TAKING OWNERSHIP: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NON-ABORIGINAL PROGRAM FOR ON-RESERVE CHILDREN

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University 2004

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
Faculty
of
Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2006

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DEGREE   Master of Arts

TITLE   Taking Ownership: The Implementation of a Non-Aboriginal
                  Program for On-Reserve Children

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, I assessed the appropriateness of a non-Aboriginal early childhood education intervention, the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program in 5 on-reserve First Nations communities, by focusing on the experiences of the program employees. Findings from individual and focus group interviews and researcher observations revealed a process of "taking ownership" of the HIPPY program by these women. "Taking ownership" included three sub-processes: (1) views regarding the strength of the program shifted from children's school readiness skills to supporting cultural pride and awareness; (2) the women's self-identities moved from cultural disconnectedness to a strengthened Aboriginal identity; and (3) whether HIPPY is Aboriginal became an increasingly important issue for these women because they, as Aboriginal women, delivered it. By taking ownership of and culturally contextualizing the HIPPY program these women have further ensured its appropriateness for their communities.

DEDICATION

To the Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In Aboriginal communities, children are seen as gifts from the Creator, and this traditional view is reflected in the importance placed upon early childhood education programming in Aboriginal communities across Canada (e.g., Ball, 2004; Goulet, Dressyman-Lavallee, & McCleod, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996). Although great emphasis is placed on education, Aboriginal people consistently have poorer educational outcomes (e.g., high drop-out rates) than any other group in Canada (Perley, 1993). As a result, considerable scholarly and practical effort has been devoted to understanding and improving these outcomes. As part of this effort, questions have been raised concerning what are appropriate models of early education for Aboriginal communities. As I discuss in more detail in my literature review, although a range of views on this issue can be found, a common conviction is that decisions about the education of Aboriginal children must be made by those to whom they matter most -- their families and communities. As such, any evaluation of early childhood programming in First Nations communities must include the views of the community.

In this thesis, I sought to examine one non-Aboriginal early childhood education intervention, the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program, as it was implemented in five on-reserve First Nations communities, by focusing on the experiences of the community members who work

in the program. This investigation, which comprises part of the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project[1], was motivated by questions regarding the appropriateness of HIPPY for First Nations communities. Here I report on how five Aboriginal HIPPY employees from five different First Nations communities have "taken ownership" of the HIPPY program, which they have come to value as an appropriate and important program for creating a foundation for more positive educational outcomes in their respective communities.

In the following chapter, I review historical and contemporary issues concerning Aboriginal children, as well as present traditional and current Aboriginal views on the education of children. This review provides a context in which to consider current Aboriginal early childhood education programming, including the HIPPY program. The historical context is of particular significance due to its effects on Aboriginal peoples today, which are clearly evident in the participants' stories as presented in my results.

In the third chapter, I discuss my methodology, which was qualitative and included five semi-structured individual interviews, extensive researcher observations and one follow-up focus group interview. I also present the ethical considerations, including Aboriginal ethical considerations, taken in carrying out the current study, and I give a brief characterization of each of my participants. I conclude this chapter

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[1] The "Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project" is a qualitative study, which focuses on the process of introducing, implementing and maintaining HIPPY in five on-reserve communities in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

with a description of my analysis, which was based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) articulation of open-coding.

Chapter four is the presentation of my analysis of the individual interviews and follow-up focus group interview. I also include my observations, which are my personal reflections as a researcher.

In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings regarding the appropriateness of implementing HIPPY in Aboriginal communities. I also examine my findings in relation to the literature on the historical and contemporary context in which Aboriginal education occurs, and conclude that early childhood education programs must provide Aboriginal children the opportunity to develop cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social and physical skills in a culturally relevant context that will enhance their self-concepts and inspire a passion for learning, while considering the broader social needs of children, families and communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context

Residential Schools

In the 1600s European missionaries were sent to North America to develop a school system for Native children (Fournier & Crey, 1997). The first boarding school in Canada for Aboriginal boys was opened in 1620. Over the next two centuries various attempts were made through educational institutions to "civilize" Aboriginal people. From these initial attempts came the establishment of day schools, where children would attend schools near their homes, which they could return to at the end of the day (Fournier & Crey, 1997). In the 1800s day schools were for the most part abandoned and gave way to the more aggressive residential school era, which began in 1846 when the government and a number of church denominations (i.e., Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist) in Canada joined forces to strip Aboriginal children of their culture (Furniss, 1992). At this time, the churches were given ultimate authority over the education of Aboriginal children. The residential schools were seen as a means of separating children from the influence of their families and communities.

The conditions within the residential schools were often deplorable and oppressive (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Although conditions varied from one school to the next, emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse were rampant. Particularly

harsh punishments were given to those who attempted to engage in their traditional

cultural, language or spiritual practices. For example, at the Kuper Island Residential

School in British Columbia, children who engaged in such activities were subjected to

public whippings and forcible confinement (Olsen, 2001). The children were also

exposed to the use of militant corporal punishment, which conflicted with the

traditional Aboriginal childrearing belief and practice of modelling appropriate

behaviour and minimal physical punishment (Haig-Brown, 1988). Many children

could not endure such cruelty, and the death rate among Aboriginal children

attending the residential schools was staggering (Fournier & Crey, 1997). In attempts

to escape, many children froze to death or drowned. Children also died as a result of

neglect, abuse, disease (e.g., tuberculosis), malnutrition and suicide. Many who

survived the residential schools suffered lasting consequences, returning to their

communities with symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, such as insomnia,

uncontrollable anger, alcohol and drug abuse and panic attacks, to name a few

(Fournier & Crey, 1997).

The residential school era resulted in countless tragic stories, but there are also

numerous accounts that convey a sense of hope. Over the past two decades, a

number of publications (e.g., Fournier & Crey, 1997; Furniss, 1992; Haig-Brown,

1988; Ing, 1991; Olsen, 2001; Sterling, 1992) have been released that have been

dedicated to the telling of Aboriginal peoples' experiences in residential schools, and

one striking feature of many of these publications are the stories of courageousness

and heroism. For example, amidst all the efforts to strip Native children of their

culture, the establishment of counter-cultures arose, where Native children rebelled against the oppressive conditions forced upon them (Haig-Brown, 1988). This was the case at the Kamloops Indian Residential School where such counter-cultures began in opposition to the harshness of the regulations that governed the children's daily lives. From the formation of gangs to running away, Native children attempted to resist the relentless assault on their cultural identity. Neither federal policy nor missionary righteousness were successful in assimilating Native children, and "through pain, hunger, cold, and corporal punishment, the people... managed to remain their ancestors' children and to glean understanding of the importance of being Native as an irrepressible part of life" (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 125).

The Child Welfare System: The "Sixties Scoop"

Continued efforts to assimilate Aboriginal children were carried out on the part of the Canadian government through the social welfare system (Fournier & Crey, 1997). In 1961 the "sixties' scoop" began with a stated mandate of "child protection." Social workers acting upon the authority given to them by the government removed Aboriginal children from their homes both on and off reserves. According to Fournier and Crey (1997), these social workers made decisions about what constituted appropriate childrearing practices based largely on white, middle-class values. In addition, Aboriginal families that were in need did not have access to the same social services as non-Aboriginal families. Rather than supporting Aboriginal families through difficult times or periods of transition, the government encouraged social workers to take children away and place them in non-Aboriginal foster care or

adoptive homes, where children were often exposed to some degree of emotional, spiritual, physical or sexual abuse (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

The social welfare system established conditions in which Aboriginal children were once again stripped of their cultural identity in a discriminatory manner (Fournier & Crey, 1997). For example, although non-Aboriginal families were able to remain in contact with their children while they were in foster care, this was not the case for Aboriginal families, who were virtually cut off from their apprehended children. Fournier and Crey (1997) contend that Aboriginal children living within adoptive homes or foster care often disappeared, "the vast majority of them placed until they were adults in non-Aboriginal homes where their cultural identity, their legal Indian status, their knowledge of their own First Nation and even their birth names were erased, often forever" (p. 81).

Contemporary Issues: The Impact of Alcoholism

Many of the historical events discussed above are seen as antecedents to a plethora of contemporary social problems (Whitehead & Hayes, 1998). Today, issues such as poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide, crime and violence are prominent concerns in many Aboriginal communities across Canada. Aboriginal peoples have a particularly long and painful history with alcoholism. Since its introduction by fur traders, "alcohol became deeply entrenched in Aboriginal communities all over North America. It combined with despair, dislocation and

unemployment to create a deadly cocktail that robbed Aboriginal families of pride, self-respect and their future" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 173).

In the 1950s, the consumption of alcohol was seen as particularly damaging (Haig-Brown, 1988). As a result of the residential school experience, many Aboriginal people coped through the use of alcohol, consequently creating unsafe environments for their own children. Haig-Brown (1988) interviewed survivors of the Kamloops Residential School, and several participants retold their stories of having been profoundly affected by alcoholism in their families. One participant commented that her mother's alcohol abuse often resulted in neglect, to the extent that she was raped by an extended family member.

The abuse of alcohol and its consequent disruptive impact on parent-child relationships had several other negative consequences (Fournier & Crey, 1997). First, the abuse of alcohol in Aboriginal communities provided the rationale for removing thousands of Aboriginal children from their homes. To make matters worse, a disturbingly high number of Aboriginal children are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), and an even greater number are born with Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) (Stout & Kipling, 1999). The consequences of prenatal exposure to alcohol can be devastating. Children with FAS are found to have deficits in recall/memory, language acquisition, fine-motor skills, and problem solving, overall intellectual impairment, attention deficits, and thus learning disabilities, as well as hyperactivity (Roebuck, Mattson, & Riley, 1999), all of which have implications for the development and implementation of early childhood education programming.

To address the effects of alcoholism, drug and alcohol education was clearly mandated in the Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) policy paper, which argued for the integration of preventative resources and rehabilitation programming for youth and adults. Health Canada (Stout & Kipling, 1999) reported that more than one-third of Aboriginal peoples in Canada were under the age of fourteen with many of them suffering from Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), and indicated that careful attention must be given to the special needs support required for these children. In addition, Aboriginal parents want to have access to the resources that will allow them to identify children with special needs and the support to deal with such issues (Goulet et al., 2001). The better equipped parents are with the appropriate resources, the more likely they will be to assume the care of their most precious resource: their children (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

It has been argued that rather than developing separate programs for Aboriginal children with special needs, these children should be integrated into the programs that will be offered to the entire community (Ball, 2004). For example, it is believed that the Aboriginal Head Start program (discussed below) could be expanded to accommodate the special needs of children with FASD (Stout & Kipling, 1999). Whether Aboriginal children with FASD are integrated and accommodated within existing programs or are given access to programs suited specifically to their needs, the developmental effect of FASD is an important consideration in the context of early childhood education and the needs of Aboriginal communities across Canada.

Policy

The history of the relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples is a long and complicated one. A formal relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples was established in 1867, when the federal government was given jurisdiction over Indian Affairs (Fleras, 1996). With the development of the Indian Act in 1876, the Department of Indian Affairs had the legal power to control every aspect of Native peoples' lives. From who would be identified as a status Indian, to control over reserve land and resources, Native peoples' lives were essentially invaded and regulated by the federal government (Fleras, 1996). After relentless petitioning by Native people, in 1951 substantial amendments were made to the Indian Act (Haig-Brown, 1988). One such revision led to the allowance of Native children to attend public schools. It was believed that creating an integrated education system would be the best course of action to assimilate Native children.

In 1969 the federal government released the "White Paper Policy", which mandated the transference of responsibility of Aboriginal education from the federal government to the provinces (Battiste & Barman, 1995). At that time, it was still hoped that Aboriginal children would assimilate and adopt mainstream cultural values. Appalled at the continuation of institutionalised control over Native education, the Native community issued the "Red Paper Policy", where Native educational experts began developing a policy for Native education, which subsequently gave rise to the National Indian Brotherhood's (1972) Indian Control of

Indian Education policy paper. Aboriginal peoples were fervently opposed to the government's attempts to pass off their responsibility, as they themselves wanted the opportunity to administer and implement educational programs for their children. The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) policy paper was founded upon the belief that, "happiness and satisfaction come from: pride in one's self, understanding one's fellowmen, and living in harmony with nature" (p. 1). In addition, the policy was guided by the principles of local control and parental responsibility. From implementing cultural content and heritage language learning into curriculum, to outlining the appropriate educational facilities necessary to meet the educational needs of children and adults, the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) stressed that all decisions regarding Indian education must be made by or in consultation with Indian people.

In light of the National Indian Brotherhood's assertions, in 1973 the federal government announced that it would not transfer responsibility for Aboriginal education to the provinces and in principal conceded that, "Indian control of Indian education" would be reflected in national policy (Battiste & Barman, 1995). Thus, national Aboriginal leaders were given the authority to oversee Indian education. In an effort to support this transition, funding was administered by the federal government for the establishment of regional Indian cultural centres, which were intended to support research and development of cultural education. In addition, the government also funded Indian education training programs at several universities across Canada (Battiste & Barman, 1995). Since these initial efforts, and as a result of

persistent activism, band-run schools began to emerge in the mid 1970s (Haig-Brown, 1988). Although these schools were primarily federally funded, the administration, curriculum development and hiring was the right and responsibility of each respective band that chose to undertake this format.

