doing excellent then all of a sudden there's a trustee that doesn't like [Aboriginal peoples] Indians. They [board members] can change and they manipulate the other school board trustees into thinking the same [ideas] they are thinking. I've seen it happening time and time again. Its healthy people that we want in there, healthy people, balanced in mind, body, spirit and heart. So when they see themselves experience, what we're [*Anishinaubec*] made of, then they will support a program set up in a way that the local school needs for them.

Achieving balance in life can be obtained through prayer. This subtheme of prayer is mentioned later in the chapter. Following is a quotation from a story discussed in the subtheme of prayer to show the interconnectedness of relationships and themes to one another. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* uses prayer as a daily activity to accomplish balance. She went on to say:

So there's a lot of stuff to touch upon when you're trying to accomplish balance in one's individuality, at the school setting, at the community setting, a lot to be considered. It's not just the one day. It's a daily thing.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe believes that balance is necessary to maintain a healthy state and pass that healthy way, that good way of being, on to the children we teach. We must conduct ourselves in a balanced and healthy way mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Respect

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe communicated a message regarding respect and ways to practice the principle of respect. When I asked *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* what *Anishinaube* children should learn in the community and in the school about traditional knowledge and values, she replied:

The responsibility that we have as teachers for a child to be continued to be nurtured is to practice the principles, to practice respect, in respecting their teachers and they can't have that, if they don't respect themselves. If the teachers, the initial teachers have not taught them the good things about respect, then how can they pass it on as nurturing?

Respect is such a central concept that I considered using it as a major theme, not as a subcategory, but in the end, I included respect under the theme of Beliefs. Respect engenders notions of love and caring, but also provides the basis for other aspects of relationship. We can disagree with someone but still respect that person if the motives and ethics of that individual are sound. Respect and balance are related as foundations of interpersonal relationships, including those with both organic and nonorganic beings. Respect prevents us from assuming that our role in a relationship is greater than the others. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* related her teachings regarding organic and nonorganic beings, such as thunder beings:

It is the natural law because the thunderbirds are the carriers, the keepers of the fire. They are respected for that role. We [*Anishinaube*] don't even have to ask. Here's my tobacco. We just do it without asking any questions. As we nurture their [thunder beings] fire by thanking them for their fire, we are nurturing our own fire.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe shared this story with me and discussed her story in relation to what has been written in books and told in schools about thunder. The esteem with which she held thunder was different from the attitude typically held in mainstream

culture about thunder. She learned about thunder within the context of powerful Thunder Bird beings. We communicate with Thunder Beings and show them respect using *semaa*. Patterned into the daily practice of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was her respect for “immanence,” that is, a belief in, knowledge of, and respect for unseen powers (Graveline, 1998). These unseen powers are in the natural environment, and *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* emphasized the need to maintain a reciprocal relationship between organic and nonorganic beings. She spoke about “fire” as a metaphor for our spirit.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe practiced a custom that she shared with me as she welcomed the Thunder Bird beings. I had observed the same custom as a child. As a child, I watched my grandfather put down *semaa* into the fire when the Thunder Birds arrived. He acknowledged their presence and thanked them with *semaa*. I follow the same practice.

Theme 2: Values

I selected the subthemes of relevance of giving and sharing, learning is inherent, learning by example/modeling, and learning by respectfully watching and listening as key elements of the theme of Values as they were exhibited and displayed to me by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I discuss each of these subthemes in turn.

Relevance of Giving and Sharing

The relevance of giving and sharing was demonstrated to me by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* through her actions and the actions of others rather than through what she said about giving and sharing. I observed a natural order integral to individual and community living through the use of the unspoken language. Giving and sharing is obligatory in the traditional *Anishinaube* way of life that includes gatherings, feasting,

ceremony, and the gifting of Elders and individuals. Gifts were bestowed on *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* for sharing her knowledge with the communities and community members who sought her guidance.

When *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* was asked what she thought *Anishinaube* children should learn about traditional knowledge and values, she replied:

The other thing is to share. Sharing like to say maybe once a week to have a little *fruit party*, sharing fruit at that circle, and sharing berries at the circle. It becomes very important for the children. They look forward to that.

It was important to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* that sharing be demonstrated in a good way, that is, consistently and frequently, to encourage children to share. In other ways *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* also displayed giving and sharing as she shared her knowledge and gave her time to tell her teachings.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe talked about sharing stories in circles and the strength that communities draw from these sharing circles. In this cultural practice, sharing and giving take the form of sharing stories. Although I discuss the subtheme of stories in greater detail under the theme of Teachings, I also want to make a connection here to show how giving and sharing can be related in story form. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* described the function that stories told in a talking circle can carry within the community:

That's why those circles were so strong *miisaa maandaa giizhiwebak mdaaswigodbon* (*this is what they said 10 winters ago*). The Elder would say that is what happened to me, 10 years ago and they expressed what happened 10 years ago. That's the tradition they followed, to be able to share their story... The Elders share their stories, *miisaa miinwaa maandaa gasish ge wiiaa* (*this is what happened to me*). They shared their stories of how they overcame their obstacles. That's what happened in the teaching circles, the sharing circles.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe talked about the importance of sharing in talking circles and how other individuals learn from others' experiences shared. "The healing of that circle is what I'm talking about. The healing of that circle begins with me. When I have healed enough, I could sit in that circle and share, 'This is what happened to me.' " The sharing of stories in talking circles is a way to give others the gift of one's own experience. Experience leads to learning, and learning may lead to wisdom. It is the wisdom that is the most treasured and valued in the stories told in talking stories.

Giving and sharing also establishes a basis of a reciprocal relationship in which value is placed on learning from each other in respectful and mutual relations. Within Aboriginal cultures, giving and sharing are considered natural and spontaneous processes when working with Elders. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared her teaching on the role of each nation that makes up the human race. Giving and sharing ensures *mino-bimaadsowin*, *living the good life*, for the gifts given to us from the Creator, and as communicated by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, they allow us to have a good life:

I'm reminded of the resourcefulness of each nation, the yellow nation, the black nation, the white nation, the red nation. Each was given a drum, a pipe, song. They [Nation] were sent to their direction and from that direction they would teach for generations to come the sacredness of those directions and the teachings that they carry...as we look around us today, the yellow people are to remind the rest of the quadrants, be mindful what goes into your mind...do they still have the gifts of the Creator, that were given to them, the original teachings? They do. They have their pipe, they have their dance, they have their songs, they have everything that has been given to them, still in tact, they're strong people, then you look to the black people, they were given the part about emotionality. Do not be all heart, but remember that you remind the people to balance the head with the heart so that there will be guidance and protection on the journey of life. Do they still have their original gift from the Creator? Yes they do; they're very strong and their dances and their songs and their ceremonies.

Each nation has gifts to share with other nations. When each nation is willing to not only share but also to accept the gifts offered by other nations, all nations will be able to live in balance with one another, as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* observed.

Learning as Inherent

I would like to share a personal response to what I gathered about the topic of *learning is inherent*. Listening to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* tell her stories recalled for me the prophesies of the *Anishinaube* Elders about a time when we as a people would stand up and reclaim our culture and other aspects of what has always been sacred to *Anishinaube* people. Listening to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* tell her stories and share her wisdom with me was completion of the way our Elders from the past had prophesied that cultural revival would take place. Nothing that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared with me was strange. Her words felt familiar to me, as though I had heard them before and they fit exactly into a place in my thinking that had been waiting for them.

I identified with Fitznor (2002), who wrote that her influences come from her community of origin and her Cree ancestry. I also was closely connected to my Ojibwe community and maternal *Anishinaube* grandparents, whose cultural and spiritual influences impacted my life. It was not until I was fully involved in the work with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* that I was able to fully understand how deeply embedded those teachings had remained within my thinking.

As I stated in chapter 1, my earlier years were grounded primarily in an Ojibwe milieu that included language, nature, traditional medicines, food, people, personal wealth of a particular kind, and ways of being. Shared values were grounded in Ojibwe ways. Values such as sharing and a connectedness with other people, the land, plants, and

animal life were demonstrated to me through an unspoken understanding. We had very little material wealth, but we had a great deal of personal wealth that consisted of rich cultural experiences, cultural knowledge, and a sense of our belonging in and with the community and the land.

My childhood was like Fitznor's (2002) childhood in many ways. My grandmother worked with sweetgrass, porcupine quills, and birch bark. My grandfather hunted, cut wood, and planted our food. Crafts, wood, and wild game were bartered for other things that we needed, but did not have. I recall times when members of the community would deliver fish and then drive away with a cord of wood or different crafts my grandmother had made. My grandparents were self-sufficient, and they depended on gifts from the land. I saw my grandfather use *semaa* in its sacred meaning while hunting birds and animals for our use. I never questioned this practice. Water, for example, was never wasted, and each day, the richness of *Anishinaube* life was demonstrated to me in a good way. I grew up with these daily realities, and when I think back, I realize that these ways of being were never spoken about; we just lived them.

