Parent Participation in a Cree and Ojibway Head Start Program: Development of a Conceptual Framework

by

Rachel Eni Lawrenchuk

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

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BY

RACHEL ENI LAWRENCHUK

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Cree and Ojibway parents and educators of an Aboriginal Head Start Program regarding parental participation in their children's education. Using a participatory action research approach which allowed for active involvement and reflection, participants discovered strategies to fulfil needs through parent participation. Human ecology theory and teachings of the medicine wheel were found to be helpful in data interpretation, using a grounded theory approach. Findings were collected through interviews, workshops and document review. Components which emerged were incorporated into a parent participation wheel design, composed of parent benefits, care giving role, Aboriginal education, culture, identity and community. Themes which emerged were care giving responsibility, understanding personal and cultural history and a search for meaning. Limitations of the study and implications for further education, research and practice are provided.

Dedication

For Demian and Ovadia

and in memory of my uncle

Leon Arie Filiba

1949 - 1983

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My sincere thanks and gratitude to all of the people who helped me along in completing this thesis and especially to:

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Parent Participation in a Cree and Ojibway Head Start Program: Development of a Conceptual Framework

Chapter 1: Introduction and Objectives

For the last three decades Aboriginal peoples have been assuming greater control over their education (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987; Couture, 1987; Haig-Brown, 1988; Hampton, 1993; Perley, 1992; Reyhmer, 1992; Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). A major part of the effort toward Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education is the inclusion of parents into every aspect of educational program planning and implementation (Barman, et. al., 1987; Couture, 1987). Parents influence the educational process by including their traditions and values into the program (Couture, 1987; Charter, 1996; Hart, 1996). Encouraging a high degree of parental participation and enthusiasm for their children's education is "one of the best ways" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 61) in which teachers can attempt to build children's self-esteem, reduce discipline problems and boost children's regard for themselves as learners.

Parental endorsement of education is important in terms of cultural, psychological and academic success.

The inclusion of parents into their children's educational programs is of significant importance to Aboriginal peoples. Prior to the policy of "Aboriginal Control of Aboriginal Education" (Barman, et. al., 1987), it was "unheard of" that a relevant philosophy and psychology of Aboriginal education could be based on traditional Aboriginal values and behaviours (Couture, 1987, p. 178). Aboriginal parents were discouraged from any involvement in their children's education (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Barman, et. al., 1987). Under the Indian Act of 1867 and the neo-colonial administration that the Act imposed, Aboriginal peoples lost the power to make decisions affecting their communities (Castellano, 1986; Frideres, 1988). Parents were conditioned to believe that they were inferior and to accept the judgements of administrators, teachers and other educational "experts" (Castellano, 1986). The exclusion of parents from their children's development and education left

parents feeling alienated and isolated from their children's educational experience (Manitoba Health, 1995).

One preschool program, Head Start, attended to the problem of Aboriginal parental and community isolation and alienation from their children's educational experience. Head Start provides Health, educational and social services to families, many of whom are living at or below the poverty line and are headed by single, young females (Manitoba Health, 1995). One of the main goals of Head Start is the inclusion of parents into every aspect of program planning and implementation (Manitoba Health, 1995).

Despite its family focus and more than 30 years of operation in the United States, "no one as yet has come up with a conceptual framework to spell out the dimensions of (parent participation) and a strategy for carrying it out" (Collins, 1993, p. 26). It is this absence of a program strategy for parental participation that this thesis will address.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a conceptual framework of parental participation for the Head Start program. A framework is necessary in order for the program to adequately and successfully carry out its responsibilities to families.

Parent participation is defined here as the involvement of the mother or primary caregiver in their child's preschool educational program. This involvement includes volunteering one's time on the parent board or committees, in the classroom, acting as an advocate for the preschool program or cooperating with teachers and children in any area of program planning and implementation.

A crucial question to be asked concerns the elements of parent participation in Head Start. Parent participation, if it is to absorb one's time and energy, must have considerable value to the parents in their educational role with their children. Activities for parents should be planned to contribute to the skills, knowledge, attitudes and culture of the parents

so that they can become more effective parents and teachers of their children. Workshops on principles of child growth and development would be an example.

The present thesis focussed on the participants of Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Program. It explored the aspects of parent participation that were important or problematic to parents and staff. Aspects which were important included a curriculum that is distinctly Aboriginal, education and other support services for parents and principles of child growth and development. Traditional teachings on parenting and household management were also identified.

The research style utilized was participatory action research (PAR). Participatory action research is "an approach to social investigation with the full and active participation of the community in the research process. (It is) a means of taking action for development and an educational process of mobilization for development, all of which are closely (inter)woven with each other" (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1987, p. 11).

The salient methodological element of PAR is the joint analysis performed by the Cree and Ojibway parents, educators of this community and the researcher with her thesis committee. Unlike classical research methodologies, PAR does not make assumptions regarding the needs of a particular community, establish a rationale for them and develop programs or services based on these findings. Instead, the approach focuses on the perceptions of the participants regarding their educational and support needs, underlying problems and potential resolutions. Using a PAR approach reintegrates Aboriginal peoples into the educational process and allows for Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education. It is for these reasons that PAR was considered to be the most efficacious research style.

Chapter Two describes traditional Cree and Ojibway values and behaviours as perceived or recalled by elders and other Aboriginal writers. It also sketches the Aboriginal history of domination by and assimilation into Canada, as well as other issues facing Aboriginal peoples generally and Cree and

Ojibway communities living in the inner city of Winnipeg in particular.

Chapter Two also reviews parent participation research, describes the history, family support and educational goals and objectives of Head Start in the United States and Aboriginal Head Start in Canada. One centre, Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start, is the focus of the present thesis.

Chapter Three describes the participatory action research approach and Oshki-majahitowiin program in greater detail, data collection processes and grounded theory methodology, rationale and data analysis.

Chapter Four illustrates the research findings. Findings are categorized in the first two steps of the analytic process according to categories and their properties. Themes emerged from the synthesis and analysis of the findings and are conceptualized in a 3-dimensional, balanced and dynamic wheel.

In Chapter Five, the wheel which conceptualizes parent participation at Head Start is described. This discussion forms the basis for the interpretation and

discussion of the findings and assists in understanding the perceptions offered by the participants in the study. Human Ecology theory and the teachings of the medicine wheel assist in data interpretation using a grounded theory approach. The participatory action research process is described. Limitations to the present study and implications for further research are offered.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Aboriginal Traditional Lifestyle

Awareness of the value of the Canadian Aboriginal tradition in education and healing grew in 1968-69 after months of intense struggle by such developing organizations as the National Indian Brotherhood and Indian Association of Alberta (Barman, et. al., 1986; 1987; Couture, 1987). Members of these organizations agreed that Aboriginal values and traditions must be incorporated into the education and healing of Aboriginal peoples (Barman, et. al., 1987; Couture, 1987; Hampton, 1993). "In order to survive in the twentieth century, we must really come to grips with (the) white man's culture and with (the) white man's ways. We must stop lamenting the past. The White (sic) man has many good things, borrow. Master and apply his technology. Discover and define the harmonies between the two general cultures, between the basic values of the Indian way and those of western civilization - and, thereby forge a new and stronger sense of identity. To be fully Indian today, we must

become bilingual and bi-cultural. We have never had to do this before. But, in so doing, we will survive as Indian peoples, true to our past. We have always survived. Our history tells us so" (Couture, 1987, p. 179).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the traditions and values of Aboriginal peoples in general and of the Cree and Ojibway peoples of Manitoba in particular. Next is a brief historical analysis of Aboriginal domination and assimilation in Canada and some salient issues affecting the lives of Aboriginal peoples today. A review of the parent participation literature follows. This chapter ends with a description of the history, family support and educational goals and objectives of Head Start in the United States and Aboriginal Head Start in Canada. One centre, Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start in Winnipeg, is described in greater detail.

Aboriginal Groups Historically

"Social organization is the indicator, it is the common denominator of the group, the integrator" (Farb,

1988, p. 133). Examining the ways in which people have organized themselves socially allows for an understanding and appreciation of the elements of culture, dynamics and rules they use to govern themselves (Farb, 1988; Hart, 1996). By examining the social organization of the Cree and Ojibway groups in Manitoba, I have gained a deeper understanding of the dynamics and rules which govern the people of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start community.

Aboriginal nations represent diverse cultural and traditional backgrounds, each with its own philosophies and practices. To state that one particular philosophy or practice is common to all would deny the cultural richness found in each nation (Barman, et. al., 1986; 1987; Native Council of Canada, 1990). Although identifying similarities among indigenous peoples worldwide may provide a useful starting point, identifying commonly held beliefs of diverse nations presents a danger of reinforcing existing stereotypes (Charter, 1996; Hart, 1996). The present thesis focuses on Cree and Ojibway practices in Manitoba.

The Cree and Ojibway nations are clan based, bringing together groups of people through kinship ties (Hart, 1996; Jenness, 1977). Groups varied in structure depending upon existing ecological conditions (Couture, 1987; Farb, 1988; Hart, 1996). In the winter months, groups were smaller and more scattered. In the warmer months, the groups would assemble into larger groups and meet at some predetermined spot (Hart, 1996). Ecological conditions included not only the physical or biological environment but also the technology available for exploiting the environment, as well as other human populations with whom they must interact (Farb, 1988). The groups would assemble for various reasons, including meetings, councils and spiritual ceremonies (Farb, 1988; Hart, 1996). Sometimes groups would meet for hunting, trapping and fishing (Hart, 1996) or to develop war parties (Milloy, 1988). At the gatherings, participants would discuss and reflect upon individuals' world view (Hart, 1996). These views were expressed not only through what was discussed but through the methods used for gathering

(Hart, 1996).

An Aboriginal historian, George Sioui is quoted by Hart (1996) when he suggests that, "Amerindian society is extremely close-knit: each individual receives the attention and affection he or she requires. Everyone has an equal place in the social circle and everyone protects with equal devotion the security and quality of social life taken from it" (p. 61). There is a characteristic perception that contrasts sharply with western individualism and institutional forms based on private ownership (Couture, 1987, p. 181). This is collective or communal perception of interconnectedness that goes beyond people to include all living things (Couture, 1987).

Traditional Views on Family, Education and Support

The family is a social institution that is important to virtually all Aboriginal nations (Hart, 1996). Family structures are founded in early tribal organizations and may differ according to the customs of each tribe (Native Council of Canada, 1990). In order to understand family structure and the strength

Cree and Ojibway people derive from it, one must recognize that family and culture are inseparably linked to the individual in that a sense of selfhood is derived from culture transmitted through family systems (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Integral to this definition of family is the role of the extended family and community. "The family is a recognized cornerstone of. . . Indian society. It serves as a repository for value orientations that guide human behaviour, as a transactional milieu for life span socialization and as a catalyst for cultural revitalization" (Native Council of Canada, 1990, p. 15).

The concept of family is broader than the nuclear family definition used by non-Aboriginal people (Hart, 1996). Cree and Ojibway families commence with the Elders of the family and extend vertically to encompass children and grandchildren and laterally to include adult siblings, cousins, their spouses and children (Native Council of Canada, 1990).

Networking amongst members of the family/community may result in intimate bonding. It encourages self

reliance attained through individualism and assures the survival and prospering of those within the family circle (Native Council of Canada, 1990).

According to the Elders and other Aboriginal writers, Cree and Ojibway people possess a value system from which customs and traditions have been passed along many generations. Although individuals in society are all equal and hold viewpoints which are equally valid, not all points of view are the same; world views and positions vary depending upon one's place or role in the family system (Couture, 1987; Hart, 1996).

The most distinctive feature of Cree and Ojibway family life was the central position of the child (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Cree and Ojibway writers believe that the child represents the primary means through which a culture can preserve its traditions, heritage and language (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Children are considered to have the trust of the past and the hope for the future (Castellano, 1986; Native Council of Canada, 1990; The

Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Child care practices were perceived within the extended family context. Economic reasons may have required children to move from one nuclear family network to another, but it is within the extended family network that help was obtained in times of crisis (Couture, 1987). Child rearing customs gave children emotional and physical room to make mistakes, to succeed as well as to fail, a practice that tends to foster emotionally free, autonomous and responsible individuals (Couture, 1987).

A highly respected position in the extended family is that of the Elder (Couture, 1987; Hart, 1996). Elders are often sought out for their wisdom. It is believed that, due to their long lives and experiences, they have come to understand a great deal about life and have developed certain skills (Hart, 1996). Elders may play a central role in such activities as unifying the family, offering spiritual guidance and child rearing (Couture, 1987; Hart, 1996).

Traditionally, Elders are the "guardians,

purveyors and teachers of the oral traditions and history of the people; they are the doctors, the healers, the expert survivors" (Couture, 1987, p. 183). Ideally, the "truth" of the Elders should be known to all educators and other members of society (Couture, 1987). This principle presents a practical problem to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike since there are not many Elders alive today and the available few are in high demand and therefore not always accessible. Also, a considerable amount of time is required to learn their teachings and ways of life (Couture, 1987).

Traditional Values and Philosophies

Education is an integral factor in everyday living within the family (Charter, 1996). "Learning is a transformational action that can lead us to internalize more life preserving, life enhancing habits. Learning can mean acquiring new knowledge, new attitudes and values, new behaviours, actions and what is most important, a new perspective for interpreting meaning and purpose" (Charter, 1996, p. 57). Learning is perceived by people from Cree and Ojibway culture to be

a personal journey toward wholeness which is determined by the individual's own pace of development (Hart, 1996).

