NIM-BII-GO-NINI OJIBWE LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION STRATEGY:

FAMILIES LEARNING OUR LANGUAGE AT HOME

by

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For Mom and Dad

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and

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Abstract

The Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language Revitalization Strategy is a grassroots approach to language learning that has been in collaborative development and implementation with members of my family since December 2008. Nim-bii-go-nini is two words: *Nim-bii-go,* more commonly pronounced Nipigon, and *Nini*, meaning people. We are Lake Nipigon Ojibwe people. This study is one response to some of the negative intergenerational impacts that the Residential Schools have on Aboriginal youth and their families, particularly loss of language and loss of culture. This revitalization strategy is an Eight Cycle Process that includes Basic and Assessment Processes that aid in the organization and development of our language learning plan. Situated within a combined feminist and Indigenous theoretical framework, the study took a participatory action approach wherein I observed and documented my family's ongoing efforts to generate momentum for the revitalization of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language. A phenomenological interview approach helped me gain insight into the impacts of Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language acquisition. In particular, this study describes how my family has needed to renew our familial relationships and rebuild our cultural foundation so that intergenerational knowledge sharing can fully occur; without this renewal and rebuilding, the initial stages of the revitalization of our language could not have taken place. This study demonstrates more than a reversal of the colonizing homogenization of the Western education imposed on us, it is an example of a grassroots effort to rebuild the frayed social fabric of our Indigenous societies through families coming together to learn their language.

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To our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, for your love, strength, and guidance through it all.

My message:
Treat each other with respect. Be especially good to the ones you consider weaker or less powerful than yourself; you never know who they will become.

Nya:weh, Meegwetch

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Many scholars assert that self-esteem is a basic need that determines self-worth and constitutes the core of personality (Ing, 1991; Maslow, 1943). Yet, from 1857 to 1996 Canadian church and state policies "geared toward the final solution of the Indian problem" (Scott in Annett, 2001, p. 6), [1] enacted through Residential Schools, have extensively damaged self-esteem in Aboriginal people in genocidal efforts to "re-program" them in order to access their traditional lands and resources (Annett, 2001; Chrisjohn, Maraun & Young, 2006; Knockwood, 2005). Aboriginal children have inherited, amongst other bequests, a legacy of low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, low valuing of education, lack of pride in their uniqueness, language loss, identity confusion, disrespect for their heritage and family, and many suffer from an inferiority complex (Haig-Brown, 1988; Ing, 1991; Johnston, 1988; Nawagesic, 2001; RCAP, 1994). Provincial educational institutions via their Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy continue to assimilate and acculturate Aboriginal children and consequently prevent them from reaching their full academic and human potential (Adams, 1999; Battiste, 2002; Ing, 1991; RCAP, 1994).

Despite the fact that many Aboriginal parents have recognized the struggles and have voiced their concerns with the mainstream education system, their efforts have been largely to no avail (Miller, 1996). Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, in identifying "symptoms of oppression" as manifestations of Canada's colonial history, maintain that it is imperative that Aboriginal people decolonize our own consciousnesses in order to transform our circumstances (Freire, 2000; McPherson & Rabb, 2003; Nawagesic, 2001). A crucial aspect of this decolonization process entails a profound realization that the social conditions under which Aboriginal people live are not the result of inherent defects in our character, but rather are the

[1] The term "Final Solution" was not coined by Hitler or the Nazis, but prior to WWII by Indian Affairs Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott in April of 1910 when he referred to how he envisioned the "Indian Problem" in Canada being solved (Annett, 2001, p. 6).

results of an ongoing systematic and systemic assimilation program (Battiste, 2002; Ing, 1991). Given that one object of attack in Residential Schools was language, we must emphasize that the foundation of Indigenous culture is our oral tradition and thus build self-esteem in Aboriginal children through the renewal of Indigenous culture and language (Fishman, 1991; Haig-Brown, 1988; Reyhner, 1999). It is upon these foundations that intergenerational knowledge sharing can occur around how to strive for *m'no b'modziwin* (try to live a balanced, harmonious or good life).

Using a participatory approach, situated within an Indigenous, feminist, post-structural, decolonizing framework (Kovach, 2005; Smith, 1999), in this qualitative study I observed and documented my family's ongoing efforts to generate momentum for the revitalization of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language.

Personal Background

I came into language revitalization trying to help my oldest son do well in school. I saw that he did not like school and that the other students did not welcome him into their peer groups. After conducting numerous tests on him, the teachers and principals concluded that due to his low academic achievement and behavioural problems they could not help him and made referrals to counselling agencies. Although we followed through, the referrals were not effective and the situation for my son did not change. I knew that we were on our own. I took on the challenge of finding a way to help my son through my own academic studies. Much of the literature I read pointed to language revitalization as a way to help Aboriginal youth to succeed academically. Marie Battiste (2002) has said that language is the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge and that where there is cultural strength, there is academic success. The

development of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibway Language Revitalization Strategy, then, is a result of my efforts to help my son, and other members of my family.

I am a graduate student in the Masters of Education program at Lakehead University. I am a mother to three children aged eight, eleven and sixteen years, and I am the second oldest of eight siblings. I am of Anishnabe[2], Ojibwe and Haudenosaunee[3], Ongwehonwe and Onondaga ancestry. I am Mohawk and a member of the Mud Turtle Clan through my mother, Onondaga on my biological father's side and Ojibwe through my Dad's side. I am married to an Ojibwe from Long Lake #58 First Nation and had lived there until I decided to attend Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. I have lived all of my life on reserves in Canada and have lived off-reserve periodically only for educational purposes.

I was born in Brantford, Ontario and raised by my maternal grandparents on Six Nations territory until I was five years old. I spent most of my childhood between Six Nations and Gull Bay First Nation, and it was not until I was nine years old that I predominantly lived with my mother on Gull Bay First Nation. Over the years, my mother has taught in Six Nations and in various places in Northwestern Ontario including Armstrong and we have lived on reserves such as Constance Lake First Nation and Rocky Bay First Nation. Throughout my youth, the land surrounding Gull Bay was my playground and my place of solace. I feel connected to the land and water there and have my places where I can go and just be. I remember looking out at Lake Nipigon and the land and feeling a sense of belonging and peace that I could not find anywhere else. I feel privileged to have grown up in Gull Bay and because the people who live there have known me since childhood, and I them, I am still and will always be a part of the community.

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[2] Anishnabe constitutes the Peoples of the Three Fires Confederacy and include Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi.
[3] People of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are the Six Nations, Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida and Tuscarora.

I can speak some Ojibwe and what little I do know came from interactions with family and friends in the community. My vocabulary is nothing worth bragging about and consists mainly of teasing phrases and swear words. Because my parents are from two different tribes, they did not speak their languages at home and I do not know any of my Indigenous languages fluently. Although I lived with my grandparents when I was younger, they rarely spoke Mohawk to each other and only when they did not want anyone else to know what they were talking about. My Dad had been taken from his parents and forced to attend St. Joseph's Residential School in Thunder Bay as a child and is traumatized by his experiences there to this day. Despite attempts to eradicate his language, my Dad still speaks fluently what some people have called the "old" Ojibwe.

Significance of Research

As an Indigenous researcher, I am especially interested in the everyday lived experiences of Aboriginal youth and how their families can collectively strive for *m'no b'modziwin* to help them succeed academically through Indigenous language revitalization. My research question was: **Can momentum for the revival of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language be generated in one Anishinabe family and will language revitalization lead to increased self-esteem among its members?**

Although Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have clarified problems facing our peoples and identified areas of Indigenous culture that can be strengthened, I was not aware of this body of knowledge nor had I read any of the literature prior to undertaking university studies. Despite its existence, this important information is not being disseminated to the people who could benefit from it most, for whom it could make the most difference. As a result, many

Indigenous parents already engaged in decolonization are left feeling isolated, frustrated, and powerless to do anything substantial to help their children in crisis. I have not yet found or accessed any practical solutions or effective strategies that relate directly to the everyday lived experiences of Aboriginal youth. When asked, many youth in my family feel the need for cultural fulfillment and want to learn their Native language but they often lack the necessary skills and resources to do so. This study strived to fill these needs.

My thesis research has both practical and scholarly significance. On a practical level, I hope that with a clear fundamental understanding of who they are and where they come from, the Nim-bii-go youth with whom I worked will be better oriented to not only succeed academically, but also in other aspects of their lives. I work from the assumption that when people feel good about themselves they can strive for *m'no b'modziwin*, and then endeavour to reach their full human potential. As an Indigenous mother and academic, I am consciously utilizing the knowledge and skills acquired from Euro-Canadian educational institutions to improve family relations through language revitalization; I hope it can help other Indigenous families who want to come together for a common cause. In addition, this thesis enabled my parents to create a family heirloom and pass a significant part of themselves onto their grandchildren and generations yet to come. Through the recorded language CDs, their voices will reverberate throughout time and will encourage our family to learn their Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language motivated by the love they feel for them.

Additionally, I endeavoured to devise a method to disseminate this information to those who could benefit from it most and for whom it could make the most difference – the people at the grassroots who comprise our communities. Given that Nim-bii-go-nini is inclusive of Indigenous people settled along the shores surrounding Nim-bii-go (Lake Nipigon), now that the

thesis is complete, I am hoping I will receive requests from other Nim-bii-go-nini to share information regarding this project. Indeed, this sort of grassroots interest and sharing of information would be an indication of the success of this strategy and its objective to more widely generate momentum for Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language revitalization. Another indicator of success lies in the ability of my family to speak our Ojibwe language. In order for other Nim-bii-go-nini families who seek to revitalize their language to see this strategy as viable, I must first gain academic credibility from educational institutions by publishing articles and giving presentations at academic symposiums and conferences. Once I have spread the word about this strategy academically, I can then spread the word family to family.

On a scholarly level, this study builds upon existing Indigenous methodologies and contributes to the Aboriginal education literature in terms of its approach, philosophy, pedagogy and curriculum. The subjective epistemology embedded in the theoretical perspective used in this study is Indigenous, specifically Nim-bii-go-nini. I assert that Nim-bii-go-nini research is one of many Indigenous methodologies that embody distinct worldviews, epistemologies, pedagogies, ethics, relationships, cultural values and beliefs (Kovach, 2005; Smith, 1999). Although this combined feminist and Indigenous methodology is not specifically Indigenous Feminism, it does contribute to demonstrating possibilities within this paradigm.

Further, this research initiative aspires to the vision, principles, and goals addressed by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education in their Accord on Indigenous Education. These goals are: Respectful and Welcoming Learning Environments; Respectful and Inclusive Curricula; Culturally Responsive Pedagogies; Mechanisms for Valuing and Promoting Indigeneity in Education; Culturally Responsive Assessment; Affirming and Revitalizing Indigenous Languages; Indigenous Education Leadership; Non-Indigenous Learners and

Indigeneity; and Culturally Respectful Indigenous Research (ACDE, 2009). My research aids in addressing a major concern with teacher and graduate education that Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized and have limited application to students in general. Given that Aboriginal ideas have historically been a heavy, but largely ignored, influence in shaping Canada as a Métis nation, Indigenous education and Indigenous knowledge systems nonetheless continue to be a part of the foundation of Canadian institutions waiting acknowledgement (Saul, 2008). Language revitalization "is a contribution to many of the central problems that eat away at modern life, at modern man [sic] and at modern society" (Fishman, 1991, p. 7). Indigenous language revitalization benefits everyone in that it "will result in a world that is more deeply compassionate, wise, more caring and protective of the Earth, and more beautiful for its songs, ceremonies, and prayers" (Johansen, 2004, p. 569). My research enhances the profile and benefits of Indigenous education within educational institutions and the public at large by proudly presenting a living, culturally viable example of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy within academia and within society. This study brings attention to the diversity of learning strategies and how education can and should be culturally inclusive and adapted to the context and needs of learners. "At every level – whether philosophical or utilitarian – the Aboriginals do have much to offer the rest of us" (Saul, 2008, p. 25).

The bulk of the language revitalization content, syntax and pedagogy was elicited from the knowledge and life experiences of my father. He is a living educational treasure, a Residential School survivor, a testament to the strength and endurance of our people, and one of the few "elders, knowledge keepers, and workers who are competent in Aboriginal languages and knowledge" that "comprise a functioning Aboriginal university based on Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy" (Battiste, 2002, p. 21). As a family, we developed and continue to

develop our own tailor-made strategy that utilizes our own resources, which concomitantly adds to Indigenous knowledge, pedagogy and language revitalization curriculum materials.

This strategy incorporates a wholistic pedagogical approach that takes into consideration the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of teachers and learners. Featured within its Eight Cycle Process are Basic and Assessment Processes that aid in organizing and developing our language learning plan. Utilizing Bingo as both a learning game and organizational tool, we have developed a nine week Language Learning Plan and an accompanying assessment, our Footsteps Chart. Centering on family dinners, our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language Revitalization Strategy incorporates a Talking Circle component that aids in addressing some of the intergenerational impacts that the Residential School has had on our family as a whole. This problem solving technique has helped my family to learn to communicate with one another in a healthy way as we deal with the many issues that we must face as Aboriginal People in Canada.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Language

The basic principle of any language, as I understand it, is agreed-upon concepts and sounds with symbols or characters that represent meaning to the users of that language (McPherson, INDI-3100 Research Methodology - Lecture, 2006). Virtually all people have within their culture their own distinct language and symbols that record meaning and transmit their history to future generations (NMAI, p. 1). Many Indigenous peoples possess distinct forms of written communication, even if European immigrants did not recognize them as such. Long before Columbus, written methods of communication were used, such as the wampum belts of the Haudenosaunee, illustrated codices of the Aztecs and Maya, the winter counts of the Plains[4], elaborate knots, and notched wood, etched stone, and rock paintings or pictographs (Johansen, 2004, p. 577).

The pictographs that still exist on and around Lake Nipigon and Gull Bay are examples of this symbolic language principle. I know of a pictograph that was painted in red on a sheer rock wall that juts out from the lake, surrounded by water like an island. The pictograph was of a person, standing in a canoe, with arms outstretched over his or her head, and holding a paddle in his or her hands. Although I did not know what this pictograph meant, I wondered what materials were used to paint on the rock and marvelled at how long the pictograph must have been there as I traced my finger along the outline of the rough textured image. I asked my Dad if he knew what kind of paint was used to adhere to the rock surface for so long. He said that they must have used eggs mixed with something for colour. These symbolic language principles have much spiritual significance that has yet to be fully understood and acknowledged. I have heard my brothers talk

[4] Measured from the first snowfall to the next year's first snowfall, a winter count was a series of spiralling pictographs painted onto a buffalo hide that helped Plains tribes to record histories and to keep track of the passage of years (NMAI, p. 1).

about seeing similar pictographs while trapping and fishing out on the lake. They described them as being smaller and closer to the ground, which we think indicated that they may have represented the *Ma-ma-gweh-seh*, or Little People that live in the area. They were told not to bother them and they left tobacco at the base of the paintings. I have asked my Dad if he knew what the symbols meant, but he did not and said that his Dad or some of the older folks in Gull Bay might still know what they mean. I understand that these pictographs are a part of our written Ojibwe language and that they symbolize and record events that occurred in that area a time long ago.

Language functions as more than a means to communicate and transmit ideas. According to Richard Littlebear (1999), "'language is the basis of sovereignty' as well as the vessel of culture" (p. 2). [5] At the time of Columbus' first landfall in 1492, there were "at least three hundred distinct Native American languages … spoken in North America" (Johansen, 2004, p, 570). Today, there are 190 languages remaining, with a great many in imminent danger of being lost. Only "20 of 175 surviving Native American languages in the United States are still being learned as a first language by children from their parents" (Johansen, 2004, p. 570). A passage on the 15th Annual Sustaining Indigenous Languages Symposium (SILS) website remarks that, "every two weeks another of the world's languages is no longer being spoken" (SILS, 2008, p. 1).

In his article, "Back from the (Nearly) Dead: Reviving Indigenous Language across North America," Bruce Johansen (2004) wrote about the people of the Cochiti Pueblo, near Albuquerque, New Mexico, and how they "were moved to revitalize their language after they conducted a survey that disclosed that all of its fluent speakers were thirty-five years of age or

[5]To elaborate, Littlebear (1999) has said that, "We have all those attributes that comprise sovereign nations: a governance structure, law and order, jurisprudence, literature, a land base, spiritual and sacred practices, and that one attribute that holds all of these other attributes together: our languages" (p. 2).

older. The few speakers under age thirty-five were semiliterate" (p. 566). He quoted Mary Eunice Romero, a Keres speaking Pueblo, who asked, "What is going to happen to our language in 20 years when those [who are] 35 years old become 55? In 20 more years, when they're 75?" (Johansen, 2004, p. 566). It has been estimated that "without programs to make young people fluent in Native languages, 70-percent of the Native languages that are spoken today in North America will die with the next generations of Elders" (Johansen, 2004, p. 570).