Most of my recollections about school are about experiences that occurred outside of the classroom. They include memories of walks that my classmates and I took with our teacher and the garden that our class planted in the schoolyard. When I asked *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to tell me how our *Anishinaube* children learn, she answered, "The Aboriginal children have their knowledge [...] in a full capacity knowledgeable mentally, knowledgeable emotionally, knowledgeable physically and knowledgeable spiritually."

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe told me that Aboriginal children learn with their whole being, which is made up of four quadrants. For learning to happen, all four of these quadrants need to be acknowledged because this is how children learn. By ignoring one of the quadrants, optimal learning does not happen:

Not acknowledging the giftedness of the other students [...] and so [...] when we put that aside when we put that quadrant aside, we're depleting our own sacred knowledge. It doesn't have time to blossom; it doesn't have time to grow.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe commented that this way of learning is inherent to Aboriginal children. She told me that it is in our DNA. I interpreted this to mean that learning using the four quadrants is inherent in the ways of the *Anishinaubec*: "It is seeded. The seed has been planted through the DNA, through our DNA. That's why for us to go out and take a nature walk it is so... soooo refreshing for us because we're connecting with...Creation."

It became clear to me that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* believed not only that Aboriginal children learn in specific ways but also that Aboriginal children have the capacity to learn and that learning is a cultural prerogative. Aboriginal children are not averse to learning: in fact, they love learning. However, they may resist learning in ways that separate them from the ways of being that support their cultural identity and do not allow them to be balanced and healthy human beings.

Learning by Example/Modelling

When *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and I were driving back from visiting a young girl in a neighbouring community, I asked her what she remembered the most as a child about what she had learned from the old people. She spoke tenderly as she recalled her childhood memories of spending time with them: "When I sat with them, when they

sat in their quilting circles, or whatever circles that they created, I would always be observing, and I was always listening. Not only what they were saying, but what was left unsaid.”

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe also talked about the importance of being shown an example first as part of the learning process. She assured me that she works with children today in the same way that she was taught as a child:

That allows us to be helpers to them rather than being codependent. That they expect us to do all the work and the work is not mine, the work is theirs. So I don't take away that privilege of doing things with them, but I show them, this is how it's done. Showing and teaching are two different things. The way I was taught was to be shown first, and I got a great example. To know how to do it, then I would do it the next time around. And its very good when its shown like that rather than just saying it, “Ok, here are the directions on how you are going to get to this place and if you can't read then you can't get to that place,” but if someone supports you through that one task then you will remember that for the rest of your life.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe said that she always reminds teachers that their responsibility is to act as a guide to the children who are in their presence: “As teachers at school, we recognize, we acknowledge the child that comes is brought into our presence. We are merely guides to help that child on its journey of experience.”

It has been my experience that Aboriginal children prefer that their learning begins with an example before they are expected to complete a task. I also learn that way. For instance, I read a dozen or more thesis documents prior to beginning this writing process. I learned from each of them and took away from those examples knowledge about how I wished to form and frame my own written work. I am deeply grateful to those who walked this academic path before me.

Learning by Respectfully Watching and Listening

It seemed appropriate to include this particular subtheme because in Indigenous circles, *learning* is demonstrated as *respectful protocol* through active listening and observation. This theme presented itself one day in the field. At the onset of this study, I was aware that as an insider researcher, I also was a learner in this situation. *Learning* for me meant *respecting protocol through watching and listening*. At our first meeting, I presented gift pouches of *semaa*, and introductions were conducted according to the *Anishinaube* welcome.

Over the course of the first 3 days, it was an honour for me to be granted permission to accompany *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and her helper while they conducted cedar bath ceremonies. For 2 days, I watched and actively listened as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and her helper made their daily preparations. Each day they carefully opened their bundles and laid out the personal items that they would need to carry out the cedar bath ceremonies. When everything was set up, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* helper filled her bowl with plant medicines and lit them to create a smudge for cleansing. The helper began smudging herself first and then followed with the smudging of her items. She then passed the smudge bowl to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, who smudged herself and her items. She then passed the bowl to me. Inhaling the sweet fragrances of what I knew were healing medicines, I followed by example and cleansed. The helper picked up the bowl again, proceeded to cleanse the entire room, and waited for the first person to arrive.

As each person arrived, I observed that proper protocol was followed. Exchanges of *semaa* and greetings were respectfully presented to the Elder. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii*

Kwe introduced me to the people who had come and informed them that my role in relation to hers was that of learner. My relationship with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* silently reassured them if they silently questioned my presence in the room. My presence in the room was validated for them by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* trust in me as a learner. Each visitor then greeted me and tacitly accepted my presence.

At the onset of each ceremony, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* asked each person about his or her well-being. My role as learner was to listen and watch respectfully. With all of my senses fully alert, I sat silently, listening, observing, and absorbing all that was going on around me. Not imposing myself on others, and being as respectful and inconspicuous as I could, I paid special attention to nonverbal and verbal cues between *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and her helper. By observing *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* actions, it became evident to me that she regarded her guests' well-being highly and that she worked with them in respectful ways. Directing them with her soft voice, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* guided them with kind and gentle words. The aroma of burning medicines filled the room. I noted that it was customary for everyone present to end each session with a pipe ceremony. At the end of the day, and after the cedar bath ceremony, I watched again as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and her helper carefully packed away their bundles and cleansed the entire room once more.

Theme 3: Ceremony

Smudging

Throughout my life, I have observed that Elders have said that all ceremonies and public or private gatherings are to be done in a good way, *mino-bimaadsowin*, beginning with a good heart, mind, and body. It is understood that ceremonies are done in a good

way and a healthy way to welcome the spirit helpers to enter the sacred realm with us. The physical space should be prepared carefully. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* incorporates smudging into her daily life. As a Medicine person working with spirit life forms, she always welcomes and invites the spirits by smudging the area first.

During the data collection process, I observed *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* prepare regularly with smudge in her daily work. Prior to ceremonies, certain procedures were followed. The smudge was used in preparation for a ceremony, during a ceremony, and again at the end of a ceremony. For ceremonial medicine work, smudge was used to cleanse the workspace. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* also cleansed the individual to prepare the mind, body, and heart to be receptive to the work of the medicines. This meant putting aside all negative thoughts and to think with a compassionate heart.

When I asked how smudging should be used in the classroom, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* told me that she believed that if a student's feelings are associated with negative energy brought from the home to the school, these problems can be eliminated through a smudging ceremony. Smudge also helps to settle down the spirit:

We need to offer tobacco to give thanks for all that is and they do that. They do their smudge to "right" anything that has been undermined, like if there were problems at home, they take those problems to school. Through the smudging ceremony those problems are eliminated.

Smudge also can be used if children become too rambunctious in the classroom. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* prescribed smudge to settle them down. She commented, "When they're rambunctious, to settle them down, is to smudge." I learned firsthand what she meant by settling them down. On the morning prior to my interview with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, she sensed my anxiety and nervousness about the interview process. In her kind and gentle way, she reminded me to start the interview again with a

smudge. Soon the burning medicines in the smudge settled me down, and I was able to proceed with the interview feeling calm and relaxed.

Prayer

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe knew the importance of prayer. She was taught that everything begins with prayer. It was how things were done. Prayer was often associated with a *semaa* offering. It is the tradition of prayer and *semaa* that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* regards with the highest respect. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* referred to the fire here as our Spirit and that all living things have a Spirit:

Prayer is everything that you do, because we've gone so far away from that fire. Therefore now we have to retrain our selves and say, "I need to take time to nurture that fire." Where as before everything was a prayer, when I was fixing my net and I am praying to the Creator, talk to me, "*Aapji chi-miigwech gwii shumnak biinoojimok* [I say, "Thank you, I need to feed my children"]. That was a prayer in itself. And the different things that they did and even when the logging companies came, the many trees that they cut down, *semaa* [tobacco] "*kaawiin jidah neekaane*" ["I am sorry my brother"]. We address that nation, that tree nation, and you say, "I'm sorry my brother, I have to do this." So it's not something that's written over here and you pray at this time. It's an incorporated thing; it's already in there.

When listening to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* describe a life of prayer, I was reminded of something that the Elders say: When a person is living life in a good way, every footstep is a prayer. Our Elders lived prayerful lives. They did not merely say a prayer; they lived a prayer.

Semaa

In this discussion, I use the traditional name in *Anishinaube-mowin* for tobacco, which is *semaa*. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* spoke about the importance of *semaa*. She said that the importance of *semaa* should be demonstrated in schools and communities.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe stated that by acknowledging our own cultural traditions and use *semaa* the way it was intended, we show by example.