Fundamental to Cree and Ojibway teaching philosophy is the notion that everyone and everything are both a teacher and a student (Charter, 1996; Hart, 1996). Teachers are primarily individuals who have some experience with the material being taught (Hart, 1996). All people have knowledge. For example, a child is able to teach an adult to play and laugh (Charter, 1996). According to writing on traditional beliefs, individuals cannot teach what they do not understand or have not experienced (Charter, 1996); further, there is no shame associated with not knowing or understanding certain skills. Individuals are not expected to have expertise in all areas of life (Charter, 1996). Individuals at all stages of development learn from one another by listening, questioning, analysing and testing new approaches (Charter, 1996).

Besides learning from other people individuals are

able to learn from the environment. For example, the ability to thrive on very little and sometimes for long periods of time on nothing may be linked to the following natural observation of a hedgerow of lilac. One great lilac bush had died of some mysterious cause. All of the other bushes in the row were shaggy with purple in the springtime. As the observer attempted to dig out the dead plant, she discovered that its root system was attached to all of the other living lilacs in the row. The most astonishing realization was the fact that the dead plant was the "mother" plant. The roots were the oldest and the thickest. All of the baby plants were surviving even though "the mother" could not. The observer understood that lilacs reproduce with what is called a sucker system, so each tree is a root offshoot of the primal parent. In this system, even if the mother fails, the offspring can survive. By observing nature thus, the observer was able to learn that in nature it is possible for one's offspring to survive, to develop and to continue to thrive independently even tough the mother has nothing

to offer (Estes, 1997).

All persons in their lifetime pass though four basic stages of development (Charter, 1996; Hart, 1996; Manitoba Health, 1995). These stages are childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age (Charter, 1996; Hart, 1996; Manitoba Health, 1995). In each stage, individuals are expected to master specific learning tasks. Stages are not associated to an individual's chronological age. One may be in more than one stage of development at any given time, depending on the particular developmental domain, i.e., intellectual, emotional or spiritual.

Life transitions are linked to seasons where observable transitions can be related to daily living (Charter, 1996). The life cycle is apparent through the life/death/life cycle of plants and animals (Charter, 1996; Estes, 1997).

Several underlying values are important when implementing Cree and Ojibway education. Understanding these values is crucial to effective, culturally respectful educational planning (Couture, 1987;

Charter, 1996). For example, knowledge is to be shared, not owned nor imposed on others (Charter, 1996). This principle leads to important values such as non-intervention, that is not imposing one's beliefs on others as the only right way to live, and cooperation.

Humour is valued, used to make light of situations or to review failures (Couture, 1987). Humour distances an individual from an experience to allow for new learning experiences (Charter, 1996).

Storytelling is used as a method of teaching for practical and philosophical purposes (Hart, 1996). Stories have also been used by traditional healers (Hart, 1996). For example, the Plains Cree medicine people have used stories as therapy by bringing unconscious conflicts and resistance to a conscious level where they can be reached (Hart, 1996; Estes, 1997).

In addition to the oral tradition, other activities were used for teaching. These activities include feasts, pipe ceremonies, sharing circles,

traditional dances and singing, potlaches, sun dances and sweat ceremonies (Hampton, 1993; Hart, 1996).

For Cree and Ojibway people, the sharing circle is a form of teaching in a group format (Hart, 1996). Individuals would gather in a circle to discuss important topics. Symbolically, the topic is placed at the centre of the circle and everyone is given a chance to share their views. Since participants are seated in a circle, each person will have a different perspective or part of the picture. Everyone expresses their views so that a complete picture of the topic is developed. Individual views are blended until a consensus is reached. Knowledge is shared for he benefit of each of the members and the entire community (Hart, 1996).

The Medicine Wheel

The medicine wheel is a symbol for many Aboriginal nations, including the Cree and Ojibway (Hart, 1996; Manitoba Health, 1995). It has been used as a guide for teaching as well as for healing (Hart, 1996). The basic teachings of the medicine wheel include assuming a holistic approach and finding balance, connection and

harmony (Manitoba Health, 1995). This symbol relates directly to some major components of traditional teaching and healing (Hart, 1996).

History of Assimilation and Domination in Canada

Knowledge of pre-colonial history in Canada is very limited (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Canadian history, as it is taught in schools, has been written mainly by English-speaking Canadians, specifically of British ethnicity (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Frideres, 1988). For example, most history books begin with the "discovery" of North America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 (Native Council of Canada, 1990). These texts describe the land and its peoples based on the inferences of the European immigrants (Frideres, 1988). The history prior to European arrival, for the most part, is recorded in the oral traditions of the many different Aboriginal nations and was made available by the oral historians of each tribe (Native Council of Canada, 1990).

According to the European view of social reality portrayed in many educational texts, the original

peoples of North America are not seen in terms of their diversity of culture and traditions. Their social, political and economic structures are undermined and the people are treated as inferior based on the absence of European values (Frideres, 1988; Green, 1992; Native Council of Canada, 1990).

In general the European immigrants to Canada have shown contradictory attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples (Frideres, 1988). "Whites have publicly proclaimed respect for Natives' rights while privately denying them such basic claims as the right to vote and the right to choose their reserves" (Frideres, 1988, p. 17).

The arrival and settlement of the European people to Canada brought conflict and change to Aboriginal peoples and continually eroded their culture and way of life (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Aboriginal philosophies and values were disregarded (Couture, 1987). The dominant ideology was to more or less integrate them into Canadian society (Native Council of Canada, 1990). Aboriginal people were thought of as

"savages" in need of being "civilized" in order that they be allowed entry into the "kingdom of God" (Native Council of Canada, 1990, p. 8). A comprehensive program was implemented by government and church officials whereby Aboriginal peoples were systematically dehumanized and de-culturated. "The civilizing of the Indians does not mean the compulsory (acceptance) of the white man's customs but it is the transformation of the whole man. It means the physical, mental, moral and spiritual development of the individual and race. Custom unjustly has compelled us to accept a division of this work, namely, that the temporal welfare of the Indians belongs to the state, and the moral and spiritual training is the duty of the church, and the education of the young is a scheme of co-partnership" (Native Council of Canada, 1990, p. 8).

The federal government of Canada sought to meet the above goals by implementing a policy of "isolation, education and assimilation," a policy expressed in the Indian Act of 1876 (Frideres, 1988). The policy failed miserably to the detriment of Aboriginal peoples.

"Next to shooting Indigenous peoples, the surest way to kill us is to separate us from our part of the earth. Once separated, we will either perish in body or our minds and spirits will be altered so that we end up mimicking foreign ways, accept foreign thought and build a foreign prison around our Indigenous spirits, a prison which suffocates rather than nourishes as our traditional territories of the earth do. Over time, we lose our identity and eventually die or are crippled as we are stuffed under the name of 'assimilation' into another society" (Smallwood, 1995, p. 285).

Assimilation Through Education

The federal government and church officials agreed that the most effective means of assimilation was through education (Barman, et. al., 1986; Frideres, 1988; Gagne, 1994; Perley, 1992; Smallwood, 1995). Residential schools were established in an effort to separate Aboriginal children from their families and communities as well as from white settlements. In these schools Aboriginal children would be disconnected from their traditions and languages and taught all

manners of European culture, from styles of dress to the use of the English language (Barman, et. al., 1986).

Aboriginal parents were discouraged from any involvement in their children's education (Barman, et. al., 1986; 1987). Under the Indian Act and the neo-colonial administration which the Act imposed, Aboriginal peoples lost the power to make decisions affecting their communities (Castellano, 1986). Parents were conditioned to believe that they were inferior and to accept the judgements of administrators, teachers, and other educational "experts" (Castellano, 1986, p. 52). The exclusion of parents from their children's care and education has left parents feelings alienated and isolated from their children's educational experience (Health Canada, 1996).

A New Control of Aboriginal Life

Although several changes have been made, the Canadian federal government continues to make decisions affecting all facets of Aboriginal life. It is only

recently that a serious attempt has been made by the federal government to actively seek participation from Aboriginal peoples concerning the determination of Aboriginal life (Barman, et. al., 1986).

Aboriginal peoples now know that in order to improve the quality of life of their communities and to succeed academically, socially, economically and politically, they must assume control over their destinies (Barman, et. al., 1987). In order to take an active role in this process, educators and other members of the community have focussed their attention on preparing children and youth for successful participation in all facets of social, economic and political life in modern Canadian society. One program, Aboriginal Head Start endeavours to meet these goals (Health Canada, 1996).

Review of the Parent Participation Research

Much of the literature on parent participation in their children's education reflects a positive relationship between parent involvement in their education and student academic achievement, attitudes

and aspirations (Brand, 1996; Daniel, 1996; Foster & Loven, 1992; Greenberg, 1989; Lopez & Schultz, 1996; Morris, Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1996). Although this is true for most of the literature, there are critics who question parent participation benefits for improving the development and academic success of young children. These critics "challenge programs that are designed to exert a central influence on parents' care giving roles, assuming that the skills they bring need to be replaced by the more 'desirable' values represented by the school" (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano & Daly, 1995). These studies imply that lower economic status parents are failing their children academically by not providing an enriched environment for learning (Neuman, et. al., 1995). An alternative view is that parents of lower socio-economic status have high aspirations for their children but lack the skill and knowledge for attaining these goals (Neuman, et. al., 1995).

Notwithstanding such arguments, several benefits of parent participation have been documented in the

literature. These benefits include the child's higher academic achievement, improved school attendance by students, positive attitudes towards the school by children and their parents and positive parent - teacher relations (Foster & Loven, 1992).

A great deal of the research available focuses on the teacher's role in supporting and/or training parents to become better teachers for their children. This includes, inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom, reading to the children at home and at school, helping with homework assignments, serving on advisory and decision-making boards and advocating for the school (Berger, 1995; Gracon & Ashelman, 1995).

Other studies focus on extending parent's understanding of the classroom curriculum, involving parents in the assessment of their children's growth and development and encouraging parents to practice school related activities in the home (Enz, 1995).

Some programs have broadened their concept of parent participation to include attending to parent and family needs. Offering support to families includes

forming a partnership with parents towards a common goal or joint interest (Dinnebeil & Rule, 1994) and valuing, guiding, helping and empowering parents (Lopez & Schultz, 1996).

The Oshki-majahitowiin parent participation program focuses on the education, overall health and well-being of children and their families. It is a multi-generational model which focuses on the education and well-being not only of the children enrolled in the program, but of the parents, and in many cases grandparents, others in the extended family and ultimately the next generation. The program model assists families in the attainment of self-sufficiency through education and employment training while at the same time providing other services, including child development and parenting education that supports their children's healthy development. Parents are valued as their children's primary teachers and are accorded respect in every aspect of program development.

At Head Start, staff do not question the benefits of parent participation. On the contrary, the program

is built on the principle of parent ownership, the ultimate goal being that parents will be educated to the point where they become the teachers of the program. In this way, Head Start is a component of a larger strategy towards empowerment, family and community development.

Project Head Start

Head Start was developed in the United States in 1964 (Valentine, Ross & Zigler, 1980). "Civic unrest and a commitment to social reform characterized the decade that gave it birth" (Valentine, et. al., 1980, p. 21). Head Start grew from President Johnson's War on Poverty and the belief in the effectiveness of education and training at an early age (Valentine, et. al., 1980; Washington & Oyemade, 1985).

Over the past 32 years Head Start has provided comprehensive services including health, education and social services to more than 11 million preschool children and their families (Lombardi, 1990). Head Start's mission is to contribute to the achievement of national educational goals (Collins, 1993). Besides

contributing to school readiness, Head Start provides a range of medical, dental and nutritional services for children (Collins, 1993). For children with disabilities Head Start targets special services on diagnosed needs (Collins, 1993).

Head Start's focus is families in the lower socioeconomic groups. Nonetheless, not all eligible families were served by Head Start. In 1992 President-Elect Bill Clinton made a commitment to serve all eligible preschoolers by 1996 (Collins, 1993).

Contributions to Society

Head Start may not have eliminated poverty in America as experts had originally hoped, however, Head Start has come closer than any other federal program to demonstrating "effective ways of reducing childhood morbidity and mortality, supporting families and providing a boost to the overall development of children" (Pizzo, 1990, p. 30). It has provided nutritious meals, vaccinations and dental care to children who would otherwise not have had them.

Besides the improvement of physical health,

repeated educational evaluations of Head Start have demonstrated striking short-term improvements in children's social, emotional and intellectual development (Collins, 1993; Gage & Workman, 1994; Valentine, et. al., 1980). Studies have shown long-term educational improvement as well (Valentine, et. al., 1980).

Even in the light of the direct contributions to child development, it is with respect to services directed at parents and other family members that the most exciting Head Start innovations are occurring (Collins, 1993). Parents who participated in Head Start were able to exercise greater control over their own lives by influencing decisions over the care of their children. Parents were able to experience more positive relationships with their children, relationships based on trust and a raised sense of self-esteem (Collins, 1993). Many parents gained career training and even employment. Others learned how to affect political institutions. Many parents were involved in programs targeted at substance abuse

(Pizzo, 1990).

Family Support and Education Strategies

Family support and education are an integral part of Head Start's mandate. Emphasis on the family is valued by government, the Head Start community and child advocates (Collins, 1993). Researchers over the past three decades have also emphasized the importance of parent participation in their children's education (Bauch, Vietze, & Morris, 1973; Greenberg, 1989; Willmon, 1969).

