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THE MISSING LINKS TO DEVELOPING HOLISTIC ABORIGINAL EARLY
CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN CANADA: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

by

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A Major Research Paper

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Early Childhood Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2007

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Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This critical literature review explores the concepts of language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge in relation to aboriginal early childhood development in Canada. Recognized is the urgent need for action in aboriginal communities and the connection between language, cultural identity, and health. The review provides a synthesis of findings including a discussion of challenges, options, and recommendations and a summary of themes. The critical content analysis is based in holistic principles of child development and identifies what is missing, ambiguous, and confusing within the literature and takes an advocacy stance on behalf of aboriginal children and families. The conclusion integrates ideas from the analysis into a statement of needs for future literature that will contribute to improving aboriginal child health and development. The most important findings are the need for clarity and consistency of terminology, the need to focus on children, and the need to include family voices in future literature.

KEY WORDS: aboriginal children, early childhood education, indigenous knowledge, aboriginal education, language, literacy

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This paper is dedicated to the children, families, and staff of
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Tasiurvik Child Care Centre in Inukjuak, Quebec.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

If our words and our several modes of imaginative representation are replaced by others that are not the reflection of our hearts and minds and experiences and the heritage of our people, then so is our sense of reality. (Chamberlin, 2000, p.127)

The Scope of the Issue

In recent years, Early Childhood Education has received increased attention in Canada. Research such as the Ontario Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) has emphasized the significance of the early years and has led to the creation of several initiatives (i.e., Best Start; Early Years Centres; Healthy Babies, Healthy Children) to support early childhood development and promote positive parenting practices. While early childhood education receives increased attention “[a]boriginal early childhood education is gaining recognition as having unique attributes different from those shared by the broader Canadian society” (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005, p.41).

There are over one million people in Canada who identify as aboriginal, including approximately 700,000 First Nations, 70,000 Inuit, and 260,000 Métis peoples (Statistics Canada, 2001). The population is young, with a mean age of 25.5 years and growing with a birth rate that is almost double that of other populations. Additionally, one in four aboriginal children live in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2001). There are currently more than 600 Aboriginal communities in Canada and approximately fifty different cultural groups with fifty distinct languages (Assembly of First Nations [AFN], 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001). While there are similarities between groups, there are significant differences within each community and family. There are inconsistencies in service delivery and many communities have minimal or no early childhood services at all. For example, Aboriginal Head Start exists in only 126 of

600 aboriginal communities in Canada (Health Canada, 2004). There are several significant factors influencing the delivery of services especially for families living on federal reserve lands, “where access to childcare, health, and development services is limited by geographic distances, social and cultural barriers, and eligibility regulations” (Ball & Pence, 2006, p.4). Recognizing the importance of healthy development in the early years, along with the challenges for provision of early childhood services in aboriginal communities, make this a fundamental issue for discussion.

Throughout the world, indigenous cultures approach child health and development in a holistic way (Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2000; Fearn, 2006; Greenwood, 2001, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005) in contrast to the prescribed ages and developmental stages evident in the dominant Euro-Western child development theories. It is recognized that colonialism and assimilation have created significant imbalances in the health of aboriginal people (Fearn, 2006; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; Ing, 1991), resulting in a considerable loss of language, identity, self-esteem, and nurturing ways (Fearn, 2006; Frideres, 1999). Greenwood (2005b) discusses the link between indigenous health and early childhood development and argues that the health and well-being of aboriginal children cannot be examined without understanding and acknowledging their unique social, political, and historical context. Early childhood environments for aboriginal children that foster and promote cultural strength, harmony, and citizenship, are at the forefront of addressing health disparities (Fearn, 2006; Greenwood, 2005b).

Both aboriginal communities and the government express great concern about aboriginal child health and point out an urgent need for action regarding early childhood development and literacy. Early childhood programming is identified as an essential service

for healthy communities and cultural survival (Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2000; Greenwood, 2001, 2004, 2005a; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Purpose of Paper

This critical literature review explores the areas of language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge in relation to aboriginal early childhood development in Canada. Both Canadian and international literature is reviewed and applied to the Canadian aboriginal early childhood context. Recognized is the urgent need for action in aboriginal communities and the connection between language, cultural identity, and health. This critical analysis examines the literature in three stages. First, the literature is organized and discussed in three areas of focus: language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge. Secondly, a synthesis of findings from the literature is provided. This includes a discussion of challenges and recommendations identified by the authors as well as a summary of key themes. Thirdly, a critical content analysis based in a holistic child development framework is provided. This analysis identifies what is missing, ambiguous, and confusing within the literature. It also draws attention to inconsistencies, use of terminology, and takes an advocacy stance on behalf of aboriginal children and families. The most important findings are the need for clarity and consistency of terminology, the need to focus on children in the literature, and the need to include family voices. Addressing these needs demonstrates cohesion and direction toward the intended goal of providing a holistic approach to aboriginal child development. The conclusion of this paper integrates ideas from the literature and analysis into a statement of needs and recommendations that will contribute to improving aboriginal child health and development. Such an exploration recognizes the impact of personal values and opinion on the interpretation

and analysis of the literature. Identifying and illuminating what is missing will move thought from unawareness to a more informed consciousness and lead to advocacy in the aboriginal child health and development area.

Limitations of Review

This analysis situates the issue within its socio-historical context but does not go into detail regarding colonialism and its effects on indigenous peoples as discussed by Chamberlin (2000), Goldie (1995), and Henderson (2000). Specific aspects related to Canadian colonialism and aboriginal peoples, including a discussion of the Indian Act (Frideres, 1999; Henry, Taylor, Mattis & Rees, 1998), the politics of self-government, treaties, social programs, and lack of economic development (Frideres, 1993, 1999; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993), as well as the effects of the residential school systems (Barman, 1996; Ing, 1991) are not explored except to contextualize the debate. The overrepresentation of aboriginal children in the Canadian child welfare system and the factors influencing the multiple disadvantages faced by aboriginal families within the child welfare context (Bennet & Blackstock, 2002; Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004) also are not addressed. While this research does not address language issues faced by immigrant families or challenges in multicultural or multilingual classrooms, it draws from literature focused on these issues (Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leonie, Sandhu, & Sastri, 2005; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Pacini-Ketchebaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). The process of language learning and linguistics and second language acquisition (Baker, 2006; Bialystok, 2001) are not covered, nor are specific language strategies used in the classroom such as

‘authors in the classroom’ (Ada & Campoy, 2003), the ‘early authors program’ (Bernhard, Winsler & Bleiker, 2004), or ‘identity texts’ (Cummins, 2004).

Terminology

For the purpose of this paper, the terms *aboriginal* and *indigenous* refer to the same grouping of peoples who identify themselves as descendents of the original inhabitants of Canada. The term *aboriginal* is used as defined in the Canadian constitution, referring to all people of indigenous descent, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Colonial governments created the term *aboriginal* as a broad label to include First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Some people avoid this term because of its colonial roots and prefer the term *indigenous* which connects them to an advocacy movement of indigenous peoples worldwide (Ball & Pence, 2006; Fearn, 2006). ‘First Nations’ is a term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word ‘Indian’ and describes all the aboriginal people in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. The term Indian is considered misleading and offensive by many aboriginal people and has largely been replaced by First Nations (Government of Canada, 2003b). The author uses both *aboriginal* and *indigenous* to refer to aboriginal peoples and acknowledges the terminology utilized by specific authors when referring to their work.

Theoretical Framework for Review

This analysis examines the literature from a critical perspective. A criticalist is “a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005, p. 139). There are some basic assumptions accepted by critical researchers. It is believed that every society systematically gives privileges to certain

cultural groups and oppresses others (Freire, 1970). Internalized oppression is the way in which individuals unknowingly help to maintain their lack of privilege by accepting their social status as natural and inevitable. This internalization reproduces their oppression as each person born into this group accepts the pre-existing patterns of discrimination (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Freire (1970) emphasizes the sense of frustration and powerlessness that non-privileged groups feel in relation to their opportunities to realize their potential. Providing insight to guide them toward greater autonomy and ultimately emancipation is the aim of a critical approach. It is also understood that there is never one essential, universal answer to any issue, and instead it is accepted that there must be continual questioning and discussion of the meaning and impact of issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gall et al., 2005).

Critical theorists believe that reality has been shaped over time by a collection of social, political, economic, cultural, and gender factors that create a context that is assumed to be ‘real’ and unchangeable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This current analysis acknowledges how specific factors (i.e., the Indian Act, residential schools) have shaped the ‘reality’ of aboriginal Canadians. The critical paradigm also recognizes the multiple identities of oppression, meaning that oppression experienced by an individual is an interactive combination of many oppressions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This paper also frames the discussion within a set of holistic child development principles created by combining Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of development, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, the developmental niche (Super & Harkness, 2002), and aboriginal perspectives on child development (AFN, 2005; Fearn, 2006; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK], 2005).

Situating the Author

The author of this paper is a non-aboriginal teacher. She has experience working in early childhood environments in aboriginal communities as well as the development of curriculum and training materials for aboriginal early childhood educators. The author is influenced by the writing of Margo Greenwood, Gaile Cannella, Radhika Viruru, Paulo Freire, and George Sefa Dei. These factors inform the author's interpretation and analysis of the literature.

Areas of Focus

There are three common areas of focus that emerge from a review of the literature. These are language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge. Language is seen as the mechanism that transmits culture from one generation to the next (Antone, 2000; Corson, 1998, 2000; Frideres, 1999; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). Fishman (1991, 1993, 2001) states that language indexes, symbolizes, and creates its culture. Freire and Macedo (1987) maintain that "language is also culture" (p. 53). Historically, church and government-run education for aboriginal people in Canada operated from an assimilation model (Barman, 1996; Ing, 1991; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). Teaching aboriginal children to use English was a fundamental part of this process and the way English was traditionally taught systematically silenced aboriginal languages.