Joshua Fishman, a pioneer in the revitalization of Indigenous languages worldwide, has said that,

> The most important relationship between language and culture … is that most of the culture is expressed in the language. Take language away from the culture and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, riddles, proverbs, and prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handled in any other way. You are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing the land upon which you live and the human reality that you're talking about. (Fishman in Johansen, 2004, pp. 569-570)

Much loss can be traced to the Residential Schools, where the language was literally beaten out of Indigenous children who were forced to live there. In her article, "The Effects of Residential Schools on Native Child-Rearing Practices," Rosalyn Ing (1991) has said that, "Because the object of attack in the Residential Schools was the language, it is necessary to emphasize that the foundation of Native cultures is its oral tradition, to reaffirm that the loss, or near loss, of the language has affected the traditional way of life" (p. 77).

It is important for us as Indigenous people to understand that the social conditions that we live under today are not of our own doing but are the result of what has been done to us. There are many reasons why Indigenous parents did not pass their language on to their children. Some have tried to protect their children from the same brutal punishment that they had endured for speaking their language. Others passed on the parenting "skills" they witnessed in the Residential Schools to the next generation and raised their children in the same manner in which they were raised; they did unto their children what had been done unto them (Haig-Brown, 1988; Ing, 1991; Knockwood, 2005; RCAP, 1994).

I am not sure that simply knowing the language is enough to give our children what they need to become fulfilled in knowing who they are. I am beginning to think that the fulfillment that Indigenous academics have mentioned is about the *process* of learning, that it is more about the journey than the actual getting there. *How* we revitalize our language is just as important, if not more so, than the actually achievement of it. Jon Reyhner (1999) has said that,

> Historically, school-based second language teaching has not led to widespread 'communicative competency' (the ability to carry on a sustained conversation) in the new language for most students. It is extremely important to use language teaching methods in schools that will prepare and encourage students to use the language they are learning outside of school. (p. viii)

Reyhner synthesized the work of other academics and outlined five principles that need addressing, with varying degrees of emphasis, in effective language-teaching programs:

> 1) Putting primary emphasis on communication, not grammar, 2) Using context that is real or at least realistic, 3) Processing content of high interest to the learner, 4) Adjusting the pace of instruction to the students' progress, including moving

> from simple to complex (generally speaking), emphasizing speaking over speaking correctly, and putting comprehension before completion, and finally 5) Correcting students through modeling. (pp. viii, x)

We know that in the Residential Schools, Indigenous children were denigrated and abused for speaking their language. We appear to have replicated some of that pedagogy. I have noticed that sometimes when someone makes a mistake as they try to learn their language, they are teased and ridiculed. I was slightly surprised and also reassured when I found that language revitalization and Indigenous academics have addressed this issue. When speaking at the Fourth Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium in Flagstaff, Arizona, Littlebear (1999) challenged himself to come up with different ways to say "just speak your language," and talked about seven ideas that he had come up with. His fifth radical idea entails that,

> ...we must inform our own elders and our fluent speakers that they must be more accepting of those people who are just now learning our languages. We must sensitize our elders and fluent speakers to the needs of potential speakers of our languages. In many of our tribes, the elders are teachers and bearers of wisdom. As a result, when they criticize or make fun of a person trying to speak one of our languages they are taken very seriously, and some people will not even try to speak the language once they have been criticized by a respected elder of that tribe. When this happens, it hastens the death of that language. Somehow we must turn this negativity around. Do not be so over-corrective about pronunciation. We all make mistakes. I have spoken two languages all of my life, and yet I still make mistakes in both of them. I spent five years intensively studying the English language, and I still make mistakes in that language in reading, writing, and

> speaking. However, in spite of my mistakes, I have been successful at writing articles and speeches in the English language and some have even been published. As long as we can understand each other, we are doing all right. Understanding each other in our languages is the main criterion, not our errors in pronunciation and grammar. Later on we can work on correct pronunciation, but first let us get people talking our languages and this latter aspect is going to take time. (pp. 3-4)

It is also important to know that there are many Indigenous people around the world who, like Indigenous people in North America, have been colonized and oppressed by dominating settler societies, with negative consequences for language.[6] Their children, like ours, continue to suffer the consequences and poor academic success that oppressive education systems have created. The Maori of New Zealand are one of the examples of an Indigenous group who attended Residential Schools and learned in a colonial language, also with negative results. "Because Maori children, despite speaking English, were doing poorly in school, a preschool movement was started. Putting children in school at an earlier age, along with the spread of radio, television, and movies, accelerated the rate of Maori language loss" (Reyhner, 2005, p. 2). An additional example is Native Hawaiians, another Polynesian people:

> Before the late 19th century, when Hawaii was an independent nation, Hawaiian children were taught to read and write in their Hawaiian language in their own schools. But after a coup d'etat overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893, American missionaries and businessmen used their newfound power to outlaw the use of the Hawaiian language schools throughout the islands. As a result, by the

[6] It is interesting to note that not all Indigenous people are people of colour and not all white people belong to dominating settler societies. The Sami People, one of the Indigenous people of northern Europe whose ancestral lands encompass parts of northern Sweden, Norway, Finland, Russia and the Ukraine, also struggle for their Indigenous rights to self-determination and freedom from oppression (Solbakk, Bennett, and Cubrilo, 2006).

> 1980s, there were few Hawaiian children who could still speak their heritage language in the 1980s. Again, despite speaking only English, these children did not do well in school. (Reyhner, 2005, p. 2)

Language Stabilization

With the revitalization of Indigenous languages, there is much to be gained. According to Battiste (2002),

> Language is by far the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous language and their symbolic, verbal, and unconscious orders structure Indigenous knowledge; therefore, educators cannot stand outside of Indigenous languages to understand Indigenous knowledge. Where Indigenous knowledge survives, it is transmitted through Aboriginal languages. Where Aboriginal languages, heritages, and communities are respected, supported, and connected to elders and education, educational successes among Aboriginal students can be found. (p. 17)

In efforts to reverse the language loss trend, many immersion programs have been started in communities around the world by the people themselves. Beginning at the grassroots, language revival through immersion programs have spread across Turtle Island, including amongst the Native peoples of Hawaii, the Cochiti Pueblo of New Mexico, and the people of Akwesesne Mohawk territory (Johansen, 2004, p. 567). In 1982, Maori language activists responded to the language loss trend with a movement for Maori immersion preschools, known as Te Kohanga Reo (the language nest):

> Relying on the fact that many elders still spoke Maori, schools were able to operate entirely in the native language. In addition, smoking was banned, they

> were to be kept very clean, and parents and preschool teachers made the decisions. By 1998 there were over 600 of these preschools. Wanting their children's Maori education continued and based on the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi with the British government, activists convinced the New Zealand government to provide first Maori immersion elementary schools. Secondary schools soon followed and finally Maori language university programs, which helped prepare Maori teachers to work in immersion schools. (Reyhner, 2005, p. 2)

Observing the success of the Maori, in 1984, "Native Hawaiians started their own language nests (Punano Leo) after parents successfully petitioned the state to change its English-only law. As in New Zealand, popular support extended the Hawaiian language immersion programs into the public schools. By 1996, there were nine sites serving 175 children; in 2003 there were 12 preschools and 23 public schools with Hawaiian immersion classes" (Reyhner, 2005, p. 2).

In 1996, the Cochiti Pueblo immersion program began with a summer program for thirty children under instruction from the Tribal Council. All instruction was carried out orally, with no written texts. The program grew quickly as the news spread throughout the community. They started with four teachers and with sixty children in attendance. By the third week, the attendance grew to ninety and by the end of the summer, the children were starting to speak. These experiences at the Cochiti Pueblo reflect a language revitalization trend across North America, where many Indigenous languages that have been on the verge of extinction are being spoken and taught through immersion programs (Johansen, 2004, p. 566).

Founded in 1979 by Mohawk parents concerned with the lack of cultural and linguistic services available in local public schools, the Akwesasne Freedom School (AFS) is an

independent elementary/middle school that conducts full day classes from pre-Kindergarten to grade 9 year round. Parents and teachers operate the AFS through a consensus decision-making process with financial support primarily from donations and fundraising activities. In 1985, a historic decision was made to adopt a total Mohawk immersion curriculum. AFS was the first to implement this type of curriculum and did so without approval or funding from state, federal or provincial governments. (AFS serves a Nation straddling the U.S.-Canadian border.) The School was formed to help make the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) Nation strong again. "By focusing on our young people, we reverse the assimilation process and ensure that the Mohawk people do not lose their language, culture and identity" (Akwesasne Freedom School, 2010; Kanien'keha:ka - Living the Language, 2010). Language revitalization at Akwesasne has become such a part of general community life that a quarter of the people now speak Mohawk with some degree of fluency. The weekly community newspaper, *Indian Time*, carries regular Mohawk language lessons that cover everyday situations such as weather (Johansen, 2004, p. 575).

For the past sixteen years, the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium (SILS) has been disseminating information about effective practices to teach and learn Indigenous languages. Held across the United States and Canada, these symposia have brought together community language activists, language teachers and linguists to share and disseminate ways to revitalize our precious Indigenous linguistic heritage so that it will not be lost to our children. The goals of the Symposia are:

> To bring together Indigenous language educators and activists to share ideas and experiences on how to teach effectively Indigenous languages in homes, classrooms, and communities; To provide a forum for exchange of scholarly research on teaching Indigenous languages; and To disseminate through the

> Internet and monographs recent research and thinking on best practices to promote, preserve, and protect Indigenous languages. (SILS, 2008, p. 1)

A number of books have been published from a selection of papers presented at the symposia. Many of the references for this section of the literature review have, in fact, been taken from one such book, *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages*. Overall, the papers discuss opportunities and obstacles faced by language revitalization efforts, programs and models for promoting Indigenous languages, the role of writing in Indigenous language renewal, and how new technology is being used to compile Indigenous language dictionaries, publish Indigenous language materials, and link together dispersed language communities.

Benefits of Language

There are many benefits of learning Indigenous languages that have profound impacts on children. I will argue that through a decolonized approach to revitalization of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language, renewed pride in identity and improved self-esteem can result. I theorize that the process involved in learning and the actual speaking of the language fills a void in children that they may not have even consciously realized was there. Because I do not speak my own languages fluently, I can only imagine the fulfillment that knowing, speaking and living a language brings.

Language scholars assert that learning to speak your language can help children improve their social behaviour through knowledge of appropriate cultural protocol, renew strength in families and in our spirituality, and foster love of our language, love of our people, love of our land, and love of knowledge (Johansen, 2004; Reyhner, 2005). Intergenerational language transmission at home can strengthen families and can benefit babies and young children in their acquisition of the language (Reyhnerner, 1999). Language can also help youth to feel that they

belong and are distinct instead of looking to gangs or becoming assimilated to the dominant society (Littlebear, 1999):

> Our youth are apparently looking to urban gangs for those things that will give them a sense of identity, importance, and belongingness. It would be so nice if they would look to our own tribal characteristics because we already have all the things that our youth are apparently looking for and finding in socially destructive gangs. We have all the characteristics in our tribal structures that will reaffirm the identities of our youth. Gangs have distinctive colors, clothes, music, heroes, symbols, rituals, and "turf" (our reservations). We American Indian tribes have these too. We have distinctive colors, clothes, music, heroes, symbols, and rituals, and we need to teach our children about the positive aspects of American Indian life at an early age so they know who they are. Perhaps in this way we can inoculate them against the disease of gangs. Another characteristic that really makes a gang distinctive is the language they speak. If we could transfer the young people's loyalty back to our own tribes and families, we could restore the frayed social fabric of our reservations. We need to make our children see our languages and cultures as viable and just as valuable as anything they see on television, movies, or videos. (pp. 4-5)

In summarizing Steve Greymorning's 1997 symposium presentation and paper, "Going Beyond Words," Reyhner advocates the Maori "philosophy of language from the breast," which emphasizes intergenerational language transmission in the home. The Maori have started language classes for mothers with children 16 to 24 months old. Mothers learn Maori while their

babies also learn the sounds and cadences of their tribal language. Reyhner (1999) describes how:

> young children pick up the sounds and rhythms of the language(s) spoken around them and how older children not so exposed to their tribe's language need specific help to pick up the sound system that they do not learn at their mother's side. It is well known that infants who are breast fed pick up immunities from childhood diseases from their mother's milk, and ... children who learn their [I]ndigenous language and culture at their mother's breast pick up immunities from the diseases of modern life that lead our children to joining youth gangs, abusing drugs and alcohol, and becoming members of the rootless consumer society. (p. xvii)

The Cochiti immersion program that began in 1996 grew quickly and started positive behaviour change in the children learning to speak Cochiti. According to Mary Eunice Romero, when the kids went home, they spread the news that, "Wow, they're not using any English. They're not writing. It's just totally Cochiti" (Johansen, 2004, p. 566). Romero noticed that the mode of instruction or pedagogy changed the behaviour of the children. Most kids came into the program as rowdy as can be, but by the time they left, they knew the appropriate protocol of how to enter a house, greet an elder, say good-bye. This behavioural change was attributed to the fact that the kids could now use verbal communication for the most important pieces of culture, that of values and love, which started a chain reaction in the community.

Another example of the benefits of a custom-made Indigenous pedagogy is illustrated by Reyhner (2005) who spoke with a parent of a Punano Leo student in Hawai'i, who described its curriculum as a way of life that you take home. This mode of instruction was seen to bring back the moral values of the culture and help mend families. Having more input into their children's

learning, parents became more involved in learning their Hawaiian language as well and volunteering to help clean the school. Hawaiian immersion schools graduated their first high school students in 1999 and by 2005 had more than 3,000 students in grades K-12. At the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, both undergraduate and graduate programs are taught in the Hawaiian language.

Role of Technology

The role of technology in the revitalization of Indigenous languages is complex and presents many issues and concerns. Like education, technology can be a double-edged sword depending on how you use it. Some people feel that the use of technology as a pedagogy changes the language in ways that detract from it (Littlebear, 1999). Others caution against putting too much reliance upon language media and not enough emphasis on people at the grassroots (Valiquette in Reyhnerner, 1998). Still, language and culture are alive because the people who live them are. When people use the tools around them to suit the needs of their communities, technology can be helpful.

Reyhner (1999) notes important factors found in successful efforts to maintain minority languages. Most important to minority language preservation is the intergenerational transmission of the language in the home by families, and not in government policies and laws. In his landmark 1991 book, *Reversing Language Shift*, Joshua Fishman asserts that, "The road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity" (p. 91). Reyhner (1999) reiterates this and cautions against placing too much reliance on native language media, schools, and governmental efforts. An Indigenous language radio station or policy statements such as those found in the Native American Languages Act of 1990 can make

for a friendlier environment for minority languages, but they are no substitute for grassroots efforts focused on using Indigenous language in homes and at community social occasions.

One of the objections Littlebear (1999) has against technology and the mechanical and electronic means of teaching Indigenous languages advocated by many is that we omit the "spice words" that enliven our languages. These "spice words" are words that give variety and meaning to our languages. When taken out of context, these words are isolated and do not stand alone because they often depend on grammatical and semantic links to whatever is being discussed. When people are recorded speaking their own languages, these "spice words" are often omitted and the languages become very stilted and formal. Advocating the use and appreciation of home-produced curriculum materials, Littlebear (1999) encourages community members to support their school-based programs and to do things that are proactive and positive to ensure the continued use of Indigenous languages. Noting the continual evolution of language, he goes on to assert that,

> Words change; cultures change; social situations change. Consequently, one generation does not speak the same language as the preceding generation. Languages are living, not static. If they are static, then they are beginning to die. When I first heard young Cheyennes speaking Cheyenne a little differently from the way my generation did, I was upset. One little added glottal stop here and there and I thought my whole world was falling apart. It wasn't, and it still hasn't fallen apart. So we must welcome new speakers of our languages to our languages, especially the young ones, and recognize they will continue to shape our languages as they see fit, just as my generation and the generation before mine did. (p. 4)

In his discussion of the uses of technology in Indigenous language revitalization efforts, Reyhner comments on both the benefits and disadvantages of these "technofixes" for endangered languages. Drawing upon the work of Hilaire Paul Valiquette, he asserts that computers are the most questionable of language teaching tools:

> They are not cost-effective; they bypass intergenerational teaching; they often involve handing over control to technical experts. They are very often connected with bad L[anguage] teaching (word lists, clicking on the face to hear the word 'nose,' etc.). Their use makes a patronizing statement: "the superiority of technology of the dominant culture is saving you". (Valiquette in Reyhner, 1999, pp. xv-xvi)

Nonetheless, commenting on the positive aspects of technology, Reyhner went on to write that, "Computers do have a use in long-range language preservation" (1999, p. xvi), and then described a dictionary project as a good example of using technology to inexpensively aid both language documentation and to make that information more accessible to Indigenous language learners. He also mentioned research that described tape recorders and other technologies being used to help an oral culture be maintained and diffused in Africa (Reyhner, 1999, p. xvi).