Several models for family support and parent participation have been tried, each with a unique emphasis regarding program implementation eg., Collins, 1993; Gage & Workman, 1994; Pizzo, 1990).

Different Head Start programs over the years have emphasized different aspects of parent participation. For example, Gage and Workman (1994) describe the "bottom up" approach which is inclusive of parents on a variety of levels and in several activities. According to this model, parent involvement has the parent actively involved with the child at home and in all

ways that promote optimal learning and growing.

Collins (1993) describes the two-generation model that has been advocated in the United States in the context of welfare reform since the passage of the Family Support Act of 1988. These models have a common strategy. They assist families to "attain economic self-sufficiency through education and job training while also providing other services, such as, parenting education and high quality child care that support children's healthy development" (Collins, 1993, p. 26). This strategy is realized through the following five key principles: 1) building on existing strengths of the Head Start program, 2) responding to child and family needs in a holistic fashion, 3) formalizing collaboration with other federal, state and local funding sources, 4) developing a kit of program management tools to facilitate family support, and 5) setting realistic goals and objectives and assessing results systematically.

Washington and Oyemade (1985), on the other hand, describe a model of family support and parent

participation that relates to trends in family life. These trends include the feminization of poverty, the rise in teen parenting, the increase in the number of mothers of preschool children in the workforce and the increasing challenge for low income families to attain economic self-sufficiency. These four changing conditions in American families create new demands on individuals and on the programs that serve them. The advocates of this model agree that these dramatic changes are neither short term nor likely to be reversed.

Although there are several ideas in the air with regard to implementing family support and parent participation models, no one as yet has developed a conceptual framework to articulate the dimensions of family support and parent participation and a strategy for doing it (Collins, 1993). Development of a conceptual framework is important in several respects.

A conceptual or theoretical articulation would serve to organize research, guide practice and function as an explicit aid to discussion and clarification

(Hampton, 1993). In the absence of a conceptual framework it is difficult to set boundaries and expectations for local Head Start programs. It is hard to meet goals for academic success and self-sufficiency. It is difficult, also, to develop family needs assessments, and case management, monitoring and reporting tools. External agencies and institutions including child care programs and schools cannot be clear about what to expect from program collaboration with Head Start.

Chapter 3: The Research Process, Methodology and Data Analysis

The Research Process

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of some Cree and Ojibway parents and educators of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Program regarding parental participation in their children's education. Using participatory action research, information regarding the personal experiences of the participants was to be derived through "collective engagement in a rhythm of action-reflection" (Castellano, 1986, p. 52).

Much of the research about parental participation in their children's education has used a quantitative approach (eg.,Dinnebeil & Rule, 1994; Foster & Loven, 1992). Some have included a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods (eg., Morris, et. al., 1996). Quantitative methods are supported by a positivist paradigm that views the world as composed of observable and measurable facts. Therefore, quantitative research designs are very

specific, structured, controlled and deductive. The goals of quantitative research are prediction, verification of hypothesis and generalization of relationships (Cheal, 1991; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hampton, 1993; Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). Although this approach has provided useful information about parent participation in their children's educational experience, participant involvement is minimal and therefore cannot capture their perceptions and/or subjective realities of their situations (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992; Green, George, Daniel, Frankish, Hebert, Bowie & O'Neill, 1994).

Participatory action research (PAR), on the other hand, is appropriate for studying and gaining insight into the perceptions and realities of parents and educators of Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start. PAR moves beyond qualitative methodology to include a process whereby the community participates in the generation of knowledge, definition of the problem as they perceive it and collective analysis. PAR uses qualitative and phenomenological methods that root the research in the

"experience of those who live the situation" (Ellis, 1990, p. 25).

This type of process allows the participants to contribute to a social transformation that is of benefit to themselves. Examples of potential benefits to the participating community include the elimination of poverty, dependence and exploitation (Conchelos & Kassam, 1981; Grossi, 1981). The benefits are possible only when the research focus is on the knowledge or educational experience of the participants (Gaventa, 1988; Latapi, 1988; Tandon, 1981, 1988).

This chapter proceeds with a more detailed description of PAR with an emphasis on the generation and implementation of knowledge by the general populace. A description of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start program follows. Methodological issues are discussed. This chapter ends with a description of the methods and data analysis.

Basic Premises of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

According to Hall (1981) PAR is based on the following premises:

A. The problem to be addressed originates in the community itself.

B. The ultimate goal of the researcher is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved in the research. The participants in the research process are the beneficiaries.

C. PAR involves the people in the community in the control of the entire research process.

D. PAR focuses on issues affecting a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups including immigrants, labourers, indigenous peoples and women.

E. Central to PAR is its role in strengthening people's awareness of their own abilities and resources and its support to mobilization or organization.

F. The term researcher can refer to both the community and persons involved in the research and to those with specialized knowledge or training.

G. Although those with specialized training or

knowledge often come from outside the situation, they are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachments.

Knowledge Generation and Participatory Action Research

The basic assumption underlying PAR is that "ordinary people are capable of generating the knowledge necessary to guide their actions" (Castellano, 1986, p. 50). According to Hall (1981) the creation of knowledge that comes from the people contributes to the realization of a "person's science" which serves and is understood by the general populace and does not perpetuate the status quo (p. 14).

There are several methods for developing and activating collective analysis in PAR. These include drama, drawings, interviews, diaries and workshops as a means for assisting people in examining the deeper layers of the social structure (Ellis, 1990; Hall, 1981; Latapi, 1988; Tandon, 1988). Such methods for generating knowledge can lead to the systemisation of new knowledge, "knowledge not generated by the dominant

ideological producers in the super structure but generated by and consistent with the experiences and world view of ordinary people" (Hall, 1981, p. 14).

Sharing knowledge among all social economic classes is a way of preventing those in power from maintaining the monopoly of determining the needs of others. PAR, in effect, aids in the transfer of power to the groups engaged in the production of popular knowledge (Castellano, 1986; Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1988). Whereas PAR could be implemented within powerful institutions, it has been interpreted in research with oppressed or powerless groups, among those who have been historically dispossessed of the right to produce socially legitimate knowledge (Castellano, 1986; Ellis, 1990).

The Role of the Participatory Action Researcher

The role of the PAR researcher is twofold. Although nothing stops the scientific researcher from participating as a peer in the research process, he or she must be willing to submit personal experience to the collective process of deciding what is valid and

useful for the basis for action. He or she can and does draw conclusions, postulate theories and publish reports of their activities and engage in scholarly exchange pursuing goals that may be quite separate from the development of goals of the community (Castellano, 1986). The researcher must consult with the community being researched to ensure that information that is contrary to its interests is not distributed. This dual role of researcher i.e., that of peer as well as "scientist" is important to PAR and is based on the belief that if the researcher is not intimately involved in, and has no personal experience with the situation being researched, it is almost impossible for her to interpret it with and degree of accuracy (Ellis, 1990, p. 24).

Educational Component to Participatory Action Research

PAR is not suitable for all research questions. Evidence is accumulating, however, that in identifying access points for community change, setting priorities for development, integrating interventions with various sectors of community life and applying results of

laboratory and survey research, PAR methods have an important contribution to make in research aimed at development (Castellano, 1986).

PAR involves a process of education through which the experiences, interests, skills and attitudes of each of the participants are identified and shared. All of these "realities" are then interrelated and included as part of the larger process of establishing a group identity (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1987). From this process the participants are able to understand their own potentials to produce knowledge, analyse it, examine alternative ways of resolving problems and initiate action to overcome the present conditions.

PAR recognizes that social change and planning for such are not only questions of intellect and rationality but also of spirit, intuition and subjectivity (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1987).

Methodological Issues and Participatory Action Research

PAR is a process or style of doing research rather than a specific method. The methods can be any combination of quantitative or qualitative approaches (Green, et. al., 1994). They vary according to the needs of a specific study and the stage in the research process. Although some writers have described PAR methodology, most have described it as a process that may employ a variety of methods (Green, et. al., 1994). The actual research methods employed, although necessary for measurement of outcome, appear less important than the process (Green, et. al., 1994).

PAR is a "way of working" rather than a specific research method. "It includes, among other things, a dialogue between researcher and community on the appropriateness and the motives behind the various methods proposed. PAR demands, as much as other research, that data collection and analysis be systematic if they are to serve the community in initiating appropriate change" (Green, et. al., 1994, p. 17).

Theory building is, according to PAR, based on the synthesis of theory and practice. PAR was not ever intended to be a new ideological and scientific holistic system. It was, however, meant to start the research from concrete reality, incorporating the people's point of view, in an effort to contribute to a type of social transformation that eliminates poverty, dependence and exploitation (Conchelos & Kassam, 1981).

The Research Setting

Head Start was introduced to Canada by the federal government in January, 1994. In June of that same year, Cabinet gave their first approval. Health Canada officials consulted with several individuals and organizations including Aboriginal organizations, provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal parents and educators regarding the design and details of the initiative and in April, 1995, final details and levels of funding were approved.

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative is an early intervention strategy which addresses the needs of young Aboriginal children living in urban centres and

in large Northern communities. This comprehensive program is designed to meet the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of children and their parents. The Initiative employs locally controlled and administered Aboriginal non-profit organizations who see parents/caregivers as natural advocates of children and whose primary concern is the health and well-being of Aboriginal children and families. Each project focuses on preschool children and includes the following components:

- culture and language
- education
- health promotion
- nutrition
- social support programs
- parent participation

Aboriginal Head Start operates from the assumptions that children will have better health, nutrition, physical, intellectual, social and emotional stability than their peers who do not participate in the program. Parents who become actively involved are

expected to report improved relationships with their children, greater life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Further, children involved in the program will be more likely to complete high school. These assumptions are based on long-term studies of successful American Indian Head Start programs.

Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start is an Aboriginal initiative sponsored by Andrews Street Family Support Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. It is funded by Health Canada. Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start opened its doors to families in January, 1997, and a few months later had 20 families enrolled in each of the Cree and Ojibway cultural and educational programs. Parents and caregivers eligible for participation in the program must meet the following criteria:

1. be of Aboriginal descent,
2. have children between the ages of 2 and 5 years,
3. reside in the inner city of Winnipeg (in the area between Duffrin and Redwood Avenues, Salter and Arlington Streets), and
4. be willing to participate in the Head Start

program with their child or children.

This program was developed with a community focus. As stated in the Aboriginal Head Start Community Training Program manual, ". . .Oshki-majahitowiin (is) committed to fostering the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of young Aboriginal children living in the community. In that regard we recognize and support the idea that extended families have an essential role to play in teaching and caring for our children. In all aspects of our operation we are informed by and strive to realize the traditional customs, beliefs, practices and teachings of our ancestors, guided always by the wisdom of years and experience enjoyed by our traditional elders" (Mis Ko Mune Dous/Miko Manitosis and Oshki-majahitowiin, 1997).

Sample Selection

Individuals chosen to participate in the study were parents and educators the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start. Selection criteria included the following: be of Aboriginal descent, be active and regular participants in the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start

program, be able to understand verbal English and be willing to answer open-ended questions and contemplate one's own experiences.

The term "participant" refers to individuals who were included in this study. Participants were actively engaged with the researcher in meaning making, that is, they cooperated in specifying both the questions and the answers. Using grounded theory methodology the best participants are those who know most about what the researcher attempts to study and are able to communicate this knowledge (Hampton, 1993).

According to grounded theory, the researcher's goal is to achieve saturation of data. Saturation has occurred when the researcher is not hearing anything new and is the test for sample size (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A sample of eight participants, including six mothers and two female educators, were recruited to participate, a number which proved to be adequate in achieving data saturation.

The researcher first approached the director of Oshki-majahitowiin Program in the spring of 1997 to

obtain consent to proceed with the study. The director approved and invited the researcher to present the study at a parent meeting in September 1997.

What was especially interesting to both the parents and educators of the program was the particular style of the study, i.e., participatory action research. According to the director of the program, "Our people have been studied to death. We have had enough of researchers coming into our communities to study us. They come in and ask questions to suit their needs. Then they leave, making whatever they decide is right out of the information they heard. And the whole process never has anything to do with our needs and it's never interpreted into what we actually said."

The centre coordinator recruited participants, asking individuals who attended the meeting if they were interested in an interview and two half-day workshops. From a list of potential participants, the researcher telephoned each to explain the study's purposes and made appointments for interviews. (See Appendix A for the 'explanation of the study' given to

research participants).

The study was introduced to 10 potential participants in order to obtain a sample size of eight. Participant recruitment and data collection occurred over a three month period. The participants were provided with both a verbal and written explanation of the study. Information explained included the nature, purpose, duration of the research, data collection methods and potential risks and benefits of participation.

Ethical Considerations

A fundamental requirement and responsibility of a researcher is to safeguard the rights of the individuals participating in the research project. The principles of research ethics are "voluntary participation, freedom from physical or psychological harm and distress and anonymity or confidentiality of information" (Polit & Hungler, 1987, p. 25). In order to respect the informants' rights, the researcher employed several strategies.

It was reinforced throughout the study that

participation was strictly voluntary and participants could choose not to answer particular questions or to quit the study at any time; however, no such requests were made.