The traditional use of *semaa* is something that is done at the beginning of the day to ask for guidance and protection. It is presented to the Creator and all spirit helpers. As a teacher and a grandmother, she feels that her first responsibility is to show children how to pray with *semaa*; how to be mindful of the meaning of what they are doing; and how to hold *semaa* to their hearts and say, “This is what I believe in, and this is what I feel today.” She stated:

So when we, as a people acknowledge our own traditions, let’s say tobacco in the morning and I ask for guidance with that tobacco, protection with that tobacco, presenting to the Creator and all his helpers, asking, that’s my first responsibility, as a teacher, as a grandmother and I show the kids how to do that, how to be mindful, how to hold that tobacco to heart and say this is what I believe in, this is what I feel today, if there’s sadness then put that sadness into the tobacco and ask mother, the earth, to transform it for me, to transform it for the child.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe also spoke about *semaa* as a powerful way to communicate with the Creator:

Like I said, tobacco is very, very strong, when you have no words to speak about a situation, when you offer tobacco you say, “Creator, *Chi-miigwech Jiminadoo* for giving me the gift that I am going through right now, I thank you.”

When *semaa* is used as it was intended, it can have a tremendous impact. The use of tobacco as a medium for giving thanks is an ancient practice. Tobacco as an inhalant is a more common experience for children in communities today. The inhaling of tobacco is considered by many Elders to be abuse. The one inhaling the tobacco is abusing the body and abusing tobacco, which was not given to us for that use. Some Aboriginal leaders believe that the process of educating children about the traditional use of tobacco will support efforts to stem the harmful use of tobacco as an inhalant.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe shared some experiences regarding *semaa*

teachings she had in the classroom with young children:

When you introduce the tobacco, the spirit of that tobacco will speak on your behalf to the Creator. When we had our tobacco offerings at the school, once a week...this one time I was doing a tobacco teaching, I introduced the tobacco. This is what we do with our tobacco, and now we will all go outside and put our tobacco down at the base of a tree. So we all went out. I had three teachers take each direction and I directed to take one of the 4 directions each. So they had their little tobacco in their hands and they had to say a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator with that tobacco... One of the little guys in my group said, "Creator, I thank you for my life today". He was only 6 years old. He goes to the south and says, "I thank you, Creator, for my life today." To the west, he says, "I give you thanks for my grandma, my grandpa. I give you thanks for my mom, my dad, and Creator, I give you thanks, for my uncle, who is an alcoholic, you know, and nobody can help alcoholics, as a matter of fact they hate alcoholics, but Creator, I thank you for my uncle, I thank you for my aunty, I thank you for my other uncle."

That little prayer he said just kept going on and on: "I thank you for this, I thank you for my dog, my cat that brings me so much joy. I thank you for everything you have given me today, and I offer you this tobacco." He put his hand to his mouth, he kissed the tobacco, the grandfather, the grandmother tobacco, and he makes a little bit of clearing at the bottom of the tree and puts his tobacco down and that was his prayer. So I tell that story because many times because we as children of the Earth, we doubt that our prayers are being answered. It's a daily thing.

When *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared that story about the little boy, she spoke in such a way that listening to her filled me with much love and compassion for the child.

This story made me think about some of the children I had taught who would have benefitted from the experience of *semaa* and prayer.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe expressed additional ways in which the use of *semaa* has been significant in her life and in her prayers. When she returned to her home community, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* relied on her spirit helpers to overcome a difficult time in her life. She called on the spirit ancestors for spiritual guidance. In exchange for their help, she made them an offering of *semaa*: "I asked the powers of

prayer as I offered my tobacco I asked grandfathers, grandmothers, and all my relations to please help me.”

Among other medicines, *semaa* plays a special role of being the medium for both asking and thanking the Creator for whatever is needed and is given. In addition, *semaa* is offered to other human beings as a way of asking and thinking. The offering of *semaa* is also an expression of honesty, sincerity, and good intentions. As such, the use of *semaa* supports the maintenance of reciprocal relationships within a healthy Aboriginal social order.

Sharing of Oneself

This subtheme relates to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* perception of traditional knowledge. The phrase *sharing of oneself* captures the meaning of the elements of survival, healing, humour, beliefs, values, social structure, and creativity that are foundational within culture. For instance, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared her own healing journey with me. She had been in the non-Native world and after a long absence, she returned to her home community a broken person. She told me about her own healing journey, and she shared the *Miigwech* song, which I have included below, in bold text. The song came to her during a fasting ceremony at a sacred place known as Dreamers Rock. This was *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* sharing of herself as she beat on her hand drum and told her story:

I was a very broken person when I came back. Someone presented me with a drum, a little Thunder's drum. Up to that point I didn't know actually what my feeling was because I'm still gathering medicine for my journey. From the experiences I'd had, some more painful experiences but, nonetheless teachings and medicine of where I'm supposed to be, doing and walking.

So after my meeting on a Sunday afternoon, I went to our famous place called Dreamers Rock, a place to meditate to reflect upon my life. Alone without

any physical assistance, nobody was with me, except my Spirit helpers. I sounded my drum for the first time, in a long time.

It didn't make any sense to me. It didn't make any resonance for me. There was no connection with my drum and myself. It was just a sound and I asked the powers of prayer as I offered my tobacco. I asked grandfathers, grandmothers and all my relations to please help me through this obstacle course and very gently they answered my prayers. I felt my heart for the first time in a long time. I felt it becoming alive and pretty soon the heartbeat came out (*beats on drum 2 times*) and my heartbeat was the same as the sound of the drum connecting with the heartbeat of the nation and I was very happy and I asked for a song to help me over this, so I may thank and give honour to the Creator for creation everyday of my life. I was so happy then the song started to come:

*Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk,
Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk,
Miigwech dikit dawenmaagnag,
away ahi, away aho
away ahi, away aho (repeat chant 4 times)*

I became very connected with my drum, and I was very happy. I opened my eyes and I saw two heads looking at me from the water, and they greeted me. They were the heads of two turtles and they said to me, "Welcome home, granddaughter. You have been away from home for such a long time, welcome home." I was so happy that somebody had been watching over me. I closed my eyes and I sang:

*Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk,
Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk,
Miigwech dikit dawenmaagnag,
away ahi, away aho
away ahi, away aho (repeat chant 4 times)*

My heart was just bursting with joy. I opened my eyes. I saw two more heads coming out of the water. These were two heads of snakes. They too welcomed me to the circle. "Welcome granddaughter," they said. "Welcome home. You have been away for such a long time, welcome." I cried again, I closed my eyes, and I sang:

*Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk,
Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk,
Miigwech dikit dawenmaagnag,
away ahi, away aho
away ahi, away aho (repeat chant 4 times)*

The singing ended, and the drumming continued as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared her healing story:

Life couldn't be much livelier than at that moment. I opened my eyes again. This time, I saw a pair of ducks swimming in the water. They too, looked at me and they said, "Granddaughter, welcome home. You have been away from home for such a long time. Welcome." I was really happy that they had welcomed me, and I cried again, and I sang as I closed my eyes.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe sang her song as she beat on her hand drum:

*Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk,
Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk,
Miigwech dikit dawenmaagnag,
away ahi, away aho
away ahi, away aho (repeat chant 4 times)*

Without losing a beat, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* continued to tell her story:

I opened my eyes again and this time I saw a pair of geese sitting in the water so majestically. They looked at me with such compassion in their eyes as they welcomed me too, welcomed me home. They said, "Granddaughter, welcome. You have been away for such a long time. Welcome home". I cried again because I was so happy, and I sang, as I closed my eyes.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe sang again as she beat on her drum and told the rest of her story:

*Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk,
Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk,
Miigwech dikit dawenmaagnag,
away ahi, away aho
away ahi, away aho (repeat chant 4 times)*

I opened my eyes, and I saw the birds sitting on the trees, on the branches just listening to me, and they began to sing their songs, each to its own tune. What a glorious, glorious time! A little whisk of wind came along to make the leaves on the trees dance. There were little ripples on the lake as they kissed Grandmother Water Spirit. The mountain was so-o-o magnified and yet so majestic that everything was at my fingertips.

The drumming ended with a few loud beats.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe believed that the sharing of oneself helps others to learn about the world and to heal. When I asked *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* what teachers can do to help their children, she answered:

If they really consider themselves as a person that is awakened, awakened to a way of life, then they need to fulfill their responsibility. It's not merely the teaching part; it's the sharing of one's life... to write their own Medicine Wheel, that is why it's called *Medicine*.

This discussion of ceremony and the sharing of oneself might have been included within the discussion of teachings, but I have included *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* story and song here for a specific reason. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared a story and song about a specific kind of ceremony, a ceremony for healing. As I mentioned earlier, it was not my intention to write a prescription for knowledge, wellness, or anything else. Nor was it *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* way to provide me with a prescription. In telling her story and singing her song, she gave me an example of a path that served to heal for one individual, namely, herself.

Some ceremonies are communal and follow a long and well-established pattern. However, some ceremonies are personal, individual, and take a form that has not yet been determined at the start of the ceremony. Part of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* message here, I believe, is that we may not know where we are going when we begin a spirit journey, but that is not important. We will be helped. We will be guided. The important thing is that we start.

Theme 4: Teachings

Stories

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe considers stories important sources of knowledge to be shared as teachings. She illustrated the relevance of stories by telling one about the

Strawberry Woman's teaching about reconciliation: Grandmother Strawberry Woman brings that great gift of reconciliation and forgiveness. With reconciliation, there is a better understanding of self first, which then creates a bond with others. The bond grows between a child and that child's peers, and between the child and the child's teacher. When reconciliation occurs, trust develops. This can all take place in the sharing circle.