Literacy is generally defined as the quality or state of being literate, which is to be acquainted with letters or literature and being able to read and write. Types of literacy include functional, cultural, and critical literacy along with alternative views of literacy including holistic, transformative, and emancipatory literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gamlin, 2003;

National Aboriginal Design Committee [NADC], 2002). Indigenous knowledge, however, is not easily defined. It is recognized as a dynamic process including elements of indigenous ways of knowing and being, culture, language, and values (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and is based in the holism of spirit, self, land, and the interconnectedness of all things (Cajete, 2000). It cannot be separated from the individual or their cultural community and is therefore very different from the Eurocentric concept of culture. The continuation of cultural practices, the increase in cultural identity, and the pride and protection of languages are emphasized by First Nations and Inuit families and communities as ways to create positive cultural identity in young children. These are seen as the keys to First Nations health and community renewal (Ball, 2003; Battiste, 2000).

Over the last thirty-five years, aboriginal communities have strongly voiced their right to define and develop education for their children (AFN & the National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; AFN, 2005). This movement promotes the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and languages into program development, content, delivery, and evaluation (AFN, 2005; Ball, 2004; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Recently, the Canadian government expressed concern about national literacy rates (Government of Canada, 2003a; House of Commons, 2005), which consequently raised awareness of the specific literacy issues faced by aboriginal peoples. Problems commonly associated with illiteracy include lower educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and a lower health status (Dunn, 2001; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005); conversely, literacy skills create healthy, educated, employable citizens (Dunn, 2001; Government of Canada, 2003a; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). The current challenge is retaining indigenous languages while at the same time facing the pressure for mastery of the dominant language for economic contribution and survival.

Method for Identifying Literature

Databases including Academic Search Premier, Proquest Research Library, Ebsco, Eric, and PsychINFO were searched from the years 1999-2007, using a combination of the keywords: aboriginal, indigenous, native, First Nations, Inuit, literacy, language, education, childcare, early childhood education and indigenous knowledge. The Canadian Journal of Native Education and several sources of government documents were also reviewed. The literature investigated consists of writing that promotes literacy for aboriginal peoples in any form including English literacy, aboriginal literacy or aboriginal language literacy (Dunn, 2001; Gamlin, 2003; George, n.d; Graham, 2005; NADC, 2002), indigenous knowledge (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; Ball, 2004; Antone 2000, 2003), generative curriculum and culturally responsive programming (Curwen Doige, 2003; Goddard, 2002; Greenwood, 2005a; Pence & Ball, 1999), bilingualism (Corson, 2000), immersion (Johnston & Johnson, 2002), and aboriginal control over education (Battiste, 2000; Blackstock, 2006; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). Government and literacy coalitions have created documents that support aboriginal education and English literacy. These documents define aboriginal people as a special population at risk of unemployment, health problems, poverty, and incarceration due to low literacy levels (George, n.d.; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). Aboriginal organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Inuit Tapariit Kanatami (ITK) promote literacy and education that incorporate culturally appropriate curriculum and teaching methods in order to create healthy children and families. Focused attention is given to articles written by aboriginal authors as well as literature written specifically about aboriginal language, education, literacy, and indigenous knowledge.

Socio-Historical Context

The current challenges faced by aboriginal Canadians have been shaped by the history of colonialism and a series of assimilation policies and legislation. The Indian Act was passed as legislation in 1876 and gave parliament control over Indian status, political structures, landholding patterns, resources, and economic development (Frideres, 1999). It was designed to promote forceful assimilation, in which aboriginal peoples were expected to adopt the cultural attitudes and norms of the dominant culture and give up their own cultural traditions histories, values, customs, and languages (Henry et al., 1998). By means of the Indian Act, the Canadian government imposed a form of institutionalized racism as they dismantled aboriginal social and political institutions (Frideres, 1993, 1999; Bolaria & Li, 1988).

Residential schools, operated by missionary societies with the support of the federal government, were designed to assimilate First Nations people and culture (Henry et al., 1998; Ing, 1991). In these environments, aboriginal children were forbidden to speak their languages, practice their traditions and customs, or learn about their history (Henry et al., 1998). Students who attended these schools feel that the experience has deeply affected their sexual relations, their abilities as parents, and their feelings about their religion and culture. It was also seen to increase alcohol abuse and contribute to the high levels of suicide and domestic violence (Wilson, as cited in Henry et al, 1998). Residential schools failed not only in their assimilation aims, but also by further marginalizing generations of people, from both Canadian culture and their own cultures and communities (Barman, 1996; Henry et al., 1998; Ing, 1991).

The ‘Sixties Scoop’ is a term that refers to the phenomenon where unusually high numbers of aboriginal children were apprehended from their families, and fostered or adopted

out, mostly into white families. Even though at the time the apprehensions were thought to 'be in the best interest of the child', multiple losses were experienced by adoptees (Henry, et al., 1998).

Aboriginal lands with valuable resources were often confiscated when government agencies wanted them for the building of railways, roads or dams or to extract natural resources. Community relocations were seen as solutions to a number of issues but proved disastrous as they imposed dramatic changes on aboriginal way of life, family, and community structure. These changes resulted in a loss of economic independence and the establishment of welfare dependency, an increase in family violence, and a variety of social and health problems (Frideres, 1999; Henry et al., 1998).

The history of colonization and assimilation resulted in serious imbalances in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of aboriginal people, families, communities, and nations (Fearn, 2006; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Children face poverty, unemployment, lack of food security, and environmental factors that contribute to the current overall health status of aboriginal people (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; Fearn 2006). Existing policy, administrative, and program barriers restrict the effective delivery of culturally appropriate programs and services through pan-aboriginal approaches. Isolation, transportation issues, and a lack of quality medical care, along with language and communication barriers, further contribute to negative impacts on aboriginal child development.

Frideres (1999) discusses how aboriginal people were separated from their traditional life, and at the same time, rejected by Canadian society. He says aboriginal people continue to be expected to adapt and integrate into the existing social order. The assimilation policies

of the Canadian government paved the way for the loss of language in aboriginal communities and the loss of language means the loss of key aspects of culture and identity (Frideres, 1999).

Perspectives on Child Development

In order to explore the concern for aboriginal child health and development, perspectives on child development must be addressed, including Euro-Western perspectives, socio-cultural perspectives and aboriginal perspectives. Traditional Euro-Western child development theories that promote universal child development discourse are accepted as essential to ECE theory and practice and are reinforced by current research and training programs (C. Taylor, 2004). Universal child discourse makes claims about children yet fails to locate these claims in their historical or cultural context (C. Taylor, 2004). It also promotes individualism and autonomy and prescribes developmentally appropriate practice (Prochner & Cleghorn, 2005). Aboriginal communities often see these theories as “not transferable, relevant, or even desirable within the cultural enclaves, socioeconomic conditions, and often remote geographic setting of many First Nations and Inuit communities” (Ball & Pence, 2006, p.5).

Recent theories support a holistic approach to child development that acknowledge cultural, historical, and environmental influences on development. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of socio-cultural development suggests that development is the result of the interaction between cultural and historical factors. The three major components in this process are identified as the role played by culture, the use of language, and the child’s zone of proximal development, referring to the distance between a child’s actual developmental level and the higher potential they can reach with help or guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Social influences

contribute significantly to children's development of cognitive abilities and a form of mentoring or guidance strengthens this growth (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005). According to Vygotsky, culture is a social construction and cognition is rooted in language and cultural experience (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development views behaviour and development as the collective function of individual biological and personality characteristics, environment, and the larger contemporary and historical contexts in which the child is developing. Super and Harkness (2002) conceptualized the developmental niche, consisting of three interrelated components with the individual child at the centre. The three components are the physical and social settings of daily life, the culturally regulated customs of childcare and child rearing practices, and the psychological characteristics of the child's caregivers or parents. Both the ecological systems theory and the developmental niche look at the child within his or her environment, recognizing that the child possesses individuality, personality, and temperament and is influenced by a number of systems, people, and environmental factors, including language and culture. Graham (2005) echoes these ideas stating "[c]hildren build their perceptions and conceptual frames of the world through family interactions during daily tasks of living" (p. 331). This process of socialization is ongoing and shaped by the child's lived experiences and by stories told about the experiences of others (Graham, 2005).

Aboriginal Perspectives on Child Development

Aboriginal perspectives on child development are holistic with a balance of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of the individual, family, and community (AFN, 2005;

Fearn, 2006; ITK, 2005). Children are viewed as a gift from the creator and it is the job of the caregivers and community to nurture and guide them so they will fulfill their purpose while on this earth (Fearn, 2006). Greenwood and Fraser (2005) stress how the words of elders and traditional stories carry the knowledge of how to care for children. The care and education of children is considered a sacred and valued responsibility from the time the child is conceived (Fearn, 2006; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Aboriginal perspectives believe that the child is already someone and the purpose of learning is the realization of the self, not the molding or creation of the self which is emphasized in traditional Euro-Western theories (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Traditions, ceremonies, and daily observations are all integral parts of childrearing and so programs must incorporate and provide children with opportunities to grow and learn in their way of knowledge (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Children's observations of adults are considered key learning processes in aboriginal child development. Aboriginal perspectives also recognize that people are impacted by the choices and actions of others and consequently children are given a sense of responsibility to the community to help them define their role. If children are supported and connected to their cultural identity, they will develop a strong sense of belonging (Ball, 2004; Fearn, 2006; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

The following holistic principles of child development are a combination of socio-cultural theories of development and aboriginal child development perspectives discussed above.

- Development is holistic and consists of inter-dependant dimensions.
- Development begins prenatally and learning is already occurring at birth.
- Development is influenced by a variety of sources, and varies depending on the child's nutrition, biology, genetics, and social and cultural context.
- Children's development is cumulative operating on a continuum.

- Development and learning occur by the child interacting with people, objects, and the environment.
- Children are active participants in their own learning and development.
- Children live within a context of family, community, and culture and their needs are best met within that context.