The ideas described in this literature review have been used to collaboratively design the language revitalization strategy studied in this thesis. The readings generated from the Sustaining Indigenous Languages Symposia (SILS) have inspired me to visualize what the revitalization of our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language might look like for us. I am encouraged by the sense of community that these authors and editors convey through their work and aspire to add my voice to theirs in this revitalization song.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

Indigenous Methodologies

The subjective epistemology embedded in the theoretical perspective that was used in this study was Indigenous, specifically Nim-bii-go-nini. I assert that Nim-bii-go-nini research is one of many Indigenous methodologies that embody distinct worldviews, epistemologies, pedagogies, ethics, relationships, cultural values and beliefs (Kovach, 2005; Smith, 1999). Despite the lack of literature and studies conducted that employ a Nim-bii-go-nini research approach, a Nim-bii-go-nini theory of knowledge and knowledge production lies at the foundation of this study because it is undertaken from the perspective and worldview of a Nim-bii-go-nini person utilizing Western tools to conduct research into issues that are of deep personal interest. I am a Nim-bii-go-nini woman and I cannot separate where I come from and who I am from how I think and experience the world. Similarly, Indigenous epistemology and methodology are what make Indigenous research distinctly Indigenous, rather than the methods.

Indigenous methodologies are one of a variety of emancipatory methodologies, such as feminist, critical and postmodern/post-structural, that align objectives of liberation and experiences of marginalization, silencing and injustice within their frameworks (Kovach, 2005). The Indigenous methodology that will be utilized in this study is influenced by the Kaupapa Mâori research described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her 2000 article, "On Tricky Ground," and in her 1999 book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, as well as by the methodologies described by Margaret Kovach in her 2005 article, "Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies."

Smith (1999) has said that, "Decolonization … does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather it is about centering our

concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p.39). She explained that Kaupapa Mâori, or Mâori research, is one of many Indigenous methodologies. She explained that, "Mâori scholars have coined their research approach as Kaupapa Mâori research rather than employing the term '[I]ndigenist'" given that "Kaupapa Mâori research has developed its own life, as an approach or theory of research methodology, it has applied across different disciplinary fields, including the sciences" (p. 90). She maintains that "researchers who employ a Kaupapa Mâori approach are employing quite consciously a set of arguments, principles, and frameworks that relate to the purpose, ethics, analyses, and outcomes of research" (p.90) that are theorized and practiced from a Mâori way of knowing and being in the world. She makes connections between Kaupapa Mâori and feminist research that "has challenged the deep patriarchy of Western knowledge and opened up new spaces for the examination of epistemological difference" (p. 88) as well as the "[c]ritical and social justice approaches to qualitative research [that] have provided academic space for much of the early work of [I]ndigenous research" (p. 90).

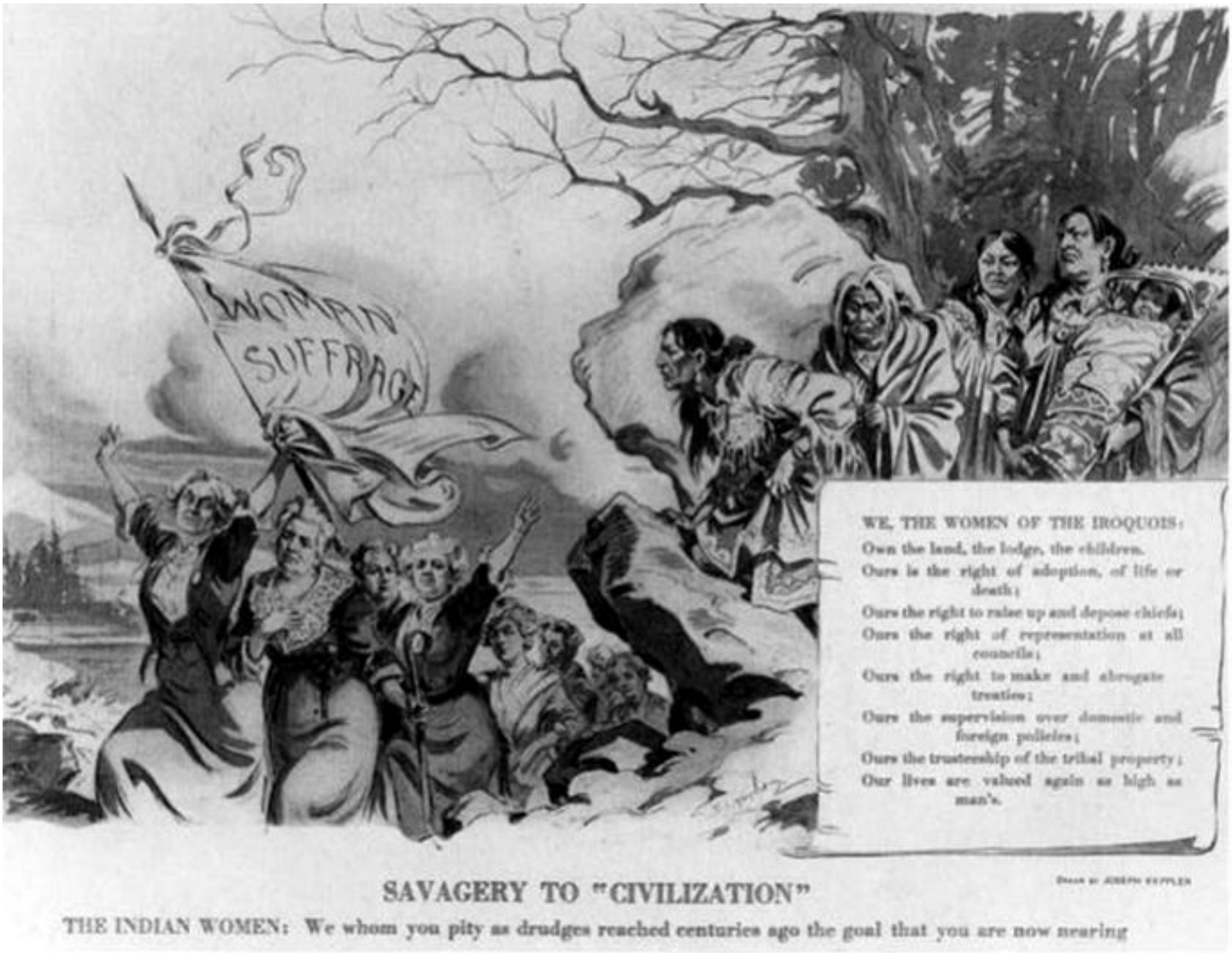
Feminist conceptual and analytical tools that will be used in this study are feminist standpoint theory, feminist post-modernism, symbolic annihilation, and agnotology. Feminist standpoint theory is a way of knowing and producing knowledge that assumes that there is "a" women's perspective while feminist post-modernism assumes a multiplicity of perspectives (Ardovini-Brooker, 2002). Symbolic annihilation is a concept that addresses stereotypes in the media which is revealed through agnotology – the study of culturally induced ignorances (Shiebinger, 2004). It has been suggested that the objective of stereotypes is "not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations" (Hill Collins, 1991, p. 69). It has been further suggested that negative controlling images are

manipulated through symbolic annihilation, which is a process where women, and men, as symbols, are ignored, trivialized, exploited or denigrated in media (Tuchman, Daniels & Benét, 1978). Historian of science Robert Proctor (in Shiebinger, 2004) has said that,

> [a]gnotology serves as a counterweight to traditional concerns for epistemology, refocusing questions about "how we know" to include questions about what we do *not* know, and why not. Ignorance is often not merely the absence of knowledge but an outcome of cultural and political struggle. … What we know or do not know at any one time or place is shaped by particular histories, local and global priorities, institutional disciplinary hierarchies, personal and professional myopia, and much else as well. (p. 237)

I have embodied each of these emancipatory tools within this study both conceptually and analytically. As conceptual tools, feminist standpoint theory and feminist post-modernism are paralleled within the Indigenous paradigm in that there is "a" Nim-bii-go-nini perspective within Indigenous knowledge and knowledge production. This is simultaneous to the post-modern assumption of multiple perspectives that are exemplified within the Indigenous knowledge systems of the many and diverse Indigenous Peoples of the world. This study highlights the analytical tool, symbolic annihilation, as it is illustrated in the trivial status and marginal position of Indigenous education within Canadian educational institutions in general (Battiste, 2002; Saul, 2008) and within feminism in particular (Lindberg, 2004; Maracle, 1996). In addition to its epistemological applications, I have utilized agnotology as a decolonizing analytical tool to better understand knowledge and knowledge production. As a result, I have come to view feminism and women's rights in North America as an Indigenous/European or Métis idea that is illustrated in the photograph, "Savagery to Civilization" (See Figure 1) and

Figure 1: Savagery to "Civilization" from Grinde & Johansen (1990); Landsman (1992)



THE INDIAN WOMEN: We whom you pity as drudges
reached centuries ago the goal that you are now nearing

We, the women of the Iroquois
Own the Land, the Lodge, the Children
Ours is the right to adoption, life or death;
Ours is the right to raise up and depose chiefs;
Ours is the right to representation in all councils;
Ours is the right to make and abrogate treaties;
Ours is the supervision over domestic and foreign policies;
Ours is the trusteeship of tribal property;
Our lives are valued again as high as man's.

philosophically conceptualized by John Ralston Saul (2008) in *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*. Saul argues that Canada is a Metis civilization that exists "upon a triangular foundation of Aboriginals, francophones and anglophones" (p. 119) given that "[a]nyone whose family arrived before the 1760s is probably part Aboriginal" (p. 8). He asserts that the lived history of Canada has been deeply influenced by the political, civil and commercial relationships with Aboriginal people that have been carefully negotiated through European intermarriage with Indigenous women (p. 11). Our Grandmothers' influence is still felt today.

Although this combined feminist and Indigenous methodology is not specifically Indigenous Feminism, this Nim-bii-go-nini framework incorporates feminist analysis as a tool for challenging racism and colonialism (Lindberg, 2004; Maracle, 1996) and will undoubtedly add significantly to the debate within this paradigm. Given that some feminisms[7] plagiarize Indigenous concepts and exclude the early contributions of Indigenous peoples (and women) to Western knowledge and technology, I refuse to include myself within a proclaimed emancipatory paradigm that creates, perpetuates and reaffirms culturally induced ignorances and continues to symbolically annihilate me and my cultural heritage. Should feminisms choose to further engage with agnotology and include a revised decolonized history of feminism as it relates to Indigenous peoples (See Figure 1), along with the works of authors like Lee Maracle (1996), Tracey Lindberg (2004), and Paulo Freire (2000), as well as early feminists such as Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898) and modern feminist Sally Roesch Wagner, in their (currently White) Women's Studies introductory and development of feminist thought courses, I might

[7] I use the term "Feminisms" as described by Tracey Lindberg (2004) in her article "Not My Sister: What Feminists Can Learn From Indigenous Women." She says that "Feminisms, as homes to ideological theories, understandings, and beliefs, cannot encompass and further that which they do not understand—that which they cannot experience" (p. 345).

reconsider my position within a feminist framework and would be happy to contribute to Indigenous Feminism in a more meaningful and integrative manner.

Returning to Indigenous research, Kovach (2005) asserts that although research has been, and in some instances still is, used as a tool of colonization and oppression, Indigenous research can be used as a practical tool in decolonization and in the larger struggle for self-determination (p. 33). Although Indigenous peoples have been "researched to death" by non-Indigenous researchers, by engaging in our own research inquiry based on actual, not presumed need, we can find out things that effectively respond to those inquiries. "Researching back" is a decolonizing approach to research that implies resistance, recovery, and renewal (Kovach, 2005, p. 32, 33). Kovach further states that "methodologies from the margins" that do not hide from but embrace the political nature of research are the greatest ally of Indigenous research (p. 33). She describes her exploratory work as a voyage into "emerging writing, conversations, and thinking within Indigenous research and its role within the production of knowledge" (p. 21). Although she says that Indigenous researchers "make research political simply by being who we are" (p. 20), I disagree with this assertion of basic identity politics. Just because a researcher may be a woman does not necessarily mean that her research is feminist. Likewise, I have known some Aboriginal researchers who were not motivated personally or politically by collective emancipatory concerns.

Participants

Members of my immediate family who have taken part in our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language revitalization strategy are: my Dad and Mom, Lester and Lorna, both age 60; my five sisters, Melanie, Dawnis, Randi, Rose, and Cheri, ages 40, 33, 28, 26 and 24; my twin brothers,

Lester Jr., and Louis Jr., age 32; my sister-in-law, Katherine, age 26; my brothers-in-law, Randy, and Douglas Jr., ages 38 and 32; my sons, Dwight and Dalton, ages 16 and 11; my daughter, Demi, age 8; my eleven nephews, Lorne, Lester III, Daniel, Randy Jr., William, Kazmair, Douglas III, Lucas, Linden, Dra'go, and Louis III, ages 14, 13, 12, 11, 8, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1; my nephew-in-law, Cory, age 26, my five nieces, Maigan, Jeanette, Mariah, Brandi-Rae, and Louanna, ages 20, 16, 12, 8 and 3; and my grand-niece, Myley, age 1. Including myself and my partner, Wendell, at any given time there have been at least 35 people participating, with 19 youth who are 16 years of age and younger. This strategy is an ongoing process and as such, the thesis thus far has focused on participant experiences of Cycles 1 through 4, and preparation of Cycle 5.

Once REB approval/permission was granted for this study, the participants in our language revitalization strategy were contacted in person and by phone, and a meeting was set up to determine who was interested in participating in the research study. For those who could not attend the meeting but wished to participate, I met them individually to obtain their consent. At the meeting, potential participants and their children were provided with an information letter and consent form that briefly described my study and informed them of their rights as participants. I summarized the main points and processes involved with the documented observations of the language revitalization strategy and emphasized that key aspects of this study centre on and around language revitalization among youth and that therefore inclusion of children under the age of 18 would be helpful. I informed them of their right to withdraw their information from the documented observations of the study at any time without penalty of any kind and their right to anonymity and confidentiality. The option to be named or referred to by a pseudonym was outlined in the consent form. Parental/guardian consent was obtained for those

under the age of 18 who wished to participate in this study. The consent form allowed for those under the age of 18 to sign their names to indicate their consent to participation.

Although the initial stages of the study were conducted in English, with the objective to move toward more use of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language, written communication in the English language was not a barrier to participants. Aside from the absence of appropriate policies established for research involving Aboriginal people (TCPS, 2005), and that there are unresolved ethical considerations when it comes to obtaining informed consent from status Indians in Canada (McPherson & Rabb, 2003; Smith, 1999), no other known barriers prevented the participants from providing informed consent. All participants whom I contacted gave their consent to participate.

Participants who gave consent to be recorded by audio, video, in photographs or written notes were given the option whether or not they consented to share their information in any public dissemination of research results. Consent for such sharing of information was not assumed and was obtained on an individual basis prior to the use of any recorded data. An expression of discomfort by some of the younger participants regarding public viewing of their video interview footage was interpreted by me as the revocation of consent. Thus their privacy was respected and the videos were not included in this study. Although the option for participants to be named or to be referred to using a pseudonym was made available in the consent form, participants gave their explicit consent to reveal their names in any published materials.

Phenomenology Interview Approach

I have been inspired by the phenomenology approach as a way to organize and structure

the interviews that were used to assess the impacts that learning our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language had on my family members. It was my hope that, once conducted, the interviews would constitute a record of participants' lived experiences. Van Manen (1997) has said that,

> the methodology of phenomenology is more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique. Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques. The "procedures" of this method have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning, oriented to allow a rigorous interrogation of the phenomenon as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question. The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing). (p. 131)

According to van Manen (1997), phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience and hermeneutics describes how one interprets the "texts" of life (p. 4). He has said that human science research is the,

> phenomenological and hermeneutical study of human existence: phenomenology because it is the descriptive study of lived experience (phenomena) in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning; hermeneutics because it is the interpretive study of the expressions and objectifications (texts) of lived experience in the attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them. (p.38)

One of the things I take from van Manen is that the place and atmosphere of the location for the conversations to occur is of significance to the comfort level of participants which can influence what and how much of their lived experience they disclose. Our conversations took

place in my home because "[t]he home reserves a very special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of our being. Home has been described as that secure inner sanctity where we can feel protected and by ourselves. Home is where we can *be* what we *are"* (van Manen, 1997, p. 102, emphasis in original). Going for a bike ride with his son, van Manen described, is a lived experience that allows a certain tone in their relations and "makes a certain kind of talking, a certain togetherness possible that is quite different from the more personal talk at bedtime, which differs in turn from the atmosphere of the kitchen chatter in the morning during breakfast" (p. 38). He said that there is a unity to the bike-riding experience that makes it into something unique, "a closeness of feeling and yet a distance of intimacy, a physical involvement and yet an energy of separateness, a participation in the outside and yet a private preserve on the inside" that allows him, upon reflection, to call it "going for a bike ride with [his] son" (p. 38). Since I moved to Thunder Bay, I had frequently invited my nieces and nephews to stay at my house for the weekend. Our weekend sleepovers were a ritual at one time, and I believe that my nieces and nephews are as comfortable at my home as they are at theirs. Other members of my family are also regular visitors to my home. This is why I chose my home as the location for our conversations to take place.