Although participants were not expected to suffer any ill effects regarding involvement in the study, the content had the potential to evoke personal feelings and possible discomfort. The researcher was prepared to stop the interview, reschedule if necessary and explore only those issues participants were comfortable disclosing. The researcher offered to stop the tape recorder at any time; only once did this occur, when a participant felt she wanted to share the information with the researcher that she was not ready to put on tape.

Data derived through the interviews and workshops were held in the strictest confidence. Tape recordings and transcripts were identified by code number only and the list of participants was kept entirely separate from the data. Only the researcher had access to the list of participants. Only the researcher and her

thesis chair had access to the transcripts.

All of the participants viewed the study as a positive and educational experience. It was considered to be useful in putting events and feelings into perspective. (The consent form given to parents is included in Appendix B).

Data Collection Methods

The data for the study were generated through several methods, including documents and demographic data; semi-structured, in-depth interviews with mothers and educators (Appendix C); and informal discussions and workshops (Appendix D).

A number of Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start documents were collected and studied, including the policy manual, a proposal for funding, manuals including the community leader training program, and reports outlining family demographics. The researcher reviewed minutes from parent committee meetings and notes taken at parent and staff workshops. From this exercise I gained valuable information regarding the direction, goals and objectives of Oshki-majahitowiin

Program. I was also able to identify critical areas of concern in the area of parent participation and Aboriginal education in the program. Document review provided demographic information, including current occupations of parents, number of children in the family, ages of the children and number of children enrolled at Head Start.

The most time consuming and informative method of data collection was the interview. Interviews took place at Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Centre (n=7) and at a participant's home (n=1). The time period from the initial contact of the participant to schedule an interview and the completed interview ranged from seven to fifteen days. Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and was tape recorded. The tapes were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy.

The researcher administered data collection and analysis simultaneously following the procedure for grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process allows the researcher to adapt the interview to the purpose of the research and the

emerging theory. According to Glaser and Strauss, "In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories on their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (Hampton, 1993, p. 276-277).

To use grounded theory effectively, the researcher needs rich, detailed data. In order to develop a durable, useful grounded theory, however, the data must provide a variety of complete accounts of major issues and processes in order to be able to depict the participants' worlds. Such data result in developing analyses easily and with convincing arguments (Charmaz, 1990).

The data gathered were organized in order to provide for later coding and categorizing (Charmaz, 1990; Glaser, 1978). Framing, pacing and managing the interview questions all affect the type and quality of material the researcher obtains. Since the study relied heavily on interview data, the incisiveness of the analysis depended upon suitable questions and knowing when to ask them.

The interviews were directed conversations, the exact content of which depended on the participant's psychological and physical status (Charmaz, 1990). These included level of understanding of the issues, ability to reflect on past behaviours and decisions made (Castellano, 1986; Charmaz, 1990, Hampton, 1993). Other factors affecting the direction of the conversation included the relationship between the researcher and the participant, the researcher's theoretical perspective and the topic under investigation (Glaser, 1978). Being too directive poses hazards when interviewing. The overly directive interviewer can cut off the most interesting leads and rich data, or may load assumptions into the questions without being aware of doing so. For example, asking a participant to tell me about her experiences with racism and discrimination assumes that she has had these experiences. In contrast asking the participant to tell me about her experiences in school, her relationship with the teachers and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students provided less direction and allowed

a respondent to tell her own story.

Different types of questions offer different information to be included in the study. Informational questions bring the respondent further into the interview and establish chronology, types of events and personal experiences. Reflective and feeling questions can be introduced once the researcher has established rapport with the participant (Charmaz, 1990), and they help to elicit information about the self. Examples of reflective questions are as follows: "How did losing your child to Child and Family Services affect you? In what ways has participation in Head Start affected your family life? What have you learned about parenting since participating in Head Start? How would you compare the person you were years ago with the person you are now? What does participation in Aboriginal spirituality do for you?" These questions helped elicit the narrative of the respondent's story with minimal framing by the researcher.

The last questions of the interview were designed to complete the interview on a positive note. The more

intense the interview, the more questions and comments needed to end the interview and help the researcher to feel positive about herself (Charmaz, 1990). For examples, "What have you learned about yourself over the past (period of time, with involvement at Head Start)? How have you grown as a person with these experiences? What is your five year dream, that is, in the best possible scenario, where would you like to see yourself in five years?" Such questions elicited interesting data on symbolic meanings of self as well as accomplishing positive closure (Charmaz, 1990).

Questions were developed prior to data collection. Once I began the interview process, I realized that questions in the original interview guide needed to be either modified or discarded. For example, once I began interviewing the participants, I felt that question number ten ("Tell me a bit about your home and your child's place in it") and question number eleven ("Who does your child like to play with") were irrelevant since they did not contribute to the purpose of the research. On this basis the questions were

excluded from the interviews.

Another method of data collection, informal discussions, is particular to participatory action research. Since the researcher is interested in the lived experiences of the participants and the participants are presently, actively engaged in the issues which the researcher is studying, it is important to be able to illicit information from the participants at other times during the study. For example, additional information was derived from participants during program times, at cultural ceremonies and at informal meetings with the director, staff and parents. Informal discussions added a richness to the data and allowed the researcher to understand more fully some of the topics discussed during the interviews.

Finally, two half-day workshops were implemented after the interviews were completed. Workshops are often used as a technique within a participatory action research project to determine community needs and increase awareness of problems and commitment to

solutions (Ellis, 1990). Workshops are meant to educate the participants, to empower and/or increase awareness of parent participation in the preschool.

During the workshops, I assumed the role of educator/facilitator. Since this role required my full attention, I arranged for a couple of the participants to take notes on the flip chart at the front of the room. This proved effective, since it allowed participants to feel they were actively involved in the generation of knowledge rather than feel as though they were mere recipients.

The following behaviours were encouraged during the workshops:

1. Using participants' values and social interest to determine the purpose, character and direction of parental participation, family support and education. This process involved the dual aspect of parenting, including caring for the child as well as the self, traditional parenting, teaching and healing. The process was facilitated by the participants.

2. Using participants' experience as the basic content and material in the learning process. Experiences shared helped to build skills and develop a method of thinking which can be applied to other situations in the participants' lives. These also helped to validate the participants' experience as a source of knowledge.
3. Linking Cree and Ojibway contemporary situation to their historical development. Economic, political and cultural forces that have created the social conditions were identified in an effort to understand how these social conditions are expressed in the present.

The thesis committee met prior to the first workshop to assist in analysis of the data derived from the interviews. The purpose of the meeting was to gain consensus among committee members regarding the workshop content and format.

Workshops were 2.5 hours in duration. They took place at Oshki-majahitowiin Centre on November 12 from 1:00 - 3:30 p.m. and November 19 from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Workshops were scheduled one week apart to allow for additional research, meeting with participants of the thesis committee, reflection and/or absorption of information.

Workshop content was based on information derived from interviews and informal discussions. The first workshop, entitled 'Myself, My Child' highlighted discussion regarding self care, responsibilities and expectations of the mother to herself, her child and to the society of which she is a part. The second, entitled 'Self Esteem Through Dramatic Excercises and Storytelling' workshop involved parents actively in exercises to promote a healthier well-being and a happier parent - child relationship. These included exercises designed to reduce stress, information on body and mind care, dramatic exercises to help facilitate communication and self expression and storytelling.

Including the workshops in the data collection process offered an opportunity for the researcher, parents and teachers to listen to one another and to

learn from stories and comments shared. Participants built on one another's ideas and developed group cohesion. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the workshops and many requested that we have more workshops in the near future.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory analysis can provide researchers, educators, policy makers and others with alternative understandings of the beliefs and actions of parents and educators involved in Aboriginal preschool education. Subsequently, newly discovered information may be used to improve communications with parents and to act on issues which parents specify (Charmaz, 1990).

In keeping with the goals of participatory action research and the aim of grounded theory, analysis focussed first on the creation of theoretical categories from the data. Subsequent analysis was of the relationships among key categories. This was done in an effort to "construct theory from the data" (Glaser, 1978, p. 55). By starting with data from the lived experience of the research participants, the

researcher can understand how they construct their worlds. That lived experience shapes the researcher's approach to data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1990). Grounded theorists affirm, check and refine their developing ideas but they do not limit themselves to preconceived hypotheses (Charmaz, 1990).

Grounded theory differs also from other qualitative approaches. Most qualitative approaches stress collection of copious amounts of data before delving into the analysis. Researchers often complete their major analytic work long after they have completed data collection. Grounded theorists, on the other hand, use their emerging theoretical categories to shape the data collection as well as to structure the analytic processes of coding, memo-making, integrating and writing the developing theory (Charmaz, 1990).

Characteristic of grounded theories is the researcher's commitment to analyse what is actually being observed in the field or in the data. If the researcher identifies recurrent themes or issues in the

data, s/he needs to follow these leads, which can take the research in unanticipated directions (Charmaz, 1990; Hampton, 1993).

Grounded theorists aim for analytic power and conceptual clarity to synthesize, explain and interpret the data. The rigor of the grounded theory method depends upon developing the range of relevant conceptual categories, saturating (i.e. filling, supporting and providing repeated evidence for) those categories and explaining the data. Similar to other research methodologies, the quality of grounded theory studies depends on the methodological thoroughness, significance of the research questions and the incisiveness of the analysis (Charmaz, 1990).

In keeping with participatory action research style, the researcher can be an important tool in the research process if s/he uses his/her sensitivity, responsiveness and adaptability to advantage. Even as the researcher and the participants interact, they shape the reality that unfolds (Ellis, 1990). In the present study, the flexibility in the research design

allowed the type, level and intensity of interaction to vary as necessary in different situations and settings.

The researcher's perspective consists of more than philosophical stance, school of thought and methodological strategies (Charmaz, 1990). It also includes her skill, experiences, maturity, motivation, insights into and ideation of the data (Glaser, 1978). Of course, the researcher's perspective influences what she sees in the data. The researcher in the present study was interested in how the Indian Act and neo-colonial administration which the Act imposed affected Aboriginal people's power to make decisions affecting their children and their communities. The data revealed that history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada was intertwined with personal educational and community involvement. Without an initial interest in historical issues this connection may have been missed (Charmaz, 1990).

Generally, grounded theorists begin with a set of experiences they wish to explore, in this case Aboriginal parental participation in their children's

preschool education. The research questions initiate the inquiry. The following questions are examples: "How do Aboriginal parents perceive Aboriginal education? In which ways do Aboriginal parents participate in their children's education? What is their participation with Head Start specifically? What is their personal educational history?"

Exploration of thematic questions led the researcher to search the relevant documents/literature and to ask a set of interview questions that tapped people's beliefs, views and actions regarding parental participation in Head Start. From the information gathered, codes and categories were developed which described, synthesized and explained the data.

Coding and Categorizing the Data

Rather than a mere description of topics, codes and categories reflect emerging ideas. They help the researcher to take the data apart and frame analytic questions. In this way, codes and categories help the researcher to build an analysis of the data rather than remain at the level of description (Charmaz, 1990).

By grounding the categories in the data as specifically yet analytically as possible, the researcher can make each category clearer, suggest its parameters, begin to outline the conditions under which the category develops and to search for its consequences (Glaser, 1978). Conditions refer to the prerequisites which influence and shape views, interactions and events rather than determine them. By maintaining this type of analytic posture, even the initial methods of handling the data can enhance developing a theoretical analysis of it (Charmaz, 1990).

Initial coding prompts the researcher to study the data, dispel earlier, preconceived assumptions about the data and begin viewing the data analytically (Charmaz, 1983). As the researcher begins to render some codes into the categories s/he defines them analytically and delineates their properties. Line by line coding keeps the researcher examining the collected data rather than lapsing into theoretical illusions which have little connection to the data

(Charmaz, 1990). The interests of the researcher in the present study, for example, led to such questions as, "Of what larger process is this action a part? How did this action, belief, definition, relationship, pattern or structure evolve? What do these data state or assume about the self or about relationships?" By examining the collected data with a theoretical eye, the set of categories developed remains closer to the actual data and simultaneously moves beyond description (Charmaz, 1990).

Coding for processes, actions, assumptions and consequences rather than for topics leads to greater analytic precision (Charmaz, 1990). "To find these processes, grounded theorists carefully scrutinize participants' statements and actions for patterns, inconsistencies, contradictions and intended and unintended consequences" (Charmaz, 1983). Initial questions may be: What are people doing? What is happening? When looking for processes, the researcher must also ask: What kinds of events are at issue here? How are they constructed? What do these events mean? By

looking for major processes, researchers delineate how events are related to each other (Charmaz, 1983).

Seeking to discover, identify and ask questions about the assumptions participants hold keeps the researcher thinking critically and defining what is implicit in the data. The researcher then defines how the participants act upon their assumptions in the specific setting which helps the researcher convert topics into processes. Also, rather than viewing the participant's assumptions as truth itself, the researcher gains some distance on his/her own materials. Thus, the researcher avoids over immersion, which may lead to internalizing the views of participants (Charmaz, 1983).

Raising Codes to Concepts

Raising a code to a concept means that the researcher takes a code, defines it succinctly and analyses it. The wording of the term or code is important since the researcher now intends to treat it as a conceptual category, rather than a mere descriptive topic or code (Charmaz, 1990).

A conceptual framework is more abstract than codes. It is part of the researcher's larger theoretical framework which specifies conditions, offers explanations and makes predictions. When treating a code as a conceptual category, the researcher specifies its properties, notes the conditions under which it arises, relates how it changes, describes its consequences and ultimately specifies its relationship to other conceptual categories (Charmaz, 1990; Glaser, 1978).