The concerns for aboriginal child health and development in Canada are recognized along with understanding that these cannot be separated from their socio-historical context. The framework used to explore the literature comes from acknowledging the differences and the similarities between traditional child development theory, socio-cultural theories, and aboriginal perspectives on child development. The holistic principles of child development are used in combination with a critical paradigm to review and analyze the literature as well as to construct a statement of needs. The next chapter will review the Canadian and international literature that addresses aboriginal education language, culture, and identity. Explored are three areas of focus – language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge.

Chapter 2

Areas of Focus

This chapter organizes the literature into three areas of focus: language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge. This section reviews the literature in order to discover the concepts embedded within it.

The major authors reviewed provide a variety of perspectives. Canadian aboriginal authors include Antone (2000, 2003), Battiste (2000), Castellano (2000), Fearn (2006), George (n.d.), Greenwood (2001, 2004, 2005), LaFrance (2000), Lahache (2000) and Watt-Cloutier (2000). The Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, National Aboriginal Design Committee, and the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture are all Canadian aboriginal organizations and committees. Indigenous authors from other parts of the world include Cajete (2000), Duran and Duran (2000), Henderson (2000), and Smith (2000). Ball (2003, 2004, 2006) Burnaby (1996), Corson (1998, 2000), Cummins (1995, 2004), Curwen Doige ((2003), Gamlin (2003), Goddard (2002), Graham (2005), Grant (2001), Hebert (2000), Paulsen (2003), and Pence (1999, 2006) are all write from a non-aboriginal Canadian perspective. American writers reviewed are Cannella and Viruru (2004) as well as Fishman (1991, 1993, 2001). Dunn (2001) writes from an Australian perspective, while Chamberlin (2000), During (1995), Goldie (1995), Loomba (1998), and Varadharajan (2000) are all considered to be post-colonial thinkers. The first area reviewed and discussed is language.

Language

Language and Culture

Language refers to a system of symbols that is used to communicate information and knowledge. Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2005) and Berk (1998) discuss how child development

theorists including Piaget (1954), Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Super and Harkness (2002) view language as an integral part of the child development process. Freire & Macedo (1987) state “language and reality are dynamically interconnected” (p. 29).

Chamberlin (2000) states:

We are often told that language defines what it is to be human, individually and collectively. Different languages, the argument goes, therefore define us differently; thus while language in the abstract may be what defines us as human, language in practice – different languages in different practices – determines these differences. (p.133)

Language and culture share an undeniable partnership in the perception of who you are to yourself and others (Kublu & Mallon, 1999). Cannella and Viruru (2004) explain that language “is seen by many as a behaviour that shapes and creates cultures” (p. 38). A common understanding is that language is seen as the mechanism that transmits culture from one generation to the next and operates within our society as one of the most important practices through which cultural production and re-production take place (Antone, 2000: Corson, 1998; Frideres, 1999; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). Freire and Macedo (1987) claim that, “language is also culture” and “the mediating force of knowledge; but it is also knowledge itself” (p. 53). Frideres (1999) agrees that language is fundamental to cultural identity. The Assembly of First Nations (as cited in NADC, 2002) maintains that, “language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared, and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one’s ancestral language” (p. 14).

Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2005) ask if people who speak different languages think about and experience the world differently. If so, are these differences in thinking due to the structural and lexical differences in the language spoken (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005)?

Language influences how someone refers to people, objects and events and determines what aspects of life are attended to. The influence of language on thinking implies that within different languages, there are linguistic elements that make it easier to communicate about specific events or objects particular to the cultural group (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005).

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes the powerful influence of social and cultural factors on cognitive and language development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Super and Harkness (2002) also acknowledge that child development is influenced not only by the immediate family, but also by the society, culture, language, and history of the community. According to Vygotsky (1978), the development of egocentric speech, inner speech, and external speech are grounded in one's social and cultural orientation. Roer-Strier and Rosenthal (2001) confirm that a culture's childrearing practices, including language, are directly connected to the image of adulthood that the culture values. This means that social interaction with others within the culture will shape the child's thinking and language at various ages, as well as the type of adult he or she will become.

Fishman (1991, 1993, 2001) explains three elements in the relationship between language and culture. The first element is that language indexes its culture, meaning that the language that is associated with a culture is the one that best expresses it through vocabulary, idioms, and metaphors. Secondly, language symbolizes its culture and what it represents as well as symbolizes the status of the culture in comparison to others. Thirdly, culture is partly created from its language, as it is acted and transmitted verbally from one generation to the next. Fishman (1993) also notes the importance of acknowledging that culture is derived from many sources beyond language including geographic location and historical factors.

Post-colonial scholars (Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998; Viruru, 2001) point out that language has been one of the central tools in the continuing colonization of the world by Euro-Americans and that colonial power was maintained through language (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994). Language continues to be a singularly divisive factor between what cultures are deemed ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’. Societies that use written languages are considered superior to those that don’t (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Chamberlin (2000) states that language can be both an instrument of survival and an instrument of power, depending on who is using it. During (1995) also discusses the connection between language and power explaining that the politics of language rests not on the power within language, but on the power behind language.

The Power of English, Language Attrition, and Revitalization

Baker (2006) claims that access to English is interpreted as a gateway to wealth, prominent social positions, and valued forms of knowledge. “The international prestige of English and English speaking nations and the popularity of Anglo-American culture has given the English language associations of status, power and wealth” (Baker, 2006, p. 87). The influence of the English language continues to extend and frequently dominates over many high-status domains and functions such as politics and business. Even though English is not the most widely spoken language in the world, it is spoken in some of the wealthiest countries. It is the only language in many monolingual countries and influences world-wide mass media. It is also associated with Anglo ways of thinking that have colonized much of the world (Baker, 2006). This makes the number of speakers not as important as what the

English language represents. Kublu and Mallon (1999) describe how parents use English in an attempt to connect their children to this source of status, power, and wealth.

Baker (2006) describes how many of the world's languages are endangered and that "50% of the world's languages are no longer being reproduced among children. Thus many of these 50% of languages could die in the next 100 years unless there are conservation measures" (p. 45). One of the first signs of language decay is when children no longer use their native language while playing (Kublu & Mallon, 1999). Hale (as cited in Battiste & Henderson, 2000) confirms this finding that half the world's six thousand indigenous languages are endangered because children do not speak them. The second sign of language decay is when parents speak the aboriginal language and the children answer back in English. A third danger sign is when the language in the home is primarily English but an entire generation is cut off from communicating with the elders who only speak the aboriginal language (Kublu & Mallon, 1999).

Language vitality can be attributed to several significant factors. These factors include status factors (economic, social, and symbolic status), demographic factors (geographical distribution, number of speakers, level of saturation), and institutional support factors (mass media, religion, administration, schooling) (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977). It is widely recognized and "[i]nternational experience confirms that the status of a language influences whether it will be used and supported" (The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture [TFALC], 2005, p.3).

Aboriginal Languages and Education

Battiste and Henderson (2000) state that indigenous languages and world-views are critically endangered. Of the approximately fifty aboriginal languages still alive in Canada, only three, based on the number of speakers, are considered to be flourishing – Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway. Approximately one third of aboriginal Canadians have conversational abilities in an aboriginal language (Statistics Canada, 2001). The decline of aboriginal languages in Canada did not happen by accident or as a function of evolution.

There are many reasons why our generation of parents cannot speak our ancestral language. The residential school system's abusive campaign for the elimination of our languages and identity; non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive homes who sought to "take the Indian out of us," enrolment in "integrated" provincial schools which showed neither respect nor understanding for the importance of our languages and cultures; and, intermarriage. (Iris Lauzon, RCAP, 1996 in Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000, p. 25)

Many elders attribute the loss of language and culture to the residential schools and emphasize that the focus now should be on helping young people to learn and to take pride in their traditional languages and cultures (TFALC, 2005).

English and French, not aboriginal languages, have the status of being the official languages of Canada. Although most Canadian provinces have taken steps to provide second language instruction in aboriginal languages within the curriculum, these methods are insufficient to achieve oral fluency or language preservation. In addition, no province is prepared to provide regular school instruction in aboriginal languages. Canada's formal education system is forever affected by past policies and strategies used to educate aboriginal children and therefore "[i]t is impossible to understand education as an autonomous or neutral practice" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 39). Historically, the system failed at providing aboriginal people with the opportunity to learn skills that are required for personal or

academic success (Jones, 2003). The decisions that continue to be made in the midst of conflicting provincial and federal policies are informed by the socio-historical context of aboriginal education in Canada.

The state of aboriginal languages provides a revealing measure of the federal government's lack of commitment to action and change. Since 1972, the AFN has identified First Nation languages and cultures as a priority when they released the position paper *Indian Control of Indian Education*. This document states that "[u]nless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being" (p. 9). Over the last thirty-five years the AFN has conducted research and continued to lobby for protective legislation to advance the language rights of First Nations. The AFN believes that only through a nation-wide effort will the First Nations realize its vision for a national strategy where First Nation people are in control of the revitalization and preservation of First Nation languages and cultures. In the 1972 position paper, a consensus was reached when First Nations parents and community members decided that preschool and primary school classes should be taught in the language of the community and that transition to English or French as a second language should be introduced only after a child has a strong grasp of his own language (AFN, 2005). There was initial policy development and there is evidence of government support, but this translated into minimal financial support without a tracking system to show how the funds were spent (Fettes & Norton, 2000). Elder Taylor, Assembly of First Nations (as cited in Graham, 2005) says:

Our language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other...it gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group. There are no English words for these relationships because our social and family life is different from theirs. (p. 330)

TFALC (2005) describes language as containing social and spiritual values and a collective sense of identity. TFALC (2005) sees the present generation as having the responsibility to salvage and strengthen the ability to speak and retain their languages so that future generations will be fluent. Languages are also an important part of the connection to the land. The oral tradition is described as most important and it is the responsibility of the elders to pass on stories. Dunn (2001) stresses the importance of looking at the social context of language development and the need to recognize that oral cultures manage knowledge in a different way. Elders emphasize that languages must be kept alive through daily use in everyday activities (TFALC, 2005). However, communication between elders and youth is not possible when young people are unable to communicate in their native tongue.