In 1991, the Canadian government established the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Castellano, 2000). The Commission was ordered in response to the public's reaction to the armed conflict between the Canadian state and Aboriginal peoples over Mohawk lands. The mandate of the Commission was to examine and present the history of the relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples. In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Report was released, and throughout that document there is no other topic that penetrates the concerns of Aboriginal peoples as much as education, as it "is woven through every section of the RCAP Report" (Castellano, 2000, p. 265). The primary recommendation on education was that territorial, provincial and federal governments need to recognize that along with the right to exercise self-government, Aboriginal peoples have the right to local control of education. In addition, this right must be accompanied by stable fiscal support. Overall, Aboriginal organizations across Canada were receptive to the RCAP; however, ongoing research and research independent of the Commission were clearly mandated (Castellano, 2000).

From residential schools, to federally run day schools, to band-run schools, Aboriginal peoples have overcome insurmountable obstacles in their attempts to gain "Indian control of Indian education" (Haig-Brown, 1988). Clearly the relationship

between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples has been tumultuous, but

with such efforts as the RCAP (1996) and other initiatives affecting policy, inroads

appear to be slowly being made in the establishment of a more peaceful, and

hopefully one day, mutually satisfying relationship.

Traditional Education

In making decisions about what early childhood education programs are best

for Aboriginal communities, we must also examine and consider traditional forms of

education and teaching. Contemporary programming should be guided by the

knowledge that,

> Long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indians had evolved
> their own form of education. It was an education in which the
> community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the
> land was seen as the mother of the people. Members of the community
> were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that
> each child learned how to live a good life (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992,
> p. 5).

Amongst the various Aboriginal communities across Canada there are

numerous differences in terms of language, spiritual and cultural practices (Fournier

& Crey, 1997). However, what all of these communities seem to share is the belief

that children play a central and crucial role in the transmission of Aboriginal cultural

identity, and they are seen as integral to the survival of Aboriginal peoples both

economically and socially.

Traditionally, through the art of storytelling, each First Nations group would

celebrate and pass on the legend of its own heroes such as the Raven (Fournier &

Crey, 1997). These legendary figures were seen as "tricksters of learning" and were used to convey traditional beliefs about such values as courage, respect and humility. This way of learning was in stark contrast to European expectations of children, and the belief that they were "to be seen, but not heard" (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Oral traditions have been central to all forms of learning in Aboriginal communities (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Through oral traditions Elders have taught children about practical skills and spirituality, and based on their sex, age and social status, children were expected to listen, observe and subsequently carry out the tasks that were expected of them. The skills passed on provided children with the necessary tools to survive (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992). Children's knowledge was founded on experiential learning, and their education, which started at birth, encompassed the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Aboriginal children were expected to implement the skills demonstrated with an understanding of the importance of respecting their relationship with the environment, which would enable them to be autonomous and self-sufficient. Through largely informal instruction, children learned how to build shelters, fish, hunt, trap, gather food, prepare food, as well as traditional spiritual and agricultural practices, which provided children with the skills and knowledge necessary to function not only in everyday life, but allowing them to immerse themselves in a spiritual context (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992).

The specific roles that young children would later fulfil as adults were determined very early on in their lives (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992). For example, if it

was believed that a particular child was to be a medicine person then training for this position would begin in childhood and would be completed when it was determined that the child was ready to practice as a medicine person.

The Role of Parents and Elders

In the past, Elders, extended family members, older children and adults throughout one's community viewed themselves as responsible for the caregiving and educating of an individual child (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This belief persists, which is evident in a recent early childhood education study carried out by Ball (2004), where First Nations that participated associated knowledge of one's culture with one's sense of self, and viewed the interactions between Elders, parents and children as the basis of transmitting and teaching traditional knowledge.

Within Western ideology, biological parents are primarily responsible for the care of their children, and those children's education is largely institutionalised (Fournier & Crey, 1997). With these conflicting views, the traditional Aboriginal parenting and educational model has been devastated because of forced enrolment in such institutions as Indian residential schools (Ball, 2004). Countless individuals have been deprived of the opportunity not only to engage in their traditional cultural and spiritual practices, but also of the experience of being parents; of teaching and nurturing their children (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Haig-Brown (1988) quoted a participant from her study as saying; "The residential schools took away the responsibility of the parents because the parents didn't see the kids all year" (p. 122).

In effect, one's parenting skills are based on their experiences of being parented. Generations of Aboriginal children never had the opportunity to be parented; to live in a nurturing and loving environment and hence, never acquired parenting skills.

The importance of the role of parents was emphasized in the Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) policy paper released by the National Indian Brotherhood's Education Committee. It was argued that, "If we are to avoid the conflict of values which in the past has led to withdrawal and failure, Indian parents must have control of education with the responsibility of setting goals" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 3). The desired outcome was for children's education to reinforce their cultural identity and to provide them with the necessary training that would allow them to prosper and succeed.

In addition to the important role that parents play, Elders are one of the most revered resources, and their role in education is seen as paramount (RCAP, 1996). Through life experience and the wisdom gained as a result, Elders teach Aboriginal children about their history, culture, traditions and morality. They are also an essential source in the area of heritage language learning. Furthermore, they can provide guidance and assist educators and students by parting their wisdom and experience through such activities as language lessons and storytelling. Although the possibilities abound, it has been very difficult to incorporate the teachings of Elders when Aboriginal children's learning continues to occur in a predominantly Eurocentric framework. In the RCAP (1996) Report it was acknowledged that tensions persist between the expectations of Elders, what the current structures permit, and what the

Elders themselves are willing to do. Some Elders have expressed frustration in their efforts to pass on their knowledge in contemporary school settings.

Ball (2004) asserts that it will take considerable effort to put Elders at ease in the school environment, as many of them have had negative experiences with education, such as having to attend residential schools. In addition, the traditional Aboriginal family structure is slowly transforming and becoming more reflective of the so-called "nuclear family", and so both educators and Elders are uncertain of the role that Elders should have within the existing school system (Ball, 2004).

Contemporary Aboriginal Early Childhood Educational Programming

Given the history of the education of Aboriginal children, and the differences between First Nations' traditional educational practices and more mainstream Western ideologies, clearly a balance must be found between traditional values and modern educational programming. Fournier and Crey (1997) assert that,

> The traditional values that sustained First Nations for thousands of years before contact are emerging as the foundation that will carry Aboriginal nations to recovery and renewal. After five centuries of a cultural and economic war waged primarily against their children, First Nations still believe it is the young who will prove to be the mainstay of the renaissance now underway (p. 207).

In the following sections, I examine the importance and role of heritage language learning programming; discuss one of Canada's most well known contemporary Aboriginal early childhood education programs (Aboriginal Head Start); and introduce the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

Heritage Language Learning

Language is a vital means of transmitting culture (Hébert, 2000). Our worldview is shaped by the languages we speak (RCAP, 1996), and it has been argued that, "unless 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" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 9). Ignace (1998) asserts that language is a source of personal and collective pride, unifying communities, which is integral to one's preservation of self-esteem and is a necessary component of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wholeness. To ensure assimilation of Native peoples, one of the goals in the establishment of residential schools was to eliminate Native children's use of their heritage language. This purposeful decimation of language has resulted in a loss of cultural understanding and connectedness (Ignace, 1998). The impact of the residential schools left some parents refusing to pass on their heritage language and cultural traditions to their children, because in order to get by, parents recognized that one must learn to speak and read English (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Across Canada Aboriginal languages face the risk of becoming extinct, as their use is on a steady decline (Fettes & Norton, 2000). In 1998 (Norris), Statistics Canada reported that at the current rate of decline in heritage language use, only 3 of 50 remaining Aboriginal languages could feasibly survive. However, with more recent statistics showing further decline in heritage language use, these remaining three languages are not free of the threat of extinction. For example, in the 2001 Aboriginal

Peoples Survey (O'Donnell & Tait, 2003), which set out to examine the well-being of non-reserve Aboriginal peoples, Statistics Canada reported that the rate of off-reserve Aboriginal language speakers who are fluent enough to conduct a conversation dropped from 20% in 1996 to 16% in 2001. In addition, the use of an Aboriginal mother tongue at home decreased from 8% to 6%.

Many Aboriginal educators are taking action to revive and restore the use of their heritage languages (Ignace, 1998). This is particularly important because many Aboriginal communities are facing the harsh reality that there are very few Elders remaining who are fluent in their heritage language. Early childhood education programs that focus on language are seen as imperative, as the period between birth and five-years-old is seen as the most critical period to begin teaching children language (Koshyk, Beaulieu, Jamieson, & Broatch, 2000). Compounding this is the fact that English or French is the dominant language being taught in Canadian classrooms with a very limited amount of time being spent on heritage language learning, thus creating yet another obstacle in Aboriginal peoples' attempts to retain their languages (Ignace, 1998). Therefore, early childhood educational settings are seen as important environments for immersing Aboriginal children in their heritage language. An extensive literature review carried out by Demmert (2001) revealed that those students who were enrolled in an Indigenous language program, and felt represented by that program, demonstrated increased academic performance, were less likely to drop out of school, were more likely to attend classes, had fewer medical problems and had fewer behavioural issues.

In addition to these early learning programs, and in order for language revitalization to occur and to ensure fluency, children must also be provided with additional opportunities to be immersed in their heritage language (e.g., in their homes), which requires the involvement of the entire community (Ignace, 1998). Therefore, Aboriginal education scholars see that the need goes beyond early childhood educational programming, and should include adult education to encourage and support the involvement of adult heritage language speakers (Gardner, 2004).

In British Columbia, many fluent heritage language speakers are nearing retirement and several initiatives are underway to address this issue (Ignace, 1998). For example, Ethel Gardner, an expert in Aboriginal language renewal, is developing an electronic master-apprentice language-learning program (Thorbes, 2005). Although attempts to revitalize her Stó:lō Halqemeylem language have been well underway since the early 1970s, Gardner (2004) has noted that,

> Two issues from these earlier initiatives soon became evident. First, the school programs were highly influenced by a linguistic approach and failed to promote a strong understanding of the cultural aspects inherent in the language. Second, the Elders were in the classrooms teaching the young children, but the parents were not able to reinforce the language at home. Thus the language was not being transmitted and reinforced naturally from one generation to the next (p. 134).

To address this latter concern of intergenerational language transmission, greater efforts have been made to educate adults, allowing them not only the opportunity to engage in and learn their Halqemeylem language, but also to support their children's acquisition of the language.

One of the most successful Indigenous early childhood language learning

programs, which inspires many Canadian Aboriginal heritage language teachers, is the

Maori preschool immersion program Kohanga Reo (Language Nests) in New

Zealand (e.g., Fleras, 1987; Gardner, 2004; Ignace, 1998; Johnston & Johnson, 2002).

Developed in the early 1980s in response to an ever-increasing loss of language,

Maori parents, educators and community leaders wanted a program where their

children could be fully immersed in their language within an atmosphere that

reflected the traditional Maori family setting (Johnston & Johnson, 2002). The

objectives of this program are to provide reliable childcare for parents (which would

then allow them to seek full-time employment), increase children's academic

performance and create a balance between the dominant cultural context and the

Maori cultural identity (Fleras, 1987). In the face of countless barriers both within and

outside of the Maori community, the program has succeeded and has led to the

development of immersion programs ranging from kindergarten to university, serving

multiple generations (Johnston, & Johnson, 2002).

In a review of heritage language preschool immersion programs, Johnston and

Johnson (2002) outline the issues that Aboriginal communities face in setting up such

programs in their communities. These authors place significant emphasis on parents

and the essential role that they play in their children's acquisition of their heritage

language. Through attendance at adult language education classes and direct

involvement in the heritage language preschool program, parents assist their

children's learning and are thus able to attend to the larger goal of cultural

revitalization. Given this vision of the greater good, this type of initiative goes beyond the parent-child relationship and requires the involvement of the entire community. Community support may come in the form of philosophical, logistical and economic contributions. It is also likely that such programs will face a tension between traditional educational beliefs and the dominant methods of teaching and learning; have difficulty finding teachers and may lack the appropriate materials such as books written in the community's heritage language. It has also been argued that research examining these programs should be initiated and carried out by the Aboriginal communities where the programs are being implemented (Johnston & Johnson, 2002).

One of the greatest challenges faced by Aboriginal communities in implementing heritage language learning programs is having access to the appropriate resources (Ball, 2004). Ball contends that such programming requires fluent heritage language speakers, training for heritage language speakers, heritage language curriculum and funding to pay heritage language speakers. Funding was seen as one of the most significant concerns facing Aboriginal communities, and the lack of it has held many communities back from putting these and other early childhood education programs into practice (Goulet et al., 2001). Even if such programs are implemented, they face the impending possibility of having that funding terminated.