When teachers recognize their roles as mentors, they are then able to guide children in the right direction, but their role as mentor is not limited to the intellectual aspect of life in classrooms. Teachers serve as guides for the emotional and spiritual life of students in classrooms, whether knowingly and willingly, or not. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared with me:

Because behind that story, lets say the strawberries, is reconciliation. I don't have to say reconciliation. I don't have to say, "I forgive you" because I have it in me to forgive. That's the teaching of the Grandmother Strawberry Woman, [who] brings that great gift of reconciliation of self and when our children know that, they will not be scared...I know it seems like a very hard task, but really, it's very easy, [and] once they get into the rhythm of life, they know what they have to do.

It is interesting to note that southern *Anishinaubec* represent the shape of the strawberry as the shape of the heart, which is placed on traditional garments in beads or quillwork for dance and ceremony. This is appropriate because the Grandmother Strawberry Woman's story of reconciliation and forgiveness has much to do with the heart, our emotional guardian. In addition, the shape of the heart, when displayed, also acknowledges our physical place in the heart of North America, what we call Turtle Island. Turtle hearts are very strong. They can survive forest fires and months in frozen mud. Stories about strawberries and turtles may be used to teach children about their inheritance of strength and resilience.

The Grandmother Strawberry Woman's story, when told by a teacher within the context of a classroom talking circle, might set in place a collective understanding of the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. With that understanding in place, strawberries in a *fruit party* (see p. 47 for *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* teachings about this practice) might serve not only to introduce reconciliation and forgiveness to the children but also to celebrate those elements of emotional and spiritual wellness.

Stories are important in learning about facets of traditional knowledge, but they also may be a source of healing. I want to highlight what *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared about giving and sharing. I use this quotation again because I found that much of what we can know of traditional knowledge takes place through the telling of stories:

It's my own personal, my own personal journey as I experienced it in my life that's all I can share. That's traditional knowledge... That's why those circles were so strong ... *miisaa maandaa gyswebsiaa daasagodbon* *The Elder would say, that is what happened to me, 10 years ago*, and they expressed what happened 10 years ago. That's the tradition they followed, to be able to share their story. Traditionally, the strong, the way the elders when they are healed, they are the [pause] the examples of that traditional knowledge. They share their stories, *miisaa miinwaa maandaa gasish ge wiiaa*. They share their stories of how they overcame the obstacle.

The telling of stories is a gentle, personal, and highly effective way of sharing communal history and personal history. Stories may gently provide a cautionary note or encouragement, depending on what the listener is able to gather from the story. The telling of stories in the Aboriginal context embodies the Aboriginal ethic of noninterference. The teller of the story is, in effect, saying, "This is how things are. You decide."

Elders

Elders are a connection to the past. Their daily lives and their voices bring us closer to a reality based on actual experiences. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* believed that teachers in the classroom have greater roles to play when working with *Anishinaube* children than the roles that teachers have typically assumed. She believed that in order to walk a path of purpose and learning with the children, teachers must become familiar with the children's culture:

Some of these teachers are upside down like this [*Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe holds Medicine Wheel upside down*]. They have only knowledge, but they have no experience, so us as a people, we share that knowledge. All they need to do is come to us, us as elders, the doctors of our culture and we will share that information with them. So the responsibility lies then with the teacher, wanting to, if they really want to help, then they will do their utmost to become in a way with the teachings so that they are backup for the child.

Graveline (1998) asserted that Elders play a vital role in transforming the classroom atmosphere when a link is established between them and the classroom community. We want to honour them by listening to them and learning from their wisdom:

What am I doing as a teacher if I cannot nurture my children? What am I doing? What do I need to do? I need to go back to my child and say to her, it's okay. It's going to be okay to be the *Anishinaube* child that you are, that you have chosen to be. It's okay. It's not a no-no anymore to be an Aboriginal child, but be the best that you could be for today." Those first 7 years are vital for our children and the next stages. The child as it grows; the spirit continues to be nurtured. And I've mentioned our first teachers are our parents, our grandparents, we give thanks to them for our existence. Had it not been for them, then we would not be here, and we honour the sacredness of those roles that they have in our world. I talk about sacred, cause it has no room for any shadow self to be present and when you have that [sacredness], the child is pure, in thought, word and indeed.

Elders often bring with them an element of unconditional love that is precious. That deep affection, demonstrated through the telling of stories and sharing of self, has

the capacity to touch the heart and spirit of children. Being with an Elder is, in a sense, a way of experiencing both the past and the future. The Elder was once a child, and the stories of the Elder can relate that experience of being a child in an earlier time. In addition, however, the listeners to the story also will be Elders some day. Often, Elders will relate that to the children. They may say, for example, "Be mindful of what you are doing, what you are experiencing, because some day, you will be telling your experiences to your own grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe shared her experiences of working with school-age children and providing them with the nourishment for cultural revitalization:

The kids back home have their school powwow, and they are so proud to be able to dance, to be able to dance in full regalia for their school. It initiates the pride that they hold, and it just helps them flourish just like flowers as they are dancing around the drums at school powwow day. From the Kindergarten, from the daycare at age 2, right up to Grade 5, how they thoroughly enjoy themselves at that dance.

There is strong evidence to indicate the important contribution of Elders to children's educational experiences. Elders hold certain qualities, and they have the capacity to engage students in concentrated listening as they also learn about who they are. This capacity was demonstrated through *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* words:

I trained my youth to the best of my ability about cultural awareness, who we are, how rich in heritage we are, and at the end of the school year when they held up their Medicine Wheel and said, "This is who I am," they were proud as little peacocks, saying, "I am proud to be who I am."

For a learner, the pride that is experienced when learning from an Elder can be heartfelt and significant. I believe that the affinity between Elders and children can be explained only as a spiritual connection.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe continues to tell stories in both English and *Anishinaube-mowin*. She learned the English language early in life:

When I went into the world, and Dad told me, when I asked, “Why is it so important that I have the second language, I have my teachers already?” He said, “My girl, my daughter, it is not enough, in 30 or 40 years’ time, you’ll be sitting in a circle, teaching the same teachers, relying on people’s safe teachings as we have, in a different language. That’s the only way you’ll understand.”

We cannot know how it was that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*’s father knew that she would one day be teaching in a language other than *Anishinaube-mowin*. Wisdom based on experience is a gift that Elders offer to those who will learn from them. Knowledge gained from the parents of her parents was passed down to her parents and then to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. She continues that same custom of passing knowledge to new generations.

Ceremony

Anderson (2000) documented many Native spiritual traditions that emphasize balance between men and women, and ceremonies that are structured in ways that require equal input from all persons involved. Our ceremonies help us to remember the need for balance and the need for one another. Ceremonies are spiritual customs and traditions that provide direction for individuals, families and communities where important decisions need to be made. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* described this process:

They have to tell their feelings and begin to work together. Like the Cree people up in northern Québec, they’ve got their ceremonies down to where they need to be. So before every major project takes place, the whole community goes into ceremonies, whether it be 25 people present or whether there’s 10 or whether there’s 50, there’s ceremony being done, to ask for guidance and protection on that journey. I don’t know what the answer is. Only the Creator knows, but they have to come together and say, “Well this is what I’ve received.” Then the community people will say, “And this is what we’ve received at our ceremony so they all come together and make things happen.”

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's description of the purpose of ceremony began when she and I were having a conversation regarding *Anishinaube* control of their own education and what we need to do for that to happen. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* primary concern was in regard to cultural revitalization. We will need to relearn and, in some cases, learn more about our traditional ways of living with one another, making decisions, and guiding our children. Ceremony will be at the heart of that process.

Ceremony is rooted in ancient cultural customs that are still experienced today. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* encapsulated the spirit of ceremony:

I was on a fast, and I asked the conductor of the fast to search for my spirit name. I gave him tobacco. By the end of the fast, he did a naming ceremony for me, and that's when "Young Eagle Woman" came in, and again, that's a special part of my personal growth.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe considers life a ceremony and draws strength from traditional ways. Even when she is in places away from her traditional environment in a contemporary setting, she is able to draw strength from ceremony. As I travelled with her, I observed that the same calm and gentle habits of mind and spirit that were maintained in solitude in Manitoulin territory were practiced by her when in urban settings, surrounded by many other people.

Personal Reflection

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe shared her connectedness and her groundedness with me, and it is my most earnest hope that I have adequately and appropriately shared them with the reader of this document. She reminded me that her groundedness and sacred knowledge did not come from a textbook, but from a higher source: the Creator. The greatest teacher in her life's journey around the Medicine Wheel of Life has been *experience*.

The findings in this study clearly established that the survival of Aboriginal people depends on whether we wish to live in wholeness and find balance. The basic tenet of the teachings of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* is the need to know one's spiritual self first, and from that, a walk with connectedness will follow.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's message for healing to happen is to look seven generations back and look seven generations ahead. Her words:

I honour, and I give thanks...knowing that my generations, my seven generations, are behind me, understanding me, congratulating me, being proud of me, for what I have been able to accomplish, and so it is, when I look to the future, what my thought form is today, is to help bring that balance back. Unless I can do that, there's no healing...my actions today will affect seven generations to come.