TFALC (2005) sees the Canadian government as having a duty to provide the necessary resources to restore aboriginal languages as redress for the failure to protect these languages in the past.

Literacy

The second area of focus evident throughout the literature is literacy. The term ‘literacy’ means different things to different people (Cummins & Sayers, 1995) and the form, function, and meaning of literacy vary with the community, culture, or social group (Shieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984). UNESCO’s (2005) definition of literacy is “the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short simple sentence about one’s everyday life” (para. 2). Paulsen describes literacy as “the means through which people articulate the expression of their consciousness and experience, in either written or oral form” (Paulsen,

2003, p. 25). Generally, a society will raise their children to be literate in the literacy of that particular culture, in a way that is functional and relevant to their lives, and able to meet their social purposes (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001; Super & Harkness, 2002). The spread of basic cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy is considered key to individual and societal development and success (UNESCO, 2005).

According to George (n.d), “both the government of Ontario and the government of Canada see literacy as the ability to access and use information, usually in print format in the two official languages of this country – English and French” (p.2). The Government of Canada (2003a) states:

While investments in post-secondary education are absolutely critical to the Canadian economy, investments in literacy and other essential skills are also very important. Without these foundation skills, individuals are extremely limited not only in terms of their ability to learn, but also in their ability to function fully in society. Moreover, given the economic costs associated with low literacy skills, society loses too. (p. 12)

The government’s advances in addressing literacy concerns are based on the promise that there will be improvements in the labour market and economy, better community and child health, improved safety, advancement on immigrant issues, and increased social cohesion (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). Freire and Macedo (1987) argue for the need to look at the act of reading from a critical perspective noting that “reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (p. 29). Literacy efforts need to critically situate the pedagogy, considering the context of the students, the families, and the teachers.

Types of Literacy

Literacy is the combination of reading, writing, and corresponding numeracy skills

(UNESCO, 2005). Cummins and Sayers (1995) define functional literacy as a level of reading and writing that allows people to function sufficiently in social and employment situations typical of current industrialized countries. Cultural literacy emphasizes the need for shared experiences, knowledge, and expectations in order to adequately comprehend written word, media, or social interactions, which legitimize the knowledge and values of the cultural hegemony (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). Functional and cultural literacy lack critical examination of context and are both assumed to be politically neutral and separate from issues of power in society (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). However, “[c]ritical literacy is explicitly focused on issues of power” (Cummins & Sayers, 1995, p. 89) and reflects the ability to analyze what is beneath the surface (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). Freire and Macedo (1987) identify the ability to think critically as highly important in order to meaningfully participate in society. Cummins and Sayers (1995) agree, stating that critical literacy “enables individuals to challenge disinformation and become more socially involved in the democratic process... and encourages marginalized communities to become more aware of the value of their own cultural heritage” (p. 90). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), to be literate “is *not* to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one’s voice, history, and future” (p. 11). Freire and Macedo contend that focusing solely on the technical skills of reading and writing fails to address coercive power structures. “For marginalized communities, functional literacy can be attained only through critical literacy” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.104). It is important to recognize the existence of a continuum of literacy levels taking into account the range of functional skills applicable to a variety of situations (e.g., reading a legal contract, newspaper, or using a computer) and the fact that what really matters is the ability to grasp the meaning(s) of a text and develop critical judgment

(UNESCO, 2005). Liberatory approaches to literacy argue that only through critically situating literacy does one become functionally literate.

Rethinking Literacy

Cannella and Viruru (2004) discuss the common Western viewpoint that “literate human beings are always better off than illiterate ones” (p. 39). A widespread perspective of literacy is that it is essential for economic vitality as well as cultural competency in society (Government of Canada, 2003a; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). The Canadian government considers functional literacy skills necessary so that citizens are contributing and participating in society. The government also admits that illiteracy has high economic costs due to the high rates of unemployment and incarceration, health issues, and community problems associated with it (Government of Canada, 2003a; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005).

Through further exploration, critical literacy has shown that literacy is another artificial truth created in particular social and political contexts in which it is valued (Chamberlin, 2000; Henderson, 2000). Hence, the concept of literacy is invested with an enormous range of assumptions and presumptions. Graff (2001) states that the complexity of literacy is not well recognized and as a result of this misunderstanding it is divided into simple binaries of literate/illiterate and written/oral. Literacy is assumed to be value neutral and its inclusion in schools implies that every child can and should learn to be literate under the right conditions (Graff, 2001). The final assumption identified by Graff is that economic development is directly linked to investing in formal education. It is often forgotten that

human beings have functioned very successfully in a variety of times and cultures without being literate.

Luke and Freebody (1997) examine the relationship between reading and colonization and conclude that the manner in which reading was taught for many centuries clearly placed some people in the centre and others at the margins of society. English language instruction, along with the introduction of classic English literature, was part of this process. The Canadian government focuses their definition of literacy on the ability to use the written word in English or French and this is done to the exclusion of all other types of literacies, contributing to a stigma about low literacy levels (George, n.d.).

Freire and Macedo (1987) outline the pedagogical approach known as emancipatory literacy. The first element of emancipatory literacy is that students must become literate about their own histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environment. Secondly, they must also learn and understand the codes of the dominant culture so they can transcend their own environments. There is often an enormous tension between these two dimensions of emancipatory literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). If literacy is based in a critical reflection and these two dimensions, it becomes a medium by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reclaim their history, culture, and language practices (Freire & Macedo, 1987). According to Freire and Macedo (1987):

Literacy can only be emancipatory and critical to the extent that it is conducted in the language of the people. It is through the native language that students “name their world” and begin to establish a dialectical relationship with the dominant class in the process of transforming the social and political structures that imprison them in their “culture of silence”. (p. 159)

Literacy taught in the dominant language empowers the ruling class, supports the maintenance of the elitist model of education, alienates students, and denies them tools for reflection and critical thinking (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Literacy is dynamic and has the power to transform lives (Antone, 2000, 2003; Dunn, 2001; Freire & Macedo 1987; Gamlin, 2003). Learning to be literate is an act of re-symbolizing and reinterpreting the past as well as sustaining particular world-views and the survival of distinct and vital cultures (Gamlin, 2003).

Aboriginal Literacy

Aboriginal peoples in Canada face numerous challenges in the areas of education and literacy that are unique to them as a population and a culture. Aboriginal peoples are likely to have lower levels of education and financial achievement than the average Canadian. They experience much lower rates of labour force participation, and are more likely to be employed in low-skilled occupations or to be unemployed (Government of Canada, 2003a; House of Commons, 2005; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). If aboriginal people lack the necessary education and literacy skills to compete in the economy, they will be excluded from new opportunities and pushed even further to the margins (House of Commons, 2005). The government views aboriginal people as representing a critical potential labour force resource that will meet the needs of the Canadian economy in the next decade (Government of Canada, 2003a; House of Commons, 2005). Enhancing the literacy skills of aboriginal learners is said to be an essential step toward maximizing their employment (Government of Canada, 2003a). Education in English is seen as the key factor to improving these skills; however, education is considered problematic in most aboriginal communities based on historical factors associated

with it.

Burnaby (1996) discusses how federal and provincial governments historically dealt only with English and French literacy among aboriginal peoples, ignoring aboriginal language literacy. Burnaby also indicates a division between literacy in aboriginal languages and English or French literacy for aboriginal peoples and recommends this position be counteracted in policy development.

Dunn (2001) views aboriginal illiteracy as a symptom of powerlessness rather than a reason for it and illustrates this by looking at the socio-historical context of Aborigines in Australia in relation to their poor literacy rates through the 1990s. This author also describes a discontinuity between home and school for aboriginal children especially in regards to language and literacy. Much of this is based on an assumption by the dominant culture that writing is a natural part of social life. Whereas for indigenous peoples, oral culture is the foundation. Aboriginal cultures customarily use oral tradition as the means by which cultural beliefs, knowledge, and shared values are conveyed and preserved (Frideres, 1999). While Freire and Macedo (1987) stress the importance of literacy's oral dimension, aboriginal authors (Battiste, 2000; George, n.d.; NADC, 2002) define orality as distinct and separate from literacy, rather than a component of it. Oral cultures manage knowledge and information in a different way than literate cultures (Dunn, 2001). Even though Western literacies may be necessary for participation in mainstream society, they should not deny aboriginal literacies (George, n.d.).

George (n.d.) explains that native literacy is a tool which empowers the spirit of native people by recognizing and affirming their unique cultures and the interconnectedness of creation. Native literacy contributes to the development of self-understanding and critical

thinking and also “fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination” (George, n.d., p. 6). Elements of aboriginal literacy include ways of knowing and being, holistic learning, oral tradition, storytelling, culture, and language. It is broad and holistic; dynamic not static. Some key principles of First Nations literacy identified by George (n.d) are to ensure that programs are community based and holistic and that they place literacy into culture rather than fitting culture into literacy. Additional principles promote using the dual forces of language and culture to sustain and maintain a positive cultural identity, to develop relevant teaching materials and methodology, to empower learners in relation to others, and to contribute to community development (NADC, 2002). Literacy is viewed as having positive effects on parenting skills and employment rates and increases access to health care and services providing opportunities for advancement (Antone, 2003; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; George, n.d.).

Aboriginal literacy is more than just the ability to read, write, and do mathematics in English in the hope of gaining employment. Aboriginal practitioners in aboriginal literacy programs incorporate wide-ranging goals focused on preserving aboriginal language and culture and reclamation of identity (NADC, 2002). Grant (2001) demonstrates that the literature regarding emergent literacy shows a growing focus on socio-cultural contexts and highlights that many children are equipped for school by their experiences before entering school, including their home environment. For many aboriginal children, beginning school is like entering a foreign country (Grant, 2001). It is extremely important to support strong native identity by providing holistic programming and incorporating traditional knowledge and values into the education of native students in the school (Antone, 2000).