As communities, such as the Stó:lō, struggle with the threat of their language facing extinction, language revivalists continue to persist in their efforts to pass their language on to future generations (Gardner, 2004). It is an effort that requires the

participation of each generation, from preschoolers, to parents, to the communities remaining Elders. Thus, it is not enough to offer heritage language learning only within early childhood education settings. Parents must also be supported and encouraged to learn and speak the language within the home environment, while honouring and learning from the few remaining Elders who are fluent in the community's language.

Aboriginal Head Start

One preschool program that appears to acknowledge the importance of heritage language learning and the role of the entire community is Aboriginal Head Start. The development of Aboriginal Head Start programs in Canada was based upon the need for an early childhood education program for urban and northern Aboriginal communities (Health Canada, 2000). There are now over one hundred Aboriginal Head Start programs running in Canada (Sones, 2002). The program is founded on a holistic approach focusing on culture and language, education, nutrition, social support, health promotion and parental involvement. Aboriginal Head Start encourages the active involvement of parents. In fact, parents play a central role and are involved in every aspect of the program, including setting up, improving, operating and assessing its effectiveness (Sones, 2002).

In a study carried out by Ball (2004), Elders, parents and early childhood education staff claimed that there are numerous benefits to programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, as they provide social support and access to services for

parents and children who are at-risk. It is also believed that programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, which requires the involvement of the entire community, provide a framework reflecting traditional childrearing practices. Aboriginal Head Start also makes available safe spaces in Aboriginal communities, where parents can trust the quality of care that their children are receiving, particularly because the parents themselves play a significant role in the programs development and implementation. Finally, early childhood programming such as Aboriginal Head Start is seen as beneficial because it allows parents the time and opportunity to commit to furthering their education and/or seek employment opportunities (Ball, 2004).

Aboriginal HIPPY

As is noted above, there are a number of benefits to the Aboriginal Head Start program. However, centre-based programs such as Aboriginal Head Start require that families go to the program. Within many Aboriginal communities, willingness to seek programming may be a concern. Because of issues associated with negative schooling experiences, the child welfare system and substance abuse, many families may be isolated and reluctant to participate in group or community programs. One program that speaks to this problem is HIPPY, which is a thirty-week, home-based, early-intervention program that was developed in Israel in the late 1960s (Westheimer, 2003a). The HIPPY program was designed to improve the school readiness of low-income, immigrant preschoolers and support their parents as their child's first and most important teacher. The HIPPY program is provided in-home and is intended to reach those families who may otherwise not have sought or have access to services

for their children. Currently, HIPPY is being implemented in such countries as Israel, the United States, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

In 2002, based on the concerns about educational outcomes for Aboriginal people (e.g., less than 30 percent of Aboriginal youth complete secondary school in British Columbia), community leaders and educators at the Chief Dan George Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia felt that the HIPPY program would be beneficial to Aboriginal communities (Chung, 2004). Consequently, within the last four years, five First Nations communities in and around the Lower Mainland of British Columbia have adopted the program on their reserves and together formed the Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium. This is the first time that the HIPPY program has been implemented in an Aboriginal setting in Canada.

Within the Aboriginal HIPPY program, as in all HIPPY programs, parents are trained and supported by Home Visitors from their communities, to work with and improve their children's linguistic, cognitive and social skills. Each Home Visitor works 20-hours/ week, and their prescribed role entails working with up to 10-12 families; meeting with each family once every two weeks in their homes to show the parents the curriculum, and to role model the lessons that the parents will then teach their children. They are also expected to run two group meetings per month with all the families they work with, to provide further support and additional enriching activities. Finally, the Home Visitors must attend bi-weekly meetings that are run by the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinators, which are held for all Aboriginal Home Visitors within the Lower Mainland Consortium. The Coordinators oversee the Home

Visitors' work and they also organize the bi-weekly training meetings. The Program

Manager oversees the administration of the Aboriginal HIPPY Program, and

introduces and provides training for Aboriginal communities across Canada who are

interested in implementing the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

Although there is a limited amount of research on the impact of the HIPPY

program, it has largely been seen as a success (BarHava-Monteith, Harre, & Field,

2003b; Le Mare & Audet, 2003; Westheimer, 2003b). In addition to positive

educational outcomes for children, preliminary studies have also revealed that the

program has far reaching implications. For example, some studies have demonstrated

that the program has a positive impact on parents, the parent-child relationship and

the communities in which the HIPPY program is implemented (BarHava-Monteith et

al., 2003a; Le Mare & Audet, 2003; Younger, 2003). Because HIPPY has heretofore

not been implemented in Aboriginal communities, it is not clear whether these

findings will transfer to that cultural setting. The originator of HIPPY, Avima

Lombard (1981) claims that the program is suitable for all cultures, but the colonial

history of Aboriginal peoples, particularly as concerns education, raises some very

specific concerns that may not be relevant to other groups. As discussed previously,

such issues as having control over the education of their children, and the mandate to

implement culturally appropriate materials and heritage language learning is of central

concern in Aboriginal communities. Hence, issues regarding appropriateness may

arise with the implementation of a "mainstream" program such as HIPPY in First

Nations settings.

The Implementation of Non-Aboriginal Programs in Aboriginal Settings

Views regarding the modification, adaptation and implementation of non-Aboriginal education programs in Aboriginal communities range from cautiously supportive (e.g., Charters-Voght, 1999; Goulet et al., 2001), to somewhat oppositional (e.g., Kirkness, 1998). For example, Goulet and colleagues (2001) caution that in developing Aboriginal early childhood education programs, we must ask ourselves, "whether the program merely extends an alienating institution to shape the child earlier so that there is a smoother transition into the institution or responds to the needs of the child, parents and First Nations communities" (p. 143). Goulet et al. do not dismiss the implementation of non-Aboriginal programs, but argue that the needs of Aboriginal peoples must be reflected in the programming being offered. Therefore, they suggest that early childhood programs must promote such things as Aboriginal cultural content, heritage language learning and parental control of programming.

According to Charters-Voght (1999), the critical issue in programming for Aboriginal children is who selects or decides on the program. Charters-Voght asserts that Indian Control was defined by the National Indian Brotherhood to give First Nations people the freedom to make decisions about how to educate their children, and that the Indian Control policy is a useful guide in determining appropriate programming.

At the other end of the spectrum, we hear the argument that it is inappropriate to adapt a non-Aboriginal education program and implement it in Aboriginal communities. Kirkness (1998), an Aboriginal scholar asserts that,

> We must take a strong stance in shaping our education. To do this we need radical change... we must cut the shackles and make a new start. It is time for us to forget Band-Aiding; it is time for us to forget adapting; it is time for us to forget supplementing; it is time for us to forget the so-called standards, all of which have restricted our creativity in determining our own master plan (p. 11).

Given these concerns, any evaluation of early childhood programming in First Nations communities must include the views of the community and not simply focus on child outcomes as is typical in traditional program evaluation research. Accordingly, the purpose of my study was to evaluate the appropriateness of the HIPPY program in Aboriginal communities, by focusing on the experiences of community members who work in the program. More specifically, I explored the views of five women from five different First Nations communities concerning the strengths of the HIPPY program, whether HIPPY met a need in their community, and the cultural relevance of the program for their community.

METHOD

Previous research on the HIPPY program has relied primarily upon quantitative methods (e.g., BarHava-Monteith et al., 2003a; Le Mare & Audet, 2003). Out of respect for the Aboriginal tradition of storytelling and the acknowledgement that Aboriginal peoples have had countless negative experiences of being the "researched", it seemed more appropriate to implement qualitative methodologies in the current study. Thus, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five Aboriginal HIPPY employees; included my observations from the various meetings and events I attended with the participants, and carried out one follow-up focus group interview.

It is important to note that the current study did not set out to document the experiences of all those participating in Aboriginal HIPPY. Rather, it is a glimpse into five Aboriginal women's experiences as HIPPY employees and their beliefs about the HIPPY program.

Ethical Considerations

In addition to the standard practice of receiving ethical approval from the University (i.e., Simon Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics), the current study and the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project have also been guided by the Aboriginal research ethical codes of conduct set forth by Ball (in press) and Schnarch (2004). Ball (in press) contends that the research process must be founded

on inclusion and requires a relationship that is built upon trust, cultural literacy, partnership building, acknowledgement of Indigenous values, the use of appropriate methodology and the opportunity to explore positive components of the culture. The goal of the current study and the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project has been to adhere to such ethical standards. Further, it is hoped that the findings from the project can be brought back to the participating Aboriginal communities, and that it will assist in the development of a relationship amongst Aboriginal community researchers and community members, university researchers and early childhood educators.

The Documentation Project has also been guided by the following standards of practice articulated by Schnarch (2004):

1. Researchers should provide ongoing explanations of all aspects of the research project, including its purpose, sponsorship, anticipated benefits and risks, methods, community and individual involvement and reporting plans.

2. Community involvement, participation and consultation are required.

3. Local and traditional knowledge should be incorporated.

4. Research must respect the privacy, protocols, dignity and individual collective rights of Aboriginal Peoples.

5. Meaningful capacity development for Aboriginal Peoples should be incorporated into the project.

6. Reports and summaries should be returned to communities in an appropriate language and format.

7. Aboriginal Peoples should have access to the research data, not just the reports.

8. Community protocols should be respected.

9. Community interests should be supported, benefits maximized and harm reduced or avoided.

To address some of these guidelines, we have hosted community events, attended applicable conferences and the Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitor and Coordinator's bi-weekly training meetings. It is during the bi-weekly training meetings where the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium have been informed about such issues as research methodology, community and individual participation and reporting plans. Furthermore, because the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager is our community partner, and since we have frequent contact with the Home Visitors and Coordinators, we often discuss what everyone would like to get from the documentation process and the direction they would like to see it move. We have also begun to host community luncheons with each Home Visitor on their reserves, where we invite all on-reserve community members to join us for an informal meal, so that we can introduce and discuss the Aboriginal HIPPY program and the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project. We also invite community members to participate in an individual interview to discuss the HIPPY program and/or early childhood education in their community. In addition, we have also started to attend Chief and Council meetings on each reserve to introduce the Aboriginal HIPPY program to those who are not familiar with it, and to present the Aboriginal HIPPY

Documentation Project. Finally, we have consulted with our First Nations colleagues, the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager and each community's Home Visitor regarding community protocol.

As a non-Aboriginal researcher, I have also been guided by the words of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) who cautions:

> Researchers are in receipt of privileged information. They may interpret it within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework. They have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgments, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetrate ignorance (p. 176).

In an attempt to address these concerns, I have tried to heed Smith's (1999) advice by learning as much as I can about First Nations culture and concerns, and to seek support and consent from various First Nations community members. While establishing this foundation, I have also dedicated a significant amount of my time to developing relationships with the Aboriginal HIPPY employees and the five First Nations communities that we have been working with, which has been sought through attending the Aboriginal HIPPY year-end celebrations, hosting community luncheons and presenting the Documentation Project at Chief and Council meetings. In addition, to further develop our relationship with the Aboriginal HIPPY employees, the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project and the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager collaborated and organized a retreat in the fall of 2005. All the researchers, Home Visitors, Coordinators and the Program Manager travelled to the Chehalis reserve in southwestern British Columbia, where Willie Charlie, co-owner of

Sasquatch Tours and storyteller of the Chehalis people, welcomed us all into his family's longhouse and hosted a two-day cultural awareness workshop.

Participants

The participants in the current study are five Aboriginal women who live on five different reserves in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (see Table 1). Four of the participants in the current study are Home Visitors. Within the HIPPY model, Home Visitors are usually parents who reside in the community that the program serves, and who themselves have children who have graduated from the HIPPY program (Le Mare & Audet, 2003). Within the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, all of the Home Visitors live in the communities they are serving, but not all of them have children. The fifth participant is currently the Program Manager of Aboriginal HIPPY.

Three of the participants (two Home Visitors and the current Program Manager) are or have been Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinators. When the current Program Manager completed her individual interview, she was the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator and her interview was based on this role. Again, to clarify their roles, the Home Visitors work directly with the families, the Coordinators oversee the Home Visitors' work and they also organize the bi-weekly training meetings. The Program Manager oversees the administration of the Aboriginal HIPPY Program, and introduces and provides training for Aboriginal communities across Canada who are interested in implementing the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

All of the participants selected a time, date and location that worked best for them for completing the individual interviews, which occurred between February and May 2005. The focus group was held in a boardroom at Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre in November 2005. All of the participants selected a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. In addition, to further ensure confidentiality, the participants' reserves are not identified in the current study. Below, I provide a brief characterization of each participant, which is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: **Participants**

Participants	Janita	Ann	Hope	Marie	Lisa
Age	29	24	23	30	38
Years as HIPPY Employee	1.5	3	3	4	4
Current Position	Home Visitor	Home Visitor/ Coordinator	Home Visitor/ Coordinator	Home Visitor	Program Manager
Years in her Community	29	6	8	29	36
Number of Own Children	2	0	0	2	2
Own Children in Program	Yes	No	No	No	No
Education	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	Completed Grade 11	MEd Candidate

* As of Spring 2006.