Within the concept of the seven generations is a message of accountability. I am accountable to seven generations into the future for what I do today. In addition, I am accountable to seven generations in the past. The seven generations in the past and the seven generations into the future are unseen. Much of what I learned about traditional knowledge from *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* dealt with relationships and concerns about both the seen and the unseen. Being in relationship with the unseen is a daily life practice for *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. Responding to the unseen is part of her value and belief system. Much of the basis for her teachings comes from her experience of ceremonies that call upon the unseen for guidance and assistance.

I share the following chant that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* sang for me:

Miigwech dikit Mishoomsuk, Miigwech dikit Nookmisuk, Miigwech dikit

dawenmaagnag. This chant was introduced earlier in the chapter in the form of a prayer as it was presented to me. The translation in English means, *Thank you, I say, my*

Grandfathers. Thank you, I say, my Grandmothers. Thank you, I say, to all my relations. I

share this English translation because the prayer was a significant part of the teachings that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared with me. These teachings cannot go unannounced and unarticulated to you.

In this chapter, I answered, in large measure, the first of my research questions: What are *Anishinaube* traditional knowledge and values? I organized that discussion around four relevant themes: Beliefs, Values, Ceremony, and Teachings. In the chapter that follows, I conclude my discussion of this narrative study of traditional knowledge by sharing my perspectives regarding possible answers to my second research question: How can traditional knowledge and values be incorporated into today's schools? I include a summary and discussion of the study. I share my interpretations of the findings and make recommendations for further study. I also include a discussion of possible efforts that may draw strength from this study. In addition, I share my personal reflections regarding the research journey.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, INTERPRETATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

As an *Anishinaube-kwe*, I take responsibility for what I have learned, and I wish to share what I have learned truthfully with others. It is not an *Anishinaube* practice to be directive and intrusive. Therefore, I will not tell the reader what to believe about traditional knowledge, nor will I tell the reader how to proceed as a result of reading the study. As a researcher of Aboriginal descent, I framed my conclusions as a personal narrative. This study began with a ceremony, so I feel that it is fitting to end it in the same way. A common practice in rituals is to carefully pack away the bundles when the ceremony is complete. The final part of this chapter contains my closing remarks in my poem and a prayer. I was mindful that this ritual (process) of wrapping up the bundle is really an analysis of the data collected in the study.

Creswell's (1998) matrix of the research process, qualitative characteristics, and narrative characteristics provided a framework for reflecting, first, and then summarizing the process of conducting and completing the study:

As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual (p. 474)

Although the central research design for this study was narrative inquiry (Creswell), other aspects of qualitative research also proved useful. My study was ethnographic to some extent because I participated in life events that took place during the time I spent with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I played the classic ethnographic role of

participant/observer (Spradley, 1980). I conducted the study of traditional knowledge using naturalistic processes to the greatest extent possible.

Summary and Discussion of the Study

I conducted the study of traditional knowledge according to the standards of university research protocol. Although the content of my topic is not typically mainstream and Western, the processes by which I conducted the study were well-established in Western research traditions. First, I identified a research problem. I was seeking to understand and represent the experiences of a woman well-recognized within Aboriginal circles for her vast store of traditional knowledge and her long-standing practice as an advisor, healer, and Elder (Creswell, 1998).

Before I began the study of traditional knowledge, I gave much thought to the process and what I thought the process would be like. I knew that it would be difficult. I had seen the effects of graduate study on other Aboriginal students. It was my deep desire to pursue graduate studies but, with equal enthusiasm, I wished to study something that would lead to better outcomes of the schooling process for Aboriginal children. I also had a desire to study with an Elder because I wanted to hear what the old people had to say. Further, I wanted to study with someone whose home community was close to mine on Manitoulin Island. I knew that I could not manage all of those conflicting priorities alone, so I turned to traditional practice for guidance.

In 2004, I chose to participate in a spring fast being held near my home community on Manitoulin Island. I put down *semaa* and asked the Creator for guidance. I knew so little about research that I did not have a specific request for help. Essentially, I wanted to learn what questions were in my heart. Those questions would guide my

planning of the study. The fast was sponsored by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I had informally met *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, and I knew who she was. I saw how she interacted with others, and that reinforced my desire to work with an Elder, but I did not yet know who that Elder would be.

During the summer months, I continued to ponder the possibilities for focus of my study. Should I study children? Should I study with children? Should I study schools? If I would be able to study with an Elder, who would that Elder be? The following fall, I participated in a second fast, also under *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* sponsorship. By that time I had settled on the idea of studying with an Elder and the prevailing question continued, as it had, to be about the identity of the Elder with whom I would study. At the fall fast, I again observed *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* guiding others and seeing to the needs of everyone in the gathering. At some point, it simply occurred to me, as though the thought had been there all along, that it would be *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. I had made preparations before the fast without knowing what I was preparing to do, and when I had an opportunity to speak to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, I asked for a few moments of her time. She gave me that time.

I introduced myself and explained my dilemma. I told her that I could not provide her with a lot of detail of the academic side of the project, but that I had a deep desire to study with an Elder and hoped that she would be that Elder. Without a word, she accepted the *semaa* that I was holding. She held the *semaa* close to her in a loving gesture, and I knew then that she would be the one. I left the fall fast feeling greatly lightened of the burden of uncertainty. This study would be possible, and I was on my way, with help, to make it happen.

I then reviewed the literature available to me regarding traditional knowledge. Within the discipline of narrative inquiry, the utility of literature is minimal. Because the amount of literature available on the subject was also minimal, this made for a happy coincidence for me (Creswell, 1998). I avoided using literature that problematized Aboriginal children or painted a grim view of the future. I selected only those writings that placed Aboriginal children and their families in a positive, resilient, and optimistic light. I also sought to find the works of Aboriginal writers, but that was not always possible. I eventually used the works of predominantly Aboriginal writers, with the addition of works by Bell et al. (2004), Sefa Dei et al. (2000), and others whose research has informed the study of Indigenous communities.

My literature review is brief, and if it does anything, it documents the need for the additional voices of Aboriginal scholars in higher education. After completing the literature review, I was able to develop a purpose statement and research questions for my study. My purpose statement and research questions were designed to explore the meaning of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* experiences as an advisor, healer, and Elder with an active and busy cultural and community practice (Creswell, 1998). As I mentioned in chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative study was to listen to, dialogue with, record, and document how one Elder, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, perceives traditional knowledge and values its survival. This Elder is often referred to in *Anishinaube-mowin* as *kendaasoo-kwe*, a woman with knowledge. I applied for Lakehead University Research Ethics Board approval to conduct the study and succeeded in securing that approval. At that point, I was ready to begin my journey in the "field."

There was a period of dormancy for the study as administrative changes and faculty turnover at Lakehead University's Faculty of Education were addressed, but in April of 2007, I began the process of collecting qualitative narrative data. In the field, which included several locations in Ontario on or near Manitoulin Island, I collected field notes that documented *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* story in her own words (Creswell, 1998).

I spent time with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* in April through June of 2007 in locations on her reserve, in Ottawa, and on a reservation in the state of Maine. In all, I spent the equivalent of 20 days with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. We often worked from daybreak until late into the evening. Our time together was intensive. It was not unusual for *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* community members or members of other communities to call on her late into the evening. People would travel great distances to arrive at her door in the middle of the night for a ceremony conducted by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*. She was available day or night to people who needed her help.

From June to August of 2007, I transcribed the data. In August of 2007, I began the process of analyzing the stories that I had collected in conversation with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* and in response to interview questions I had asked her. I had also collected field notes based on observation of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* cultural practice during in which I participated, after a period of intense observation. I also maintained a practice of reflective journaling that supported the analytical process by providing contexts and connections for the other elements of the data collection process, which included participant observations and interview sessions. I sought to analyze the stories by identifying themes articulated in *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* discourse. I

collaborated with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* over the telephone during the transcription process to ensure that I had accurately transcribed her words verbatim in *Anishinaube-mowin* or English. I occasionally asked her to verify the translation of words in *Anishinaube-mowin* into English. I conducted several member checks with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* to ensure the accuracy of my transcripts and interpretations (Creswell, 1998). At one point to ensure copies were received in a timely manner, I made a visit to personally deliver a copy to *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*.

In October of 2007, I began to write my thesis. I continued to collaborate with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* as I constructed text that reflected the lived experience of learning from *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* (Creswell, 1998). I also collaborated with *Anishinaube-kwe* Elders in the Thunder Bay area in order to assure myself that the interpretations and claims I had made were as respectful of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* as possible. I was assured that they were.

The listing and coding of themes in a linear fashion produced a body of text that was appropriate for the difficult task of completing a thesis. The process of listing and coding did not, however, facilitate my interpretation of the themes in a way that clearly showed the interconnectedness of relationships, sacredness, balance, and the devotion to a greater power of Aboriginal life.