Two analytic processes contribute to raising codes to concepts. These are constant comparison and continued questioning. Constant comparison includes comparing data with data; comparing different individual's situations, beliefs or accounts of the same type of event or issue; comparing data from the same individual given at different times; and comparing properties found in the data with other properties (Charmaz, 1990).

Comparing different people's accounts means taking some topic such as an experience, issue, period of

time, relationship or stage and juxtaposing data from each person against each other one. For example, comparisons were made of discovering and defining Aboriginal traditional practices. Then accounts were compiled to compare the circumstances under which they discovered and defined traditional practices, how they felt, thought and dealt with it, what they faced at that time, who became involved, and so forth. Just looking at such basic issues systematically yields thick description and often analytical insights. Thus, I learned that some individuals find their strength and peace in participation in traditional practices, that it takes time before certain individuals become ready to participate and that ultimately the pursuit of traditional involvement is a search for identity and therefore for meaning.

Raising a code to a conceptual level means making a series of decisions about it. These are deciding that the code reflects a significant process, relationship, event or issue, deciding to pursue it in subsequent data collection and connecting it to other

categories.

Throughout the research and writing processes grounded theorists follow interests, leads and hunches that they find or identify in the data. Then they may gather more data, ask more questions and check their developing categories. Their emergent categories explain and conceptualize the data, common sense understandings of these and likely other theoretical interpretations.

Theoretical development results from theoretical sampling. Here, the researcher collects new data to check, complete and extend theoretical categories.

The researcher in the present study conducted theoretical sampling only after defining key concepts. Delaying focussed theoretical sampling fosters gaining an in-depth understanding of the realities and issues at hand. Hence, theoretical sampling fits into the research and analytic processes much later than initial sampling of sites, people or documents. By the time theoretical sampling is planned, the researcher will have some hunches or even some hypotheses s/he wishes

to check. Thus, theoretical sampling shapes further data collection as the researcher pursues developing conceptual ideas rather than amassing general information. For example, here, the researcher was led to gather additional materials to specify and clarify opportunities for parental participation in educational institutions, Aboriginal parental involvement in their children's educational institutions and Aboriginal educational philosophy.

Throughout the coding process, the researcher used theoretical memos to engage in an extended, on-going dialogue with the self. Memos are "written elaborations of ideas about the data and the coded categories" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 120). They represent and are derived from the initial codes (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As an intermediate step between coding and writing the first draft of the analysis, memo writing connects the analytic framework provided by the initial coding with the polished ideas developed in the finished writing (Charmaz, 1983). Systematic memo writing allows the

researcher to complete and build categories. The goals are to generate ideas freely, develop a memo fund that is highly organisable and define what is implicit or explicit in the data (Charmaz, 1990). Sources for memos include code-to-code followed by code-to-concept comparison and reading in the field. Memos are generated during collection, coding and analysing of data. Then peak as coding saturates (Glaser, 1978).

Finally, during writing and re-writing phases of analysis, the researcher works to bring the research together. S/he explains implicit arguments, provides a context for them, makes links to the literature, critically examines the categories and concepts and presents the data clearly (Charmaz, 1990).

Conclusion

In summary, the study was designed to explore the perceptions of parents and educators of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start program regarding parental participation in their children's preschool education. Eight key individuals were included in the study in order to obtain the data. Data was collected through

document review, interviews, informal discussions and workshops. Grounded theory methodology guided analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter are derived from data collected during interviews, workshops and document review at Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Centre between September and December 1997 and concentrate on the components and each of their properties identified in the first two steps of the analytic process. The themes which emerged from the synthesis and analysis of the findings are conceptualized in a 3-dimensional, balanced and dynamic wheel. The thematic analysis is presented in the discussion chapter.

Demographic Characteristics

All of the study participants were women. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, a major part of parental involvement in the Head Start program comes from the women. Many of the families are predominantly run by women, including mothers, grandmothers and aunts.

The predominance of the female care giving role cannot be generalized to assert that all families

enrolled at Head Start are run by women alone. Support offered by the fathers of children enrolled in the program cannot be overlooked. In one example, the common-law partner of a study participant has shown active and ongoing involvement in several areas of program planning and implementation, educational workshops and recreational activities. He was present and offered support to his partner during her interview in the present study.

Of the eight participants, six were parents of children enrolled at the program and two were staff members. Although the staff were qualified educators and/or counsellors, they considered their personal life experiences and the journeys they had taken as the most precious gifts they could offer to those enrolled in the program. According to one of the staff participants, "I was one of those parents from way back then. I can see myself in them. . . I know where they are at. . . because I've been there. In this way, I consider I've had the best training (be)cause I've been there and I learnt to overcome."

The six parent participants ranged in age from 22 to 28 years old, with a mean of 24 years. They had seventeen children among them, ranging in age from babies still in the womb to eight years.

All of the women in the study were active participants in their children's education, and they were involved in community development efforts initiated by Head Start and in their own education, including academic upgrading, child development and parenting education. Many were learning skills which can be carried over into the work force. Finally, many were learning or re-learning Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The women in this study described themselves as strong and committed to the education and well-being of their children and their families. Their greatest asset was their laughter. It was the gift of laughter as well as a sense of trust in oneself, one's family and traditions that carried them through the tough times and into a new time of hope and optimism.

Components and Their Properties

The six components identified in the study refer to major issues addressed with participants, that is, parent benefits, care giving role, Aboriginal education, culture, identity and community. Each component contributed to a number of properties emerging from the data that categorized the experience of the participants. Table 1 summarizes the components and their properties.

Table 1:

Components	**Properties**
Parent Benefits	*Head Start Participation*
	Greater Opportunities
The Care Giving Role	*Commitment to One's Child*
	Strengthening the Community
	Supporting and Encouraging Resilience
Aboriginal Education	*History*
	Aboriginal Control
Culture	*Language*
	Traditions
	Spirituality
Identity	*Finding Out Who One Is*
	Passing Knowledge to the Next Generation
Community	*Place*
	Meaning

Parent Benefits

The first component referred to benefits parents received from the program. Two properties emerged from the data in relationship to this component: Head Start participation and greater opportunities.

Head Start Participation

The first property emerging from the data was related to the participants' well-being at the time they were participating in Head Start. Participants had come a long way in their journey towards a healthier more fulfilled lifestyle. Participation in Head Start gave the mothers an opportunity to learn about themselves and their children, their children's needs, developmental issues, likes and dislikes. Parents expressed feeling calmer and more at ease since they started attending Head Start. Probably the most pronounced difference in the lives of the participants were their feelings of purpose and hope for the future and their sense of control and active involvement in their lives. The following statements made by three participants express how they experienced this change.

One participant said: *I guess just being able to come here, instead of feeling totally isolated and feeling, oh, like there's really no future out there. So I get a feeling, know that there is a life out there, a future, then I don't feel so despaired and my kids don't feel it. Just bringing them and teaching them that there are healthy ways.*

A second said: *I'm learning about myself and my parenting and like how to control my anger. Right now I'm teaching my daughter how to control her temper tantrums. Like I'm going to those anger management classes so then I try to teach her to go in your room and do whatever you have to do and letting that anger go. Well, we do that when I'm getting that way too. I teach her to go and smudge or go and have a bath. . . and she's learning.*

A third said: *I'm upgrading myself. . . I'm doing a lot of reading and I'm always upgrading myself at the workshops, whatever is out there. I'm educating myself in every way possible, but as far as academics goes, I*

know I need a lot more in that area.

Greater Opportunities

The focus of the second property was related to what the present and the future hold. Experiences of greater opportunities may have resulted from changes in societal norms and expectations, from cultural and personal shifts in values or from support they received from Head Start. The feeling of greater opportunities is illustrated in the following comments made by participants:

For a lot of our upbringing you weren't a fit parent unless you were with your child twenty-four hours a day. But that isn't so; we're learning all this now. You need time for yourself so you can be a healthier parent. I think back in my relationship, the woman stays home and looks after the kids and the man goes out and works. But that isn't so now. It's a give and take. If the guy wants to stay home he can and the woman can do more with education and finances and stuff. The family still benefits. But we're

learning this now.

For another participant greater opportunities meant she could afford to participate in activities she could not otherwise afford:

Now we go on outings. I went on one and now I'm going on another and that's experiences for us that we can't afford financially and even if we could we don't have a vehicle to get to some of these places that they go to.

The Care Giving Role

The second component arising from the data was the participants' care giving role. Three properties were important to the participants' care giving responsibilities: commitment to one's child, strengthening the community, supporting and encouraging resilience.

Commitment to One's Child

In terms of their own child development, many of the participants described an absence of extended family support, guidance, love, warmth, security or feelings of belonging and alienation from Aboriginal

traditions and lifestyle. These women were either separated from their parents at a young age and/or did not know who their mothers or fathers were. One woman told of how she was introduced to her mother at the age of fifteen, "Before then I'd see her come and go; I thought she was my auntie." One woman received little from her parents stating, "I don't remember them teaching me anything at all."

Parenting skills and child care responsibilities were negatively affected as Aboriginal people were taken from their communities to the residential schools or to cities and towns away from their families and communities.

Several of the women in the study described losing their own children and the pain that it caused them. In response to how she felt about having her daughter taken away from her by Child and Family Services, one woman said, "I felt like I wanted to give up everything. I started thinking stupid, like suicide."

The difference between these women and others who have given up hope may be found in thoughts such as the

following which was added to the comment above, "But then I was thinking, that isn't going to change anything." Another mother told of how finding out she was pregnant for her second child inspired her to quit drinking and to take control:

I started realizing I had to make changes. I was pregnant with K. I could have easily had an abortion but that wouldn't have solved anything. I think I was hurting. . . because of the things I'd been through. I couldn't have an abortion, so I decided to have her.

Each of the participants described her parenting role as the most important of her functions. In a workshop women expressed that they were interested in having a full time career one day, but that for the time being, they were mothers, raising and educating their children as well as learning skills along side them.

In terms of the way they perceived their children, participants did not place expectations on them. Children were seen as unique, possessing strengths and weaknesses in different areas. The mothers saw their

role as encouraging and protecting their children in whatever they did and making a commitment to be there for their children, forever. Participants highlighted their children's creativity, gentle nature, physical coordination or colourful personality. One mother said, "I just want him to succeed. And even if he doesn't, it doesn't matter. I just love him for who he is. . ." According to another mother, "What matters in our family most is the children and that's about all. It's always been like that because they're the smallest."

Strengthening the Community

The second property to emerge from the care giving role was the participants' perceived responsibility towards the well-being of the community of which they are a part. Participants knew that in order to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children their community had to be a safe and healthy place to live.

Traditionally Aboriginal communities functioned as a unit. Individuals helped one another in various

different roles and responsibilities so as to contribute to the survival and well-being of the community. This traditional environment is the goal for community development. The director of Oshki-majahitowiin Program commented:

In society today, everything is so compartmentalized. Different levels of government, for example, make decisions and these decisions may or may not have anything to do with the families living in our community or the family who lives at (specific address). Neighbourhoods are built up this same way. There's a mom, a dad, couple of kids. They have their house, a car or two and a white picket fence separating them from the people living next door, people they may or may not be acquainted with. For many of our families life is not like this. . . Head Start is just one program within the community. But if we teach the parents the skills they need to empower themselves, they can carry these over to their children, the children grow, the family and even the extended family

grows. The community will take care of itself. It's only through a community development process that our community will become stronger and it starts with the mothers here at our program.

Supporting and Encouraging Resilience

The third property to have emerged was the support and encouragement participants and staff of Head Start offer one another to find a balance between caring for the self and caring for one's children. An example is the program director's commitment to secure her staff's employment at the centre even in the face of hardships:

I thought if we're going to focus on hiring community people, then we better be able to support them. With this particular member of staff, the college wanted me to kick her out because she wasn't producing satisfactory assignments. To let her go. My attitude was, first of all I couldn't believe they would ask me to do that because this was my program and I said no. This woman, this particular worker has something to offer. She has her experience as an

Aboriginal person, as an Aboriginal mother. She has gone through some very real crises in her life that she's learned from. You can't get that experience through the college in a child care certificate. Not with the type of work that we want to do. I also think that you give up on somebody too soon. That's another setback for her. That's another thing that's going to rob her of her self-esteem. Another thing that will rob her of her personal growth and really, she's come so far. At the same time, I had to be clear with her, in terms of 'I'm going to support you but the responsibility remains with you. This is a two way street. I give, you give.' I think that was the changing point. She realized that I was going to stand behind her and that I was prepared to give her time to work on her stuff. At the same time, I could do all of this, but she had to meet me somewhere half way. . . if you're going to support something that is community based, then you're going to have to put your money where your mouth is.

The desire to help rebuild the Head Start participants' competence and self-resilience was strong. This came through in many ways, particularly in wanting to leave as much choice up to the parents as possible. One informant saw the process as being gradual:

We give the parents an opportunity to participate any way they want to. There are no rules. Sometimes they participate in activities just to be a part of things. A lot of the parents don't really have a lot of stuff to use to interact with their children. They can do it here. We have a mother who started last year and now she'll be teaching Cree here. Isn't that a plus! . . . some parents are simply not ready to participate. We just give them their space. When they are ready to come, they'll come. . . We are trying to teach them how to be a family. Give them back some of their stuff, who they are, because that was all taken away from them.