Janita

Janita was interviewed on March 21, 2005, on her reserve, in the space where, at the time, she was holding her Aboriginal HIPPY group meetings. Janita was a Home Visitor briefly when the program first started, but left the position to attend to the demands of being a parent. Janita has returned to the Home Visitor position, when it became available again. She was encouraged to apply because of her previous training, experience and the fact that she had a child who was eligible to enrol in the Aboriginal HIPPY program. At the time of her interview, Janita had been a Home Visitor for a total of six months.

Janita is twenty-nine years old and has lived in her community since she was born. She has two children ages four and nine. Her oldest child was enrolled in Aboriginal HIPPY for approximately two years. Janita is currently doing the Aboriginal HIPPY program with her youngest child and is grateful to have had it in her own home. Janita feels Aboriginal HIPPY has strengthened her and her husband's ability to support their children academically. Janita finished high school and is currently completing her Early Childhood Education Certification.

Ann

Ann was interviewed on February 18, 2005 in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project office at Simon Fraser University. Ann has been a Home Visitor for the past three years and has also taken on the role of Coordinator as of September 2005, a role which she shares with Hope, one of the other Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitors. Ann is twenty-four years old, and spent most of her

childhood living off-reserve, in another part of the province. Although Ann finds it difficult to discuss this, she acknowledged that her parents did not want her living on-reserve until she was older because of the problems with drugs and alcohol on-reserve. Once Ann completed high school, she moved with her family to the reserve her mother was from where she has resided since 1999. In addition to completing high school, Ann has also attended college studying Applied Business Technology. Ann would like to continue her work in early childhood education and return to school to become a kindergarten teacher.

Hope

Hope was interviewed on February 24, 2005, on her reserve, in the Band Office boardroom. Hope has been a Home Visitor for the past three years and with Ann, also fulfils the role of Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator. Hope is twenty-three years old and has lived in her community for nine years. Hope grew up primarily in an off-reserve community in which she was not seen as a minority. Education and academic success were very important in Hope's family. Hope finished high school and has taken several college courses. Hope is very outspoken and aspires, to one day, be Chief of her community. "I'm going to be the Chief. I'm kind of... I'm somebody here, maybe not to everybody, but to a lot of people. So, I want to build on that."

Marie

Marie was interviewed on February 15, 2005, on her reserve, in the space where, at the time, she was holding her Aboriginal HIPPY group meetings. Marie is thirty years old. She has been a Home Visitor for four years and has lived in her community almost all of her life. Prior to her involvement in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, Marie had never before travelled beyond her community. Marie dropped out of school in Grade 9, but returned to school to complete Grade 11 when her two children were in preschool. Marie hopes to one day return to school and complete her Grade 12 and to pursue additional post-secondary education. In terms of future aspirations, Marie does not know specifically what she would like to do, but she does see herself continuing to work in the field of early childhood education.

Lisa

Lisa was interviewed in her office on May 18, 2005. Lisa is the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager. Lisa is thirty-eight years old, has two teenaged children and has lived in her community for over 36 years. Lisa's grandmother was the last fluent speaker of her community's native language. In addition to her work as Program Manager, Lisa is also a MEd candidate in First Nations Curriculum, and is the community partner in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project. Lisa's position has evolved over the past four years. Originally, Lisa was hired as the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator, which is the position she held during her individual interview. However, as national interest in the Aboriginal HIPPY program began to spread, there grew a need to have a representative of the program that could

introduce and provide training to Aboriginal communities across Canada. She now does this in her capacity as the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager.

Documentation Process: Data Sources

The data sources in the current study included semi-structured interviews with the five Aboriginal HIPPY employees and one follow-up focus group interview. The individual interview and focus group interview data were collected in the form of audio recordings, which were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Once transcribed, the audiotapes were destroyed. Each participant received a copy of the transcript from their individual interview and was asked to read it and a summary of the transcript, to confirm accuracy, prior to the analysis stage. Between the implementation of the individual interviews and the follow-up focus group interview, I wrote detailed field notes, which were based on my observations from my meetings with the participants; the HIPPY Canada Conference and the University/Community Partnership Retreat.

Individual Interviews

To start, Lucy Le Mare, Principal Investigator of the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project, carried out preliminary interviews in June 2004 with three Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitors, two of whom were participants in the current study. Based on these preliminary interviews and my analysis of them, together Le Mare and I developed semi-structured interview protocols to use when interviewing the Home Visitors and Coordinator. The protocol for the interviews with the Home

Visitors consisted of a series of open-ended questions on such topics as: perceptions of the HIPPY program, community views of HIPPY and personal education history (see Appendix A). The questions that are most relevant to the current study are under the following headings: *Program Perceptions* (Section 2), *Program Enrolment* (Section 3) and *Cultural Issues and Relevance* (Section 6). The Coordinator's individual interview protocol also consisted of a series of open-ended questions. Some of the topics addressed included, perceptions of the HIPPY program; program implementation; program maintenance and evaluation (see Appendix B). The question that is most relevant and has been included in the current study falls under the heading *Being a Coordinator* (Section 1).

Observations

Following the individual interviews with the Home Visitors, formal data collection with these women did not occur again until the focus group interview, almost a year later. In the intervening time, I met with the Home Visitors on several occasions. Specifically, I met with them at a number of their bi-weekly training meetings; the HIPPY Canada Annual Coordinators' and Home Visitors' Conference in April, 2005; University/Community Partnership meetings; and the University/Community Partnership Retreat in October, 2005. I was both a participant and an observer at each of these events. During these meetings, I would write down brief notes about what had occurred and my observations about the content that was covered at the event. Immediately following each of these meetings, and based on my hand written notes, I would type up more formal field notes on my

computer. The insights gained from these additional sources have been included within the analysis and my discussion of the findings.

Focus Group Interview

After completing the Home Visitors and Coordinator's individual interviews and subsequently observing a shift in the participants' views, Le Mare and I conducted a follow-up focus group interview with all of the participants. Janita was the only person who was unable to participate in the focus group interview. Rather than preparing a specific interview protocol for the interview, the focus group was carried out more as a conversation and was guided by our observations and interpretation that these women were changing. Specifically, following the Home Visitors individual interviews, Le Mare and I had observed that a shift had occurred for all of the Aboriginal HIPPY employees, in terms of their views of the strength of the HIPPY program; their identities as Aboriginal women; and their claims as to why HIPPY is Aboriginal. Thus, the intent of the focus group interview was to explore the women's beliefs as to how and why they had changed personally, how and why their views of the strengths of the program had changed and why it was important to them that Aboriginal HIPPY be recognized as an Aboriginal program.

Analysis

Each interview transcript was analysed separately and then comparatively to identify common themes and unique experiences. The analysis of the individual and focus group interviews were guided by a "soft" version of grounded theory (Strauss

& Corbin, 1990), which is an inductive process that allows a theory to be developed from the ground up. Specifically, the data analysis was based on the open coding system developed and defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Open coding allows the researcher to identify and categorize a phenomenon through a comprehensive analysis of the data. Throughout the open coding process, "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomenon as reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). The codes or themes that have been identified in the current study are a result of a line-by-line analysis, with each sentence being given careful consideration. If several categories had been identified, then a more overarching code or theme could be labelled to capture the previously identified subcategories.

Once drafts of the analysis of the interviews were completed, the participants were given the opportunity to read the analysis of their individual interviews and the follow-up focus group interview, which allowed them to respond, add or make changes to their interview and comment on the subsequent interpretation. This process allowed the participants to indicate whether my interpretations were inaccurate, incomplete, or representative of their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Finally, the participants were given a copy of a draft of the current thesis, thus enabling them to provide feedback and/or raise concerns they may have had regarding the final presentation of their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Individual Interviews

In the initial individual interviews, it was clear that the most important aspect of the Aboriginal HIPPY program for the Home Visitors, at that time, was that it would equip the children in their communities with appropriate school readiness skills as well as strengthen parents' abilities to be their children's first teachers. Although there were also indicators in these early interviews that the Home Visitors' and Coordinators' wanted the curriculum to be more reflective of the culture in their communities, for many of the Home Visitors, the first few years of implementing the HIPPY program was for them, about learning the curriculum and getting families to trust them.

Meeting the Needs of Aboriginal Children

Why Aboriginal Children Need School Readiness Support

School readiness was seen by all of the Home Visitors as one of the most important needs fulfilled by the Aboriginal HIPPY program. When first interviewed, Marie believed the program was helping prepare children for their schooling, "so they're ready to learn when they go to school, and they're not scared." Janita indicated that there had been immense improvements in those children who were involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY program (e.g., fine motor, drawing and reading

skills). Ann believed the program was fulfilling the need for school-readiness, because once children complete the Aboriginal HIPPY program, they can then go to school, and they will know their colours and shapes, and they will be confident about their skills.

Ann also described how many First Nations children in her community were not ready for school, and that as a result, they get pushed through the school system and end up having negative experiences in school.

> *There is a lot of children that start school and they're not ready to start it, and then they get pushed through like to the next grade... so by the time they're in grade three they just hate school. They don't really know what's going on in class. They come into a shell.*

The preschool and kindergarten teachers, at the school the children in her community attend, had already commented to Ann that they had seen a difference in those children who participated in the Aboriginal HIPPY program. Ann also added,

> *I think especially being on the reserve and going to a public school, a new school is a really big struggle for kids and that's why I think HIPPY is good, because once they... they go into the school and if the teacher is asking them questions and they know what it is, then they'll be more confident to participate in class and make friends... imagine you are a little kid, how scared you would be when the teacher is talking about stuff, but you don't understand what the teacher is saying and the kids are noticing that you're feeling uncomfortable, then you know... they start making fun of you then you wouldn't want to go to school. I can't guarantee that HIPPY will make that difference for everybody, but I think it's a good start and a good way to get confidence for a child.*

Their focus on the need for school readiness support for the children in their communities was related to the challenges the Home Visitors' saw older children

experiencing in school as well as to their own academic experiences. Commenting on

how schools were not meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, Hope said,

> ...the blame isn't only on the effects of residential schools; it's on the
> schools even today. You can even see it in the elementary schools. We
> have some children, and I talk to their parents, who are in grade four,
> five, six and they're failing, but they're going to be pushed through to the
> next year anyways. So we are going to have somebody who is in grade
> seven or going into grade eight, but they are at a grade six level, so they
> are going to fail from the beginning, and they'd rather say I am in grade
> eight, than say I know how to do grade eight work.

Although academically successful when living off-reserve, when Hope moved

to the reserve and attended the local high school, she experienced prejudice and a

negative environment, which she does not want others to experience. The

circumstances of her own schooling motivate Hope to focus on and support the

school readiness skills of the children in her community.

> I don't want them to go through what I did. It is always... everything
> you do in life is to make things better for people in some way or another,
> so they don't have to go through what you did that was bad. So these
> guys, I want them to get a good start in life and school, and they will
> show teachers. And I had one teacher in high school say, are you related
> to so and so? And I said, like why... because we were related in some
> way.... I was bad, and I could not believe it. How could a teacher say
> that? And I looked around, and we all have the same last name... it
> has been happening for how long? Our people have been going to that
> school for 50 years or who knows how long? Since it was built... after
> the residential schools, and is going to continue on forever, but they're
> going to change it because these kids are really smart and are going to
> continue to be really smart and they won't have to be pushed through
> because they will know everything, they will be role models for everybody,
> and that's why I do what I do... to change, to make a difference.

Why HIPPY is a Good Addition to Existing Programs

When asked about the appropriateness of the HIPPY program for their communities, the participants reported that HIPPY was not only appropriate in that it provided school readiness skills, but also because of the delivery method it employed and its unique ability to work with both the parent and child in their own homes. In addition, the Home Visitors also believed that the HIPPY program was supporting parents in taking an active role in their children's education and strengthening the parent-child relationship.

Although there are other early childhood programs available on almost all the reserves (e.g., preschool and/or Aboriginal Head Start), the Home Visitors argued that Aboriginal HIPPY was the only program that came to the parents. Ann remarked that, "for some parents, they just don't feel comfortable leaving the safety of their own home." In addition, given that many of the families living on-reserve are low-income, Aboriginal HIPPY provides families with access to materials (e.g., books) that they would otherwise not have access to. Hope also argued that some children might not attend the on-reserve daycare or preschool, but are involved in Aboriginal HIPPY. Thus, one way or another, the children in her community were being reached. The belief was that all the available programs were important for on-reserve families.

Hope also believed that in addition to school readiness skills, the Aboriginal HIPPY Program,

...gets the families and the children interested in education again. Everybody always talks about residential schools... and that's something we can't change, but we can change now, and I think that's what this program does... the outlook of education, because the kids are excited about schooling. They are excited about colouring and writing, but they're also excited to see me to come into their homes and bring them homework...