These themes, when placed on the traditional teachings of the Medicine Wheel, representing the circle of life, conveyed a better understanding of the holistic character of aboriginal knowledge and experience. The Western tendency to subdivide and prioritize does not allow the ability to envision the parts (themes) in relation to a whole effectively (Sefa Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2002). The inner circle, where I placed traditional

knowledge, connects to the four circle quadrants, which were represented as the themes. These themes had a causal relationship in that one theme affected the preceding theme and the next theme. They also overlapped each another or simply bore minor relevance. The lines and arrows were not a model of rigid categorization: rather, the model was one of interconnectedness.

Figure 1 is a simple representation of the findings reported primarily in the Elder participant's own words and discussed in relation to what traditional knowledge is. One way of honouring the interconnectedness of themes was to be aware of my own interpretations as related to a cyclical framework found in the traditional teachings of the Medicine Wheel. This cyclical framework would be better known as the matrix of the Medicine Wheel in Aboriginal society.

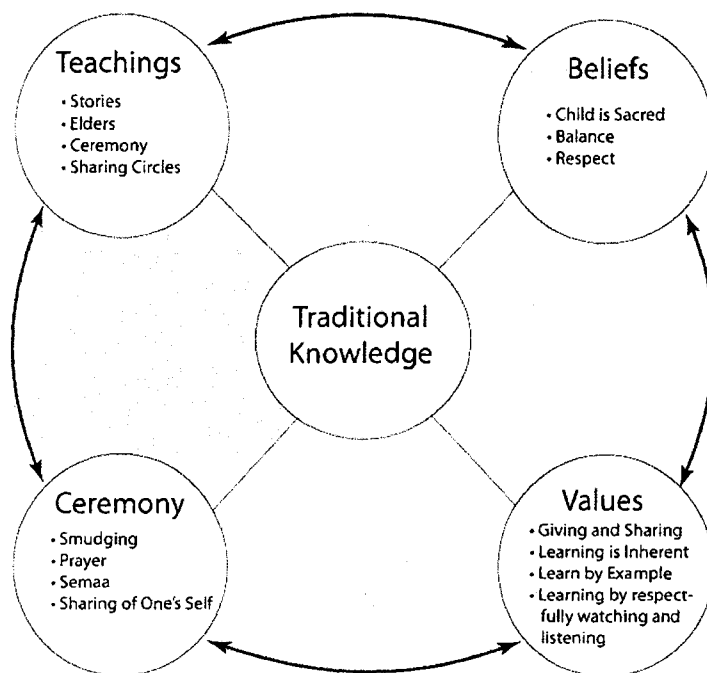


Figure 1. Interconnectedness of the themes.

I had planned to write the story of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* cultural experiences regarding traditional knowledge and my relationship in it as my thesis in this qualitative narrative. Rather, I complied with the demands of Western scholarship and analyzed the data in order to present a semantic relationship, not a story. Selecting themes was a constant struggle of trying to maintain balance with, and meaningful connections to, *Anishinaube* ways. Analyzing the data met the parameters of Western research protocols, however.

Thoughts for Further Research

Earlier in this document, I shared my personal and cultural background, highlighting my many years as an educator. I shared my longstanding concern for the lack of Aboriginal perspectives in classroom instruction for Aboriginal children. It seemed obvious to me that I would view the findings of this study from the perspective of someone wishing to “reform” education primarily through the preparation of pre-service teachers. I see the potential for the findings of this study to serve as a framework for the development of reform efforts in the area of Aboriginal pedagogy.

Hodgson-Smith (2000) defined pedagogy as not merely styles, methods, and strategies. It is also the epistemological/philosophical approach to instruction. Hodgson-Smith discussed the philosophical and epistemological beliefs that inform and guide cultural practice. Hodgson-Smith provided an example using the Medicine Wheel of the Plains Cree. In its broadest interpretation, it holds as a central teaching the importance of relations. It was *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* practice to use the Medicine Wheel frequently as a framework to guide her worldview.

In the following discussion, I explain how *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* practice and worldview represent Aboriginal pedagogy as defined by Hodgson-Smith (2000). In the brief time that I spent with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, I observed cultural practices that engender respect, truth, patience, caring and learning by example. In addition, I observed that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* stories followed these same cultural practices. One example was her story about the child, elaborated earlier in chapter 4:

When a child is born, it is in its purest form of spirit in a physical sense... yes all children are sacred; all children are at that stage because they come from spirit level, and they have that knowledge. So our job is then to take responsible accountability that the right information is said mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe demonstrated respect in many ways through prayers of thanks for all of life's creation. Another example was her belief in the natural law. In one of our conversations, we talked about the traditional usage of *semaa* to respect all life forms within the universe. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* talked about the thunder beings known as thunder and the respect shown for their roles.

It is the natural law because the thunder birds are the carriers, the keepers of the fire. They are respected for that role. We [*Anishinaube*] don't even have to ask. Here's my tobacco. We just do it without asking any questions. As we nurture their [thunder beings] fire by thanking them for their fire, we are nurturing our own fire.

I share these and many other examples in chapter 4 because *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* worldview not only extends to all life's creations but also into how she conducts herself. After many years, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* continues to share her stories on cultural practices and traditions. She exhibits the qualities of patience and kindness, giving and sharing, but her commitment to passing down traditional knowledge

derives from what she knows based on her own experiences. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* walks her talk. "Walking the talk" is regarded as truth and is highly respected in Aboriginal customs (Graveline, 1998). Although several researchers, including Hodgson-Smith (2000), have spoken in somewhat abstract terms of the need for Aboriginal pedagogy, this study not only explained the guiding principles behind Aboriginal pedagogy but also presented descriptions of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* patience, insight, and commitment to this relationship throughout.

Interpretations

This concluding section is a discussion of my interpretations as I explain what I learned by conducting this study. To provide a focus for my reflective responses and to provide greater detail in my response, I wish to explain what I learned about research as well as what I learned about traditional knowledge.

What Did I Learn About Research?

I learned that there is a mismatch between the expectations of standard dominant research paradigms and the intentions and purposes of research in Aboriginal communities, which are to truthfully and respectfully represent: language, spoken and unspoken; ways of being; and cultural practices. Those practices do not occur in hierarchical linear fashion, yet the research processes required the completion of this research of Aboriginal ways of being and cultural practices in significantly linear and hierarchical ways.

As one example, "long periods of stillness and silence" occurred in the data collection. During those periods of stillness and silence, significant events were taking place. Interactions were occurring, and learning was happening, but those other

significant events did not require spoken words. Where could I find the evidence of those interactions and other significant events?

As noted by Graveline (1998), the Elders stressed listening and waiting, not asking why: “You don’t ask questions when you grow up. You watch and listen and wait and the answer will come to you” (p. 60). However, I found in the preparation of this thesis that research often seems driven by words and questions, including research questions and interview questions. Although many Aboriginal scholars have been working to develop new methodologies (Graveline; Hampton, 1995; Smith, 1999), I could find no examples that were appropriate for my specific needs.

The second example is the necessity of direct questioning in research. I found it necessary to ask direct questions related to the study, even though that type of verbal interaction is considered confrontational and disrespectful within the context of Aboriginal discourse. I was very uncomfortable having to ask direct questions, even though some were open-ended questions, but I did so to meet the mandate required of qualitative research in the Western paradigm.

When that occurred once with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, her response in *Anishinaube-mowin* included a reminder that she had already answered the question in stories shared earlier. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe’s* stories contained teachings and wisdom embedded, but not directly stated, in her words. For instance, she did not at any point say to me, “Susan, now I am going to tell you about traditional knowledge and you had better sit and listen.” Instead, she shared *debewin*, her truth, as she experienced it.

It is my judgment that this study could not be replicated by someone with only mainstream cultural background. Does that mean that this research is a stand-alone result

of insider research? It does not have to be identified as such if we, as an academic community, commit our energies to promoting the development of novice aboriginal researchers.

What Did I Learn About Traditional Knowledge?

I learned that traditional knowledge is a lifetime of experience and commitment to serving the people. Because traditional knowledge grows out of one's life experiences, traditional knowledge is influenced by the individual's responses to those life experiences. Therefore, what I learned about traditional knowledge from *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* is strongly related to the influences in her life's work. As a Medicine person, much of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* life work has been and remains focused on the Spirit. Thus, I learned a great deal from her about the overarching role of Spirit in traditional knowledge. In a variety of ways and on numerous occasions, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* communicated to me the significant role of experience in acquiring traditional knowledge. When I shifted my interview strategy from direct questioning to requests, and I asked her to tell me about traditional knowledge, *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* replied, "My sacred knowledge comes from a very high level and that's the essence of life from the Creator, and when we acknowledge that, then one of the greatest teachers that we have, is experience."

During the time that I spent with *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*, I also experienced firsthand elements of her life's work as a spiritual advisor and a Medicine person. Therefore, I have acquired my own perceptions and understandings of traditional knowledge based on my own life experiences, limited as they were. Those experiences cannot be transmitted adequately in this study. The best that I can do is to interpret those

experiences for the reader. My overwhelming response to those experiences was an understanding of the central role of Spirit in traditional knowledge and all aspects of life. In order for me to achieve this understanding I had to go closer to home.