Aboriginal Education

The third component addresses the participants' experiences with and definitions of education and particularly Aboriginal education. Education, past and present were major issues for discussion during data collection. Participants shared their frustrations as well as their hopes for a better, more relevant educational system for their children. Such discussion comprised of two properties: history and Aboriginal control.

History

Until recently many Aboriginal communities have not been given the opportunity to heal. The effects of assimilation practices of the Canadian federal government, removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and forced attendance at residential schools continue to be felt to the present day. It is only recently that concerted efforts have been made by Aboriginal people and the Canadian government to address these issues. What is occurring now is the start of a long process of healing.

At the heart of the healing process is the need to discuss, share and question one's past. Participants shared experiences at school, compared home and school philosophies and admitted to frustrations and failures. A common topic to all of the participants was the feeling that what the school was teaching held no relevance to their lives. The following comments illustrate the point:

I remember we were getting the strap. . . Every day we had straps for whatever reason. We weren't bad kids; we just had to punished because of our colour. Or being made to stand with the gum on our nose or to kneel. They didn't teach us anything real. I mean, how were we supposed to learn in that environment? . . I learned much later that most of those teachers weren't even certified for Pete's sake!

Another participant recalled: *I remember being thrust into an environment where nobody can understand me and I couldn't understand them. Whatever they were teaching had nothing to do with me, my traditions or*

culture. I wasn't allowed to speak my language so I lost it. It's still lost.

Comments made by two participants were curious. The participants stated that they felt they were performing well in school and were surprised when they were either held back or asked to leave the school. For example: "I had all of my work done on time and I remember helping other kids in the class but they held me back. I don't know why."

The origins of these statements may be difficult to place, although the statements suggest a lack of clear communication between the school and the student. Another possibility is that the student could not relate to a system which held values and taught lessons that were so far removed from those taught at home. This inability to relate to the material taught may have resulted in the student's incomprehension of the assessment and marking strategies used by the school.

When comparing lessons and values taught at school with those taught at home, participants recalled that, as one woman put it, "One had very little to do with

the other." Aboriginal culture and traditions were not taught at the school and so had very little to do with family life.

Participants told of how their own parents felt alienated and/or confused about the school system, saying, "They never really were invited to come, so they had nothing to do with it, except of course if I got into trouble at school."

Aboriginal Control

Aboriginal people often say, "Our children are our future." It follows that the future depends on the effectiveness of education. Education shapes the pathways of thinking, transmits values as well as facts, teaches language and social skills, helps release creative potential and determines productive capacities (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 82).

The mothers and educators who participated in the present study are well aware of the power of education:

I try to encourage my kids to stay in school now. Like when they're older, I tell them now, 'You'll get

nowhere without an education. You need an education to get somewhere in life. . . there's lots of people out there who have good professional jobs from their education.' Compared to most people, like most people I see that don't have educations are on social assistance. It's hard. I'd rather see my kids do well in life, like succeed.

Participants were also aware of the importance of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education. Several of the participants referred to "quality education" and "relevance of the education to our people." One mother expressed her concerns regarding the type of Aboriginal education her children receive:

I think the thought is there but they are ill equipped. If we are going to have an Aboriginal education that is truly Aboriginal then it has to be controlled by Aboriginal people from the top levels, like an Aboriginal school division. They'd have to be dedicated to our children, to our language and culture and have parents and families involved in every step of

the education, like this place.

Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education emphasizes two key concepts upon which Head Start is built, local control and parent participation. Under their own control, individuals can learn a true sense of personal and cultural identity by recognizing traditional values while simultaneously preparing themselves to function effectively in the larger society (Haig-Brown, 1995; Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Aboriginal education is a life long commitment to all members of the family and an aid to community development. According to the director of the program:

We've started now with children 0 - 4 years of age. We're working with them and with their parents in teaching them values which are important, and these include universal values. . . Somewhere along the line the program has to be taken to older ages, 6 - 12, twelve to adult so there's a continuum of Aboriginal education, a continuum of always developing and always

supporting parents.

Culture

The fourth component emerging from the data was culture, specifically the commonalities which serve as a core around which the group self consciously organize themselves (Green, 1992). Language, traditions and spirituality are three properties in the process.

Language

Language is the aspect of culture that is central to its expression and transmission. It allows members of a culture a means for definition, a system of symbols and communication of ideas, history and goals. It is the means by which culture is communicated to the next generation.

In Canada, there are eleven Aboriginal language families and more than fifty different languages. Only a third of the Aboriginal population speak an Aboriginal language, and most are middle-aged or older. "Even the languages in most frequent use - Mi'kmaq, Montagnais, Cree, Ojibwa, Inuktitut and some Dene languages - are in danger of extinction because of

declining fluency in the young" (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 91).

The elimination of Aboriginal languages was central to the colonizers' endeavours to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into the dominant European society. In a report published by the Province of Canada in 1847 regarding the future directions in policy for Aboriginal education the following comment was made: "Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of a weaving from the habits and feelings of their ancestors and the acquirements of the language, arts and customs of civilized life" (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 25).

Effects of attitudes and policies of this kind, made a century ago, continue to affect Aboriginal people today. Study participants spoke about their first days of school when they spoke only their Native language and could not comprehend the language spoken by the teacher or the other students in the class. Women told about the "little tolerance" the teachers seemed to have in terms of the language barrier.

As children, they were not permitted a period of transition in which they might come to understand basic English before being made to compete with their English-speaking peers in the classroom. The following statement made by a staff participant expresses how the school affected her feelings about her language:

My first language was Ojibway. I always struggled in school. At home that's all we spoke when we were younger. This one teacher said I would never amount to anything because of my language. I've always been self conscious and when I had my kids, I told them I wasn't going to teach them our language because of that fact that I had struggled . . . like there was so much taken away from us we didn't even want to be who we were. Well, it was the teachers; it wasn't the kids. Indian Affairs used to run the school and we were always labelled the dumb ones. They were the smart ones.

Other participants were never given the opportunity to learn their native language as the following quotation illustrates:

It's a deadly thought actually, that my mom would stop speaking Cree. She experienced too much pain and too much discrimination that she decided she wasn't going to put her kids through that. She wasn't going to teach us Cree.

Language instruction is one of the main components of the Head Start curriculum. All of the participants expressed an eagerness to learn or re-learn their native language at Head Start, alongside of their children. Language was seen as so integral to cultural revival that parents and grandparents were getting involved in the process. The following participant related a change in her mother's attitude towards the language:

One day I just went to my mom and I said 'Mom, I want you teach us Cree. I want you to teach us all Cree,' and (after all these years of not speaking the language) she said, 'Okay,' so that's one big opportunity that my children have that I don't have.

Staff and parent participants expressed a greater

tolerance for languages in society today. The staff member quoted above discussed one of the differences in raising her nine year old daughter from raising her older children a decade ago:

But my L. and I, we try to speak (Ojibway) all the time. She wants to learn which is good. What I mean is the acceptance now. Even my older children are learning the language in school now, but it's not the same because it's not their first language.

Speaking one's native language was seen as essential for an understanding of one's culture, of one's identity. Speaking the language of the old people, of one's ancestors is said to bring one closer to understanding his/her roots.

Traditions

A second property of culture is traditions. The participants described tradition as that part of culture which gives meaning to their actions, secures understanding and exhibits respect for the culture.

Perhaps one of the reasons participants have been able to keep their strength lies in the fact that the

words and ways of the elders still had tremendous influence on their lives. The following quotation expresses how one woman was able to keep the stories her grandmother had told her when she was a child with her throughout several hardships and personal losses:

I remember her stories. They all scared me then, but they were all about lessons in life. Like this is what will happen if you don't listen to your mother or this is what happens if you stay out late at night. Well, some I liked to listen to and I heard them over and over a hundred times and now I think about them, like even when I'm taking care of my daughter. . . I remember a story my grandmother told about a little girl who never got punished by her mother. She always got whatever she wanted. I guess her mother spoiled her. Anyway the girl ended up dying at a very young age. Her mother cried and cried as to her loss. It was soon after the little girl's death when her mother went to visit her grave. She knelt down to speak to her daughter and suddenly a hand came

up out of the grave. You see, the girl was offering her mother the hand so that she could be disciplined. She could not lay to rest until her mother disciplined her. It is why she died.

Other participants described ways of doing things and the meanings behind them. One example is a story a participant told about covering the mirrors in the case of a thunderstorm so that the thunderbird will not see its shadow. Another is a respect for the environment including the smallest of creatures. "One would never kill a spider, but if you accidentally do, you need to say, 'I'm sorry grandfather spider it was the thunderbird that killed you.'"

Other traditions participants hoped to give to the next generation included a respect for women. A staff participant shared her views on this:

Within our own community, the whole thing of tradition and understanding our culture and values, the ceremonies, even our chain of command, if you want to call it that, and the roles that were played by each member of our society has been going on for awhile.

We've got 500 years of damage to undo. I've seen a lot of women start off walking the traditional way. We have our men coming behind. I'm really worried about the men right now. The women are going to change, for the better, if they are going to walk this way. They are going to impart those values on their daughters and more particularly their sons because they will be the ones raising their sons. And if they understand the values within our culture and within our society, we're going to have over the next generation, over the next few generations, different attitudes coming from those young boys, because they were raised by mothers who understand what that way is. Like family violence, if you raise your children, especially your sons to respect women, we wouldn't have to worry about family violence. They would know that hitting a woman is wrong and they would know why it is wrong. Not just the physical thing of hitting, but traditionally why it's wrong and what you would do by hitting a woman. It relates to the whole meaning of mother earth, of

destroying she who is the life giver. These are little things. Steps towards understanding what our traditional values are.

Some traditions have changed due to changes in society. Traditionally, women were not pipe carriers and did not participate in such ceremonies as Sun dances and sweats. Some elders say that this is because the woman is herself a life giver, as such she is powerful and an integral part of the life process. Because women go through a menstruation cycle that is tied in with the cycle of the moon, it was thought that a spiritual bond existed between herself, the moon and the earth. She would bring her own cycle into the ceremonies causing her to interfere with the cycle of the ceremony.

Things are different today. Aboriginal communities, such as in the present study, have reached a period of crisis. Families, roles and traditional ways have in many ways been turned upside down. According to one elder who held a pipe ceremony at Oshki-majahitowiin Centre:

What better way to help restore the crisis than to introduce the power of the life giver? Women are helping for they are praying for their men. Asking the creator to give us strength to guide the men.

One woman, herself a pipe carrier, said at a ceremony held at the Centre,

Women have started to drink alcohol and to ingest these poisons into her body. So she too, needs to cleanse herself, when traditionally, in the old days, she did not need to.

It should be noted that the exclusion of women from the ceremonies was not seen as an indication of her lower status. The woman then, as now, held a dominant and strong position in society.

Other comments, although seemingly insignificant little details in life, illustrated an unquestioning acceptance that this is the way people do things which formed a basis for cultural identity and strength. A mother described her family's ritual of smudging in the mornings, "We started doing it in the mornings with the children and they don't think anything of it. It's a

part of their day." Participants told about their children's involvement in traditional dancing, Sun dances, feasts and pipe ceremonies and their own involvement in sweats. Mothers have learned or are presently learning to make crafts including star blankets, moccasins and jingle dresses for their daughters.

Spirituality

The third property of culture to have emerged from the data is spirituality. Spirituality is at the centre of Aboriginal education, well-being and community development. At Oshki-majahitowiin Centre, the parents were involved with their children in re-learning Aboriginal spirituality and participating in prayers and traditional ceremonies.

Besides offering the women a sense of peace, understanding, hope and meaning, spirituality was the means by which Aboriginal women healed their families and communities from the consequences of domination, displacement and assimilation (Faith, et. al., 1990).

Women held a dominant position in the political

and cultural life of Ojibway and Cree societies. First and foremost, they were honoured as the givers of life. Their ability to bear, raise and nurture the new generation was seen as a special gift from the creator. This was seen as a source of power and equal responsibility (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Several Aboriginal researchers attribute present social problems as "stemming from colonization when laws and policies introduced by the colonists interfered with cultural traditions and introduced discrimination against women" (Faith, et. al., 1990). Probably the most offensive of all, was a section included in the Indian Act of 1876 which banned Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men. "Even if she spoke her Aboriginal language, practised the traditions of her nation and raised her children in the way of her people, she ceased to be 'Indian' in the eyes of the government the moment she married a non-Indian" (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 101). One participant told of her

loss of status:

I am an Indian woman, my children are Indian but I don't have my status. That means, for example, if I want to go to university I have to pay full cause I don't get that status rights. And I don't get band rights. . . well, the way the government sees it, I'm not Indian.

The staff participants described the consequences this policy had on their women and on Aboriginal people. Women could not return to their home reserves, nor could they be buried with their ancestors. They lost these rights. Their culture and identity were denied to them by the Canadian government.

This was not the case with Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men who married non-Aboriginal women did not suffer the same penalties and their wives were accepted as Indians with all the rights ensured by the Indian Act (Faith, et. al., 1990).

By 1985, after a decade of challenges by Aboriginal women, the government introduced the passage of Bill C-31. "Bill C-31 allows for the reinstatement

of those who lost Indian status to their children" (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1990, p. 101). However, not all problems have been solved, and further problems have been introduced with the passage of the Bill. For example, Indian status is still dependent upon male lineage and colonial processes of racism, sexism and a class divided economy have relegated Aboriginal women to the lowest rung of decision-making power within Canadian society (Faith, et. al., 1990).