All of the Home Visitors asserted that the HIPPY program also enhanced the parent-child relationship, by encouraging families to dedicate time each day to spend with their child. During her preliminary interview, Ann shared the following parent testimonials: "We really enjoy working on HIPPY together, I watch my child and it makes me really proud to be able to teach him and watch him learn." "Working on HIPPY curriculum with my child has also taught me how to be more available to help my older children that have schoolwork." Hope stressed that the needs in her community went beyond education, extending into parent-child relationships, the bonds between family members and the connection one has to their entire community. According to Hope, this was evident during the second annual year-end celebration where,

Entire families were coming to watch these children get their graduation presents. So, it wasn't just mom and child who is doing the work, it was brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, grandmas and grandpas... it was a huge thing. It gives them... our history... we would always come together... potlatches and special dinners and whatnot. And we got that sense, and that feeling at the year-end.

Cultural Disconnectedness: Traditional Practices and Curriculum

Knowledge of Traditional Practices

All of the Home Visitors indicated that the revitalization of their Aboriginal heritage was important, but when they completed the initial individual interviews, most of them did not have a great deal of knowledge about traditional Aboriginal beliefs regarding childhood, childrearing and education. For example, when asked about her knowledge of traditional views of childrearing and education, Marie reported feeling that she could not comment, because, "I don't follow the traditional ways, so I don't really know. I can't really answer that question." Janita was also not aware of traditional Aboriginal views, but said, "The strongest thing, I think is just bringing our language back." She also indicated that language plays a crucial role in the survival of her community's culture. In addition, Hope reported not having a sense of traditional beliefs, because she did not grow up amidst her family's community, and because her culture,

> *...slowly but surely has been diminishing everywhere and it's hard to get it back. And I think that my peers in my age group we're all the same. It's mostly... specific families that still, are really into the culture, the dancing and singing and all that stuff. So, I can't speak to that.*

Ann was aware of some of the traditional beliefs about childhood, childrearing and education. She talked about how historically the parent-child relationship was extremely important, and that the residential school era damaged this connection and resulted in a loss of culture and traditional practices that would have had parents and children interacting on a more meaningful level (e.g., berry picking, singing, hunting,

etc.). Ann said that families in her community were trying to revive these traditional practices. For example, parents were bringing their children into the longhouse and inviting them into the kitchen to learn about traditional foods. When asked about whether the format of HIPPY conflicted with traditional views, Ann suggested that while the HIPPY program did not conflict with her culture, she would like to, "bring more of our culture into it... like maybe having a prayer before we start group meetings." Ann also believed there were other opportunities to bring in her culture, like at group meetings where they could make traditional arts and crafts. Ann felt that once the program was up and running, she would be able to focus more on implementing additional culturally relevant materials and activities.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

In terms of the HIPPY curriculum, when asked whether they were concerned about the HIPPY materials being culturally relevant, all of the Home Visitors commented that they would like the materials, to be more reflective of their culture, but the importance they attached to this was variable. For example, Marie said, "I know some people are… concerned about it being more culturally relevant… to the cultures being served," but when asked whether or not it concerned her, Marie responded that, "No, it doesn't really concern me." Janita commented that she thought the HIPPY curriculum should be culturally relevant "to a certain extent," because although the program was appropriate in many ways, it would be good for the children to see themselves in the materials.

When asked whether or not it was important for her that the materials be culturally relevant, Hope said,

I do, because I'm Aboriginal. I'm native, but I don't know how it was for them [ancestors] to be Aboriginal. It's a completely different statement to say it now than it would have been to say it hundred years ago, and it's horrible that it's changed like that. If we start to show them things that were familiar to our people before and it becomes familiar to them again, we will start to gain back some of that culture, some of that history, slowly but surely.... They need to know that, when a teacher says 'oh my God are you related to them... you're Native, you're Aboriginal.' They can say 'yeah I am' and they can be proud of it. And not have to feel like it is a bad thing, because I know it made me feel really bad, and I am the kind of person that doesn't take that type of thing. I was able to say back to them, probably in even harsher ways than should have been said, and I want people to be able to stick up for themselves and to know where they come from and why they're Aboriginal... and why some people say that in a bad way and why some people say it in a positive way.

Hope spoke at length about feeling disconnected from her traditional Aboriginal culture and her belief that it is important to revitalize this knowledge. Hope wanted the children in her community to identify with and be proud of their Native heritage, and therefore believed that it was important for the materials being offered to her families to be relevant to their lives.

Ann also believed that it was important to incorporate culturally relevant materials into the HIPPY program, and asserted,

That is a goal for sure but it's like not going to happen soon because it is a lot to do that. Cause it's a lot of money and it's a lot of time and then it's also not the same for... names of things and like just traditions and stuff like that aren't the same everywhere for Aboriginals. That is a

really tough project, but it is something that we want to do… but don't expect it anytime soon. It's not something that will happen in the next couple of years or anything.

Not only were some of the Home Visitors interested in the curriculum being culturally relevant, but Ann also spoke about families in her community having expressed concern. Ann reported that parents in her community had been asking, "Is the curriculum ever going to become more focused on Aboriginal…" Again, Ann realized that this would require a lot of time and money, because each Aboriginal community has its own unique cultural identity, and these distinct characteristics would need to be reflected in the curriculum.

Frustration and Lack of Understanding

During the individual interviews, all the Home Visitors were asked about those families who were eligible to enrol in Aboriginal HIPPY, but had chosen not to participate. Three of the Home Visitors mentioned reasons as to why some families decided not to participate in the program. For example, Marie said that families simply did not have enough time. Janita commented that she was unable to develop trusting relationships with some parents. Hope asserted that some families did not enrol for personal reasons, but did not elaborate on what those might be. The most striking response to this question came from Ann, who expressed feelings of frustration and a lack of understanding as to why some families were not taking advantage of the program. Although Ann's response also captured the comments made by the other participants, she also remarked that she was uncertain about why

some families were not willing or unable to participate in the program. In speculating

why one mother was not participating in the program, Ann commented,

> *I think that's just due slightly to the laziness or not wanting to*
> *participate… she knows it's a good program. Finding time… finding*
> *time is hard for a lot of parents so…. they have a daughter that's able to*
> *be in the program and I talked to her several times but she didn't enrol*
> *her and I don't even know why. So it's probably due to… she doesn't*
> *participate in any community events and she's really shy so…. I don't*
> *know if it's just because she doesn't want to put herself out there or it*
> *could also be just that parents are afraid to have people come into their*
> *home…. I don't know exactly why it was just not right for them or they*
> *just couldn't handle anything else in their life.*

What was so striking about the comments made by Ann, was that they seemed

somewhat judgemental of the families who did not participate in HIPPY. In fact,

Ann would later remark that the most difficult piece for her to review in her

individual interview was her comments implying that a family was lazy. Although only

one participant made an explicitly negative comment about a family who chose not to

join HIPPY, I raise this issue here because it became a reoccurring theme throughout

my research. I would later learn in the Coordinator's interview and the follow-up

focus group interview that in fact many of the Home Visitors and the Coordinator

herself were feeling frustrated with and judgemental of families who were not

enrolled or able to complete the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

Summary of Individual Interviews

In the individual Home Visitor interviews described above, the women's

beliefs about the strength of the HIPPY program were based primarily on their

beliefs about the school readiness skills that the children gained in the program. Another important theme raised by the interviews relates to the Home Visitors' connections to their culture, and how most of them although interested in, felt disconnected from their Aboriginal heritage. The third issue that arose was related to the cultural relevancy of the HIPPY curriculum. While this was of interest to most of the participants, it was not paramount for them at the time, because they believed that accomplishing this would require a considerable amount of time and money. Therefore, what was more important for them was that they implement the HIPPY program as they had learned it.

Parallel Processes: As they Learned, so did we.

During the period I was conducting the individual interviews, Dr. Le Mare and I (both non-Aboriginal researchers), realized that it was important for us to gain a better understanding of both the historical and contemporary contexts in which the HIPPY program was occurring. This meant researching and learning about traditional Aboriginal early childhood education, the legacy of such events as the residential school era and the "sixties scoop," Aboriginal education policy and the literature produced by contemporary Aboriginal education scholars and researchers. Interestingly, unbeknownst to us, at the same time, as I discuss later on, the Home Visitors had also embarked on a similar quest for knowledge. Although as non-Aboriginal researchers, our reasons for examining this history were different than those of the Home Visitors and Coordinator, I do believe it allowed us to have greater insight and recognition of the processes being discussed herein.

HIPPY Canada Conference: A Turning Point

It was during the meetings I attended with the participants, during the year between the Home Visitors' individual interviews and the follow-up focus group interview, that I began to perceive and record a shift in how the Home Visitors' viewed the HIPPY program.

The first significant event that suggested a shift was taking place occurred in April, 2005, at the HIPPY Canada Annual Coordinators' and Home Visitors' Conference. On the second day of the conference, I wrote in my field notes journal,

> On April 20, 2005, Lucy [Le Mare] and I were invited to the HIPPY Canada Conference to discuss our research and to share our preliminary findings... During this presentation, Lucy announced that we had changed the title of our project from "Aboriginal HIPPY" to "HIPPY in Aboriginal Communities". The reasons we had decided to make this change were twofold. Firstly, after some reading in the areas of Aboriginal education and research, we decided to change the name of the project to the "HIPPY in Aboriginal Communities" project because we felt that part of our role was to evaluate how HIPPY, a non-Aboriginal program was working in Aboriginal communities. Our second reason was because we felt that it was presumptuous of us to call ourselves "Aboriginal" HIPPY, when we ourselves were not Aboriginal. It was at this time that one of the Home Visitor's [Ann] spoke up and said that the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium would be doing a presentation tomorrow about what makes Aboriginal HIPPY Aboriginal – and that they do not want to have the name changed. This same Home Visitor also added that Aboriginal people have already had so much taken away from them, so they wanted us to acknowledge this by keeping "Aboriginal HIPPY" as part of the project title. After this presentation, both Lucy and I felt terrible for having not consulted with our community partners about our name change, and we both felt that we needed to meet with the Consortium to discuss this issue and the nature of our relationship/partnership further.
>
> The following day on April 21, 2005, I attended the Aboriginal HIPPY site presentation that Ann had mentioned, and found it very moving. During their presentation, the women spoke about their home visits;

Raise a Reader Day (Aboriginal HIPPY receives funds from this event); the Aboriginal HIPPY group meetings; the effects of the Indian Act and the importance of the Aboriginal HIPPY year-end celebration. One of the Home Visitors also discussed the training they had been receiving on such topics as the "sixties scoop", the residential school era and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

During this presentation, one of the Home Visitors commented that much of the history that they were presenting was information they were not previously aware of. Learning this history seemed to be very important to all of the Home Visitors, and they felt it would inform the work that they did and made their role as Home Visitor all the more meaningful.

Several of the women fought back tears at various points during their presentation, which brought not only the other Consortium members to tears, but also members of the audience (myself included). It was obvious that the women had put a great deal of effort into their presentation, and I could see how important this work was for each of them. Their recognition of the history that their communities had shared appears to have contributed to strengthening their bond and creating a profound sense of community among them. It seems to me that these women are beginning to build a stronger connection to their cultures, not only for themselves, but they are also bringing this into the work that they are doing with the families enrolled in the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

In addition to my own reflections, I was very fortunate to have been given a copy of the women's notes from their PowerPoint presentation. At that time, I highlighted sections of these notes that indicated to me that each of these women were beginning to build a stronger connection to their culture. I was particularly struck by Marie's presentation, as she had previously expressed that she was not concerned about the implementation of traditional practices and the cultural appropriateness of the HIPPY curriculum. Marie's portion of the presentation was about group meetings and in that presentation she said,

HIPPY is now a big part of our communities. Having guest speakers familiar with our Aboriginal culture helps the parents feel comfortable about our backgrounds.... Bringing in Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal professionals is very powerful where our culture is concerned. A couple of examples of our traditional gatherings are the longhouse, sweat lodges or an Elder re-telling a story or myth from years ago.... Re-learning old manners of our community and coming together to share past knowledge is very important in our meetings.... People who attend the longhouse understand where our culture lives. On the other hand, for people that don't go to the longhouse on a regular basis, our culture has been lost for far too long.... Having our Elders speak our language or sing a dinner song at our meetings is soothing for people and is very enjoyable. This tradition also blesses our feasts and thanks the Creator for the meal that is set before us. Bringing the words and the teachings of our past, keeps Aboriginal beliefs alive. Better knowledge about our history regarding Aboriginal education makes things a lot clearer. Parents feel more comfortable educating and bonding with their children at home. Meeting with the parents twice a week is a big part of this educational parenting program. Giving the parents choices and results, are so powerful. With this, it will give them the tools to build their confidence and self-esteem they deserve. It will help them grow and become positive Aboriginal role models for their children. Attending the group meetings is a routine that the parents feel comfortable going to on a regular basis. In order for the parents to have a strong attendance, they need to feel accepted for whom they are and not be judged on where they are coming from or what their backgrounds may be. Offering food at our group meetings is a tradition that has been around for years... it is a very important part of our tradition that we take seriously. For HIPPY Canada, the parents work hard on their English, with Aboriginal HIPPY, we work towards building on our first language. Parents are wanting to learn the language, so they can use key words when working with their children.