It was necessary for me to go closer to home to conduct the difficult academic task of collecting data for a thesis because at home, there is a type of support not found in academic settings. Academic support was not available at home, but I needed that less than I needed the social support of being home. Wolf (2004) encountered the same sense of longing for home as she collected data for her dissertation. She chose to study an Indigenous-focused school located near the city centre where her family resided. At the school, she felt at home. She was given insider tasks to complete that allowed her to participate fully in life at the school:

I do wish to acknowledge the ways in which I was welcomed, and often honored, at the school. While the various participant experiences in which I engaged did not contribute direct academic support to my ethnography, those experiences did contribute substantially to my social support as an Indigenous critical ethnographer. As I have come to conceptualize the relationship, based on my own experience at the school, social support during academic pursuit contributed to social confidence that I was still part of the collective, which led to academic confidence which lead to academic competence (p. 94)

At home, I also felt part of the collective. Proximity to my home community on Manitoulin Island allowed me to reflect in ways that were more indigenously global, and I could easily see the common threads between *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* worldview and mine. The comfort of being close to my home allowed me to complete the tasks of data collection, reflection, and initial data analysis.

In the section that follows, I make several observations about the current conditions in Aboriginal schools related to curriculum, pedagogy, and the general nature of instructional design. I also make several recommendations for the reform of

curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional design. I tie *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* words and wisdom to each of my recommendations.

Recommendations for Curriculum Reform

Foremost in *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* recommendations for school curriculum is the importance of maintaining balance. *Anishinaubec* believe that our children are born in a balanced state, one that must be maintained. Too often, however, schools fail to provide ways for children to maintain that balance. Maintaining balance is representative of the Medicine Wheel, which requires us to place an emphasis on the human being. In today's schools, the intellectual component frequently is overemphasized. For example, achievement testing consumes enormous amounts of time that require school staff to administer and score examinations, and then deal with the aftermath of testing, including public relations with parents. Because schools commit such large amounts of time to testing, there is little time for experiential learning, problem solving, and other types of classroom instruction that do not yield evaluative, empirical data. The *physical* aspects of being for those students who attend schools that still have physical education programs are minimally addressed. *Emotional* needs are addressed only when students find themselves in trouble. *Spirituality* is absent from schools in the public education system.

Reforms to the educational process in First Nations schools must address the need for curriculum to support the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of children in an effort to support their balanced development into adulthood. Reforms to the curriculum in First Nations schools would appear on the surface to face little resistance from communities. At present, Band schools are under Band control. Thus, the

most difficult part of any reform effort, namely, local control of Indigenous education, has been secured. However, it has been difficult for First Nations school boards to abandon longstanding practices of harsh disciplinary practices and academic intensification that were the hallmark of residential schools and local schools controlled by the Canadian federal government.

Implementation of provincial curriculum standards has not always been viewed as a solution because such standards may be overly prescriptive for First Nations schools and communities. Prescriptive curriculum standards require a kind of cookbook approach to instruction: One must follow the directions precisely. It is not uncommon for prescriptive curriculum standards and the methods that accompany them to include a script for teachers to use as they are guiding instruction. Fullan, Hill, and Crevola (2006) identified prescriptive curriculum standards as a trap, producing immediate but not sustainable results:

Prescription is appealing because it applies specificity to instruction with the promise of and, in some cases, the evidence of increased student performance. We will conclude that prescription has certain fatal flaws and that as a result, it will not get us to the deep changes required for the 21st century. (p. 9)

Prescriptive curriculum standards and products, promoted by decision makers and purchased by education authorities, are appealing because they give the impression of being “teacher-proof.” When teachers or teachers with diverse levels of expertise lack the pedagogical skills to provide consistent and cohesive instruction, the prescriptive curriculum standards and products have the capacity to fill in the gap in experience. However, prescriptive curriculum standards and methods may ultimately eliminate the necessity for either students or teachers to engage in deep, critical, and inquiry-based

learning. Prescriptive curriculum standards and products deny students and teachers the opportunity to engage their intellectual curiosity and develop a love of learning.

Curriculum reform at the grassroots level will not be easy, but no significant change is rarely easy at first. Band school boards and education authorities will need to look within, that is, to First Nations families, for guidance in seeking an agenda for change. Glossing over old colonial practices with superficial cultural effects will not ensure the change that is needed. Education authorities will need to ask First Nations families, "What is the purpose of schools?"

Until the purpose of schools (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Spring, 1987) begins to reflect the beliefs, values, teachings of *Anishinaubec* families, *Anishinaubec* children will not see schools as beneficial in their passage to full adulthood in Indigenous society. School will continue to be viewed as institutions that offer nothing more than significant levels of oppression if they fail to support *Anishinaubec* families in their efforts to prepare their children for adulthood.

Do We Need the Culture-in-Education Model or the Education-in-Culture Model?

What will new thinking look like in classroom instruction? This section addresses the issue of deep change in First Nations schools. Educational change can be characterized in a number of ways, but the most basic and useful for this analysis is to examine change from a vertical perspective, that is, to look at the levels of change. We can characterize change as having one of two vertical dimensions: surface or deep (Wolf, personal communication, July 28, 2008). Changes are either symbolic or real (Fullan, 1991). First-order change is surface change. First-order change increases efficiency without disturbing organizational structures. Second-order change is deep change.

Second-order change alters the goals, structures, and rules by which education is conducted (Cuban, as cited in Fullan). In mainstream schooling, second-order change generally fails (Fullan).

As I reflect on all that *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* shared with me, I am concerned about the situatedness of education and culture, relative to one another, in schools for Aboriginal children: What takes precedence, education or culture? What is prominent? Is it *education or culture*? Within the education-in-culture model, something that I envision and advocate for, culture is prominent, and education is embedded in the culture. Culture is the teaching medium, and education is the process by which that medium is articulated. In the current culture-in-education model, education takes precedence, and culture is an add-on, but it is not experienced as central or prominent. Within the culture-in-education model, when stressors arise such as faculty turnover, shortened school day, or other unforeseen events, culture can be dispatched, stripped away, and omitted from the curriculum quite easily.

However, within the education-in-culture model that I propose, culture cannot be stripped away because culture is the medium. Culture is stable and ubiquitous. Regardless of outside influences, culture remains present and available. The culture-in-education model is first-level surface change from the prior colonial school model. It is barely postcolonial. The culture-in-education model gives the superficial impression that schooling experience includes culture.

On the other hand, the education-in-culture model supports deep second-order change. The education-in-culture model that I envision has the capacity to alter the goals, structures, and rules by which education is conducted (Cuban, as cited in Fullan, 1991).

By organizing change from the inside out and placing respect for children and Elders, often the least and last considered (by mainstream standards) members of Aboriginal society at the centre of policy decisions, the education-in-culture model holds promise for success in First Nations schools, even though it has not succeeded in mainstream schools.

How do we know that the culture-in-education model as an institution is not working for Aboriginal children? We can look at high school completion rates. We can look at college admission and completion rates. I do not suggest looking to standardized achievement scores because those measures are notoriously ineffective in accurately measuring the abilities of Aboriginal students. Decades after the movement for *Indian Control of Indian Education*, the design of school curriculum and the kinds of experiences offered to children in school does not appear to have changed much. What comes to my mind when I consider the findings for this thesis is an array of significant changes that can be made, with a fair amount of ease, that come directly from *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe*.

I recommend four changes that could create radically different school experiences for Aboriginal students, when implemented. They include the following:

1. I recommend an increase in the presence of Elders in schools. Schools will need to provide the Elders with all the privileges of the degreed and other teaching faculty. Activities of the Elders in schools could begin with four areas, including telling stories in classrooms; conducting ceremonies at a schoolwide or classroom level; providing mentorship for teachers regarding cultural practices; and counselling individual students, as called upon.

Schools will need to provide the Elders with time and other resources to teach in the classrooms. Schools also will need to provide the Elders with opportunities to spend informal time with children, telling stories and conducting ceremonies at first. If other appropriate instructional activities emerge, they should be allowed to happen.

Elders are not to be used as clerical staff, making photocopies, for example. Elders in schools are not to serve as disciplinarians. They may be available to counsel students, if called upon, but time with an Elder should never serve as a consequence for student misbehaviour. Male and female Elders must be present in the schools, and there will need to be more than one or two in the school. There will need to be one or two for each grade level, ideally. Elders in schools would not only support the children in the school but would also serve to support classroom teachers who need guidance, as *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* observed, “All they need to do is come to us, us as Elders, the doctors of our culture, and we will share that information with them.”

School boards will need to create a budgetary line item to support this effort. School boards will need to ensure that the selection of Elders to work in schools is based on the experience, wisdom, and cultural eminence of the individual. Not every old person can serve as an Elder. Some do not have the distinction.

2. Schools must attend to the spiritual aspect of the children. This can be addressed through simple ceremonies such as those described by *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* described, including the use of *semaa* for *miigwech* ceremonies.