The act of transcribing these conversations could prove to be a gruelling job, but I aspired to do them justice and capture every word recorded from the interviews. van Manen (1997) has said that,

> Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflexive appropriation of something meaningful:

> a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p.36)

Not only is this useful in conducting honest, rigorous research, I also hoped that the younger participants could look back on this recorded conversation in later years and visualize their earlier experiences learning our language. In this way, I anticipated that they could achieve a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their acquired language skills.

Interview Assessment & Parent Talking Circle

The impacts of Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language acquisition was examined by engaging in periodic conversations with eight of the participants, five boys and three girls, whose ages ranged from seven to fifteen years. This component was completely voluntary and there were no set criteria for selection of the interviewees other than the availability of interviewees and their willingness to share their experiences. Participants who gave consent for their interview to be used in this study had the option to be identified through a pseudonym. Those whom I recorded opted to use their real names; they were Demi, Brandi-Rae, William, Dalton, Randy, Daniel, Mariah and Lorne. I had wanted to interview Lester, Dwight and Jeanette as well, but never found the opportune time to do so. They will be interviewed at a future date as my research proceeds during my PhD and beyond.

These conversations were ten to twenty minutes in length and were conducted and recorded by me. I invited my nieces and nephews to sleep over at my home after one of our family dinners where we played the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo game. I set the video camera up in my bedroom and called each of them in, one at a time, in no particular order, to answer some questions and talk with me. While they made themselves comfortable on my bed, I explained

that I was recording the interview to see how learning Ojibwe made them feel and if they think it made any difference to them. I reiterated that the video of our conversation was theirs and promised that no one else would see the video unless they wanted them to. Questions that guided these conversations were: "How are you? How is life for you right now? How do you feel about learning Ojibwe? How does it make you feel speaking Ojibwe? How do you feel about your family right now? How do you feel about being Indian? How do you feel about being Ojibwe? How do you feel about yourself right now? Do you have high self-esteem? How do you feel about school right now? Is there anything that you want to say?" The Interview Assessment was used once throughout the revitalization strategy, and is intended to be a regular part of our strategy.

Although the Interview Assessments did take place, the younger ones refused to provide consent to use beyond our family because they were not comfortable sharing with others the information that they had disclosed during those interviews. These interviews were intended to be used to assess the effects, if any, that family members coming together for Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language had on their identity and self-esteem. These interviews were also to be used by participants to assess their own progress. Since consent had not been provided to use the "recorded conversations" in this thesis, I instead relied on data gathered on this topic during the Parent Talking Circle.

I asked my Mom and one of my sisters if they would consent to be interviewed. After their agreement, I gave them a list of the questions that I had asked the younger ones along with additional items. We then discussed how we should structure the interview and decided that we would conduct it according to the Talking Circle, an approach whereby our conversation would proceed in a circular fashion and only one person would speak at a time, with minimal

interruption, while the rest would respectfully listen until it was their turn to speak (Knockwood, 2005, p. 7, 8). We conversed about the following:

Speaking Language – Impacts:

Have you noticed your child(ren) speaking Ojibwe? Where?

Do you think that your child(ren) is/are proud to speak Ojibwe? How do you know?

Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren) as a result of learning and speaking their language? What are they?

Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s behaviour at home in general?

Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s behaviour at school?

Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s academic performance at school?

Language on Self-Esteem – Impacts:

What elements, in general, do you consider part of your child's self-esteem?

Do you think that your child(ren) is/are proud to be Ojibwe?

How would you rate your child's self-esteem? High, Medium, Low?

Is there anything else that you want to say?

I recorded and transcribed the Parent Talking Circle and then coded for emergent themes. The themes were colour coded and highlighted within the transcript and then examined for patterns and connections between topics that would provide for a broader understanding of the impacts of language learning. Direct quotations from the Talking Circle transcript have been included in the thesis alongside my interpretation.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Discussion

I have woven my discussion into the findings of this study, and I have divided this chapter into four sections, Language Revitalization Basics, the Estimated Timeframe, the Actual Timeframe, and Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses. The Estimated Timeframe describes the Eight Cycle Process of our revitalization strategy in detail including the Basic and Assessment Processes, along with our initial planned timeline for completion, January to December 2009. The Actual Timeframe describes what really occurred throughout the duration of this study as well as how the Basic and Assessment Processes had to be modified to accommodate my family and our learning. The Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses section focuses on two major themes, language learning and family relationships.

Language Revitalization Basics

The following section outlines how my family and I have been working to revitalize my Dad's dialect of the Ojibwe language. Our plan has been structured using a framework set out by Reyhner (1999) in his article, "Some Basics of Indigenous Language Revitalization," which include: 1) Determine the current status of your language using Fishman's Eight Stages of Language Loss; 2) Set realistic goals for your language revitalization efforts using the Eight Points of Language Learning as a guide; and 3) Concentrate on the methods, materials, and motivation you will use to achieve these goals, which he terms the three "M's" of Indigenous language education. He advised that, "It is these **three 'M's'** that will either lead [I]ndigenous language learners to communicative competence and more sophisticated language usage or to failure" (p. xvii, emphasis in original).

In his book, *Reversing Language Shift,* Fishman (1991) postulated a continuum of eight stages of language loss with Stage Eight being the closest to total extinction and Stage One being the closest to dynamic survival. Suggestions on what can be done to promote Indigenous language use at each stage are also summarized. After some consideration of Fishman's eight stages, I have placed the status of our language as Stage Seven, where only adults beyond child-bearing age speak the language. I had initially thought that we might fall under Stage Eight, given that only a few elders speak the language, but after reading through Reyhner's explanation of Stage Seven, felt that this accurately described where our language was at.

Reyhner's description of Stage Seven discusses possible goals, possible time frames, and roles for each of my immediate family members. Reyhner (1999) states that, "While often lacking training in teaching methods appropriate for large groups of older children, ... older adults can teach their grandchildren their language as demonstrated in the highly successful 'language nests' of New Zealand and Hawai'i" (p. viii). Thus, I saw a role for my Dad and a goal for him to achieve. As well, I saw a role for both of my parents in Reyhner's assertion, "These elders can care for young children in preschool settings and immerse them in their language" (p. viii). He also advised that, "Elders can also team up with certified teachers who can help control students in the classroom and suggest second language teaching methods while they learn the language along with the children" (p. viii); here I saw a role for my mother given her teaching certification. Finally, I saw a role and a goal for myself and my siblings in Reyhner's statement, "Parents are also asked to learn the language along with their children" (p. viii). The context and possible time frame emerged from Reyhner's description of "week-long retreats where participants voluntarily pledge to use no English" (p. viii) and thought of us going out together to my Dad's trapping cabin on Lake Nipigon.

In developing a 'curriculum' and implementing our pedagogy based on Reyhner's ideas, we have been following our own intuition and doing things in a way that feels 'right.' By this I mean that we have not structured our language curriculum according to the provincial school system guidelines. Our language revitalization curriculum comes from the language itself and the context in which it is used. At the same time, we have taken what is useful from these Eurocentric systems and have left the rest. We have kept in mind that,

> All teachers have been educated in Eurocentric systems that have dismissed Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. What Indigenous content these systems do offer – in the disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, or history, for instance – has been developed in the contexts of culturalism or racism. Similarly, Aboriginal language teachers have been trained to analyze Aboriginal language structures according to Eurocentric linguistic structural models instead of according to the epistemological foundations of the language itself. In addition, teachers are not provided with models of teaching or instruction that are appropriate for their own Aboriginal languages, or for different age groups, or for diverse learners of different dialects. (Battiste, 2002, p. 25)

I was initially somewhat apprehensive when Reyhner (1999) advised that it is the *three M's* (methods, material and motivation) that will either lead Indigenous language learners to communicative competence and more sophisticated language usage or to failure. As my family and I navigated the tasks at hand and problem-solved as we went along, I however, became confident that together, we could revitalize our language for ourselves, in a way that makes sense to us, using what other Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics have had to say as a guide.

The first M, Methods, deals with what teaching techniques are used at what age levels and stages of language loss. I have recorded my Dad talking Ojibwe into a voice recorder, transferred the audio onto a computer and burned onto CDs; we now have two CDs titled, "Everyday Living and Eating" and "Calendar, Seasons and Numbers." We play the CDs whenever and as often as we can, such as when we are driving for long periods of time. We also have had dinners at my parents' house and play "Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo" after the meal. The object of Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo is to see who can talk Ojibwe the longest without speaking English.

The second M, Materials, deals with what things are available for teachers and learners to use, including audiotapes, videotapes, storybooks, dictionaries, grammars, textbooks, and computer software. At present, the resources that we have in our possession are a digital voice recorder with computer connectivity, a computer with CD-burning capabilities, blank CDs, a video recorder and an Ojibwe dictionary. We also have a Super Bingo™ game set and prizes for family bingo nights. The Super Bingo™ game set is a classic bingo game that includes a spinning cage ball dispenser with caller's tray, 75 numbered balls, 20 bingo cards and see-through marker chips. After some of our family dinners or gatherings we play bingo with Dad calling the numbers in Ojibwe and everybody wins a prize. Everyone receives a card, even the babies, and the older ones help the younger ones. We play for one line and keep playing until all of the kids get a line and their prize. The adults play for a full card and the jackpot is a culturally appropriate pack of cigarettes. Another variation of the jackpot prize is a money pool. If there are ten or twelve adults playing and each pitches in one dollar then the jackpot is ten or twelve dollars.

The third M, Motivation, deals with increasing the prestige and usefulness of the Indigenous language in the community and using teaching methods that learners enjoy so they will come back for more Indigenous language instruction. Increasing prestige, for us, includes giving recognition and awards to individuals and groups who make special efforts to use the language. Most members of my family already consider speaking the language a prestigious experience. Many wish that they could speak Ojibwe so that they could understand and participate in conversations from which they are presently excluded. Many of my family members are motivated to speak Ojibwe to be able to speak with my Dad and hold a conversation with him. Being able to speak and participate in conversations with other Elders and other community members would be another prestigious experience.

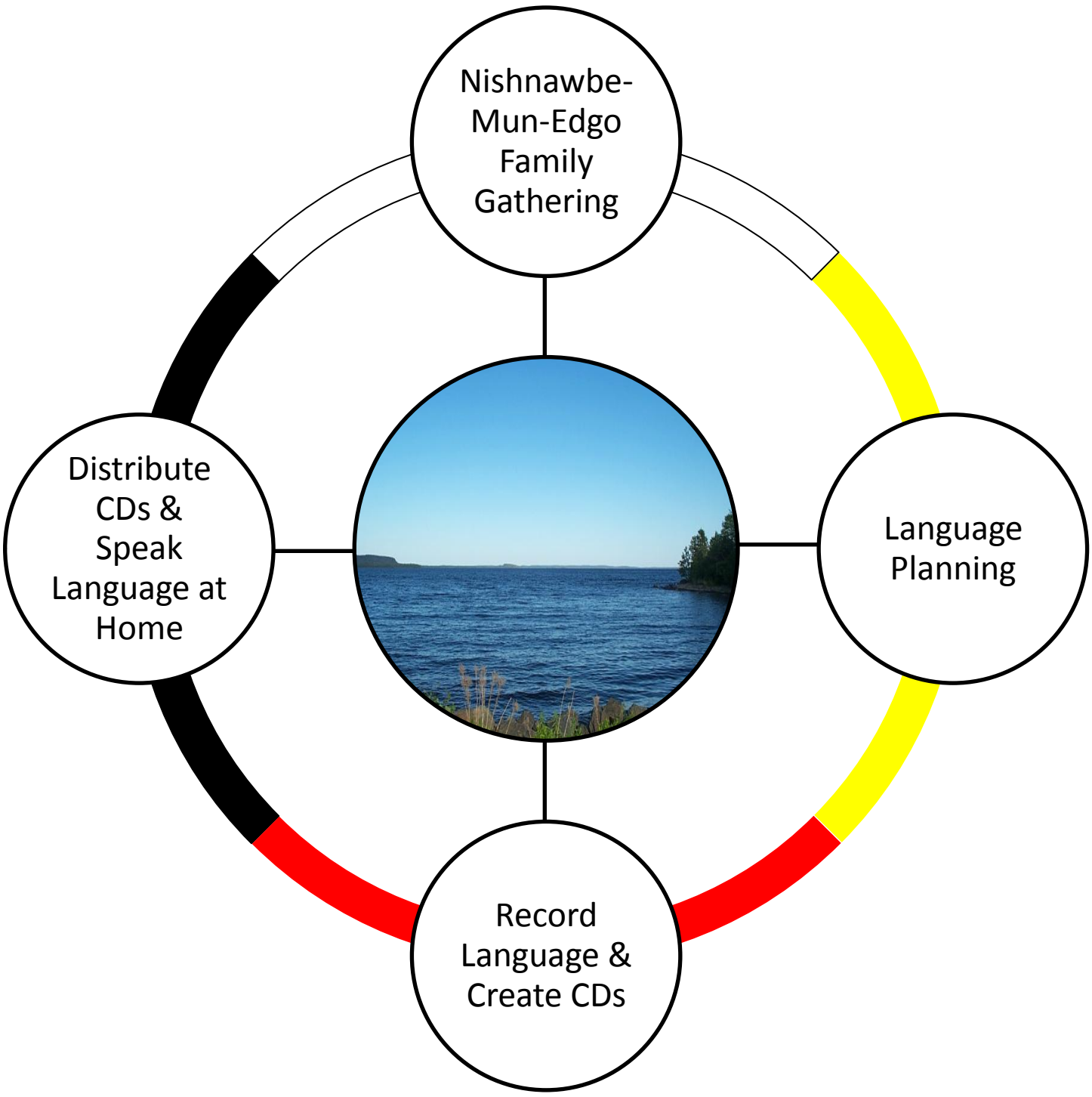
Estimated Timeframe

Basic Process

The core structure of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe revitalization strategy consists of a Basic Process that includes language planning, recording of the language and the creation of CDs, the distribution of the CDs to participants and the utilization of the language during family gatherings. This process started in December 2008, prior to my MEd thesis research.

The elements of the Basic Process have been arranged according to the medicine wheel model with the four directions and Ojibwe colours; this provides a simple, yet clear, framework for guidance in the approach to this strategy. (See Figure 2.) The four elements in the diagram connect in a procession around the circle and they also intersect with the task directly opposite it. The overall approach begins in the East (yellow) with “Language Planning,” and then proceeds to the South (red) with the “Record Language and Create CDs” aspect. Next is the “Distribute

Figure 2: Basic Process



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CDs and Speak Language at Home" component in the West (black) and then finally to the North (white) with the "Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Family Gathering" section. The "Language Planning" piece intersects with the "Distribute CDs" component directly opposite, while the "Record Language and Create CDs" aspect interrelates with the "Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo" section. This Basic Process forms the first, third, fifth and seventh cycles of the Eight Cycle Process.

The following provides a summary of the tasks for each element in this wholistic process as well as an outline of the Assessment Process which has been and will be used to gauge our accomplishments as well as to investigate the impacts of language acquisition on the participants. The Assessment Process alternates in conjunction with the Basic Process and forms the second, fourth and sixth cycles of the Eight Cycle Process.

A guiding principle throughout this process was and is the mutual understanding among participants that if any part of this language revitalization strategy feels like forced work, then there is something wrong with how we are undertaking that particular task, and we need to identify the cause, and then initiate the necessary changes so that all participants feel good about being a part of the whole process. The core structure of the Basic Process has remained the same thus far, but may evolve along with the participants as we change and grow through the revitalization of our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language.

Language planning.

All interested participants have been involved in the planning and preparation of the language learning content as well as brainstorming for suggestions on how to get the younger participants to listen to the CDs and practice speaking at home. The language learning content task includes the creation of a list of words for my Dad to speak as well as planning and

preparation for the next cycle. Participants were asked to compile a list of everyday words, phrases and sentences, which has included greetings, departure phrases, words that the kids have asked to know, words and phrases that revolve around mealtime, eating, types of food and drinks, utensils, dining furniture and school. The lists were gathered by my Mom and me, then cross-referenced for duplication and sorted into themes. The sorted theme words provided direction for the theme of the cycle as well as the title of each CD. The first three cycles have been completed along with two corresponding CDs which are titled "Everyday Living and Eating" and "Calendar, Seasons and Numbers." Preparations for Cycle #5 and CD #3, "Animals, Fish and Birds" are currently underway and involve the compilation and sorting of the new list words to be recorded then burned onto a CD. Planning for Cycle #7 include determining the theme and title of the CD as well as the preparation and sorting of the new list of words for the CD. Future themes might include weather, land and water, or songs and stories.

Record language and create CDs.

This component involved the tasks of recording my Dad speaking the Ojibwe words into the voice recorder and the creation of CDs for all participants. Once the words, phrases and sentences are recorded, they are transferred from the voice recorder onto a computer and burned onto a CD. The CD is then labelled with the title and date of recording, and then copies are made for all participants. We would like to copyright these recordings in the near future and include the appropriate copyright notifications with the CDs.

Distribute CDs and speak language at home.