Again, the views expressed by Marie during this presentation contrasted with those she expressed during the individual interview, several months earlier, about the disconnectedness that she felt with her own culture. I also recall being taken by the

fact that Marie was presenting to a room full of people. When I met with Marie to conduct the individual interview, and when I would see her at the bi-weekly training meetings, she had always been extremely shy and appeared nervous about speaking in front of others. This presentation provided further evidence that Marie's relationship to her culture was changing and that she was becoming more confident.

This new focus on culture was also exemplified in Lisa's presentation about the training the women were receiving. Ann had actually been the one to write the piece, but was too nervous to present. In her notes, Ann had written that, "Aboriginal people have enjoyed little control over many issues which affect us. Our five nations coming together at training and learning more about these issues helps us to help the families." After the Home Visitors presented some of the topics they were learning about in their bi-weekly training sessions (i.e., "sixties scoop" and FASD), Ann added, "these are a few of the issues we learn through workshops, conferences and guest speakers. We not only discuss our struggles, but the positives about the future and traditions in our communities. We grow stronger at each training."

Hope presented about the Aboriginal HIPPY year-end celebration, and she started her presentation by saying, "In order for everyone to fully comprehend the importance of our year-end, it is vital that you understand the magnitude of the obstacles we are overcoming. For this, you require a bit of history." Hope then guided the audience through the effects of the Indian Act, from the banning of cultural practices (e.g., potlatches) to the creation of reserves and residential schools. I was most taken by the following excerpt of Hope's presentation,

Now, the majority of you are familiar with the everlasting effects the residential school has had on our views of education. Having said that — think of these laws, the banning of our traditional ceremony of the potlatch and confining us to our reserves, as mirroring the effects of the residential school in terms of detrimentally affecting the social skills and family dynamic of our people. Also keep in mind that although the effects of this history are still visible within our communities, many are not even aware of the fact that these laws ever existed. In this, we are challenged even further because the difficulties of overcoming obstacles you don't even know exist are tremendous.

When I initially accepted the responsibility of portraying to you how our year-end celebration is specific to our Aboriginal background, I knew that giving you an insight to our history was an essential part of this presentation. But the most important part for you to know, is where our future lay; how each Home Visitor, parent, child and family member is and will always be influenced by our year-end...

In our efforts to honour these sixty families for their tremendous dedication and hard work, we started our own HIPPY tradition of uniting all five nations in one community to commemorate their accomplishments.... Our traditions, those of each nation, shared through song, dance, prayer and the sharing of stories is of such significance to our goal of properly honouring these families. We are not simply congratulating them for completing thirty weeks of curriculum; we are giving them a glimpse of what their commitment to pioneering this program was for. We are proving to them that they have ensured a future, for their children and the children to come that will forever link education with our traditions.

Hope was one of the Home Visitors who had expressed during the individual interview that it was important for her that the HIPPY program be culturally relevant. However, what appeared different in this presentation was how Hope conveyed greater depth and a stronger sense of connection to her culture, and seemed to be linking this knowledge to her work within the Consortium.

Following the HIPPY Canada Conference, Dr. Le Mare and I met to discuss

our observations. We were both struck by how ardently these women spoke against

us changing the name of our project from "Aboriginal HIPPY" to "HIPPY in

Aboriginal Communities" and about their claims of having ownership of the HIPPY

program. We were taken by these events, because they contrasted so sharply with the

women's comments during the individual interviews, that while they were interested

in their cultures, the Aboriginal HIPPY employees were not overly concerned about

the program being culturally relevant. At the time of the individual interviews, the

women had indicated that their primary focus was the HIPPY curriculum, as they had

learned it, and not cultural pride, which was now clearly becoming more important.

Bi-Weekly Training Meeting: Adding to our Observations

On May 16, 2005, Dr. Le Mare and I attended one of the Aboriginal HIPPY

Consortium's bi-weekly training meetings, to give the women an update on our

project and to follow-up on the observations that we had made at the HIPPY Canada

Conference. The transformation that I was seeing in the women was also evident at

this meeting, as is reflected in the following field note entry, made on May 16, 2005,

> One change that I have seen occur over time and was evident in
> today's meeting, is the Home Visitors shift from judging their families
> as to why some of them are not completing the program or have a
> difficult time being consistent, to being more understanding. It appears
> that this shift has been the result of the Home Visitors' educating
> themselves about their peoples' history. Knowing one's culture seems
> to be paramount to the Home Visitors' learning, of not only their
> community, but also it seems to have strengthened their personal sense
> of identity.

During our meeting we also discussed the following question: What is Aboriginal about Aboriginal HIPPY? When the Home Visitors and Coordinator presented at the HIPPY Canada Conference – they presented their answer to this question, and much of what they had to say was about cultural knowledge and practices (e.g., what makes Aboriginal HIPPY Aboriginal is our songs, our language, our history, our dances, etc.). Le Mare and I wanted to revisit this question of "what is Aboriginal about Aboriginal HIPPY?" to further examine and question what else might be contributing to this process of ownership that the Consortium appears to be taking of the HIPPY program. Some of the issues raised by Lisa [Coordinator] and the Home Visitors were as follows:

- By giving the program the title Aboriginal HIPPY, as opposed to just HIPPY, it gives the communities a sense of ownership.

- It takes away the notion of an institutionalised/external program.

- Aboriginal tradition is woven into the program. For example, one of the Home Visitors had her families partake in cedar stripping, thus it was argued that as soon as you bring such a program into the Aboriginal communities, it becomes an Aboriginal program.

- Flexibility has also been essential. Lisa feels that HIPPY Canada has been very understanding and supportive of the fact that the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium has had to make modifications to accommodate their communities.

- Ownership is also acquired through the program being implemented by Aboriginal people.

The more closely we work with these women and learn about the experiences they are having, the more we realize that we need to somehow acknowledge this within our research. However, at this time, it is unclear to us what this will look like and how this will unfold.

Individual Interview: Program Manager

I interviewed Lisa on May 18, 2005, following the HIPPY Canada Conference and bi-weekly training meeting discussed above. At the time, Lisa was the Aboriginal

HIPPY Coordinator, and was thus, overseeing the work and training of the Home

Visitors. The data from this interview most relevant to the current study, focused on

how Lisa had changed as a result of being involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY

program. Lisa commented that the Aboriginal HIPPY program had a profound affect

on how she viewed families living in her community. Lisa said,

> *I was already, through my experience in university, aware on a surface
> level, about circumstances of people… parents, grandparents. I was
> already aware of that, but never really looked deeper… just for my own
> sake. I never did explore it further. But, as a result of working with
> different families on-reserves, I was kind of curious about why are our
> families like this?*

Lisa did not fully appreciate the history of her people until she began working

with the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, which is where she started looking at this

history at a much deeper and more meaningful level. In addition, Lisa found that the

Home Visitors were coming to their bi-weekly training sessions questioning why

families would find it difficult to work with their children for fifteen minutes every

day, and were asking, "are our parents really lazy or… incapable?" Once Lisa began

to provide the Home Visitors with cultural awareness training, it allowed Lisa to,

> *…remove my judgment of the people that I live in the community with,
> and began to understand their circumstances… I became much more
> empathic of their situation as a result of what I've learned… it changed
> the way I can look at my mother because now I can look at her and see
> that she really did do the best that she could given what she had
> experienced in the residential school system…*

Lisa felt that after having examined such issues as the residential school system and

the "sixties scoop", she could now see why several generations of parents in her

community have had such difficulty bonding with their children and supporting their development.

This interview with Lisa only seemed to solidify for me my observations and interpretations of the ever-evolving transformation that the women in the Consortium appeared to be experiencing. In addition to the Home Visitors, Lisa herself was also changing, and as she said, becoming less judgmental of the families living in her community.

Project Title Change: "HIPPY in Aboriginal Communities" to "The Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project"

After reflecting on the events that had occurred at the HIPPY Canada Conference, and having received such passionate resistance to our project name change, Dr. Le Mare and I knew that we needed to reconsider our project title. Thus, we returned to the drawing board and together, at a University/Community Partnership meeting on September 9, 2005, Dr. Le Mare, Lisa (who was now the Aboriginal HIPPY Program Manager) and I came up with the title "Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project."

We wanted to honour the women's views by using "Aboriginal HIPPY", as well as distinguish the research "project" from the HIPPY "program." We selected the word "documentation" to indicate that we were recording the experiences of those who were involved or affected by the Aboriginal HIPPY program. We selected the word "documentation" rather than "research" because we knew that, as Smith (1999) had expressed,

...the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (p. 1).

We discussed this issue with Lisa and she agreed that it would be most appropriate not to use the word "research." She knew that for her own community, being the "researched" was often a negative experience, and she speculated that this was likely the case for the other First Nations communities that had adopted the HIPPY program. At a bi-weekly training meeting that I attended on May 16, 2005, the rest of the women within the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium unanimously approved of the new project title.

University/Community Partnership Retreat

In recognition that we were all engaging in a learning process, not only about the history of Aboriginal peoples, but about how to do "research" in this context, the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project and Aboriginal HIPPY collaborated and organized a retreat for October 3 and 4, 2005. All the researchers, Home Visitors, Coordinators and the Program Manager attended a two-day cultural awareness workshop hosted by Willie Charlie in Chehalis, British Columbia. During this time together, we also wanted to further develop our relationships and cohesion as university/community partners.

Prior to the University/Community Partnership Retreat, Dr. Le Mare and I articulated our goals for the retreat, and shared them with all who would be in attendance. Our goals were as follows:

1. To provide the Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitors with experiences that will support the inclusion of First Nations perspectives and content in the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

2. To further develop in us (Dr. Le Mare and I) knowledge of First Nations perspectives and worldviews.

3. To support the Home Visitors', Coordinators' and Program Manager's personal growth as Aboriginal women working within their communities.

4. To continue to develop mutual trust and understanding between the university and community partners.

5. To provide an opportunity to further clarify the nature of the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project.

6. To update everyone on recent progress of the Documentation Project.

7. To discuss future directions of the Documentation Project.

I described the events that occurred over the two-day retreat in the following field note entry, from October 5, 2005,

> The first day of the retreat, we met Willie Charlie, co-owner of Sasquatch Tours and storyteller of the Chehalis people, at the dock in Harrison. We were then taken by boat to the Chehalis reserve, where we were all welcomed into the Charlie family longhouse. We spent the morning in the longhouse listening to the stories of the Chehalis people. From the legends that have been bestowed upon him from his Elders to how Aboriginal peoples throughout southern British

Columbia have been affected by the events that followed "contact", Willie Charlie had us all captured by his knowledge and rhythmic voice.

In the afternoon, Darren Charlie guided us through a drum-making workshop, where we all had the opportunity to make our own small traditional drum. Several of the Home Visitors were considering using their drums for opening their group meetings. With our drums in hand, Willie Charlie took us back by boat to Harrison. At the end of day one, Lucy [Le Mare] and I had organized a group debrief, where we updated the Consortium on the activities within the Documentation Project and discussed our experiences with the Charlie family. A number of the participants expressed that they were extremely inspired by Willie Charlie and that this only solidified for them their desire to offer the families enrolled in the Aboriginal HIPPY program more culturally relevant materials and incorporate more traditional practices into their work. This shift from focusing on the thirty cognitive skills gained from participating in the Aboriginal HIPPY program to wanting to support the development of Aboriginal pride was best captured by Hope when she said, "up until now we've really been focusing on HIPPY, and now we'd like to focus on the Aboriginal part." It was also during this debrief that many of the participants expressed feeling a greater sense of cultural pride as a result of their training and being involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, and that this pride was only deepened by the stories shared by Willie Charlie. At one point during Willie Charlie's presentation, he talked about how so many Aboriginal people have or continue to feel ashamed about being Aboriginal. Marie expressed that she thought she was alone in her shame and took comfort in how others have felt as she has.

After having spent the evening in Harrison, Willie Charlie picked us up once again at the dock and took us on a guided boat tour through the lower end of Harrison Lake and up the Harrison River towards the Chehalis reserve. Willie Charlie showed us ancient pictographs and told us about the legend of the Sasquatch. We were also shown "Transformer" sites; rock formations that bear a resemblance to animal or human figures, and we learned about the First Nations legends associated with them. We returned to the Chehalis reserve for lunch and afterwards we learned some of their traditional songs and dances. Our day ended with a boat ride back to Harrison and a few more stories with Willie Charlie. Although I can only speak for myself, based on the debrief that we had on the first day and everyone's reaction to the second days activities, I think that we were all enriched by this retreat, both personally and as a group.

Based on conversations following the retreat, both the community and university partners agreed that the retreat goals were largely achieved. Many of the participants disclosed that they were profoundly moved by Willie Charlie's storytelling and the knowledge he shared with us.