Traditional aboriginal education is described as watching, listening, experiencing, and participating. A modern system of education for aboriginal people has to be holistic, community and culture based, reflecting the world view, values, and patterns of social interaction of the aboriginal community (Hill, 2001; NADC, 2002). It must be rooted in intergenerational teachings and part of everyday life (Paulsen, 2003). Any literacy project for indigenous populations “ necessarily would have to go through the reading of the word in their native languages. This literacy cannot require the reading of the word be done in the colonizer’s language” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 57).

Indigenous Knowledge

The third area of focus is indigenous knowledge. Language and literacy gain relevance for aboriginal people when situated within this context.

Defining Indigenous Knowledge

It is said that the best way to understand the concept of indigenous knowledge is to be open to accepting different realities (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, Chamberlin, 2000) and to recognize that no short answer or definition exists (Battiste, 2000). Indigenous knowledge is described as “a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity” (Daes, 1994, para. 8). It is also concluded that these diverse elements can only be learned or understood by the pedagogy traditionally used by the people themselves, including apprenticeship, ceremonies, and practice (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Rather than attempting to understand indigenous knowledge as a distinct knowledge

system, researchers and educators have tried to match it to existing academic categories of Eurocentric knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). This approach is problematic because indigenous knowledge does not fit into the Eurocentric concept of ‘culture’ and possessors of this knowledge often cannot categorize it in Eurocentric thought, partly because categorization is not part of indigenous thought (Battiste, as cited in Ball & Simpkins, 2004).

Cajete (1986) asserts that the ethnoscience, the system of knowledge and classification of concepts, of each indigenous group is unique. It is based on the adaptation to a specific place including the methods, thought processes, mindsets, values, concepts, and experiences that the indigenous group uses to understand and obtain knowledge about the natural world. Indigenous world-views are cognitive maps of the particular ecosystem that they live in (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Recognizing the diversity of indigenous ecology also affirms the diversity of aboriginal languages, knowledge, and heritages. Everyday indigenous knowledge is used by those who possess it and is often inherent and unidentifiable (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). It is “so much a part of the clan, band, community, and the individual that it cannot be separated from the bearer to be codified into a definition” (Battiste, as cited in Ball & Simpkins, 2004, p. 484).

Indigenous knowledge is not a uniform concept across all indigenous peoples but strands of connectedness do exist (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). One way to describe the unity in indigenous knowledge is “that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between the people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 42). The principle of totality or holism is what connects these knowledges (Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 1986,

2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005, Watt-Cloutier, 2000). Common elements include a connection with the land, a holism of spirit, of self, and of the land, and a focus on the interconnectedness of all relationships (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Cajete (2000) elaborates on this holistic nature stating that there are no separate categories for science, art, or religion. Cajete (1986) also explains how indigenous peoples view harmony as a dynamic and multidimensional balancing of interrelationships in their ecologies.

Ball (2003) affirms that the continuation of cultural practices, increase in cultural identity and pride, and protection of languages are emphasized by First Nations parents and community leaders as ways to create positive cultural identity in young children and as keys to First Nations health and community renewal. LaFrance (2000) contends, “the struggle for survival by First Nations peoples has magnified the need for the culturally appropriate instruction of youth” (p.102). Greenwood and Fraser (2005) state that the future of indigenous people is embedded in indigenous knowledge, which is conveyed through the traditional stories and words of elders. Ball (2003, 2004), Curwen Doige (2003), Dunn (2001), and Greenwood (2004, 2005a) all consider the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge as fundamental to aboriginal education and essential in contributing to the health of aboriginal families and communities. If aboriginal peoples are to survive and be healthy, they cannot be separated from these traditional ways (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Battiste and Henderson (2000) point out that indigenous perspectives on indigenous knowledge are rarely found in literature because to learn about them requires a different method than is the norm for traditional education and research.

Indigenous Knowledge, Language, and Literacy

The Supreme Court of Canada understands: “[l]anguage is more than a mere means of communication, it is part and parcel of the identity and culture of the people speaking it” (in *Mahe et al. v. The Queen in Right of Alberta*, 1990, 82). “The link between literacy, language, and identity is that literacy and language are the symbolic representation of a concept, and thereby language becomes the verbal means of expressing one’s beliefs, knowledge, and values” (Paulsen, 2003, p. 25). Paulsen (2003) adds that language is also the method by which people live their culture and it is the connection between one’s heritage and community. Goffman (1963) claims that language choices are of paramount importance to identity construction because the self is entirely constructed through discourse. During (1995) describes how making a choice of language is making a choice of identity. Specific literacy activities that affirm an individual’s sense of cultural identity are acquired more easily and with more involvement than those that deny and devalue cultural identity (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). Demaine (1996) maintains that when a person’s culture, language, and sense of identity are not acknowledged or supported, their educational and personal development are delayed.

Ball and Simpkins (2004) affirm that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into early childhood training and practice reinforces positive individual and community cultural identity. However, there is no one right way to incorporate indigenous knowledge in curriculum (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005) and many of the ways that indigenous knowledge is incorporated are organic, instinctual, and community specific (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Greenwood, 2004).

Traditional Eurocentric viewpoints, considering Europeans as focal to world culture, history, and economics, believe that alternative world-views can be interpreted through language translation. The illusion of translatability serves to maintain the legitimacy of the Eurocentric world-view and the illegitimacy of indigenous world-views (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). This idea also prevents indigenous communities from believing that their own languages are essential to healthy community development (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and allows myths about language to flourish including the idea that indigenous children must be immersed in English to become fluent.

According to George (n.d), aboriginal people believe that culture and language are indivisible. Elders also emphasize that language, culture, spiritual values, and sense of identity are inseparable concepts (TFALC, 2005). Curwen Doige (2003) agrees that indigenous people see their languages as a form of spiritual identity that results in shared beliefs about life and how the world works. These languages are more than just links to knowledge and tradition; they also provide a description of the peoples' relationship to their ecosystem (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Indigenous knowledge is transferred primarily through oral and symbolic traditions which "are the means for communicating the full range of human experience and are critical to the survival of any Indigenous people" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 48). Aboriginal languages provide the most powerful ways of understanding indigenous knowledge and are critical links between traditional knowledge and skills for survival (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge have been discussed as three separate concepts, however, the connections between them are evident and the relationships complex

and layered. The next chapter will synthesize the information found within the three areas of focus, as well as identify common themes embedded in the literature.

Chapter 3

Synthesis of Findings

This chapter gathers the findings from the literature and organizes them into four areas. The four areas are: challenges for programming, options for programming, recommendations found in the literature, and themes in the literature.

Challenges for Programming

Around the world, aboriginal language and literacy programs face similar challenges. George (n.d.) describes how the overall lack of knowledge on the part of teachers negatively affects aboriginal adult education. Canadian public schools still educate from a Eurocentric knowledge base (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and standardized testing is based on concepts typical to certain race, class, gender, and socio-economic status (George, n.d.). Several structural and attitudinal factors have been identified as contributing to indigenous students' difficulty and resistance in school including segregation of students, simplified curriculum, low expectations, and inexperienced teachers (Curwen Doige, 2003; Friere & Macedo, 1987). Many schools are over-crowded and under-funded, students' language and culture is often excluded, and parental involvement discouraged (Goddard, 2002; Graham, 2005). Curriculum also fails to reflect the realities of students and actively discourages critical thinking (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Curwen Doige (2003), Dunn (2001), and George (n.d.) find there are mismatches in the teaching styles of teachers and the learning styles of students. Battiste and Henderson (2000) believe these challenges exist because indigenous knowledge, aboriginal heritage, and elders have not been included in the curriculum in public schools in any significant way.

Learning effective oral communication or using orality as an alternative to literacy, is not included as a component of most literacy and language initiatives (Antone, 2000; House of Commons, 2005).

Immersion programs, like Te Kohanga Reo, Punana Leo, and some Canadian Aboriginal Head Start sites, have faced problems finding teachers who are trained in teaching as well as proficient in aboriginal languages (Curwen Doige, 2003; Greenwood, 2004; Johnston & Johnson, 2002). There is also a need to create and access more attractive, varied, and complex curriculum in aboriginal languages (Graham, 2005; Johnston & Johnson, 2002). Castellano, Davis and Lahache (2000) confirm a severe shortage of human and financial resources as well as a lack of clear provincial and federal policies. The NADC (2002) agrees that “[a]dequate long-term and multi-year funding is critical” (p. 19).

Aboriginal literacy programs in all provinces have to negotiate jurisdictional limitations in order to have aboriginal language initiatives recognized as authentic (NADC, 2002). In Canada, there are geographic limitations that affect service delivery and evaluation as communities are widespread and many are isolated and accessible only by plane. Hebert (2000) identifies the isolation of language and literacy workers as another major difficulty. The diversity of Canada’s aboriginal peoples also provides a distinct challenge to creating consistent and relevant programming. Responding to recommendations for indigenous knowledge incorporation would mean that each program must be community specific, and this would call for a considerable investment of time and money.

Options for Programming

The literature identifies several options for programming. The Rainbow Approach to aboriginal literacy, developed by the National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC), is a conceptual model that assigns colours to different types of adult literacy (Antone, 2003). This approach describes itself as holistic and incorporates aboriginal languages, English, and oral literacy skills as part of its programming. The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), established in 1985, is an aboriginal owned and operated adult training facility. FNTI developed a Medicine Wheel Model of Learning that is based on a holistic approach and centres on the balance of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical attributes (Antone, 2000, 2003).

Graham (2005) discusses the creation of an aboriginal language program in one school district delivered as an after-school program for youth. It was created collaboratively with school representatives, community, and aboriginal agencies; all contributing strategies to transform materials and curriculum. It demonstrates that adopting traditional narrative and incorporating cultural content into school practices provides a holistic approach to communication and response to community concerns.