The tasks for this section included the distribution of the CDs to the participants along with suggestions on how to get the younger members to listen to them and practice speaking at home. One suggestion for encouraging speaking Ojibwe involved the older participants, the parents and guardians, making a commitment to play the CD at least once per day and to start using the words at home whenever possible. The use of Ojibwe words written on post-it notes or pieces of paper taped to objects around the house was also suggested as a learning aid. Another suggestion to promote language involved the creation of a storybook. In this more advanced activity, Dad could tell a story while the younger participants draw pictures about the story and write about it in Ojibwe. The pictures and stories could be scanned and made into books for the older participants to read to the younger ones at bedtime.

Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Family Gatherings.

This aspect of the core strategy involved all participants coming together at least once a month to speak Ojibwe with each other. We specified times for all participants to come together for monthly family potluck dinners and on special occasions such as birthdays and holidays. During these gatherings, we tried to speak only Ojibwe throughout the meal and play the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo game afterward. This game was also a form of assessment that my Dad conducted once every cycle on all participants in efforts to measure our learning progress and language acquisition. This aspect of the Basic Process cycle marks the end of this cycle and the beginning of the Assessment Process cycle.

Assessment Process

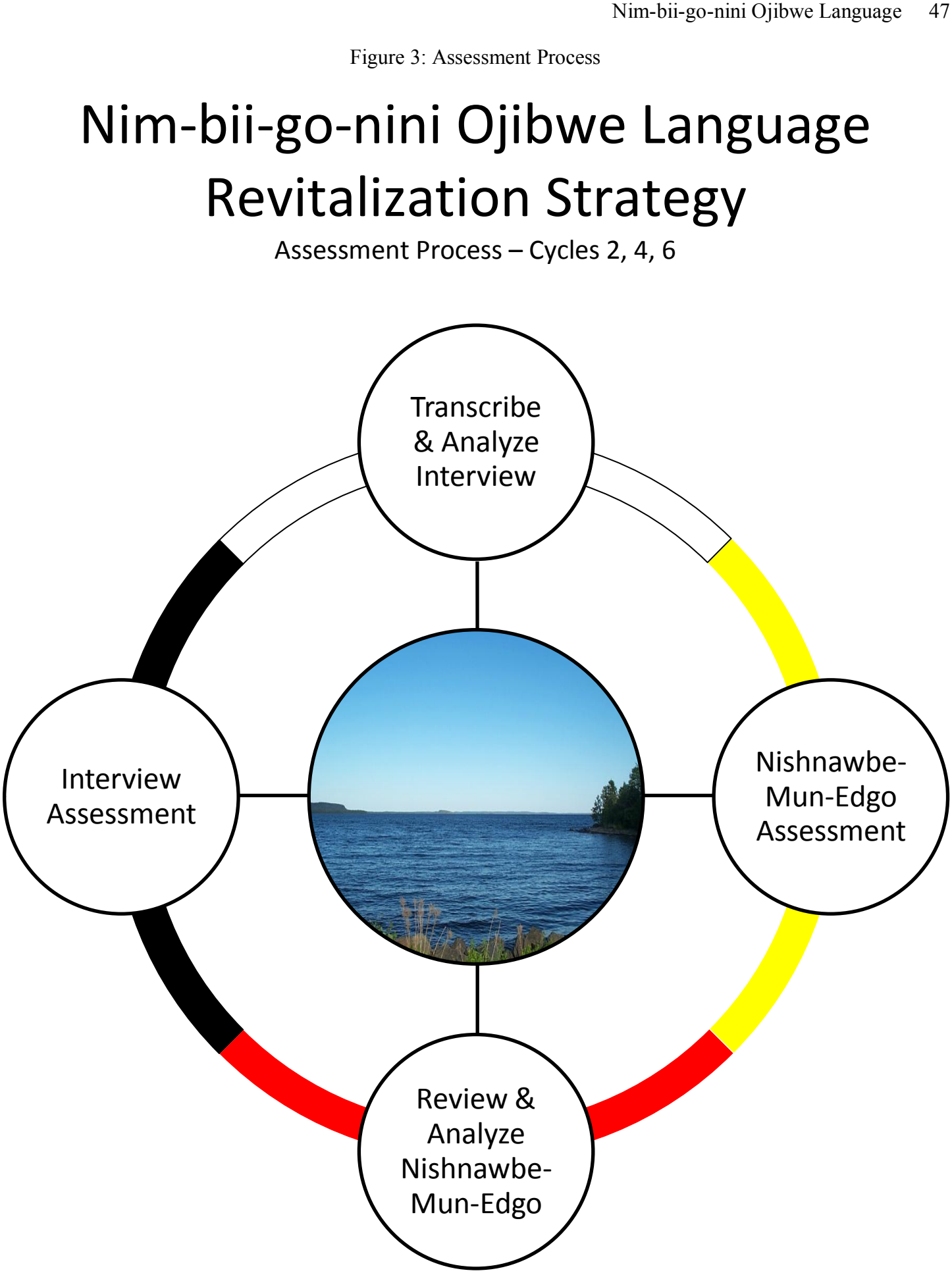
The structure of the Assessment Process consisted of: 1) the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Assessment; 2) Review and Analyze Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo; 3) Interview Assessments; and 4) Transcription and Analysis of Interviews. These assessments allowed all participants to see how far we had come in our language acquisition in a manner and with a method that did not discourage speaking among family members. The Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo assessment was conducted by my Dad once every cycle, and the Interview Assessments, review, analysis and transcriptions were conducted by me. The assessment cycle functioned as a time to reflect on our progress, take a rest from the stresses of our daily lives, and absorb the effects of our language revitalization.

Similar to the Basic Process cycle, the elements of the Assessment Process have been arranged according to the medicine wheel model with the four directions and colours as well as intersecting and interrelating sections. (See Figure 3). This procession begins in the East (yellow) with the "Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Assessment," and then proceeds to the South (red) with the "Review and Analyze Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo" aspect. Next is the "Interview Assessment" component in the West (black) and then finally to the North (white) with "Transcribe and Analyze Interview" section. The Assessment Process forms the second, fourth and sixth cycles of the Eight Cycle Process. The following is an outline of the tasks involved with the Assessment Process.

Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo assessment.

With Mom's help, Dad assessed each of the participants through the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo game. Dad was asked to either measure our progress based on a scale of one to ten or to

Figure 3: Assessment Process



develop and implement his own method for our assessment. The object of Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo was to see who could talk Ojibwe the longest without reverting to English. Players were eliminated when they spoke English and the one who spoke Ojibwe the longest in the game was the winner. We felt that all players benefited during this game, given that they were either speaking Ojibwe or listening to it being spoken. Variations of the game included Dad speaking words in English and the first one to answer him using Ojibwe got a prize or was rewarded by getting to pick an activity for everyone to do such as swimming or skating. The assessments occurred immediately after the game.

Review and analyze Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo.

This part of the Assessment Process was largely for the benefit of the participants. These assessments allowed us to see how far we had come in learning our language. It was not intended to discourage speaking or to promote unhealthy competition among family members. As a preventative measure, grades were not assigned to individuals. In the future, for those wishing documented feedback from Dad, it was suggested that we video-record Dad commenting on our progress. The video would then be burned onto DVDs, reviewed by the participants and either discussed individually or as a group during a Talking Circle.

Interview assessment.

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the impacts of Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language acquisition were examined using video-recorded Interview Assessments.

Transcribe and analyze interviews.

As described in the Methodology chapter, I transcribed and analyzed the Interview Assessments and Talking Circles.

Eight Cycle Process

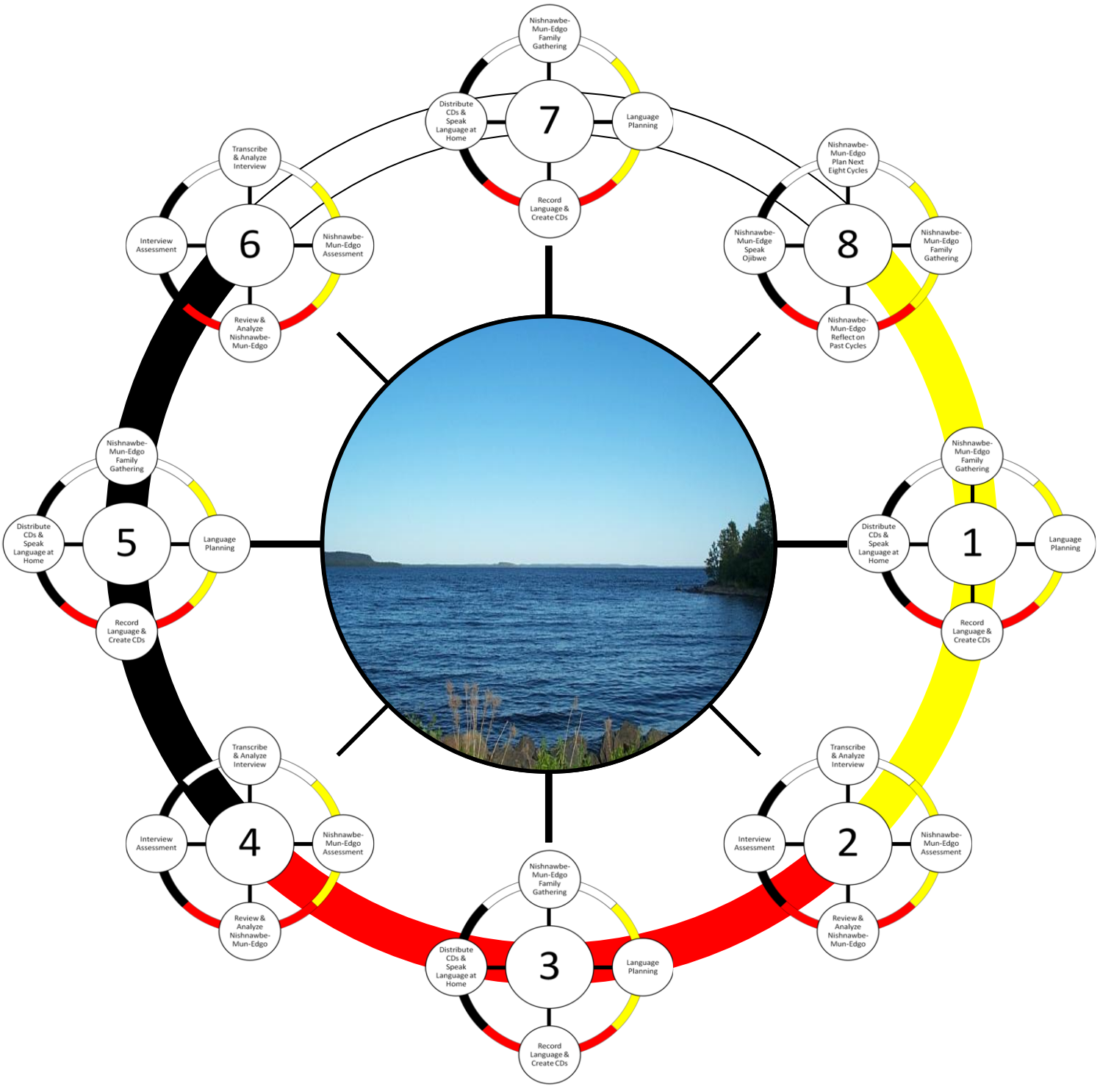
The Eight Cycle Process consists of four repetitions of the Basic Process and three repetitions of the Assessment Process with Cycle Eight being simultaneously a culmination of the past seven cycles and a progression to the next Eight Cycle Process; taken together, this forms the basic structure of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language Revitalization Strategy (See Figure 4.) Consistent with the medicine wheel model, the Eight Cycle Process begins in the East (yellow) with "Cycle #1" and then rotates onward to the South (red), the West (black) and the North (white), through to "Cycle #8". The Basic Process forms the first, third, fifth and seventh cycles and alternates in conjunction with the Assessment Process which forms the second, fourth and sixth cycles of the Eight Cycle Process. As the participants proceeded through each revolution, they named the succeeding core Cycle according to the emergent themes generated from the list of words during the language learning content preparation task. The following provides a brief summary of each of the Eight Cycle Processes (See Figure 5).

Cycle #1 was titled "Everyday Living & Eating" and took place from January 18 to February 28, 2009. Cycle #2, the Assessment Process, took place March 1 to April 11, 2009. Cycle #3, "Calendar, Seasons & Numbers," took place April 12 to May 23, 2009. Cycle #4 is an Assessment Process that began in May 2009 and, due to planned as well as unforeseen occurrences, continued until October 2009. Given that this tailor-made strategy is in a state of perpetual development by design, timelines were extended to accommodate my family's

circumstances and our lived experiences (See Figure 6.) Cycle #5 was titled "Animals, Fish & Birds" and has yet to take place. Cycle # 6 is an Assessment Process and #7 has yet to be titled.

Cycle #8 was titled "Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo" and has yet to occur. This cycle will mark both the conclusion of the seven cycles and the commencement of the next sequence of seven with a week-long family gathering that will occur at a future date. Throughout the duration of the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo family gathering, those in attendance will strive to speak only Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe. This gathering will not only allow all participants to become immersed in the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language, but also will be a time where we can reflect on the past seven cycles and celebrate ourselves, our language and our accomplishments. Also during this time, plans for the next Eight Cycle Process will be discussed along with potential themes and language learning content for the next set of Nim-bii-go-nini CDs.

Figure 4: Eight Cycle Process



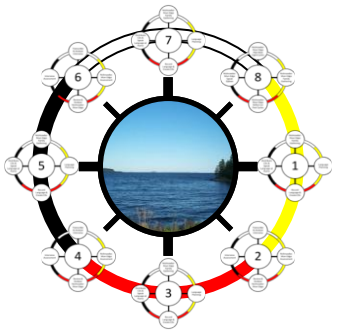
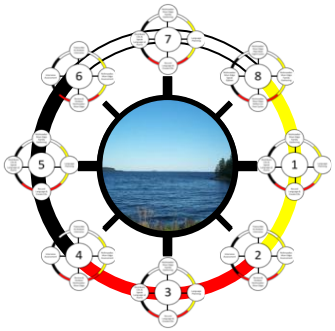


Figure 5: Estimated Timeframe

Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language 2009



	starting	ending		starting	ending
1 - Everyday Living & Eating	1.18.2009	2.28.2009	8 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Family Gathering	11.8.2009	12.19.2009
2 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo	3.1.2009	4.11.2009	Mom & Dad's Anniversary	8.13.2009	8.13.2009
3 – Calendar	4.12.2009	5.23.2009		[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
4 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo	5.24.2009	7.4.2009		[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
5 – Seasons	7.5.2009	8.15.2009		[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
6 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo	8.16.2009	9.26.2009		[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
7 - Animals, Fish & Birds	9.27.2009	11.7.2009		[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]

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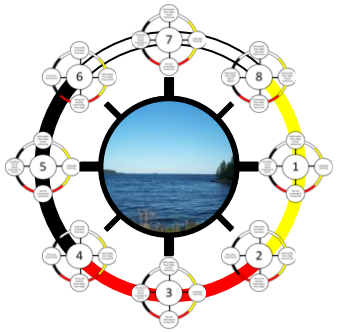
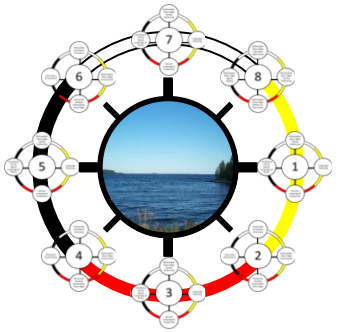


Figure 6: Actual Timeframe

Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language 2009



	starting	ending		starting	ending
1 - Everyday Living & Eating	1.18.2009	2.28.2009	Number Bingo	10.11.2009	1.24.2010
2 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo	3.1.2009	4.4.2009	Picked Medicines – Cedar, Sage, Bush Tea	10.17.2009	10.17.2009
3 - Calendar, Seasons & Numbers	4.5.2009	4.15.2009	4 – Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo – Still To Come	[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
Mom & Dad Gone to Six Nations	4.16.2009	6.8.2009	5 - Animals, Fish & Birds – Still To Come	[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
Occasional Get-Togethers, Visits & Encounters	4.16.2009	8.12.2009	6 - Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo – Still To Come	[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
Mom & Dad's Anniversary	8.13.2009	8.22.2009	7 - Cycle Still To Come	[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]
Occasional Get-Togethers, Visits & Encounters	8.23.2009	10.10.2009	8 - Week Long Family Gathering – Still To Come	[Pick The Date]	[Pick The Date]

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27	28	28	30	31		

Actual Timeframe

Through implementation of this strategy, we found that the process of revitalizing our language did not occur along a neat line nor follow our original prescribed timeframe. Rather, the revitalization of our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibway language has been more of an organic evolutionary process. We are alive and I doubt that life proceeds in any other fashion. Needless to say, then, there were many changes made to our learning plan that resulted in some differences between what was planned and what actually happened. Cycles One and Two progressed as planned, but Cycle Three was cut a bit short when Mom and Dad left for Six Nations in April and did not return until May. From that point we had minimal contact with each other as a family and did not come together to learn our language. We had planned to celebrate Mom and Dad's anniversary and birthdays that year and spent the week prior making preparations. Had we not been practicing coming together as a family, the festivities would not have proceeded as well as they had. After the anniversary we fell back into occasional contact and did not follow our language plan. In the beginning of October, we started to hold Bingo after Sunday dinner and even went out to pick cedar, sage and other medicines before the frost set in. The rest of our strategy was not followed through as planned, but we did hold our Bingo until the middle of February 2010. The important thing is we still have a plan in place, and when we decide to learn our language again, we can pick up where we left off.