Observing Change: Bringing it all Together

The findings I have articulated from the individual interviews and our subsequent observations at Aboriginal HIPPY meetings, the HIPPY Canada Annual Coordinators' and Home Visitors' Conference and the University/Community Partnership Retreat have indicated a process that I have identified as "taking ownership". This process of taking ownership of the HIPPY program seemed to be associated with the Aboriginal HIPPY employees forming and strengthening their identities as Aboriginal women. The more connected these women began to feel to their culture, the more important it was for them that the HIPPY program "belong" to their communities and that it be culturally relevant to them. While the program seemed to provide an impetus for these women to learn more about their backgrounds, learning more about their culture seemed to result in their attempting to integrate that cultural knowledge into Aboriginal HIPPY. These observations and interpretations led us to further explore the growth and change in the Aboriginal HIPPY employees.

Focus Group: Taking Ownership

It was almost one year after I started the individual interviews, on November 9, 2005, that Dr. Le Mare and I decided to reconvene with the Aboriginal HIPPY employees and run a follow-up focus group interview. Our observation that shifts had occurred for all the Aboriginal HIPPY employees, in terms of their views of the strengths of the program; their identities as Aboriginal women and their claims as to why HIPPY is Aboriginal, resulted in us characterizing these processes as "taking ownership".

Our aims for the focus group were, (1) to share our observations and interpretations about this process of "taking ownership" with the women, (2) to ask them to reflect on and discuss our interpretations and (3) to explore what had inspired them to make these shifts. As we came together, and described our observations to the Aboriginal HIPPY employees, all the women agreed unanimously that the observations and interpretations, I described in the previous section, resonated with their experiences and "rang true" for them.

Historical Context: Understanding Families, Understanding the Self

The Inspiration for Change

Bi-Weekly Training

When asked what inspired the changes described above, several of the women talked about how their process of change and current understanding of their culture had been influenced by the workshops and training they had received in their bi-weekly meetings over the past two years, through the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium.

Lisa, the Coordinator at the time that much of this training occurred, had organized

most of these bi-weekly training workshops. As previously noted, the group had

learned about the residential school era, the "sixties scoop", FASD and other related

issues that have or may affect Aboriginal communities. Most of the women said they

had some prior knowledge about many of these issues or events, but not to the extent

they did now. Hope said that,

> *When we started having those training… we started to realize what we could do in our community, so it made us stronger that way. Like we weren't just bringing HIPPY, now we're bringing history and we're bringing knowledge and… that helped us to grow, you know. To teach that.*

The participants were then asked to share with us what inspired them to

pursue this historical training. Lisa commented that,

> *I think from… a coordinator's perspective, I think I myself, somewhat maybe sat in judgment of families and I really felt that all the pieces were coming to the table where it was, we were judging families, like in that, can they do this curriculum this week… can't they just spend 15 minutes a day with their kids? And to me it was important to understand why? Why would our families struggle with this connection? Why would they struggle with the fear of schools? And so, that's when I thought, well ok, well then that sort of trigger went off and the bells went off. It's simple; we need to look back at maybe where our families were coming from and where they'd been. And of course that meant visiting the residential school.*

Recall that this issue also arose in our individual interviews with the Home Visitors,

when we heard the same questions, like, "Can't they just spend 15 minutes a day with

their kids?" Because of these questions, Lisa felt that it was important to understand

why families were struggling with the program. This was a very emotional process for everyone, as they began to understand the issues faced by their families, their communities and themselves.

Lisa also said that some of the families faced obstacles, which they do not recognize or they have no awareness of. These families know that something makes them different, but they are unable to articulate what that something is. "There's something that makes them struggle and not knowing what it is makes life so much more difficult." The training that the women have engaged in allowed them to recognize and acknowledge this struggle and how it affects the families they are worked with.

University/Community Partnership Retreat

The experiences these women had at the Chehalis retreat also fuelled some of the changes we observed. Hope said that while at Chehalis, she learned that, "being Aboriginal isn't going to the longhouse. It isn't doing the dances and the songs, it's just a feeling that you have... we're connected to everything, and I think I feel that a lot more now." Thus, Hope learned that she could connect to her Aboriginal identity and make the program Aboriginal without having to engage in specific cultural events or embrace particular cultural symbols (i.e., drums, weavings, baskets, etc). This is not to say that Hope does not want to continue to share cultural symbols and practices, and the knowledge she has gained about the history of her people with her families, but that her willingness and ability to share is not limited to these things. Ultimately,

Hope would like her families to grow and be proud of being Aboriginal, as she has. When speaking about her experience at Chehalis, Hope also said,

> *It's just, you know, just being outside with them [Charlie Family] and being in the longhouse with them, and being on the boat with them, made me feel really close to my culture for some reason. Like, you know, it made me appreciate the things… and we're connected to everything and I think I feel that a lot more now. And after we left there, everybody I ever talked to I was like, did you guys want to go to Chehalis…. But he [Willie Charlie] was really impactful and we've actually got him to speak at the year-end celebration, so he's going to come.*

Lisa added that, "I think my visit up at Chehalis brought meaning to our symbols." Lisa realized that much of the Aboriginal artwork (i.e., weavings, baskets, etc.) in her home are just symbols, and that she does not actually use them. It was Lisa's goal to one day revisit how to make such things as baskets and weaving, and to learn how to drum. Lisa felt that it was more difficult for urban-based communities, as they are further removed from the natural environment. "I think a lot of our culture is just symbolism right now." Lisa felt that it was important that Aboriginal people reinvest, revive and relive traditional cultural practices, so that they too could feel a greater sense of connectedness to their culture. Lisa saw this happening in such things as the Home Visitors' group meetings, at a grass roots level. Families could then decide for themselves what meaning these cultural symbols and practices has for them.

Applying this Knowledge and Understanding to Aboriginal HIPPY

In the focus group interview, the women discussed how their cultural training had affected their work in HIPPY. Marie commented that the knowledge she had gained made it easier for her to go into other people's homes, "It helps me feel more comfortable entering the homes that do involve themselves in the longhouse and they know a lot about their culture and it just makes me just know more about them… and what they go through." Marie also said that with those families who are disconnected from their culture, it has made her aware of the knowledge that she has gained and makes her feel like she has something more to offer the families she works with. For example, Marie commented,

> *It actually makes me feel knowledgeable, like I'm sharing something with them that I'm sharing and bringing back into their life. Because there is a lot of families that don't involve themselves in the culture and then just, they just separate themselves. And having the Aboriginal books for them it gives them the opportunity to read what the books are about and what used to happen years ago. And for myself too, I love reading, reading those books it just brings back something that was just lost… for far too long.*

As is demonstrated in the quote above, the knowledge that these women were gaining as a result of their training seemed to result in a reciprocal process. While learning more about the history of their people, the women were learning about who they were as Aboriginal women. The result appeared to be a greater sense of pride not only in their families and communities, but also in their own identities. In turn, they were not only less judgmental of the families they worked with, but of themselves.

Self-Identity: Aboriginal Pride

When asked about how they had changed as a result of being involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, all the women acknowledged that they had changed considerably. For example, Lisa spoke about how focusing the training on the history and issues faced by Aboriginal peoples had inspired them all to sit down and look at themselves as Aboriginal women. To ask such questions as,

> *...what were our experiences at school? It was then that we started to talk about whether or not we were proud to be Aboriginal when we were growing up. What did it feel like to be embarrassed to be Aboriginal, and to be afraid to say it in a classroom?*

Despite the obstacles faced by her community, Lisa reported that she had seen a change in one generation. When she was young, she did not want to be identified as Aboriginal, where as now she sees her own daughter writing about and feeling proud of being Aboriginal. Based on such experiences, Lisa reiterated that she felt it was important that the Consortium not just be identified as HIPPY, but as Aboriginal HIPPY. Lisa expressed that maybe not all the families in the program share that sense of pride in being Aboriginal, but given that the program was reaching families with children at such a young age, it was her hope that the program would promote such pride and thus she believed the title of the program should reflect that. "That's a painful life to live when you... deny who you are."

For Lisa, her involvement in the program has given her a greater sense of hope for her community. In the past, Lisa often removed herself from the history of her people.

I always wrote about it removed from myself. I never... placed myself in that picture... as a result of really looking at it in depth and looking at my life growing up and what I came to be, I think that it allowed me to better understand my mom's position in life... my grandmother... my upbringing, and she was a product of the system. Given her circumstance and being second-generation residential school.... I can now look at her and give her credit for what she did manage to do.

It was not until Lisa started working with the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium that she began to discuss with her mother the legacy of the residential schools. It was Lisa's goal that the effects of the residential school stop with her, that her children would know about it, but that they would not live it. Lisa felt that this growth in her family and in herself informed the work that she did, and that it further enhanced her passion and belief in the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

Ann commented that she had changed significantly. Ann gave one example from when she first started as a Home Visitor. When she organized her group meetings, she was so nervous she would cry. She reported that now she felt so much more confident and comfortable running her group meetings and doing presentations.

Marie spoke about being ashamed as a child for being Aboriginal, and that she knew that some of her community members continued to struggle with this shame. Marie said that she felt more confident because of her involvement in Aboriginal HIPPY and the training she had received. Marie also loved that she was able to share with her families all that she had learned, and hoped that they too would feel greater pride and connection to their Aboriginal heritage.

Marie also said that the training was important for her because of her and her family's experiences with education. Working with the Consortium and attending the various workshops helped Marie recognize and talk about not only her personal experiences as an Aboriginal person, but also the experiences of her family and her fellow community members. For example, Marie's mother went to a school where,

> ...she was hit a lot by rulers and I guess they just made her feel really ugly about herself because she was Native. But her outcome of going to school, she did not learn how to read very well. Her writing is very poor, and that's what I had to grow up with, was a mother not knowing how to read or write.... So, I believe that I missed out on a lot. But yeah, I realized what she had to go through.... It's quite a lot that people had to go through back then.

Hope said that in the past, she felt like, "less of a Native, because I don't know my traditional songs and I don't do my traditional dances..." When we were in Chehalis, which is a fairly remote community, and Willie Charlie spoke to us about Native people being connected to everything, Hope began to realize that although she was an urban Aboriginal, there were still trees on her reserve; she was still surrounded by nature, all of which she was connected to. Subsequently, Hope felt a greater sense of connectedness to her culture and believed she could share this feeling with her families.

Cultural Relevancy: HIPPY is Aboriginal

Although we had already discussed with the women their beliefs as to what makes HIPPY Aboriginal at the bi-weekly training meeting held in May, we were interested to see if this had changed over time or if they would add anything to that

list. Lisa reported that what made her Aboriginal is not what she thinks, but how she thinks and that this is different from non-Aboriginal people. It is about her, "connectedness to the land, to the environment, and to being Aboriginal. I'm not just here now. I'm a part of my grandparents, and I'm looking forward, beyond the here and now." When Lisa considered the question, "what is Aboriginal about Aboriginal HIPPY?" she pondered whether the goals of Aboriginal HIPPY were different from those in a non-Aboriginal community. "Are they different because we're different?"

In a similar vein, after some reflection Ann responded, "What makes us Aboriginal HIPPY is us... The curriculum isn't Aboriginal, but we are." This apparently brief and simple statement was actually very powerful. All the women immediately agreed with Ann's words and felt there was little need to add anything more.

As an aside, these statements from Ann and Lisa not only capture "what is Aboriginal about Aboriginal HIPPY", but in doing so, also speak to the strength of their identities as Aboriginal women.

Strength of HIPPY: Supporting Families and Communities Cultural Pride and Awareness

At one point in our focus group conversation, I asked the women whether they thought their understanding of the importance of HIPPY for their communities had changed over time. Hope said that when she was first involved with HIPPY her focus was the curriculum, and ensuring that the children in her community were going to be ready for school. Hope had since realized that, "We're not just going to

give them thirty cognitive skills to help them in school. We're going to give them a piece of identity." In addition, Hope indicated that she now saw the importance of the children in her community embracing both their Aboriginal culture and the ability to function and benefit from what is available in the dominant culture.

Hope's comments resonated with Ann, and she asserted,

Well, when I first started… 'of course the HIPPY program is great no matter what community'. I thought that it was a really good program…. And now I can see that because of the past, like residential schools and… [being] banned from having any sort of gatherings, this is like something that helps to undo that because it helps the parents to not be afraid of learning. Like education was something that was more feared because it was such a bad experience… in residential school, and so then you automatically teach your kid like what you know. After learning more about it, the HIPPY program is perfect for Aboriginal families. The gatherings we do once a year gets all five nations together, which they used to do in the past, but they don't any more… same with group meetings, just… your own community members gathering together. It was like made for Aboriginals.

Ann strongly believed that Aboriginal HIPPY supported parents in their role as their children's first teacher, and the group meetings and year-end celebrations, where the five nations came together, addressed this loss of connectedness both within the reserve and with other First Nations communities.