Poverty, ill health, educational failure, alcohol and substance abuse and family violence were realities for the participants. According to the director of Oshki-majahitowiin Centre:

This cycle must be broken and a newer, healthier one put in its place. We cannot have parent participation in Aboriginal education, we cannot have Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education until first undergoing a process of healing. This healing cannot come from forces outside of the community, the government for example. Rather, it must be initiated

from within the community, and the women right here are the ones to start the ball rolling. This is not an easy task for it means one must break free of the pain, anger and resentment. It means allowing Aboriginal women to initiate their own healing and to draw on traditional practices and an understanding of the needs of their own people.

Aboriginal spirituality starts from the position that all the elements of life and living are interdependent. Well-being flows from the balance and harmony among all elements of personal and collective life (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The individual is perceived as the life blood of the group. His/her freedom and strength offers strength to the group (Hampton, 1993). In this way, participants began the healing process with an inner healing. Two participants described their journey towards healing:

We are given the stuff we've been through because of what is ahead in our lives. We really don't control

our lives, but whatever it is we need to be able to deal with it. Whatever it is, I guess that's how I'll live my life. Sometimes it doesn't register until later, you know when things come about and then you think, aw that's why it went that way. I've done a lot of inner healing, worked a lot on myself, you name it, every aspect of the counselling stuff, including the (traditional) spirituality. My fasts, my dances, mentally, emotionally, physically, I've really worked hard. But that's okay, I'll get there eventually.

Another woman described her experience as follows:

I'm coming into contact with (spirituality) very much. I think lately it's something I look forward to doing. Like I can grow as a person. It helps me deal with some of the stuff I've been through. . . It's important for the children to understand this. It's the only thing that can give you hope. You're more stable as a person. 'Cause I think to live the traditional life you give up drugs and alcohol.

The women brought their children into the healing

or spiritual development by participating in the ceremonies and prayers in the classroom and in the home. Two women described what it meant to them to see their children engaged in spiritual activity:

. . . the smudging is really important. She wants to do that. Now, we smudge at home. We do because of what it means to her. She's a lot more calm; she used to be really hyper. It's teaching her to slow down.

Smudging, he talks about a lot. I was all amazed, I came, that was before (the program) ended for the summer, (the teachers) came in and said, okay circle time, like smudge time. I was surprised, he sat and smudged himself. Like he did it. I was so surprised.

Just as the social problems facing Aboriginal communities today have sprung in part from a collective experience, so solutions require change at the collective level. Aboriginal people acting alone cannot break the cycle of disadvantage and discrimination, but solutions can be brought about by Aboriginal people working collectively (Report on the

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). At Head Start parents participated in a process of healing that was based on the spiritual values of respect, pride, dignity, sharing, hospitality and mutual aid. It was thought that healing begins with the individual, is then built by the family, the community and finally by relationships with the greater society.

Identity

Identity is the fifth component to emerge as central to the parent participation process. Although informants identified with being Aboriginal, this was not always the case. Participants either lost their cultural identities, adopted the identity and values of the mainstream society and/or had no idea that they were Indian persons and what this meant. Identity revealed two properties: finding out who one is and passing this knowledge down to the next generation.

Finding Out Who One Is

For at least three generations, the families of the study participants experienced disruption in terms of family and community living and a detachment from

their roots. The source of this disruption included residential schooling and inappropriate child welfare policies (Castellano, 1986; Haig-Brown, 1988; Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Many Aboriginal children across the country were removed from their families and sent to live with families outside of their own culture or placed in institutions. Authorities had only one guideline for children thought to be in need of protection - removal from their families. They did not attempt to alleviate social or economic problems families faced that may have caused or at least intensified the child care problems, such as poverty or inadequate housing, nor did they support parents who had themselves been raised in institutions and therefore lacked parents as models of appropriate child care practices. Finally, they made little attempt to place the children with members of their own family or with other Aboriginal families who could help them hold on to their culture and identity (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Although the above finding is true for many Aboriginal people across the country, all of the study participants were raised by at least one family member; therefore, loss of cultural identity could not have resulted from a forced removal from one's family. Yet, each of the participants expressed a loss of cultural identity, a lack of understanding at one time of what it meant to be Indian and a shame that went along with it. Several participants share their feelings:

I started meeting lots of Indian kids, like when I started high school, but it didn't make no difference cause they were just a different colour. They didn't know anything about themselves, but I felt more accepted by them.

My mom never taught us anything about (being Aboriginal) because she never knew anything about it.

I just heard so many bad or scary things about (Aboriginal traditions) that I'm not really ready to learn (although I want my daughter to learn). I just tell her to go ahead and I listen to her explain what

she's doing but I say, mommy's not ready to learn that now.

The following comments were made by the common-law partner of one of the study participants following an interview with her.

I never had no sense of Indian identity. I always felt lost. I didn't even know I was Indian. This lady used to call me her little apple, you know, red on the outside, white on the inside. I didn't even know what that meant. When I found out I was mad. I started to want to find out about my identity. Well, I think for me it's too late, so I want to concentrate on the kids, making sure they know.

This loss of Aboriginal identity could be attributed to several different situations. For example, as mentioned earlier in the section on culture, parents or grandparents of participants could have made the decision not to teach their children to identify with being Aboriginal because of the pain that this identity caused them. Another explanation is that

the parents themselves were experiencing the effects of domination, assimilation and discrimination and therefore had no Aboriginal identity to offer.

What becomes clear from the above quotations is the importance of a positive cultural identity towards community development. The women in the study expressed a need to move forward, to reclaim what was taken from them and build a brand new Aboriginal identity.

Passing This Knowledge to the Next Generation

Crucial to the preservation of a culture is transmitting cultural identity to the next generation. Re-learning an Aboriginal identity was a central focus of the Head Start curriculum. At Oshki-majahitowiin Program, parents were not only teachers of their children, but, as was the more usual case, parents were also learning from their children through their involvement in the program.

The children at Head Start were learning at a very young age what it meant to be Aboriginal. They were participating in cultural activities and were learning

their Native language. Parents described their children as knowing who they are and feeling proud of their cultural heritage. Participants described their joy at this new education experienced by the children:

I remember being in school and being ashamed of being an Indian. That was way back when. But now, with these little ones, I guess that's why I'm so happy and proud. I never thought I'd see the day when we would be proud to be who we are and at that young of an age!

With these beginnings, children can go out into the world and they can do anything. Because they know who they are and they are proud of themselves.

The need for individuals to pass their cultural knowledge to the next generation is strong and cannot easily be crushed. The participants were subjected to poverty, oppression, onslaught against their culture and language and all that it stood for, loss of parenting and/or family support in their own upbringing and addictions to alcohol and drugs. In a

demonstration of the human will and spirit however, they have remained conscious of their ancestry and have, with support from Head Start, been able to give this knowledge to their children.

Community

The final component is the importance of community to the participants. Two properties of community were addressed with the mothers and educators. The first concerned a sense of place or territory and the second was the deeper sense of meaning that community gave to the people.

Place

According to Aboriginal philosophy, the earth is home to all living things. "It is stable through all of our changes. . . it sustains and comforts us as we are her children. We do not own this place - we belong to the land" (Hampton, 1993, p. 303). The philosophy of the earth's relation to the people is a reminder of the importance of place.

The participants in the present study experienced high levels of transience throughout their lifetimes.

These include relocating from the reserves to the city and moves throughout the city, often changing places of residence as well as schools.

Territory and the opportunity for continuity and tradition in location are important (Hampton, 1993). Aboriginal people have felt the pain of being a minority in their own land. Having a place that is Aboriginal, where one is free to relax from the conventions of white society and be one's native self is essential for well-being (Hampton, 1993).

Head Start represented this territory or home to many of the participants. It was a safe place, one that offered comfort and warmth. It was an Indian place within the community. Individuals came to socialize with others, to relax and to engage in the many activities offered. Besides offering psychological and social benefits, Head Start also offered such practical resources as a free telephone, laundry facilities and an ongoing supply of coffee and other refreshments.

Parents felt welcome in the program. They felt

they were able to come into the classroom, participate with the children and share their ideas freely. All of the participants agreed that they felt teachers welcomed their suggestions and in several cases acted upon program ideas promptly. Examples include one woman's suggestion to plan a theatre trip for families, another parent suggested a book lending program. In cases where teachers could not incorporate parent suggestions, parents felt teachers offered explanations and extended alternatives.

Teachers believed in the importance of parent participation and inclusion into every aspect of the program. Teachers welcomed their participation and felt that most of the parents held a positive attitude towards the program. Through these feelings parents and teachers were able to feel a sense of place or home.

Meaning

In addition to the physical properties of place, meaning represents what the people put into the place. At Head Start, these included education, family and

cultural attitudes and practices. In its program planning, Head Start offered more than academic education for the children. It tailored to the needs and interests of the parents and to others in the extended family. The focus was on inclusion and comfort.

The values, traditions and philosophy of the centre offered meaning to the people involved. It is this meaning which was at the essence of the community component.

Conclusion

The narrative recounting of the participants' experience depicts an integrative and complete wheel with circular components each of which is whole unto itself. The wheel conceptualizes the parent participation experience at Head Start and will form the basis for the interpretation and discussion of the findings and assist in understanding the knowledge generated from this study. An analogy will be drawn between the characteristics of the wheel and those of parent participation at Head Start. A thematic

analysis of the data will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of some Cree and Ojibway parents and educators of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Program in Winnipeg, Manitoba regarding parental participation in their children's preschool education. It was proposed that the parents and staff of the program would benefit from a participatory action research approach which would allow for active involvement and reflection regarding their individual, family and community development needs and the discovery of strategies to fulfill these needs through Oshki-majahitowiin's parent participation program.

The findings presented in the previous chapter were derived using a participatory action research style and incorporating grounded theory methodology. Interviews, workshops and document review were administered at Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Centre between September and December 1997. The data were collected and organized into components and properties

of parent participation.

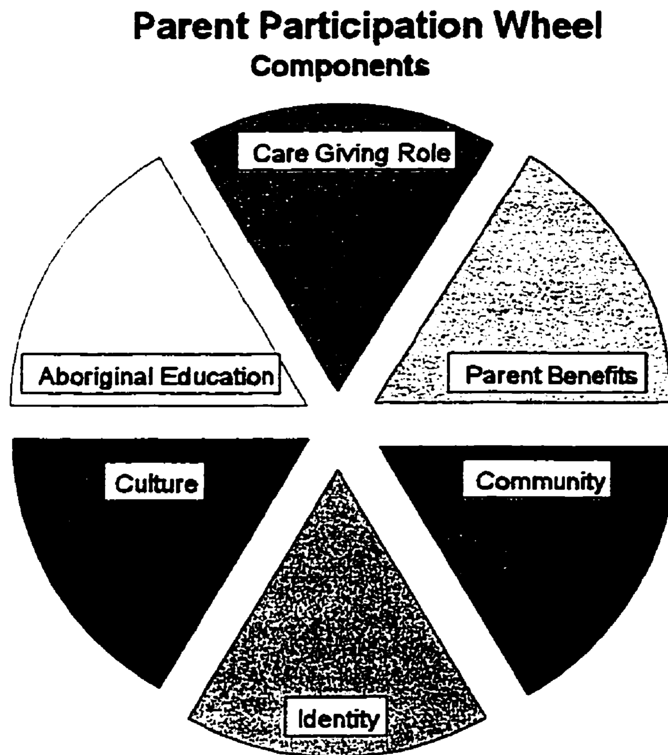
This chapter discusses and interprets the research findings in terms of a parent participation wheel I developed. The wheel conceptualizes my understanding of the parent participation process and incorporates my interpretations of Aboriginal philosophy and western theory.

Three themes have been uncovered through analysis and synthesis of the data. These highlight and bring clarity to the parent participation experience. A discussion of the participatory action research approach, limitations to the study and implications for education, research and practice will be provided.

The Parent Participation Wheel

Through interpretation of the research findings, I was able to develop a parent participation wheel (see Figure 1). The wheel is dynamic, whole, multi-layered, interconnected and balanced. Creating the image of the wheel is a means to understanding the essence of the Oshki-majahitowiin parent participation experience.

Figure 1:



The wheel symbolizes the circle of life. It is continuous and symbolic of eternity. It represents the cycle of care giving that is at once continuous and changing throughout life and over the generations. Parents learn to nurture their children by experience and observing their parents in the care giving role. The children in turn grow to become parents, providing nurturance and love not only to the next generations but also to the generation that came before them. It is this nurturing/care giving cycle that was essential to the present study and which is illustrated in the parent participation wheel.

An interruption to the care giving process will cause the circle to break therefore affecting the nurturing/care giving process. Parents and educators in the present study have experienced this interruption in the care giving process personally and were working together to repair the damage and strengthen their families, the community and future generations.

A cross-section of the parent participation wheel reveals three distinct and interconnected themes.

These are illustrated in Figure 2 and are as follows:

1. Care giving responsibility. This first theme relates to the survival of the people and is the essence of Aboriginal education, cultural involvement and community development. For Aboriginal people, children are the future. In this way, educating children in cultural and traditional issues as well as in the skills needed to survive in modern society ensure the continuation of a people.