Basic Process

We decided to incorporate Bingo as both a game and an organizational tool into our language learning plan. We have adapted the Bingo structure of fifteen numbers per each B-I-N-G-O section, to include fifteen words within five themed and colour coded sections, B - House, I

- Clothes, N - Upper Body, G - Lower Body and O - Eating. For instance, we have fifteen words under the "B" that relate to things around the house that we have coded yellow and fifteen words under the "I" that describe articles of clothes that are coded green, and so on. Dad is going to re-record these seventy-five words taken from our CD, "Everyday Living and Eating," for us to listen and practice at home. We know that the younger ones want to be involved in planning and preparation, so we decided that we would divide the words up and each family would take one of the five sections home to get the younger ones to make corresponding pictures. From these pictures we will take scans to make Bingo cards for our Sunday Dinner Bingo. Using the same Super Bingo™ game set, we will then designate each of the words to match all seventy-five numbered balls to organize and facilitate the game. Our Bingo cards will be created using the same numerical placement of the regular numbered Bingo cards.

Nine week language learning plan.

In order to introduce the words gradually, beginning with the more difficult words that need more repetition, we plan to learn all seventy-five words over a nine week period. (See Figure 7.) In the first week, we will play for one line using only the fifteen words under the "B" that relate to the house. During the second week we will use the fifteen words under the "I" that describe clothes. The third week will be a review to include a combination of the "B" and "I" words and we will play for one line using thirty words. Week four will include fifteen words that relate to the upper body under the "N". Week five will again be a review of the forty-five words that we have learned so far under the "B-I-N", while week six will involve only fifteen words under the "G" that relates to the lower body. There will be another review during week seven with a combination of the sixty "B-I-N-G" words and the eighth week will include the fifteen

words under the “O”. Week nine will include all seventy-five words that we have been learning over this period of time. If we feel that more time is needed to practice speaking the words, these timelines will adjusted to accommodate our language learning needs.

Bingo themes.

While the “Everyday Living and Eating” Cycle is underway, we will be planning for the next Bingo theme, “Calendar, Seasons and Numbers” which will involve the selection of the next seventy-five words, crafting of corresponding pictures by the younger ones, and the creation of new Bingo cards. The Bingo themes are planned to correspond with the theme for each Basic Process and will include “Weather, Land and Water” and “Animals, Fish and Birds.” (See Figure 8.) Bingo themes will be planned in groups of four for the next Eight Cycle Process.

Figure 7: Nine Week Language Learning Plan

Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibway Language Revitalization Strategy

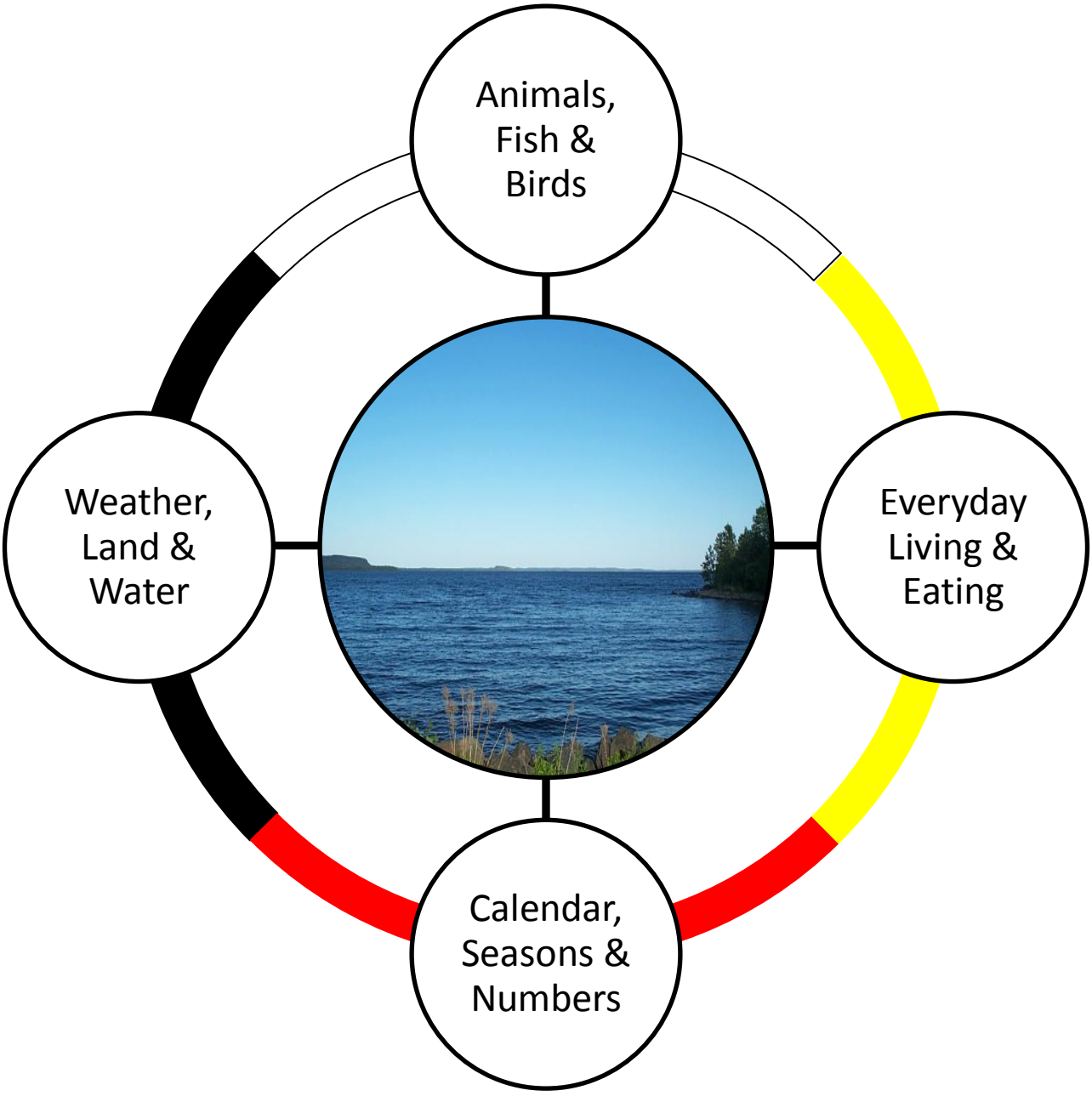
Nine Week Language Learning Plan

Week 1	B – House	Table, Chair, Cupboard, Stove, Fridge, Bed, Blanket, Pillow, Sink, Toilet, Bathtub, Couch, TV, Window, Door
Week 2	I – Clothes	Shirt, Undershirt, Bra, Pants, Underwear, Long Underwear, Panties, Socks, Shoes, Boots, Hat, Coat, Mitts, Scarf, Slippers
Week 3	B-I	
Week 4	N – Upper Body	Head, Hair, Eyes, Ears, Mouth, Nose, Teeth, Tongue, Chest, Lips, Neck, Shoulders, Arm, Hand, Fingers
Week 5	B-I-N	
Week 6	G – Lower Body	Stomach, Pregnant, Back, Hip, Ribs, Wrist, Shin, Leg, Thigh, Knee, Ankle, Foot, Feet, Heel, Toe
Week 7	B-I-N-G	
Week 8	O – Eating	Spoon, Fork, Knife, Plate, Bowl, Cup, Salt, Pepper, Sugar, Milk, Bread, Butter / Margarine, Eggs, Coffee, Tea
Week 9	B-I-N-G-O	

Figure 8: Bingo Themes

Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language Revitalization Strategy

Bingo Themes



Assessment Process

Keeping with the medicine wheel model and the structure of our revitalization plan, descriptions of the findings will be arranged in accordance with the Assessment Process. As mentioned, I had planned for the Assessment Process to be made up of two assessments, the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Assessment and the Interview Assessment. The Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Assessment measured our language learning progress and the Interview Assessment sought insight into the impacts on self-esteem that learning Ojibwe had on our young family members.

Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo assessment.

After just one attempt at the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo Assessment, we found that the game was too advanced for us to play given our variant levels of fluency in Ojibwe. We simply did not have enough words in our vocabulary to sustain a conversation for any significant amount of time. Although we tried variations of the game, including one where my Dad would say a word in English and the younger ones would compete with each other to say the word back first in Ojibwe, and vice versa, the game could not be sustained. While the game was fun and interesting to play, it also fostered unhealthy competition among the younger ones. Some were discouraged that they did not know as much, or any, words that others knew. As well, some of the adults became more competitive, which could be seen as both negative and positive behaviour. It was positive in that the parents became involved with their children in the game, but a negative aspect was that the feelings of competition intimidated some of the younger ones and overshadowed the actual language learning. Perhaps as our language skills improve as a group, this assessment may still be a possible measure that we can aspire to, provided we also figure out how to deal with the negative aspects of competition perhaps inherent to the game.

Footsteps chart.

After some discussion about how to measure our language learning progress in a more encouraging manner, my Mom told us about a technique that she used with her students that she had found to be simple and effective. She called it a Footsteps Chart. She said that the Chart was useful as both a learning incentive and assessment, and could be adapted for just about any subject. Using math and multiplication as her example, she explained that she would arrange the students' names along the bottom of the chart and the multiplication facts from one to ten along the left side in blocks of ten. Students would then craft their own Footprints[8] that could fit within the cells of the Chart. After students had demonstrated through timed tests that they knew each set of multiplication facts, they could add their Footprints above their name to make it look like they had walked up the Chart. The Footprints would continue to be added to the Chart until each student had a full trail showing that they had reached the top, their destination, by learning the multiplication tables up to one hundred.

As each student made a trail of Footprints through each block of ten multiplication tables, they would receive a prize. My Mom said that she would often give each student one individual marker or pencil crayon from a set. When she awarded each student their prize, she suggested to them that if they wanted to use a different coloured marker, they could ask to borrow their classmates. Mom said that this encouraged sharing, cooperation and good behaviour among students.

[8] One way to craft the Footprints is to dip the bottom part of a closed fist in paint, the part nearest the baby finger, and then press it against a piece of paper. This makes the sole, arch and heel of the foot print, complete with wrinkles and folds. The toe prints are made by dipping a finger in the paint and then pressing it five times on the paper above the sole of the footprint. We often do this on the frosty vehicle windows in the wintertime.

Sunday dinner bingo.

From our experience with the Nishnawbe-Mun-Edgo game evolved our Sunday dinner Bingo. We knew that we wanted to keep coming together, so we decided to make a concerted effort to celebrate holidays like Easter, Canada Day and Thanksgiving and special days like birthdays and anniversaries, with one another. While the younger ones wanted to come together often, it did not take them long to get bored in the house. Beyond just eating and then leaving, we knew that we needed an activity, so we decided to play Bingo. While Mom was growing up on Six Nations, all ten of her immediate family members would come together every week at their parent's house for Sunday dinner. She wanted to keep up this tradition with us so we decided to combine the two and start having our Bingo after her Sunday dinner.

After we decided what we were going to have for dinner the week before, I would tally how many children would be present so that I would know how many prizes that I would need to bring. Since the prize was an incentive for the younger ones to keep playing Bingo, I tried to find age-appropriate toys, games and puzzles that would interest both boys and girls. Once we had finished our meal, we would bring a folding table upstairs from the basement and arrange the furniture in Mom's living room so that we could all play. Since Dad called the numbers, he had to have a spot in the living room where he could be best heard by everyone in the room. Somehow we all fit into the space, although many of us had to pull up a piece of the floor to have a seat. While Dad called the numbers and we played Bingo, the younger ones either played their own cards, while the closest adult kept an eye on their card for them, or sat beside us and watched. The smaller ones, usually those five years and under, nonchalantly laid under the table and listened to us play. As the younger ones got their one line, the nearest adult got them to yell Bingo and helped them to say the numbers back to Dad in Ojibwe. After they had finished

calling their winning numbers, we would all cheer "yay!" and clap our hands as they received their prize. The looks on the kids' faces were priceless – they were beaming. Once all of the younger ones had got their one line and received their prize, they would go into the other room so that the older ones could get down to business and play for the full card jackpot.

For thirteen weeks we played our version of Bingo and all of the younger ones under sixteen received a prize every time. If someone brought a friend with them, they played along with us and received a prize as well. After about the sixth or seventh week, I proudly noticed that my daughter, age seven at the time, and my son, then age ten, had learned to count to ten in Ojibwe fluently and up to seventy-five with some help. They were so pleased with themselves! My daughter even told her grade two teacher at school all about it and confidently demonstrated her Ojibwe counting abilities to her whole class.

We adapted Mom's Footsteps Chart to use with our Bingo game as an organizational tool. Keeping with the format of Mom's Chart, we placed our names at the bottom and then following the Bingo format, we divided the left hand side into five B-I-N-G-O sections with fifteen numbers each. So that the younger ones do not become discouraged, we divided each of the names into age groups; 0 – 6 years; 7 – 9 years; 10 – 12 years; 13 – 15 years; 16 – 18 years; and 19 years and older. (See Figure 9 and Figure 10.) In future, to demonstrate that we know all of the numbers for each section, after playing Bingo for eight weeks, we will each count in front of everyone at a consensually designated Sunday Dinner and then place our own Footprints up our trail on the Chart.

Figure 9: Footsteps Chart - Ages 0-6

Our Footsteps Chart; B – Numbers 1 to 15; Ages 0 – 6 Years

15								
14								
13								
12								
11								
10								
9								
8								
7								
6								
5								
4								
3								
2								
1								
	Myley	Louis	Dra'go	Linden	Louanna	Lucas	Kazmair	Douglas

Figure 10: Footsteps Chart - Ages 7-18

Our Footsteps Chart; I – Numbers 16 to 30; Ages 7 to 18 Years

30											
29											
28											
27											
26											
25											
24											
23											
22											
21											
20											
19											
18											
17											
16											
	Demi	Brandi-Rae	William	Dalton	Randy	Daniel	Mariah	Lorne	Lester	Dwight	Jeanette

Interview Assessment

At first I thought that the younger ones not consenting to me using their interviews was a critical setback, but after some contemplation, the alternative I found has provided me with an even deeper perspective on how learning our language is impacting our youth. The younger ones refused to provide consent because they were not comfortable sharing with others the information that they had disclosed during those interviews. This became particularly apparent when I took the video camera to one of the Sunday Dinners and played some of the footage that I had taken during the past year. When it came to the interview recordings some of the older ones became agitated and asked that they not be played. I discerned that if they were not comfortable with their interview videos being played at their grandmother's home, then they would not consent to my writing about them in detail for my thesis given it would be publicly disseminated.

Although not being made public, the Interview Assessments are nonetheless still immensely useful to the younger ones themselves, as they will eventually allow the younger ones to see how they have grown and changed throughout the years. I suspect that this medium will also be an outlet for a debriefing of sorts for them given the open and candid manner in which they have conversed with me. I also suspect that the act of being recorded on video and having their own personal moment in the "spotlight" has made them feel especially good about themselves. I have suggested that we continue to conduct our interviews, perhaps once at the beginning of each Eight Cycle Process and again at the end.

Parent Talking Circle.

In the Parent Talking Circle, my Mom, my sister and I have discussed self-esteem assessments, and thus have led to the Language Planning aspect of the Basic Process to become

more defined and structured. Our Parent Talking Circle has been influenced by the Talking Stick ceremony described by Isabelle Knockwood (2005) in *Out of the Depths*. Everyone who wants to speak has a chance to be heard without interruption, criticism or disrespect. The person who wants to start the Circle holds the stick (or other appropriate item), and begins the discussion about the issue or task at hand. When they are finished speaking, they will pass the stick to their left, following the sun's direction, to the next person. We each take turns speaking, offering our input and listening respectfully, until the stick returns to the person who started the Circle. This instrument of free speech is also an excellent organizational tool and problem-solving technique.

The first Parent Talking Circle took place at my sister Melanie's house early one evening. My other sister, Randi was also present and although she listened, she but did not take part in the discussion. I have video-recorded only segments of our conversation although we were together at Melanie's for approximately four hours. The three of us sat around Melanie's kitchen table, drinking tea and coffee, with our children and Melanie's grandchild milling around us as we conversed. In retrospect, what took place that day was more than an honest discussion about the impacts of learning our language; it also was a sharing of ideas, concerns and feelings among three Indigenous women who, with the best interests of their children at heart, were committed to strengthening their families. With the task of trying to determine the impacts of learning Ojibwe on our children, we discussed the ten set questions.