Pence and Ball (1999), in collaboration with First Nations in British Columbia, created the Generative Curriculum Model (GCM) that is a “radical departure from the familiar paths of training and education in ECCD” (p. 36). This early childhood education training model sees communities as living systems, hence the community-focused delivery. This model is based on the idea that children reproduce the culture of their primary caregivers, their teachers, peers, and the media with which they interact (Ball, 2004). Recognizing that activities, behaviours, attitudes, and values that are so much a part of the community that they

cannot be separated into individual practice is where knowledge that is authentically First Nations based becomes key to early childhood training and practice (Ball, 2004).

Early Childhood Programming Options

The Maori, in New Zealand, are an example of indigenous people that have addressed the unique needs of their children through Te Kohanga Reo, established in 1982. These preschool immersion programs are created and run by Maori, for Maori. They support the revival of Maori language and culture and at the same time politicize aboriginal education issues (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). In this program, children are immersed in Maori in a homelike atmosphere to reattach the language to the people at a community level. Its foundation is in total immersion, the imparting of Maori spiritual values and concepts, and the teaching and involvement of children in Maori customs. The administration of each centre is done by the extended family and programming is based in traditional techniques of childcare and knowledge acquisition. The philosophy stresses the importance of balancing the involvement of Native Maori principles with pedagogical understanding of early childhood education (Johnston & Johnson, 2002). Other successful programs, such as Punana Leo in Hawaii, have been modeled after Te Kohanga Reo. The most crucial component in the success of these programs is the exclusion of English completely from the classroom (Johnston & Johnson, 2002). The communities and countries with the highest success rate, for aboriginal language growth and maintenance, have full immersion (Johnston & Johnson, 2002).

The Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) Initiative in Canada is meant to provide wide-ranging experiences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis preschool children and their families.

The programs are based on “caring, creativity and pride and are rooted in traditional community beliefs, within a holistic and safe environment” (Health Canada, 2004, para. 5). The policy states that in order for aboriginal children to become healthy young people with an interest in learning, the programs must be locally designed and controlled. “All projects provide programming in six core areas: education and school readiness; Aboriginal culture and language; parental involvement; health promotion; nutrition; and social support” (Health Canada, 2004, para. 2). The philosophy of AHS states “parents are supported in their role as the child’s first and most influential teacher, and the wisdom of elders is valued” (Health Canada, 2004, para. 3). Parents are to be directly involved in the management and operations of projects. AHS is funded by Health Canada and AHS sites on reserve are managed by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB). Health Canada Regional Offices oversee the contribution agreements and work directly with projects, while the AHS National Office provides countrywide management, support and training, and conducts an annual national evaluation. The initiative is currently being implemented in 126 of over 600 Aboriginal communities in Canada.

Corson (2000) provides a choice of three language instruction models for Inuit schools in Nunavut. The models he describes all begin with preschool arrangements because he believes it is clear that Inuit language is being lost at the preschool level. The first option places increased emphasis on the Inuit language and culture and is closely related to Te Kohanga Reo that operates in New Zealand. The second model proposed is much like a French immersion program operated in many Canadian schools, but uses English immersion instead. The third model offers a balance of the Inuit language and English, which is the intent of many current language programs operating in Nunavut schools.

Recommendations Found in the Literature

While aboriginal organizations and government have identified the survival of aboriginal languages as well as English language literacy as concerns, authors point out that many are without official language policies. The National Aboriginal Design Committee supports the creation of a separate and coordinated aboriginal literacy strategy. This strategy includes a discussion as to what constitutes aboriginal literacy activities and the inclusion of aboriginal languages (NADC, 2002). George (n.d.) recommends the creation of a common understanding of literacy, expanding the definition, and removing the stigma associated with literacy education. Battiste and Henderson (2000) recommend that a federal policy on aboriginal languages should be developed within the context of the framework for self-government. Future language policies must address the development of a broad-based strategic approach to aboriginal language teaching and be based in pedagogies that reflect distinct aboriginal cultures and curriculum that supports interactive communication grounded in the present (Herbert, 2000). Language maintenance among aboriginal Canadians needs to be considered along with issues concerning language itself and within the broader framework of social, political, and ideological factors (Corson, 1998; Cummins, 2004).

There is an agreement of the need for language programming that is community-based and controlled, with aboriginal culture and values at the centre (Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000; TFALC, 2005). Blackstock (2006) says “[t]he government needs to redress the deficits in resource access for Aboriginal children and families, and affirm Aboriginal peoples as the best decision makers for their own children” (p.5). The federal government should enact legislation recognizing the status and significance of aboriginal languages and defining linguistic rights (Battiste, 2000). Battiste and Henderson (2000) claim that parents and

relatives of indigenous children must be convinced that their languages are valuable and relevant if revitalization is to occur. Grant (2001) agrees that ensuring culturally inclusive and appropriate education comes from active engagement with the voices and experiences of aboriginal families.

New literacy programs need to move from traditional approaches that emphasize the learning of mechanical skills and separate reading from its ideological and historical contexts (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Dunn (2001) criticizes pedagogy that sees aboriginal children and families as deficient. She proposes a strengths-based approach that incorporates family involvement, accepts aboriginal languages as legitimate, encourages the participation of community, and promotes teachers' need for socio-historical knowledge. Freire and Macedo (1987) also discuss changes in pedagogy:

Educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis of literacy. This includes, obviously, the language they bring to the classroom. To do otherwise is to deny students the rights that lie at the core of the notion of an emancipatory literacy. (p. 151)

According to Curwen Doige (2003), this change in pedagogy is necessary in order to incorporate spirituality into aboriginal education. This means making connections to real life experiences and understanding aboriginal epistemology is a way to empower aboriginal students. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and teachings into programming will build academic skills and awareness of self, abilities, family, and community (Jones, 2003).

Gamlin (2003) recommends combining experiential learning with reflective practice whereby younger generations will creatively interpret and apply the lessons of elders by considering their own experience. Antone (2000, 2003) and Gamlin (2003) argue that a holistic perspective that promotes aboriginal culture as a living culture is crucial for aboriginal education. Recognizing knowledge as a relational act, teachers need to be sensitive to the

historical, social, and cultural conditions that contribute to the forms of knowledge and meaning that students bring to school (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It is stressed that in order to understand aboriginal culture we need to understand those who are living it now, not only those in the past (Curwen Doige, 2003; Gamlin, 2003). Hebert (2000) believes it is time for innovation in aboriginal education and time to embrace holistic, experiential, communicative, and multidimensional approaches.

Elders advise educational institutions to focus on training programs, immersion and bilingual schools, cultural camps, and urban language programs. They recommend aboriginal control of language curricula and to make language study mandatory (TFALC, 2005). Freire and Macedo (1987) stress that the incorporation of the students' language as the primary language of literacy instruction be given top priority. Immersion offers "intensive exposure to only one language, focuses on learning the language through meaningful content, and is aimed at the youngest members of the community, who are the best equipped to learn the language" (Johnston & Johnson, 2002, p. 108). "It is through their language that [children] will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 151). A linguistic renaissance is one of the most important elements in the movement towards self-government and holistic health of aboriginal peoples and communities (Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000).

Themes in the Literature

The synthesis of findings in addition to the exploration of language, literacy, and indigenous knowledge, reveals five major themes.

Language and Culture are Dynamically and Inextricably Connected.

Multiple authors support the connection between language and culture (Antone, 2000; Corson, 1998; Fishman, 2001; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Frideres, 1999; George, n.d.; Kublu & Mallon, 1999; NADC, 2002). Language expresses identity (Crystal, as cited in Baker, 2006) and is fundamental to individual and community cultural identity (Frideres, 1999). The relationship between language and culture is illustrated in the way a language organizes, symbolizes, and expresses the culture it belongs to (Fishman, 2001). Languages hold the values, history, and knowledge of a culture (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and it is suggested that cultural identity is maintained through one's ancestral language (George, n.d.). Language is seen as the mechanism that transmits culture from one generation to the next, and languages are considered to be one of the most important practices through which cultural production and reproduction take place.

Literacy Has the Ability to Transform Lives on Many Levels.

Literacy is described as transformative, dynamic, and changing (Antone, 2003; Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gamlin, 2003, TFALC, 2005; UNESCO, 2005). It is important to recognize the existence of a continuum of literacy. Each level, or type of literacy, contains the possibility for change and transformation. People's lives are affected in a variety of ways depending on the literacy learning approach. Functional literacy teaches people to read and write, and allows them to participate in and contribute to society (Cummins & Sayers, 1995; UNESCO, 2005). Cultural literacy allows people to gain knowledge into the social mores and codes of the culture (Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Literacy also has the ability to enable critical thinking skills and encourage

analysis of self, others, history and context (Antone, 2000, 2003; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

The revival and strengthening of indigenous languages and literacy will support efforts toward self-determination and emancipation (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Language is Part of Indigenous Knowledge.

Indigenous thought does not separate or categorize but sees the interconnectedness of all things (Cajete, 2000). It is a holistic knowledge base where language is an essential element, not an additional concept or category (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; TFALC, 2005). George (n.d) states that aboriginal people believe that culture and language are indivisible and elders also emphasized that language, culture, spiritual values, and sense of identity are inseparable concepts (Curwen Doige, 2003; NADC, 2002; TFALC, 2005). Aboriginal languages are more than just links to knowledge and tradition; they provide a description of the peoples' relationship to their ecosystem (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Curwen Doige (2003) agrees that indigenous languages are a form of spiritual identity that results in a shared belief about life and how the world works. Language is the repository that holds indigenous knowledge and carries this wisdom from one generation to the next (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005).

Literacy and Education are Relevant if Placed in the Context of Community and Family.

Literacy and education must be community and culture based, reflecting the values, and world-views of the community (Antone, 2003; George, n.d.; NADC, 2002), and made part of everyday life (Paulsen, 2003; TFALC, 2005). Education should acknowledge the

socio-historical context, be rooted in intergenerational teachings, and follow the patterns of social interaction of the community (Curwen Doige, 2003; Dunn, 2001; NADC, 2002; Paulsen, 2003; TFALC, 2005). If literacy is to be relevant, it needs to be taught in the language of the people (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and aboriginal epistemology, including spirituality, must be recognized (Curwen Doige, 2003; Dunn, 2001).