So they had their little tobacco in their hands, and they had to say a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator with that tobacco... One of the little guys in my group said, “Creator, I thank you for my life today.” He was only 6 years old.

The sharing of strawberries for reconciliation ceremonies was another practice that

Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe suggested:

The other thing is to share. Sharing like, to say, maybe once a week to have a little *fruit party*, sharing fruit at that circle, and sharing berries at the circle. It becomes very important for the children. They look forward to that.

Talking circles will need to be a daily, or more often, occurrence in classrooms. *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* also suggested that the practice of smudging, ceremonial cleansing, be practiced in schools. She described the benefits as, “They do their smudge to “right” anything that has been undermined, like if there were problems at home, they take those problems to school. Through the smudging ceremony, those problems are eliminated.” These practices will serve not only to strengthen the spiritual resources of the child but also to strengthen the emotional resources and capacity for resilience of the child.

3. Children need to spend much more time on the land. Children need to be outdoors doing experiential, problem-based, and environmental education activities. Time on the land is never wasted, even if children are simply listening to the land and the sounds of the land. When they are doing that, they are listening to Grandmother Earth, their spiritual mother. I recall my own reflection on my best memories of school as, “Most of my recollections about school recall experiences that occurred outside of the classroom. They include memories of walks that my classmates and I took with our teacher and the garden that our class planted in the schoolyard.”

In general, schools and classrooms must acknowledge the model of well-being presented by the Medicine Wheel. Schools must address the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of children with the same enthusiasm that they now commit to the intellectual aspect of schooling.

4. Teachers of Aboriginal children must be connected to the community. Both teachers and communities must support that connectedness. Teachers must be willing to establish relationships with families and see themselves as extended family, not as temporary visitors. Elders will not intrude into classroom environments. They must be asked appropriately, with *semaa*. As *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe* observed, “So the responsibility lies then with the teacher, wanting to, if they really want to help, then they will do their utmost to become in a way with the teachings so that they are backup for the child.”

Teachers play a vital role in the lives of children. They need to be willing to seek support when support is needed. Providing support is one role of Elders in the community.

In addition, an overarching concern in schools and classrooms must be the maintenance and revitalization of Native languages. Within *Anishinaube-mowin* speaking communities, the language is becoming threatened even though statistically the language appears healthy. *Anishinaube-mowin* must be embedded in all of the above activities. Elders can engage in conversations with children in *Anishinaube-mowin* even though the level of fluency in *Anishinaube-mowin* might be limited. Small children learning English language engage in beginner level conversations with older realities. There is no reason that such conversations could not take place in *Anishinaube-mowin*. Further, there is every reason for *Anishinaube-mowin* to be embedded in ceremonies, outdoor education, and community activities to welcome teachers.

These reform efforts will require a realignment of priorities as the education-in-culture model that I recommend is implemented. Schools boards have been given

unprecedented power to align schooling practices to Band and community beliefs and values (Bell et al., 2004; Chiefs of Ontario, 2005). These changes need to be made now before additional generations move into adulthood with questions about their identity and the reasons they are on the Earth (Alfred, 2005; Friesen, 1991; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1999).

This study was not an attempt to provide a detailed blueprint for incorporating traditional knowledge into classrooms; rather, it tried to present a broader picture. I anticipate that over the coming years, as Aboriginal educators work on actual blueprints, the concept of integrating traditional knowledge into classroom instruction will have many different manifestations, and only time will tell which will be the most promising.

What follows this discussion is a personal reflection about my research journey. If I could have taken you with me, I would have, but I did not know where the journey would take me. I can now share this journey with you in the form of *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* words and my words united along a single path. I am deeply honoured to be able to share this with you. *Miigwech*.

Conclusions: A Personal Journey

This study of the nature and character of *Anishinaube* traditional knowledge and values places great emphasis on Elder *Nimkii Beneshii Migizii Kwe's* own words. Emphasizing her words exactly as she spoke them to me is my way of ensuring to the greatest extent possible that her voice will be heard directly, as though the reader had been on the journey with me. In conclusion, I offer my closing thoughts. They are reflective of the personal journey that I experienced in this study.

What Did I Know About Research Prior to This Study?

*What did I know about Research prior this study?
I knew Research was **Education about Learning**
Learning Education about a Worldview
That's what I learned about Research*

*What did I know about Research prior to this study?
I knew Research was about **Higher Learning**
Higher Learning on Education about a Culture
That's what I learned about Research*

*What did I know about Research prior to this study?
I knew Research was on **First-Class, Firsthand Education**
First-Class, Firsthand Education Written only in Books
That's what I learned about Research*

*So...What did I know about Research prior to this study?
I knew that this Research would be...
First-Class, Firsthand Education on Higher Learning not found in Books
It was going to be on Research that would get me **Closer to Home**
That's what I knew about Research prior to this study.
(Maandaa-kwens 2008)*

Prayer

Finally, I extend further my closing invocations in an *Anishinaube-mowin* prayer.

*Miigwech G'Chi-Maanidoo our Great Mystery
Miigwech M'nookmisuk minwaa M'shoomsuk
Miigwech kina gegoogii-miizhiiaang
Miigwech goh gi-wiidookwishnaang
Miigwech goh gwe'ek ji-bimooseyang
Miigwech, Miigwech, Miigwech, Miigwech*

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPANT

Letter of Invitation for Study Participant Printed on LU Letterhead

January 11, 2007

Aaniin/Greetings *Nimkii Beneshiins Kwe*

Chi-Miigwech for your interest in my research on traditional knowledge entitled: TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES TODAY: A LOOK FROM NIMKII BENESHIINS-KWE'S PERSPECTIVE. I have chosen you because your teachings and presence have been interwoven into my life and have had a positive effect on me as a lifelong learner. The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experiences. My study attempts to look at, listen to, and document what traditional knowledge and values mean to you. I will ask permission during the interviews to use an audio recorder; however, at any time, upon your request, I will turn the recorder off. After the interview, I will write out (transcribe) the recordings in a written document.

As a master's of education candidate, I am required by the university to conduct a research project, analyze the data, and submit my findings to an examining committee. Dr. Seth Agbo is my thesis supervisor, and he may be reached at Lakehead University's Faculty of Education at 807-343-8051. As the researcher, I will check my understanding with you as I seek meaning from your stories, discuss the emerging themes as I understand their application to our institute, and identify applications of the findings to meaningful work that will affect others.

The interview process will be conducted between me and you with a high degree of respect in multiple meetings within a one week period at your convenience. As an

Anishinaube, I know that flexibility is important; we will work according to how we are moved. During the remaining interviews, we will review the findings of the previous interview and build from there.

Data will be stored permanently and securely at Lakehead University by my supervisor in his office. All interview tapes and written data (transcripts) will be made available to you upon request at the completion of the research.

During the data analysis portion of the study, I will collaborate with you on a few key occasions to verify my findings, interpretations, and implications of the findings to the institute. You may also read the study prior to its formal submission. The goal is to finalize the study by March 2007.

Dissemination (distribution) of information will occur in a variety of formats. Articles may be written for publication in Aboriginal journals, education journals, and newsletters. Curriculum may also be developed to incorporate the life lessons and stories you share. Formal dissemination of the findings of the research will be in the form of a thesis, a copy of which will be in the Lakehead University Education Library. You will be given a copy for your personal use.

If you want your name used in this study, I will add it to the title of the published document. There may be risks with identifying yourself in the study in that those who read the thesis may seek your advice. You would choose how to respond to each request. If you wish to remain anonymous, the collected data will be treated respectfully in all matters, particularly in regard to confidentiality. You will review the transcriptions of all taped interviews. You will also review and approve the excerpts to be included in the thesis. You may change your mind to remain anonymous or not, and you may withdraw

from this study at any time without any consequences. You may also choose to share your life lessons with those who may want to learn from you.

If you agree to continue, please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me. *Miigwech.*

Respectfully yours,

Susan Bebonang

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

_____ **I consent to participate in the study.**

I understand that:

- a) This study involves an interview and that it will be tape-recorded.
- b) I will have an opportunity to give feedback on the transcript of the interview and thus will have influence over the findings over the editing process leading to the final product.
- c) The researcher may quote segments from the good copy of transcripts within the body of her thesis text.
- d) I may choose a pseudonym (fictitious name) for myself as well as for other people and places.
- e) I may contribute photos as visual support of my message captured in written thesis text, but this is in no way an expectation or an obligation.
- f) Upon completion of Susan Bebonang's thesis, she will share a summary of her findings to me.
- g) I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

I decline to participate

_____ I do not consent to participate in this study, and I understand that this decision will in no way adversely affect me.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____ Telephone _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do traditional knowledge and values mean to you?
2. What did you do as a child that you consider traditional ways of knowing?
3. How were traditional knowledge and values taught to you, and who taught you?
4. What did you learn?
5. What are your traditional responsibilities as a woman?
6. What traditional practices do you continue to do today?
7. What do you think *Anishinaubec* children should be learning in the community and in the school about traditional knowledge and values?