In response to question one which asks, "Have you noticed your child(ren) speaking Ojibwe? Where?" Mom, Melanie and I each answered, "Yes, at home." Question two asked, "Do you think that your child(ren) is/are proud to speak Ojibwe? How do you know?" Mom's response was, "Yes, they ask questions and how to say words." Melanie said, "Yes, it instils a sense of pride in learning how to speak our language. I know this because they talk about it at

home." Question three was "Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren) as a result of learning and speaking their language? What are they?" Mom, Melanie and I together came up with a list of components we consider part of our children's self-esteem: self confidence, being less self-conscious, feeling pride in themselves as Ojibwes, thinking for themselves, and elements of the Seven Grandfather teachings. After some discussion about the initial wording of questions four, five and six, we modified them to include the ending phrase "...as a result of coming together to learn language." Question four asked, "Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s behaviour at home as a result of coming together to learn language?" Mom responded that, "Mothers are parenting the kids more and making them behave. The kids are getting along with each other and they are knowing what to do when there is a problem and not fight." Melanie agreed with Mom that the kids are learning to get along. She said that we parents are learning to take the kids' behaviour in stride, are not jumping to conclusions to assign blame, and not leaving when tensions arose, as we have tended to do in the past. There is more sense of family, inclusion, loyalty, and willingness to take the time and effort to teach. I agreed and mentioned a game of shinny that we took part in as a family at Old Fort William which, because of how they conducted themselves during the game, was a testament to the kids getting along better with each other. Question five asked, "Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s behaviour at school as a result of coming together to learn language?" We all agreed that we had discussed this already in questions one and two. I added the comment that my son, who was usually uncomfortable sleeping over at someone else's house, actually started to sleep out. Question six asked, "Have you noticed any changes in your child(ren)'s academic performance at school as a result of coming together to learn language?" Melanie stated that when her kids started talking about their Native Language class at home, she felt it meant that they were paying

more attention in school. She said that it didn't just stop at one subject, that they were paying attention more in Native Language and in other subjects. I mentioned that, like Drew Hayden Taylor, my son Dalton is a blue-eyed Ojibwe and that his appearance has caused him confusion about his identity. I noticed that language has helped my kids have more pride in themselves being Ojibwe and they seemed more self-confident in who they are and where they come from.

Emerging from our discussion of questions seven to ten were topics of conversation that pertained to elements of self-esteem, measuring self-esteem, behaviour as a measurement of self-esteem, benefits of the language strategy, language as a measurement of self-esteem, impacts of language learning, impacts of family relationships, language learning struggles, and family relationship struggles. From these topics emerged three main themes: self-esteem, language learning, and family relationships. The following section will provide my interpretation of these themes and topics of discussion in relation to self-esteem along with supporting quotations from the Talking Circle transcript. An interpretation of the language learning theme and the family relationships theme will be outlined in the "Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses" section of this chapter.

After a recap of our conversation about elements that we consider part of our children's' self-esteem, Mom raised the question about whether self-esteem could be measured. We wondered whether self-esteem could only truly be assessed by oneself, and whether it was possible for someone to accurately rate the self-esteem of another. Melanie, who is employed in the field of mental health, said that assessing someone else's self-esteem is not impossible:

> ... you can measure someone's self-esteem but you've got to know them ... there's so much to it, like other, not elements, but other factors, other environments, other

things that play, that are a part of your self-esteem, and how you think about yourself, how you feel about yourself.

We thus asked ourselves what we could measure in terms of the kids' self-esteem and came up with behaviour. Melanie stated, "I can rate their behaviours in what I see, but still I don't know what they're thinking or what they're telling themselves." Mom agreed and said, "I know when your self-esteem has gone up in your behaviour, but I can't begin to rate somebody's self-esteem, only you can." This brought us to the question of how we would measure behaviour that reflected improved self-esteem. We found the answer in how our children get along with each other and how they treat each other. I mentioned that, "Compared to a year ago, there was the arguing, we couldn't hardly get together without someone arguing or some sort of incident happening." Mom added that parents too were getting mad. I continued, "Now, we can go through a whole day with each other with virtually no argument. The kids are helping each other. Dalton and Randy offered to help William to learn to skate." Mom added that "they're even problem-solving and were helping Baby Lou in that shimmy, or whatever, shinny."

Not long before we conducted our Talking Circle, we had attended an all-day community event together as a family. Before we started our language revitalization process, we could not spend much time with one another without someone starting to argue about something. This time, we spent a whole day doing activities together as a family without one single argument. Our children were treating each other well and helping one another, and some of the older ones offered to teach the younger ones how to skate. We enjoyed a game of shinny as a family, and although it got pretty competitive, we would stop in the midst of the excitement and take the time to slow down for our little two year old, Louis Jr., so that he would have a chance to hit the ball

to score. We had an awesome time enjoying each other's company and celebrating ourselves. We concluded that this is a good measure of improved self-esteem amongst everyone.

This line of discussion raised the issue of whether any benefits in terms of self-esteem were due to our language strategy. Melanie said that because self-esteem is so complex, it is difficult to say that language on its own has changed our children's self-esteem. She said, "I can see a change in my son's self-esteem when it comes to hockey because of what hockey does for him with his self-esteem." She went on to say,

> I don't think they even realize how significant it is for them yet. But I know for me if I can understand the conversation or recognize a few words to understand a conversation, I feel like, hey, I know what they're saying. ... I think for the kids, it's just the beginning. To take that pride and feel that, it's just the beginning. Once they start to understand it more and can carry on a conversation and start to speak it more then that's when we're going to see a big difference because of language. ... You can see that there are these little differences already in their behaviour, in the way they act. ... The more they learn, the more they understand, the more they speak it, then that's when we're going to see the big differences. ... The more we do it the more we come together, the more they learn because of the program. Then your questions can be answered in a way that, 'because of language.'

We asked ourselves, then, that if any benefits to self-esteem are not necessarily about the actual learning of the language right now, what is the language learning about for us then? We realized that we have been using language as a vehicle for coming together, and that in coming together to learn the language, all these other things are happening as a result of it. Even though

the children are not fluent yet there is pride in starting to learn it, and they see a difference. Mom said, “They’re valuing learning Ojibwe. There is a value set to it now whereas before there wasn’t.” She further stated, profoundly, that “the more fluent they become, then they can talk not only to us, their family, their Baba, but they’ll hear it out there too. ... It’s like nation building. Nation building because it’s a communication with the Ojibwe nation.” Acknowledging a reciprocal connection between learning the language, coming together as a family, and self-esteem, Melanie explained,

> Right now, I think it is about coming together. Language is bringing the family together, but at the same time, it’s not all about just the family coming either. Yes, that’s a huge part of it, and I think with us getting along and learning to get along then that creates a positive environment for the learning. Then the kids are taking more, more value out of the learning, and then through the learning then comes the pride. Then comes the more self-confidence and speaking the language, and it goes outside of the family, to the school and the friends. But it’s just beginning right now. So even though it’s not all about the language where we’re seeing these improvements, yet it is significantly about the language.

Bringing the conversation back to our children’s behaviour as a measurement for self-esteem, Mom asserted that the fact that the children are learning, in and of itself, shows that that they have an improvement in self-esteem. Drawing on her years of teaching experience, Mom relayed,

> I had to build up the kids’ self-esteem. I had to make them feel good about themselves for them to have the self-confidence to want to learn. When you want to learn, then you will. So I consciously did things to build that up with them.

> There is a measure because after a while they wanted to learn. After a while they they took pride in going to school. It was very time-consuming because I didn't know at the time that I was doing it, or what to do. I just knew that I had to build up something in them, build them up before they were going to be even receptive to being taught. ... It's not only learning, it's wanting to learn. If you don't want to learn, you won't learn. If you want to learn, you will learn. ... It's knowing and understanding, then you can learn. And you get that knowing and understanding by having better self-confidence, better self-awareness. That's when self-esteem comes in there. If you think good of yourself, you will do good.

Through our conversation, we came to realize that our Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe Language Revitalization Strategy was not so much about learning our language; it was and is about our learning how to get along with each other as a family again. Our children are what have kept us together. They have been the driving force behind our language revitalization and for keeping us coming together as a family. It is they who ask for the CDs to continue to be made and it is they who want to keep coming together. Their relationships with each other influence the relationships among us as their parents, probably just as much as the relationships among the parents influence the relationships among the younger ones. The process of learning our language has become a safe, non-traumatic, non-crisis reason for us to come together once a week and just be with one another. Also during this conversation, we gained a better understanding of what self-esteem means to us in relation to our children. Self-esteem is our internal voice that takes into account a wholistic process of mind, body, spirit and emotion that is difficult and almost impossible to rate. Thus, in discerning what an assessment for self-esteem could be, we concluded that the children's behaviour is the most accurate measure and that the

whole process of coming together to learn the language affects our kids positively in their behaviour and pride in themselves.

Analysis of Weaknesses and Strengths

This strategy, like my family, is a work in progress. As such, changes have been made to better accommodate our learning needs. So that we can continue to fine-tune our strategy, two emergent themes from the Parent Talking Circle, language learning and family relationships, have been identified and analyzed in terms of weaknesses, that is, what we could do differently, and strengths, that is, what worked. I have chosen to write about the weaknesses of these main themes before the strengths because often throughout this process when we have been presented with a challenge, we have found a solution to overcome the obstacle. Rather than presenting a strictly dichotomous, "good versus bad" critique in this approach, I hope to illustrate how our journey up to this point has been much more about the process than the actual learning of our language.

Language Learning

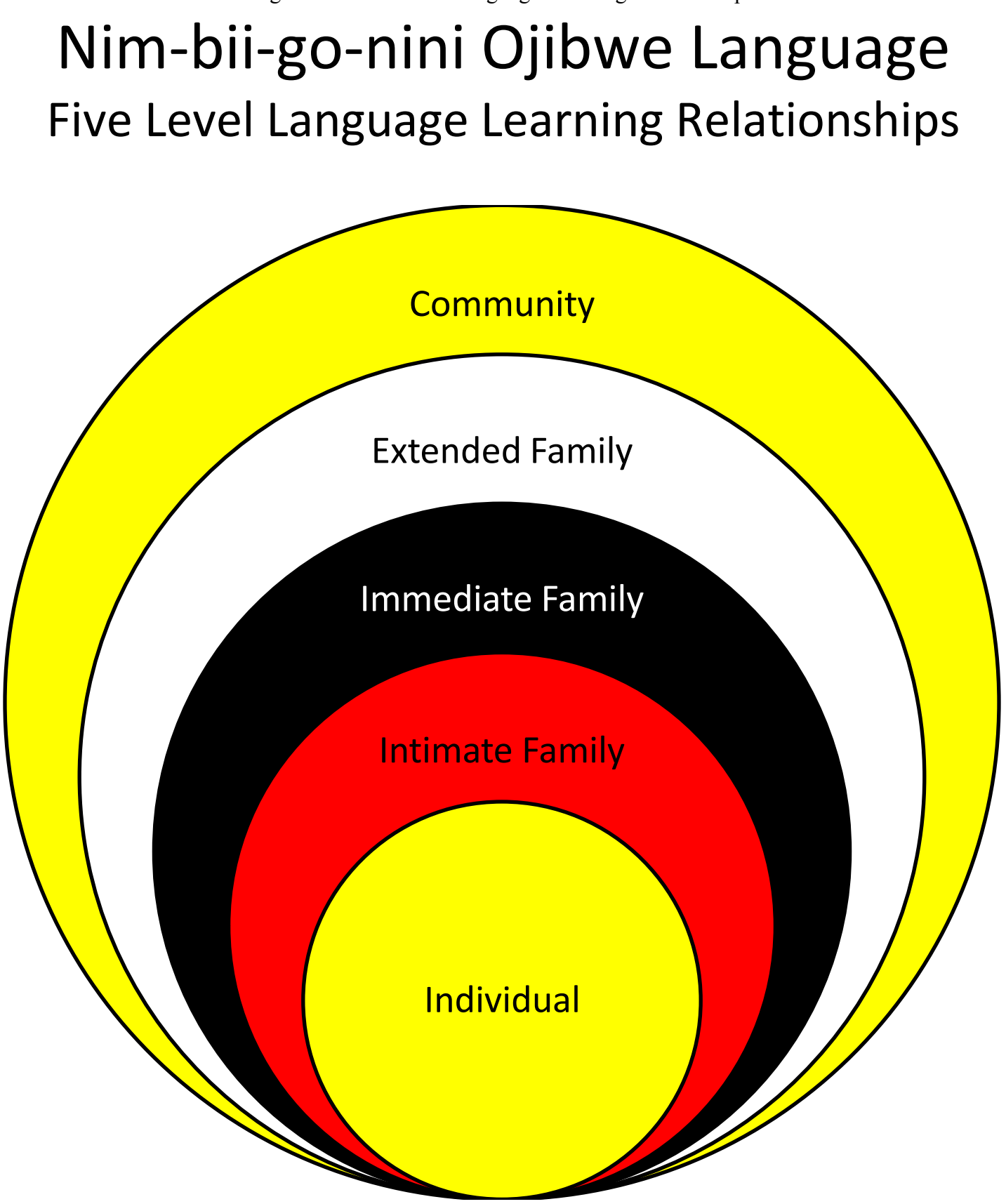
Based on my own observations, some things that we could do differently in terms of learning our language would be to be more consistent with our plan, show more commitment to coming together, and focus on improving our fluency. Although we value learning our language, we are not fluent right now and more effort could be put into following through with our plans. When we get together to play Bingo after Mom's Sunday dinner and some do not participate, it seems that not everyone has the same level of commitment to revitalize our language. If I am

mistaken and this is not the case, then perhaps our methods of communication need improvement.

Given that most of us have a low level of fluency, I realize that we may have gotten ahead of ourselves and that perhaps we need to take our learning down two levels and concentrate more on individual learning. This variation within our strategy will focus on how one person from each household in my immediate family continues to build language skills and transmit these intergenerationally by speaking and teaching their children within their homes. This Five-Level Language Learning Relationship could begin with individuals learning their language (level one), and then teaching it to members of their intimate family (level two), while simultaneously maintaining their language learning relationships with members of our immediate family (level three). Levels four and five involve language learning with the extended family and among other members of the community. Building upon the contextual foundation and methodological framework of this thesis, I will propose to do my PhD dissertation on our experiences of levels one through three. Levels four and five are beyond the scope of a PhD and its documentation will be undertaken throughout my future academic career (See Figure 11.)

One possible weakness is our use of Bingo in our strategy. I acknowledge from personal experience that Aboriginal people in Canada have been stereotypically portrayed as habitual Bingo players and this is often not positively viewed in mainstream White culture. Although Bingo is thus somewhat problematic, it is nonetheless now part of many Aboriginal cultures and is fun, interesting and most importantly, a game whose organizational structure is easily understood. I would argue that to incorporate Bingo as both a game and an organizational tool into our language learning plan has practical application that is just as useful as adapting the ancient medicine wheel into our language revitalization strategy.

Figure 11: Five Level Language Learning Relationships



One of the major strengths of this language revitalization strategy is the fact that no government money is being used for this project. I have personally experienced and witnessed how the politics among oppressed people can sometimes work. Money can be a powerful influence on people who do not have enough of the basic necessities or their basic human needs met (AFN, 2010; Clutchey, 2009; Ross, 2001; Thom, 2010). Band elections are, alas, often a prime example of small community politics at its worst (Fox & Long, 2000). Similar to how the Akwesasne Freedom School is financially supported (Akwesasne Freedom School, 2010) by community members themselves, the Bingo prizes, which cost no more than three dollars each, and the one dollar contribution to the Bingo jackpot on behalf of the 15 and 16 year olds have all been made possible through donations by me. No research money was granted for this project and much of the food for the family gatherings has been potluck, with my Mom and me being the main contributors. For the time being, as long as the rest of my siblings bring their children to participate, they are doing their part. As our strategy gains more momentum, I am sure that more family members will see the value in coming together to learn our language and will step up to take more responsibility for what it takes to make our Sunday Dinner and Bingo happen each week.

My Grandpa transmitted the intergenerational knowledge to my Mom that some people are given special abilities from Creation so that they can help other people live well. Grandpa said that gifted people are not supposed to set a specific price for what they are able to contribute to the well-being of all. Those who are in need usually have to travel some distance in order to access what they seek, and often are able to give only what they can afford. If someone with special abilities withholds sharing the gift with others just because they could not afford to pay their price, then it is as indication of that person's mindset and character. He said that this is how

you can tell if a person chooses to use their gifts in a good way or not and thus whether you should seek them when you need help. If the gifts are not shared in a good way, then sometimes they leave from the gifted person. For me, I have come to acknowledge this strategy as a gift and intend to share it in a way that contributes to the well-being of those seeking to revitalize their Indigenous language.