Aboriginal Education Works When Based in an Indigenous Knowledge Framework.

If aboriginal peoples are to survive and be healthy, they cannot be separated from their traditional ways (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). The common element identified across all indigenous knowledge is its holistic nature and the interconnectedness of all things (Ball, 2004; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). The continuation of cultural practices, increase in cultural identity and pride, and protection of languages are emphasized as ways to create positive cultural identity in young children and as keys to aboriginal health and community renewal (Ball, 2004; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Ball (2003, 2004), Curwen Doige (2003), Dunn (2001), and Greenwood (2004, 2005a) all consider the incorporation of indigenous knowledge as fundamental to aboriginal education and essential in contributing to the health of aboriginal families and communities.

Building on the identification of common challenges, options, recommendations, and themes; the next chapter will examine what is missing and unclear in the literature and the potential reasons for these absences and ambiguity.

Chapter 4

Content Analysis

This critical content analysis identifies what is missing, ambiguous, and confusing within the literature. Examining the literature from a critical perspective recognizes that history informs current practice, opinion, and action in relation to this issue. This perspective also recognizes the multiple oppressions (race, poverty, gender) faced by many aboriginal people and the impact of internalized oppression due to years of forced assimilation and racist legislation (Frideres, 1999; Henry et al., 1998). A socio-cultural framework of child development provides a lens to focus on the gaps in the literature and reinforces the importance of this analysis in relation to children and families. The content analysis also assists to draw attention to areas that contribute to ongoing powerlessness and oppression for aboriginal families and how this affects the health of aboriginal children. This review recognizes that there is more than one answer to this problem and perhaps some key answers are contained in identifying what is ambiguous and what is missing.

Problems in the Literature

The Lack of Clarity and Consistency Terminology

Inconsistent terminology is found throughout the literature. Some of this may be reflective of the time period the articles were written in, the location they came from, or the population they were intended for. Regardless, this lack of consistent terminology leads to assumptions, confusion, and may create barriers to action. S. Taylor (2004) describes how

attention has been drawn to the importance of language in social life and in discourse-driven social change. Therefore, the choice of vocabulary and words indicate meaning and carry messages (Chamberlin, 2000; S. Taylor, 2004). Inconsistent terminology creates further communication challenges and presents multiple disjointed voices as opposed to a strong unified one.

Naming 'aboriginal'

There is a range of terminology in the literature used in reference to aboriginal people including the words aboriginal, indigenous, Native, First Nations, Indian, Inuit, Métis, and First People. Sometimes these words are capitalized and sometimes they are not. It is important to recognize that colonial governments created many of the names given to aboriginal people (Frideres, 1999; Henry et al., 1998). These words can be associated with past abuse and may influence a community's response and decision regarding what they want to be called. These historical influences may explain inconsistencies of names across aboriginal groups as well as those found in the literature. These inconsistencies, however, may confuse or be interpreted as a lack of certainty and a lack of unity towards the intended action. Naming is central to identity; changing names creates instability for the people themselves and imposes further barriers between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people.

Literacy

There are various types of literacy identified and described throughout the literature including functional literacy and cultural literacy (Cummins & Sayers, 1995; UNESCO, 2005), critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987), aboriginal literacy (Gamlin, 2003; Graham,

2005), aboriginal language literacy (Graham, 2005), native literacy (George, 2002), and emancipatory literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Different authors give different meanings to the same words. For example, the term aboriginal literacy may mean many things simultaneously. It can refer to holistic literacy (Antone, 2000, 2003; Dunn, 2001; Gamlin, 2003), aboriginal language literacy (TFALC, 2005), or English literacy for aboriginal people (Government of Canada, 2003a; Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2005). It is often unclear what portion of aboriginal literacy focuses on aboriginal languages and what portion focuses on English (Antone, 2001, 2003; George, n.d.; NADC, 2002). The word literacy may also be associated with tension and conflict for many aboriginal people because of the history of colonialism and education as assimilation. A lack of clarity in the terminology used to identify types of programming creates confusion, lack of consistency, barriers to knowledge sharing, and challenges for evaluation.

Assumptions

The literature on indigenous knowledge reveals that language is an essential part of this knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Greenwood, 2004, 2005). While this is understood among indigenous scholars and communities, Eurocentric thought attempts to fit indigenous knowledge into the Eurocentric concept of culture, consequently separating its elements into categories (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). This makes it difficult to determine which authors assume language is an element of indigenous knowledge and therefore do not mention it and which authors use the term indigenous knowledge without considering language to be a fundamental component. There is also confusion between the terms literacy and orality. Some authors (Freire & Macedo, 1987) discuss the oral component of literacy

and refer to this as orality. Other authors see orality as a completely separate knowledge system (Battiste, 2000; Dunn, 2001; NADC, 2002). By not recognizing orality as a unique knowledge base further marginalizes indigenous knowledge and attempts to package it within Eurocentric thought. Threads of this confusion exist throughout the literature.

Some authors promote programming that is based in an indigenous knowledge framework (Ball, 2004; Greenwood, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005), while others use the term culturally responsive pedagogy (Curwen Doige, 2003; Dunn, 2001) or culturally appropriate curriculum (Grant, 2001). It is unclear if these refer to the same pedagogy with another terminology or if these concepts are distinctly different. 'Culturally responsive' or 'culturally appropriate' can be interpreted as philosophies imposed from the outside, while an indigenous knowledge framework is generated from within the community. This raises questions about whether non-indigenous people can create and implement programming that is founded in an indigenous knowledge framework, another area not addressed in the literature. Dunn's (2001) use of the terms 'culturally appropriate' and 'culturally relevant' pedagogy may be reflective of the Australian context or may be connected to an alternative philosophy of aboriginal education. Dunn (2001) states that the child's dominant discourse must be validated in school. She also promotes using the aboriginal language to foster English literacy development but does not indicate if the child should be taught in her or his aboriginal language.

Gamlin (2003) does not discuss aboriginal languages. It is uncertain if his use of the term indigenous knowledge assumes the incorporation of aboriginal languages. It is also not apparent who will guide the method of self-reflective, transformative literacy he suggests or in what context this will happen. Jones (2003) does not discuss aboriginal languages either but

discusses incorporating indigenous knowledge into programming to increase academic skills and self-awareness. While Grant (2001) supports basing programming in community and culture she does not address aboriginal languages or use the term indigenous knowledge. Programs claiming to be grounded in culture and community are assumed to be working within an indigenous knowledge framework but this may not be true.

Any assumption that indigenous knowledge is old knowledge and no longer relevant contributes to stereotypes and the ongoing acceptance that English and Eurocentric education is necessary for aboriginal students. Gamlin (2003) highlights the importance of understanding indigenous knowledge as dynamic and changing. Indigenous knowledge does not consist of traditional knowledge and historical facts alone but is a reinterpretation of this knowledge in the present context.

Without clarity and consistency in terminology, words start to lose their meaning. Language and discourse are used to indicate the goals that are considered worthwhile (Bacci, 2000). The lack of consistent language use and multiple meanings for one term demonstrates a lack of clarity, lack of vision, and lack of importance. These interpretations are potentially reflected in policy and funding decisions that do not support aboriginal child health and development.

The Minimal Acknowledgement of Diversity

In the past, there has been a pan-aboriginal approach to legislation, education, programming, and policy for aboriginal people in Canada (Fearn, 2006; Frideres, 1999; Henry et al., 1998) and many current education programs offer pan-aboriginal curriculum in an effort to include aboriginal content and to be culturally sensitive. Some of the literature offers an

alternative approach recommending that curriculum incorporate indigenous philosophies, languages, and practices (Curwen Doige, 2003; Graham, 2005). Henry et al. (1998) state the “inability to recognize the huge diversity among Aboriginal peoples had reverberations throughout the long history of Aboriginal-White relations” (p. 121). It is widely recognized that indigenous knowledge is community or band specific (Ball 2004; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Greenwood, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005) and so policy and programming should respond to this diversity. Very few authors (Grant, 2001) explicitly mention the importance of acknowledging the diversity of aboriginal peoples and the challenges in defining the term aboriginal. However, recognition of diversity is assumed or implied in many community-based models such as Canada’s Aboriginal Head Start and New Zealand’s Te Kohanga Reo. These models promote the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into education which, in theory, bases programming on the unique aspects of each community.

Questions reflecting the reality of many aboriginal Canadians are not asked, including how this educational philosophy translates into environments that are heterogeneous. The differences between isolated northern communities, reserves, and urban settings are not discussed in the literature. For example, the generative curriculum model (Ball, 2004, Pence & Ball, 1999) may be difficult to implement in urban aboriginal communities or in other diverse, integrated settings as opposed to segregated, homogenous ones where it has been previously applied. Greenwood and Fraser (2005) do not address how the elements of indigenous knowledge would fit into mainstream schooling, which is a reality for many urban aboriginal children, or how mainstream pedagogy can manage indigenous knowledge that is dynamic and constantly changing. Transmission of language skills is described as important

and happens differently in each community (Ball, 2000; Ball & Pence, 2006). With this in mind it may not be possible to create one model that will work for all of Canada's aboriginal communities. An attempt to create a universal aboriginal child discourse may only serve to reinforce Eurocentric perspectives and cultural hegemony, similar to the problems with universal child discourse (Soto & Swadener, 2002).

Cajete (2000) discusses the dangers of indigenous knowledge becoming a commodity. It is clear that understanding indigenous knowledge is complex and made especially difficult if working from a Eurocentric knowledge base (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). However, if indigenous knowledge is simplified, generalized, or misinterpreted, it can lead to programs incorporating a tourist approach to indigenous knowledge, positioning it as exotic and foreign, and further promoting stereotypes. Encounters with diversity cannot be confined to ghettoized courses where students and teachers are engaged in a tourist approach to culture (Varadharajan, 2000). It is a mistake to see indigenous cultures as undifferentiated from each other. These misconceptions strengthen recurrent negative themes and stereotypes rather than allowing individual communities and nations to develop.