Prior to working with HIPPY, Lisa was working with children in her community and found that many of them lacked the cognitive skills that HIPPY targeted. Some of the children with whom she worked were going into kindergarten not knowing what a pencil was, never having held a pair of scissors, or having read a storybook. Lisa saw Aboriginal HIPPY as a way for Aboriginal people to reconnect

with their community's traditional practices, which entailed the teaching of children in the home by both immediate and extended family members. Lisa's focus had shifted from the thirty cognitive skills targeted by the HIPPY curriculum to the valuing of cultural identity and pride, and nurturing the parent-child relationship. Lisa felt that, because of the Aboriginal HIPPY program, she was seeing a strengthening in these five First Nations communities, and that they were empowering the children, the immediate families, the extended family, the community and even neighbouring communities. Lisa now saw the thirty cognitive skills as not so central, but rather as a bonus. Lisa commented that,

> *What we're working with right now is, is that lack of attachment…*
> *lack of bonding… lack of confidence, and lack of pride and identity.*
> *And… the struggles without those. Because you can teach all you can*
> *seven hours a day in the school, but those kids still have to go home and*
> *if it's a rocky home and a turbulent home, you don't retain it… it's*
> *survival [mode] the kids are in right now, some of the kids.*

Hope went on to add that if, as Home Visitors, their only role was to teach the children the thirty cognitive skills, they may make it through Kindergarten, but she questioned the support these children would receive for example in Grade 1. Thus, if the Home Visitors give the parents the tools to work with their children and to be their children's first and most important teacher, then these parents will be in the habit and have the skills in place to work with their children throughout their lives. Hope used the analogy of fishing to further illustrate this point; if you give a family a fish, they will have dinner tonight; but if you teach them to fish, they will have the tools to feed their families for life.

Summary

When the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium first began to implement the HIPPY program, several of the participants felt frustrated and wanted to understand why families in their communities were not taking a more active role in their children's education and supporting their development. As a result of this, the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium took it upon itself to learn more about the history of Aboriginal peoples, education and culture. This learning process seems to have subsequently fuelled three parallel processes (see Table 2). First, the women's views regarding the strength of the HIPPY program shifted from children's school readiness skills to supporting families' and communities' cultural pride and awareness. The second process relates to the women's self-identity. There has been a movement from a disconnected or negative Aboriginal identity to a more positive, strengthened pride in identifying themselves as Aboriginal. The third, and final, process concerns whether HIPPY is Aboriginal, which initially was not an issue for the Consortium members. Over time, however, it became important to the women that the program be recognized as Aboriginal because they, as Aboriginal women, delivered it.

Table 2:   Taking Ownership

Consortium's frustration and lack of understanding of families resulted in an explicit effort to learn of the history of Aboriginal people, education and culture.		
↓	↓	↓
Self identity	Cultural relevancy: Is HIPPY Aboriginal?	Consortiums view regarding strength of HIPPY
Disconnectedness to Aboriginal identity, negative view	Not seen as an important issue: focus on school readiness	School readiness/ Role of parents
↓	↓	↓
Strengthened Aboriginal identity, positive view	HIPPY is Aboriginal because of who and how it is run	Supporting families and communities' cultural pride and awareness

Personal Reflections: Researcher as Impressionist

In reflecting back over the past two years and my work within the Aboriginal

HIPPY Documentation Project, I have spent a great deal of time considering my role

as a non-Aboriginal researcher and the validity of our work in capturing the

experiences of the Aboriginal HIPPY employees. Particularly after completing the

individual interviews, and analyzing and presenting the themes to the participants, I

felt like I was presenting a portrait. It was as if I was an impressionist painter who, as

Van Maanen (1988) articulates,

> ...sets out to capture a worldly scene in a special instant or moment of
> time. The work is figurative, although it conveys a highly personalized

perspective. What a painter sees, given an apparent position in time and space, is what the viewer sees (p. 101).

I soon realized that indeed my initial analysis was much like a painting, and that I could only capture, as Van Maanen expressed, a moment in time through my lens as a white, middle-class academic.

Upon further reflection, I have realized that as researchers, had Dr. Le Mare and I not taken the time to get to know these women and involve them in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project to the extent that we did, we would not have recognized this shift in their interests from school readiness skills to Aboriginal pride and knowledge, and the depth of personal growth that affected all of their lives. In fact, the current study would not have been possible had such efforts and observations not been made. Although I still feel I am an impressionist, and that these women's stories are told through my lens, I am grateful to have received feedback from each of them, and that my interpretations resonate with their experiences, and that we have been able to capture more than a mere moment in time; both the growth in the Aboriginal HIPPY Program and the women who implement it.

To a large extent, it has been the participants themselves who have determined the validity of my impressions, as we have discussed at length my observations and interpretations. In addition, one of the most rewarding aspects of this work was to hear participants say that they had benefited from taking part in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project. During the focus group, in November of

2005, Ann said that the Documentation Project had helped make her stronger, because it had forced her to sit down, discuss and articulate her experiences. Ann also said that, "us coming together and just talking about all this stuff, we can walk away feeling better about ourselves as well, and it helps us... get into words what it is that we're trying to convey in our communities.'' Hope added,

> *I do think that the Documentation Project is a really good thing for the community as a whole. I know it benefits us and gives us a voice, but also it's something out there that is positive about our people, and I think that makes a big difference too.*

Lisa also hoped the Documentation Project would allow those who may not have otherwise been exposed to the Aboriginal HIPPY program, to have the opportunity to learn about and understand the work that they were doing.

After sending all the participants my results and discussion section of the current thesis for feedback, I received the following email from Ann on February 9, 2006:

> *Michelle*
>
> *I've read the whole paper and I think it's perfect. I'm a little embarrassed about calling a family "lazy", but that is what I thought when we first started the program. I love to read about our interviews in the beginning and then see how each of us have grown in our positions and in our communities. Reading this has inspired me. I needed a little motivation after focusing my last month more on Coordinator rather than Home Visitor. It's brilliant Michelle.*

This was the first response I received, and I felt honoured that my interpretations had been not only accurate, but meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Attempting to determine whether or not the HIPPY program is appropriate for Aboriginal communities could be approached in a number of ways. In the current study, I chose a non-traditional method for doing so. It is through the voices of the community members that have implemented the HIPPY program that I have learned of its appropriateness, a result that could only have been obtained through qualitative methods such as those employed herein. From the initial individual interviews to the various meetings, the HIPPY Canada Conference, to the University/Community Partnership Retreat, to the follow-up focus group interview, over time, the HIPPY employees' focus shifted from the HIPPY curriculum, to a greater interest and increasing desire to include traditional knowledge and practices in the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

Collectively, as is evident from the findings discussed herein, all of the participants asserted that the HIPPY program was indeed appropriate for their communities. Not only did the philosophy of the program and the focus on the parent-child relationship reflect the needs of these five First Nations communities, but it also allowed the Home Visitors and Coordinators to include traditional knowledge and practices in the work they did. Based on these findings, the best judge as to whether a non-Aboriginal program is appropriate for a particular Aboriginal community appears to be the community itself. Again, as stated by one of the

participants, there are many common practices amongst the five First Nations in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, but we must also recognize what is unique about each of them. Thus, it would be impossible to establish one program and one curriculum that would truly be representative of all First Nations communities. In fact, for the curriculum to be culturally representative, it would need to be developed for each community.

Given that the general premise of the HIPPY program is to support parents in being their children's first teachers, which is seen as a need that is prevalent in many Aboriginal communities, the program is seen as being appropriate for Aboriginal communities across Canada. To address this issue of culturally appropriate content and the uniqueness of each community, it is believed that with the HIPPY program being implemented by community members, they themselves can add the traditions of their people. Therefore, the challenge faced by the Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitors and Coordinators, is how to balance the HIPPY curriculum and the addition of their community's (traditional) practices. This is a challenge that these five women have been learning to manage. What remains to be seen, is whether other communities will be able to strike such a balance. In addition, one should not assume that this process of "taking ownership" will naturally occur on its own. Considerable effort has been dedicated, particularly on part of the Coordinator, to developing training sessions that would be culturally meaningful to each of the five nations in the Vancouver Consortium. Furthermore, one unique characteristic of this Consortium is that there are five nations working together. Other communities that will be

implementing the HIPPY program may not have this connection to other nations, which each of the Home Visitors identified as a benefit to their work. This is not to say that such training and a balance between the HIPPY curriculum and the community's (traditional) practices cannot be made, as the structure of HIPPY allows the Coordinator to provide culturally meaningful training at the bi-weekly training sessions. However, such development will likely need to be encouraged when the program is being introduced to a community, and supported monetarily to ensure that the Coordinators have the means to develop and incorporate curriculum that is reflective of their community's cultural identity. This need was articulated by the Home Visitors, as they faced the challenge of having limited time and funds to learn about their culture and to incorporate that knowledge into the HIPPY program.

The early childhood years are pivotal for all children, and set the foundation for institutionalised educational experiences and lifelong learning. An examination of contemporary Aboriginal early childhood education programming, such as the Aboriginal HIPPY program, reveals that the mission of "Indian control of Indian education" continues to take shape as Aboriginal peoples evaluate the current offerings in early childhood education programming. As is indicated in the literature, whether educators continue to implement early childhood education programs that have been developed in non-Aboriginal contexts or such programs are developed within Aboriginal communities, regardless of their origin, it has been established that such programs must be founded on a holistic and balanced approach. Early childhood education programs must provide Aboriginal children the opportunity to

develop cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social and physical skills in a culturally relevant context that will enhance their self-concept and inspire a passion for learning, while considering the broader social needs of the child, parent and community. It is believed by the Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium of British Columbia, that all of these goals can and will be achieved through the acknowledgment of the historical context in which Aboriginal early childhood education occurs and the implementation of the Aboriginal HIPPY program.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitor Interview Protocol

1. *Being a Home Visitor*
a) Introductions:
- How did you become involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY program?
- How long have you been a Home Visitor (HV)?

b) What do you like about your job? Dislike?

c) Has being a HV changed you? If yes, how so?

d) What are your future aspirations? Do you see a connection to the work that you have done with Aboriginal HIPPY, to your future aspirations?

2. *Perceptions of the HIPPY Program*
a) Is the program meeting a need?
- What is the need?
- How? How well?
- Has this need been addressed in other ways? How?

3. *Program Enrolment*
a) Who isn't involved in the HIPPY program? Why?

b) How are your families managing?
- Are there barriers to participating?
- What makes families successful?

c) How do the families view the program?

d) How are your group meetings going?
- Attendance?
- What happens at your group meetings?

4. *Community Views/Issues*
a) How well known is the Aboriginal HIPPY program in your community?

b) How is the program viewed within your community?

c) Have you received support from community leaders?

d) Are there community members involved in the program (e.g., band council? Elders?)? If yes, how so?

5. Personal Educational History
a) Where did you go to school and for how long?
- What were your experiences like?

b) What was your parents' involvement in your education?
- What is your knowledge of their experiences with education?
- How has this impacted them as parents?

c) Do you see a connection between your personal experiences within the education system and your involvement and hopes for the Aboriginal HIPPY program?

6. Cultural Issues and Relevance
a) What is you knowledge of some of the traditional Aboriginal views of:
- Childhood
- Education/learning
- Childrearing

b) Do these "traditional views" conflict with the format of HIPPY? or the education that the children will receive when they enter grade school?

c) Do you believe that it is important for the materials to be culturally relevant?

d) Does the structure of HIPPY fit with the Aboriginal culture?

e) Do seasonal events (e.g., longhouse season, fishing, etc.) impact your ability to implement the HIPPY curriculum?

Appendix B: Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator Interview Protocol

1. *Being a Coordinator*
a) Introductions:
- How did you become involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY program?
- How long have you been a Coordinator?

b) Has being the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator changed you? If yes, how so?

c) What are your future aspirations? Do you see a connection to the work that you have done with Aboriginal HIPPY, to your future aspirations?

2. *Personal Educational History*

a) What were your personal experiences like in school?

b) How do these experiences [in school] inform the work that you do within the Aboriginal HIPPY program?

3. *Program Implementation*

a) What are some of the challenges that you have had to face in implementing the program?

b) How is the Aboriginal HIPPY program funded?

c) In terms of implementation, have you had to modify the program to meet the needs of the families you are serving? If yes, please describe?

d) What qualities do you look for in terms of hiring the Aboriginal HIPPY Home Visitors?

e) Do you think that you can generalize what you have learned from the Aboriginal HIPPY Lower Mainland Consortium to the implementation of Aboriginal HIPPY in other Aboriginal communities across Canada?

4. *Perceptions of the HIPPY Program*

a) Are there any components of HIPPY that you think don't fit with the Aboriginal communities that you are serving?

b) It has been our observation [Le Mare and Beatch] that all of the Home Visitors' refer to the Aboriginal HIPPY program as a program for parents rather than a

"children's" program. Why do you think HIPPY has been placed in this framework or point of reference for the Consortium?

c) How does Aboriginal HIPPY differ from Aboriginal Head Start?

d) Why would implement Aboriginal HIPPY in a community where Aboriginal Head Start is being offered?

e) Are you aware of the "hook" and "hub" model? If no, explain. What are your thoughts about this framework?

5. *Program Maintenance and Evaluation*

a) What challenges do you face in maintaining the Aboriginal HIPPY program?

b) Although the Home Visitors largely feel supported by their communities, in our individual interviews with the Home Visitors, there had been some discussion of some community members being resistant to the program. How do you, as a Coordinator, address this resistance?

c) In terms of outcomes, what indicators do you use to determine whether Aboriginal HIPPY has been successful? How do you measure success?

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