I thus find it problematic that many Aboriginal people who have been gifted the ability to retain Indigenous knowledge have set out to profit from the gifts from Creation that are meant to benefit all Indigenous people. I see this as a major change in the value system of Aboriginal people that has contributed to the dysfunction within our families and communities. Some have gone from a more sharing, egalitarian system to a capitalist one, where money and profit are more valuable than the well-being of people. In the early stages of my language revitalization journey, I sought out material with which to teach my children the Ojibwe language. It was disheartening to find that some Aboriginal people who still knew the Ojibwe language were selling CDs over the internet at extremely high prices. I felt that this practice excluded those who could not afford the CDs. I know of a similar situation with an older couple who sold medicines and food harvested from the land. An older family member suffers with arthritis and found that bear grease helped his pain immensely. Usually when he approached other makers of bear grease to obtain some, they either traded it to him or asked and accepted what he could afford. This particular couple asked an exorbitantly high price for a rather small amount of bear grease. Although I realize that this scenario is more complex than sheer profiteering, it was nonetheless a shame for my older family member in need to have to have gone without other necessities in order to benefit from the Indigenous knowledge meant for all.

Another strength of this strategy is that it can be customized to fit individual families. I think of the strategy as the skeleton and the people who become part of the process as the blood, muscle, and flesh. In this way, there is some balance and the system of education can be adapted to the people instead of the students being required to adapt themselves to the system. I contend that when the education system and curriculum are not congruent, the individuality and creativity of students are stifled by design. Given that the history of schools is rooted in the Industrial Revolution, most middle-class people have become homogenized for the sake of work-force preparedness (Gatto, 2003). And given that songs, stories, poems and oral representations are often accurate, and now legally recognized (Isaac, 2004, p. 9)[9] as depictions of peoples' lived history, the words in the song "Another Brick in the Wall" by the British band, Pink Floyd, "We don't need no education, we don't need no thought control", speak volumes to me (Rogers, 1979).

The most important strength of this strategy, in my opinion, is the epistemology and pedagogy that are imbued throughout this process. This approach is part of a philosophy that is inextricably connected to the land, so it will take more than simplistic following of the method I have described here to repeat what we have done as part of this study. Of utmost importance to successful replication of this study is the Indigenous epistemology embedded in the methodology, that is, the thinking behind and throughout the whole process. Perhaps persons who are not motivated personally or politically with collective emancipatory concerns and who have not engaged with their own decolonization or questioned and explored their own sense of power and privilege, or lack thereof, could not effectively repeat this study? I want to be clear that I do not condone nor make reference to simplistic identity politics here, claiming only

[9] *Delagmuukw* v. *British Columbia* (1997) was a landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision in its treatment of oral histories as meeting the evidentiary rules of court and Aboriginal title generally (Isaac, 2004, p 9).

Indigenous people could utilize this strategy. Rather, I firmly believe that the descendants of the tribes of Europe (Trudell, 2001) who align themselves with the well-being of their Indigenous nations could successfully employ this strategy to revitalize their own original languages.

Family Relationships

One of the reasons that our strategy did not always work well is because not all family members were equally committed to it and have a lot of other pressing issues in their lives. One of the most damaging intergenerational impacts of the Residential Schools was the disruption, dysfunction and disconnection it caused within our families (Haig-Brown, 1988; Ing, 1991; Knockwood, 2005; McLaren, 2007; RCAP, 1994). Given that most Aboriginal people who attended these Schools learned "parenting" skills from nuns and priests, men and women who have vowed to never conceive children and therefore do not have practical experience in parenting themselves, we do not always know how to relate to one another in respectful and healthy ways. Residential School Survivors became parents, who in turn, often have intergenerationally transmitted these poor parenting skills to their own children. It is not my intention here to make excuses or place blame; but I do think that we need to take responsibility for our own actions and stop this cycle of unhealthy relationships and make conscious efforts to treat each other better. It is helpful to know that many of the social conditions that we must live under are not solely of our own doing – they are the result of what has been done to us by colonizing settler societies as Indigenous people in North America (Adams, 1999; Annett, 2001; Battiste, 2002; RCAP, 1994; Chrisjohn, Maraun & Young, 2006; Knockwood, 2005; Maracle, 1996; McLaren, 2007; Smith, 1999).

Another intergeneration impact of the Residential Schools is that we were schooled into oppressed silence (Freire, 2000; Knockwood, 2005; Maracle, 1996; McLaren, 2007). I contend that, for the most part, we do not think for ourselves anymore because our very consciousness has been colonized. Our autonomous thought, a strength that has sustained us for centuries, has always been a threat to settler society, and this can still be seen in how our children are treated within educational settings (Battiste, 2002; RCAP, 1994). In order for Aboriginal people to transform their circumstances in any way meaningful, it is imperative that we decolonize our own consciousness, name our oppressions, and re-evaluate what it is that we truly want before we take action (Freire, 2000).

One way to achieve this more hopeful, forward-moving approach, I believe, is to talk openly and honestly about the real issues that affect us so that we can face these challenges head on. I am not interested in sugar-coating the issues that my family must face as Aboriginal people in Canada. This is how life is for us. Many of these issues include low self-esteem, lack of trust, post-traumatic stress, physical and sexual abuse, dependency and stealing from one another. We are a family in crisis and as such, we have had many squabbles and arguments. There are some families that probably get along better than ours, but we are doing something to try to get along better with each other.

Some of my family members acknowledge that there is a feeling of strength, a connection that we get when we all come together. It makes us want to be with one another and it feels like we are missing out on something if we are not there when the family meets. It is comfortable, exciting, comforting, safe, secure, and loving all at the same time. There is a presence, a sense of completeness that being with Mom and Dad, my brothers and sisters, and my nieces and nephews brings. We have come together in times of celebration and in times of crisis. Since we

have started to revitalize our language, in separate incidents, two close family members have been gang raped and another found the strength to disclose a traumatic incident of physical violence that just happened. We came together in these crises and we cooked and talked. We did not realize how huge this response was until after the fact. There were benefits in just being together in these crises that would not have happened had we not started practicing getting along with each other. The revitalization of our language has meant the renewal of our familial relationships and thus, the rebuilding of our cultural foundation and mending of the social fabric within our Indigenous society (Fishman, 1991).

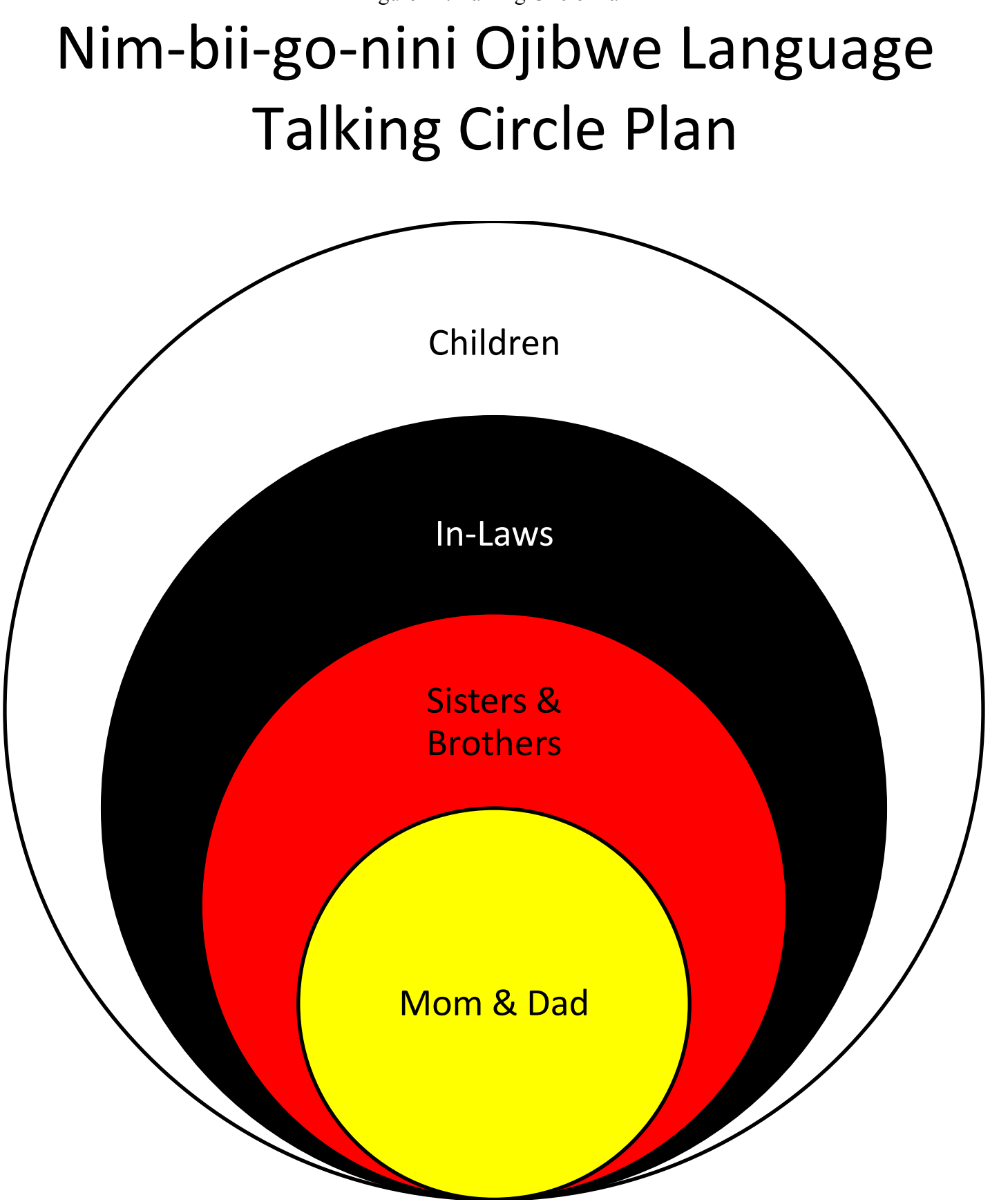
Family Talking Circle.

The Talking Circle in particular may be a problem-solving technique that can help my family to learn to communicate with one another in a healthy way. When our family dynamics becomes similar to that of a two litre bottle of pop shaken up, this method can allow us to communicate at a comfortable pace, to loosen the bottle cap and let the air out slowly so that it does not explode and get all messy. Our children are the motivation and driving force behind our family coming together, and we are already getting into the habit of being a family again. I know that my family members love each other and no matter how much we argue, we now know we will always come back eventually.

We now think we can expand the Parent Talking Circle to a Family Talking Circle. The first Talking Circle could be focused on planning, where we set the ground rules, and name the problems or issues we need to discuss, and the order in which we will discuss them. Before we begin our discussion, part of the protocol of the Talking Circle could include smudging with sage after being served a cup of cedar tea, and then the person starting the Circle can use our Family

Pipe in lieu of a talking stick. The Family Pipe will be passed around the Circle until each person has had the opportunity to speak and be heard, before it is returned to the person who began the discussion. Since Mom and Dad are the common tie that bonds all of the siblings, we feel that the first Talking Circles should revolve around them and their issues. They could decide the topics for discussion, taking as long as they need to say what is on their minds, without being interrupted, until they are ready to move on and then we can each give our feedback and support. The first Talking Circles to decide the issues for discussion and next steps in our strategy will include my parents and the sisters and brothers, following ones could involve the in-laws, and finally we could have ones that also includes the children (See Figure 12.) We have decided to begin our Talking Circles with immediate adult family members first because the issues being discussed will not only be inappropriate for young children, but the discussions will be heated until we have vented our hurt and anger and have begun to heal. The younger ones influence our relationships and we guide theirs; once we feel that we are ready to include the younger ones in the discussions, we will have the opportunity to lead by example and show them a healthy way to relate to one another through the Talking Circle.

Figure 12: Talking Circle Plan



Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study describes how my family has begun to rebuild our cultural foundation upon which intergenerational knowledge sharing has occurred and without which the initial stages of the revitalization of our language could not have taken place. In short, yes, momentum for the revival of the Nim-bii-go-nini Ojibwe language can be generated in one Anishinabe family and this strategy is the catalyst that hopefully may lead to increased self-esteem among its members. We are just at the beginning right now. We have laid the foundation for our language revitalization and for the revitalization of our family. We are each being revitalized through this process.

A pedagogy evolves through the relationships that exist between all of those involved in our language revitalization. If the relationships are good, then mutually beneficial learning will occur. If the relationships are not so good, should those involved persevere, there is opportunity for these relationships to improve. Though we continue to struggle with issues of self-esteem and sometimes still look to outsiders to acknowledge our worth, we are validating each other through this strategy. We are beginning to acknowledge what we mean to one another and to value each other more. Traumatic things have happened to us, but these terrible things can be transformed into something good when we learn from them. Horrible things will not stay that way when we take responsibility for ourselves and consciously seek to find a useful purpose for that horrible event. It is important that we persevere and keep coming together despite the challenges and traumatic events that occur. When we improve our relationships, we can relate to each other better. Should it be desired, this strategy can be an effective mode of decolonization.

The measure for language learning success that I use for myself is in my ability to learn and speak Ojibwe with enough fluency to sustain a conversation with my Dad. I know that I will

not have attained this level of Ojibwe fluency by the time I have completed my Master of Education degree, but I will have started my journey. My own motivation for learning Ojibwe is also to experience the perception and thought processes that I can only imagine speaking one's Indigenous language brings. I strive to be able to teach and speak with my children in Ojibwe and hope to one day use this strategy to learn and teach my children their other Indigenous language, Mohawk. I will continue to use our Ojibwe language in my home and in my community as much and as often as I possibly can. I will not become shy or embarrassed at the awkward looks and blatant racism that I face in Thunder Bay while doing so publicly. I continue to strive to be a good example for my children and my family.

Looking back upon our strategy for the past year, initially, I was deeply disappointed that we did not follow through with all that we had planned. I felt heartbroken by the slow language learning progress and at the dysfunction of the relationships between my family members. After some contemplation, I realize that despite my disappointment, in the broader picture, we are still doing something very important, probably far more than we realize. Fishman (1991) asserted that

> [r]eversing language shift deals with a 'good problem'[10] because it is itself a potential contribution to overcoming some of the endemic sociocultural dislocation of modernity. In this sense, then, [reversing language shift] is potentially a contribution to the solution of problems that are greater than the one that is first on its own agenda. (p. 6, 7)

At the beginning of his book, Fishman (1991) warned that reversing language shift is not for the faint of heart. I have found affirmation that my feelings of disappointment are typical when going about this type of social change. He explained that, in the main, his book "is about

[10] Fishman (1991) explains that, "'Good problems' may be defined as problems whose solutions contribute to the solutions of related problems rather than their exacerbation" (p. 6).

why most efforts to reverse language shift are only indifferently successful, at best, and outright failures or even contraindicated and harmful undertakings, at worst" (p. 1). I found validation in Fishman's (1991) assertion that reversing language shift, revitalizing one's language,

> requires reversing the tenor, the focus, the qualitative emphases of daily informed life – always the most difficult arenas in which to intervene. Indeed, [reversing language shift] resists being programmed or planned, not only because its would-be planners and programmers are frequently poor in resources and weak in numbers, but because it is initially necessary for the weak in numbers and poor in resources to tackle some of the most elusive behaviours and interactions of social and communal life. (8)

We are not merely revitalizing our language, I feel that we are attempting to transform ourselves as a family.

Through this strategy, we have learned that if we are to meaningfully revitalize our language, we need to strengthen the relationships within our family. Fishman (1991) said that for language revitalization to "take hold", it must be focused on directly, and pursued in its own right, at the intimate family and local community levels (p. 4). I thus feel that we are on the right track in taking action to revitalize our language at home. If language revitalization is not initiated at the family level, then any efforts for the maintenance of our language would be like blowing air into a punctured tire (Fishman, 1991, p. xii). Fishman asserts that families constitute local communities and that it is crucial that language revitalization efforts be undertaken by "families by means of their own efforts, resources and dedication ... [as] it counsels greater sociocultural self-sufficiency, self-help, self-regulation and initiative" (p. 4). It is in this way that language revitalization is also a process of decolonization. This is such a slow process and I think that as

one of the leaders for our language revitalization, I need to learn to have more patience with the strategy, my family, and myself. I believe that, on the whole, we are headed in a good direction.

The revitalization of our Ojibwe language has not and will not come easily. Reyhner (1999) offers valuable advice for those involved in language revitalization. He has said that,

> There has been a lack of sharing of information between communities about which [I]ndigenous language activities, strategies, and policies have proven effective and those that have not proven fruitful. Languages need special love, care, and protection by the communities that want to keep them alive. If [I]ndigenous languages are to survive, it is not enough for more children and adults to learn these languages. Environments also must be created in [I]ndigenous communities where the [I]ndigenous language is used exclusively. The old saying "use it or lose it" goes for [I]ndigenous languages as well as a lot of other things. These exclusive environments could be community centers such as the Maori Culture Centers; they can be individual homes; and they can even be Christian churches. (pp. xviii-xix)

I know that our language will not and cannot survive within my family if we remain an island unto ourselves. Reyhner (1999) has also said that,

> No one person, community, school, university, tribe, or government program has all the answers to keeping any [I]ndigenous language alive. It is only through sharing successes and learning from failures that the extinction of [I]ndigenous languages can be prevented. More needs to be done to create a network of information sharing between [I]ndigenous communities. (pp. xvii-xviii)

I anticipate that once we gain momentum and create a small base from which to practice our language, we can then branch out to others in our community and perhaps beyond. Who knows, maybe someday we will find out what the pictographs out on Lake Nipigon mean.

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