The Omission of the Voices of Families

The voices of families are missing from the literature. The few documents that incorporate community and family voices include the federal government's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996), and Towards a New Beginning (TFALC, 2005). Both Canadian documents were created in consultation with aboriginal communities and organizations. Ball and Pence (2006)

document the story of generative curriculum and the First Nations Partnerships Program in British Columbia, which incorporates community voices. Graham (2005) also promotes the incorporation of elder and parent involvement in education but she does not include their voices in her publication. While many authors support community needs and visions being used in the development and implementation of programs, there is little literature or empirical research that incorporates the views of community members and families.

There are an assortment of reasons why family voices may not be included in the literature. Challenges may exist because of the resistance of some aboriginal people to researchers and traditional research methods (Duran & Duran, 2000; Smith, 2000) and the related difficulty for research teams to access communities. The history of colonialism and assimilation practices in Canada contribute to why aboriginal families continue to be marginalized and their voices not considered. Aboriginal people have had to define their humanity based on the binary relationship that exists between the colonizer and the colonized and the dualities of civilized/uncivilized (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005). Within this ideology aboriginal families are viewed as in need of salvation. ‘Help’ is then prescribed from the outside and imposed on communities. This reinforces that idea that aboriginal family knowledge has little value.

Aboriginal scholars may not include the voices of aboriginal families because the voices of these scholars are also marginalized. These scholars must conform to Eurocentric institutions and work within Eurocentric thought processes. They must comply with the dictates of the academic field in order to gain acceptance and have their voices be considered valid.

There may also be a fear of what families might request. There is the possibility that families will request that their children be educated in English. This would be in direct conflict with all the work that has been done to advance the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and aboriginal control of aboriginal education.

The Absence of Children

The literature places emphasis on the importance of strengthening aboriginal adult literacy (Antone, 2000, 2003; Gamlin, 2003; George, n.d.; House of Commons, 2005; Jones, 2003; NADC, 2002; Paulsen, 2003). For Freire and Macedo (1987), “[a]dult literacy is an expression of the national reconstruction in progress. It is a political and knowing act committed in the process of learning to read and write the word and “to read” and “to write” reality” (p. 66). Adult literacy is seen as empowering and potentially emancipatory as the people take history into their own hands and are able to mold it and not just be objects of it (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Adult literacy is also identified as an important step on the path to emancipation and freedom from oppressive social constructs (Antone, 2000, 2003; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Government focus is also on improving adult literacy skills, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, rather than focusing on children. The federal government is concentrating on building a literate aboriginal workforce (Government of Canada, 2003a) and enabling aboriginal Canadian’s to participate and contribute to the economy. The government plans to do this by assisting aboriginal adults in increasing their literacy skills. Illiteracy costs the government money due to extensive use of the country’s resources such as social services, welfare benefits, and health care. The government focus on adult literacy and economic

growth may have influenced the focus of the academic writing as well. The academic interests may support a similar vision because adult literacy is the area where government funding is directed.

Many aboriginal literacy articles fail to mention young children (Antone, 2000, 2003; Gamlin, 2003; Grant, 2001; Jones, 2003; Paulsen, 2003) except those writing from Australia (Dunn, 2001) and those not addressing aboriginal literacy specifically but discussing aboriginal early childhood programming (Ball, 2004; Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Greenwood, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Greenwood & Fraser, 2005; Johnston & Johnson, 2002). Goldie (1995) states that an ideology is also made of what it does not mention, meaning absence is also negative presence.

When aboriginal health, literacy, and education are focused on individual progress and participation rather than holistic community health, it promotes a Eurocentric perspective that considers English literacy to be the desired state. Eurocentric knowledge transmission and prescribed practices are based on assumptions of their universal validity and desirability (Pence & Ball, 1999). This viewpoint further illegitimizes aboriginal knowledges and allows literacy to continue to be used as a tool of colonization.

Ignoring childhood reinforces the post-colonial view that “[c]hildren have been created as a group of people who must be observed and who are in opposition, at least in intellectual ability, agency, and behaviour, to adults” (Viruru & Cannella, 1998, p. 2). The same way that colonial discourses are used to construct the ‘other’ (Riggins, 1997) can also be applied to the theory of the universal child. This creates two groups as if in opposition to each other, one group as the oppressor and the other the oppressed, and is accepted as a fixed reality and a sign of normalcy. Postcolonial theory as applied to children can simply serve to

create another opportunity to justify the construction of human beings as objects (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). So, even as Indigenous people are looking for freedom from centuries of oppression, children continue to exist as oppressed objects of their situation. None of the literature reviewed in this paper includes the voices of children.

Focusing on adult literacy is not holistic or future oriented and is only a temporary solution to a bigger problem. If the entire community, especially children, is not attended to then the same problem will reoccur, as these children become adults. A holistic approach to literacy and education is not only recognizing the holistic nature of an individual and their development, as ECE programs claim to do, but also the holistic nature of the community, tribe, band, or nation. This demands a focus on children as well as adults. A holistic view of child health cannot be separated from community health, just as language cannot be separated from indigenous knowledge (TFALC, 2005) - an indigenous knowledge framework includes children.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Statement of Needs and Recommendations

An exploration of the three areas of focus, a synthesis of findings, and the construction of a critical content analysis all lead to the generation of a statement of needs. These needs are reflected in a series of recommendations informed by the holistic principles of child development discussed in Chapter One.

The Need for Clarity and Consistency in Terminology.

While it is important to recognize the reasons behind inconsistencies in terminology it is necessary for the Canadian aboriginal community to define terms and decide what language will be used. Recognizing that words define what is important (Bacci, 2000) language needs to be made precise and explicit so there is little room for assumption or misunderstanding. There also needs to be shared comprehension of what specific terms mean (i.e. indigenous knowledge, aboriginal literacy). Policy makers, researchers, and institutions would then apply the definitions that were decided upon by the Canadian aboriginal community.

The Need to Acknowledge Diversity.

While advocacy for aboriginal child health requires consistent terminology and a unified direction, the diversity of Canada's aboriginal people must also be authentically recognized. The unique culture and knowledge of each community, band, or nation needs to be incorporated into early childhood services. Looking to other models (i.e. Te Kohanga Reo,

Punana Leo) can prove valuable, but they cannot be copied. The diversity of Canada's aboriginal people is distinct and there is no recipe for the integration of indigenous knowledge. Funding, development, implementation, and evaluation must correspond with community location, language, culture, and landscape. The principles of holistic child development acknowledge that development is influenced by a variety of sources, many which are community, culture, and family specific. Recognizing diversity and allowing it to influence policy and practice will contribute to child and community health.

The Need to Focus on Children and to Include the Voices of Families.

Programs that concentrate on one group or individual progress are not holistic or based in indigenous knowledge. A focus on children's language and identity development as well as adult education and development is a more holistic approach to community health (Ball & Pence, 2006; Greenwood, 2005a, 2005b). Promoting programs based in culture and community means providing families with opportunities to communicate their desires for their children. This also means recognizing children as important and including them in the image of a literate, healthy, educated people. The holistic principles of child development see children as active participants in their own development, who are learning from birth and learn by interacting with people, objects, and their environment. The principles also emphasize that children's needs are best met within the context of family, community, and culture. Aboriginal family voices are necessary advocates for the inclusion of their children in community health strategies and funding initiatives. The marginalized voices of aboriginal families need to be sought and listened to by both aboriginal and non-aboriginal scholars.

The Need for Empirical Research.

There is currently little scholarly research in this subject area, especially within a Canadian context. Empirical research increases the amount of information available on this topic and allows for the collection of the voices of aboriginal families. Research should be founded in indigenous research methods (Duran & Duran, 2000; Smith, 2000) in order to respect indigenous communities and their knowledge. Consideration for the unique context of aboriginal families and children in Canada, as emphasized in the holistic principles of development, needs to be taken into account and emphasized in research methods and studies. Increasing research about indigenous knowledge and aboriginal families will require new ways of framing research and the validation of alternative research methods (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) so that aboriginal voices can be heard.

Further Research

Recommendations for further research should explore the practical application of these recommendations, along with discussions about developing a universal set of aboriginal education principles (Ball & Pence, 2006). The exploration of the risks and benefits of developing a universal aboriginal child discourse should be encouraged. Gathering information on community specific aboriginal early childhood services across Canada is also needed. Inquiry into the multiple oppressions faced by aboriginal people, including the impact of gender, in relation to the issue of aboriginal early childhood services, is recommended as well. Exploration of aboriginal family opinion on early childhood education and services and how to incorporate family knowledge and preference into program design, development, and delivery is also important.

Conclusion

Making a choice between languages is making a choice of identity (During, 1995) and no one should have to choose one language over another (Chamberlin, 2000). This critical review reveals new layers contributing to this complex problem. Perhaps the issue is not about making a choice between English or aboriginal languages or between Eurocentric education and indigenous knowledge. Perhaps the issue is about having the ability to make a choice.

Aboriginal literacy and education have historically been directed and prescribed by non-aboriginal people. The literature identifies that aboriginal education must be based in an indigenous knowledge framework, including aboriginal languages, in order to be relevant and contribute to community health and development. The principles of holistic child development emphasize through multiple points that family, community, and cultural context have immense influence on healthy child development. However, the discourses on aboriginal education continue to conceal and disqualify certain forms of knowledge. The elements that are missing in the literature are fundamental to understanding the problem and making decisions that will move things forward. By basing the needs and recommendations in the principles of holistic child development, the work and opinion of scholars is recognized in addition to identifying what has been missed and needs to be considered. Shifting the focus onto children and families accentuates their essential role in holistic community health. Allowing aboriginal families to contribute ideas, opinion, and make choices about the type of care and education they want for their children gives voice to families, promotes community health, and contributes to developing holistic aboriginal early childhood services.

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