Care giving responsibility includes caring for one's self as well as caring for one's children. The study participants have shown that in order to educate and care for their children they must, first, care for themselves. Role modelling in this way becomes an important method of child rearing and is central to understanding Head Start's parent participation philosophy.

2. Understanding Personal and Cultural History. This second theme is crucial in terms of offering one a sense of belonging, place and purpose. The participants in the study struggled to understand and

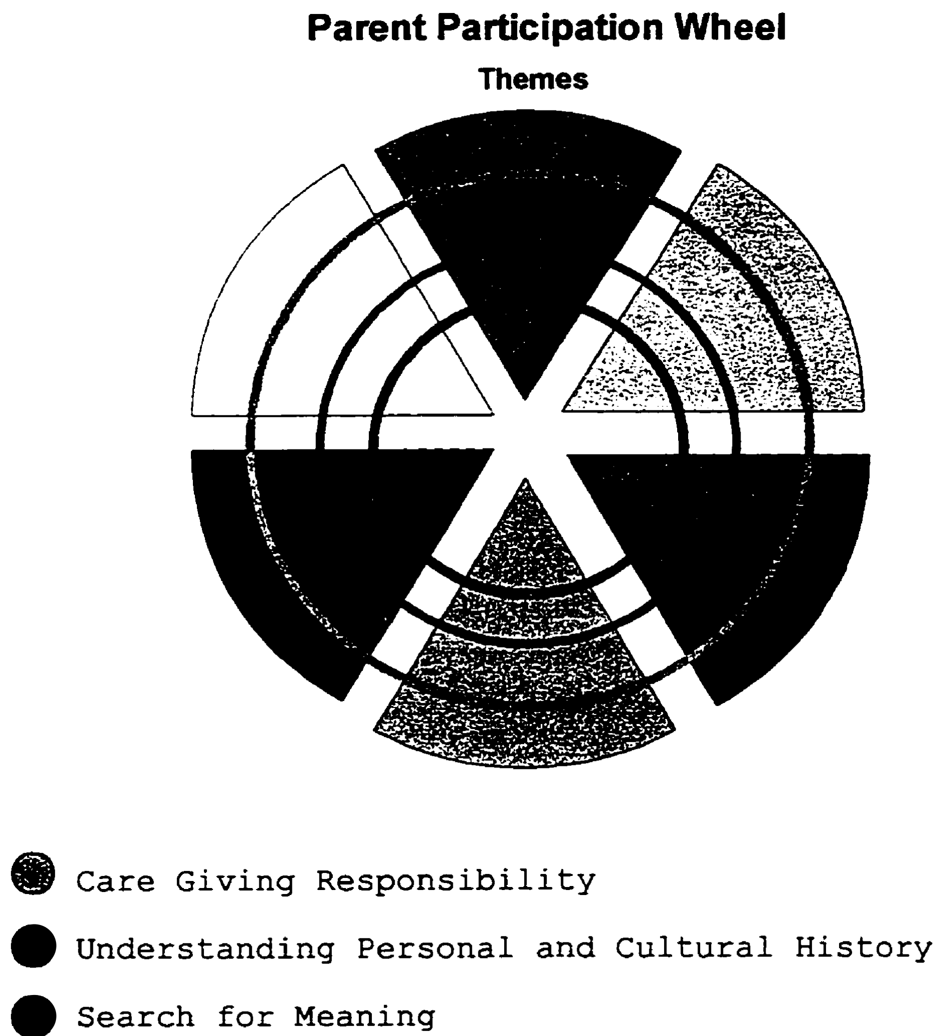
accept their personal histories, losses and pains as well as those that have been endured by their families and their people.

History was a large component of the Aboriginal education that takes place at Head Start. Besides offering a starting point for understanding who one is by identifying one's roots, it was the means for transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next.

3. The Search for Meaning. This third and final theme may well be the core of the entire parent participation wheel. It signifies the centre of all humanity and is the reason one struggles to come to terms with history and the social and physical environments.

At Head Start, traditions were not questioned in terms of whether each was indeed practised in the same way by one's ancestors. Traditional activities offered the participants meaning. It was a search for meaning that drove the participants to continue in their involvement in Head Start and their trust that this program will fulfil their personal and familial needs.

Figure 2:



Conceptual Framework

After describing the parent participation process in terms of a wheel, I noticed that the interpretation parallels both a human ecology perspective and teachings of the medicine wheel.

My interpretation of the research findings reflects my formal education training, personal philosophy, values, theoretical and methodological proclivities, particular research interests and experiences. Therefore I interpret the parent participation process in terms of human ecology theory and the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Human ecology theory emerges from the data. From this perspective I interpret and impose order to the data, explicate the relationships between the components and organize those relationships in order to allow for clear communication of ideas. Human ecology "in its most comprehensive sense is the study of the laws, conditions, principles and ideals which are concerned on the one hand with (one's) immediate physical environment and on the other hand with (one's)

nature as a social being and is the study specifically of the relationship between these two factors" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 420).

The teachings of the medicine wheel also emerged and employed a similar perspective to human ecology. It is interesting to find that the two philosophies can be easily brought together in their similarities, symbolizing a union of two cultures.

The medicine wheel includes a process of healing which begins with the individual and extends towards the family and the community. Although the individual is part of the community and moves in unison with the group, he/she is the power and strength upon whom the group is dependant. According to Aboriginal philosophy, "the whole consists of intra-dependant and reciprocally related parts, each whole is specifically different from every other whole" (Green, 1992, p. 29 - 30).

The medicine wheel offered a way of looking at individual development and extended to include others in the family, the community and the natural and spirit

worlds, to all that is living (Hart, 1996). It explains concepts in terms of four with factors represented in each of the four directions of the wheel, east, south, west and north. The human being is considered to have four components; these are the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental. When each of these is considered equally and respected the individual is said to be well-balanced and living in harmony (Hart, 1996). If too much attention is paid to one of the components at the detriment of the others, the other three will suffer. In this way, "there is a circular process occurring within every individual. It should be emphasized that the process is continuous and ongoing throughout our lifetime" (Hart, 1996, p. 67).

The Participatory Action Research Process

Participatory action research offered several characteristics which helped to guide the research and establish the goal of understanding parent and educator experiences at Oshki-majahitowiin's parent participation program. For example, understanding participants' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes

towards education and community involvement as well as the parent's education and child care giving role was possible through the PAR philosophy of grounding the research in the experiences of those who lived the situation.

Other characteristics which helped to guide the research included the following:

- Presenting a philosophical approach to working with individuals and the group using value laden dialogue and cooperative action;
- bringing parents and educators with varying levels of education and skills together in work groups to articulate problems and strategies for parent participation programming;
- discussing relevant and related topics including adult education, informal education (i.e., parent classes and workshops), and community development; and
- emphasizing generation of knowledge, power and active participation.

I was motivated by the belief that research should

serve a practical purpose if it is to benefit the individuals or groups of interest to the study. I also believed that the research findings should lead to some action or be used to influence or change the social situation being researched. For example, the present study led to my being hired to coordinate a parent leadership training program based on the needs expressed by the study participants.

I also felt that research findings should not be written and presented in such a way that only a small group of elite academics could understand. For example, the parent leadership program will include the development of a parent resource manual tailored specifically for the parents of Head Start.

To ensure the relevancy of the research to the Head Start community, I attempted to include participants in every step of the research process. This was welcomed by participants because it involved them in a process that would potentially improve their social situation. Participant involvement began in the winter of 1996, during discussions with the director of

Oshki-majahitowiin program regarding the development of a parent participation program.

Over time, I became involved in several aspects of Head Start. These included training the staff in child development and teaching practices, workshops, seminars and traditional ceremonies. I began to meet with parents and children informally, to empathize with their daily struggles and to listen to their stories and hopes for the future. From these beginnings the study was born.

Once the study was proposed and accepted by the program director, she and the program coordinator took active roles in gathering relevant documents, materials and recruiting parents for interviews and workshop participation. The participants invited me into every aspect of their program and made themselves available to answer my many questions.

I believe if I had come to the program intending to implement a traditional research approach, I would have been rejected. The director was leery about inviting a researcher into the program to study its

members as if they were passive subjects. Members of this particular community have had more than their share of this type of passive experience (see Chapters 1 and 4). She did not see any reason for program members to go through any type of research process that did not benefit them and their families directly.

It seems that too often, researchers conduct studies for their own benefits without much regard for the needs those researched. According to the former director of Andrew's Street Family Support Centre and present director of Mamawichiitata Aboriginal Child and Family Services, "it's like getting all this painful stuff to come out and then saying, okay great, thank-you, now go and bleed somewhere else."

My goal was to capture the experiences of the people and to not let the experiences be wasted. Information offered me by participants was never taken for granted. I felt privileged they trusted in me to share their histories, struggles, hopes and dreams and to journey with me through the entire research process.

Participatory action research offered the members

of Oshki-majahitowiin community an opportunity to break the cycle of passivity and powerlessness by sharing in the generation of knowledge and therefore of power. Other benefits obtained by participants included opportunities to share one's story and personal beliefs and to form a cohesive, action oriented group. Benefits derived for participants, specific to involvement in the workshops included broadening their experiences and developing competence in listening, speaking before a group, expressing ideas and opportunities for active participation in the facilitation process.

The study offered participants several opportunities for interaction and relationships. Participants interacted during workshops and found commonalities that would promote relationships long after the study's completion. Involvement in the workshops stimulated conversations about the "fun" experienced by participants, especially in terms of participation in dramatic games, storytelling, and formation of interactive work groups. Parents and

staff promoted involvement to other members of the program and discussed their participation even months after the workshops took place.

Through intimate involvement, I too, received several benefits. I learned the importance of laughter in the healing process, creation of group cohesion and stimulation of creativity. I learned how members of this Aboriginal community perceived the world, especially in terms of their roles as parents, the centrality of children and faith in their culture and community. I was inspired to continue participatory action research in the future as a means to understanding community concerns and advocating for social change.

Finally, I have gained an awareness into the importance of community based research, the power of knowledge and most of all of enabling people to become aware of social issues and to better understand how these affect their lives.

Limitations to the Present Study

The research design imposes some limitations to

the present study. These include the researcher bias, non-random sampling and participant recall bias.

As a researcher I am limited by my own experiences. I have chosen a topic about which I feel very passionate. The future of Aboriginal education and parental involvement in Manitoba directly affects the education my children will receive, their concepts of self and particularly their Aboriginal identity. It will affect their opportunities for success in their personal as well as career paths. I strive to become involved in their educational journeys in the most positive way.

Another restriction to the generalization of the thesis results rests on the fact that I chose a very specific group of people as study participants. Although study results cannot be generalized to include the perceptions of all other Aboriginal parents, results obtained offer a depth and insight into personal experience that would not have been possible using a wider range of participants.

Another limitation of the study involves recall

bias. It may be difficult for people to remember past school events; however, their perceptions do frame present action.

Implications for Further Research

The present research may be used to benefit home economics practice in both education and research. The results of the study can guide program policy and ongoing educational support strategies. Besides promoting action for members of the Oshki-majahitowiin program, the present research may inspire activity from policy-makers, health professionals and educators.

Several issues arose during data collection which could form questions for later research. Examples of such questions include the role of the male in terms of parent and educator, types of supports needed for parents and community development strategies.

Follow-up for the present research may include an evaluation of the participatory action research approach. Are parents actively engaged in meaning-making, the generation of knowledge and in planning and implementing a program tailored to meet their needs?

Conclusion

Findings from this study resulted in a conceptual scheme that described the perceptions of parents and educators of Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Program regarding their children's preschool educational experience as a dynamic, balanced and continuous wheel. Principles of the Aboriginal medicine wheel and human ecology theory emerged from the data using grounded theory analysis. Incorporating a participatory action research style allowed for the identification of components and properties significant to understanding the phenomenon. Many of the findings validated results obtained in prior research. Additionally some new perspectives and understandings emerged. Whereas findings from this study cannot be generalized to a larger population due to the limited sample size and non-random sample technique used, some useful findings were obtained that may assist educators and other professionals to provide a more meaningful education and parenting program to Aboriginal parents. Recommendations for further practice and research were

offered.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

Explanation of the Study

My name is Rachel Eni Lawrenchuk. I will be doing a study on Cree and Ojibway parent participation at Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start. I will look at your needs and interests and those of teachers at the Centre.

I will interview you exploring your views, feelings and beliefs about Head Start and your child's participation in it. I will ask general questions using a topical guideline, for example: How did you decide to start your child in Head Start? What do you do here for your six hours per week help? Do you like what you do here? Why or why not? Where did you go to school?

After your interview and the interviews of seven others, I'd like you to participate in two workshop

sessions approximately 2 - 2.5 hours each. At the workshop we will discuss similar issues in a group setting. Interviews and workshops will be audio recorded and hand written notes will be taken.

Based on our discussions, we will develop a set of themes or standards that could be used to help parents participate in Head Start.

What you tell me is confidential. Information will be used solely for the purpose of the present study. You have the right to withdraw at any time and may choose to omit or refuse any information of the information requested.

Appendix B

Consent Form

I, _____________, have read and understand the purpose of the present research study entitled 'Parent Participation in a Cree and Ojibway Head Start Program: Development of a Conceptual Framework'. I agree to participate in an interview with Rachel Eni Lawrenchuk, thesis candidate for Master of Science Degree in the Department of Family Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, University of Manitoba and in 2 workshops to be held at Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Centre.

I understand that all information gathered will be used towards developing a set of themes or standards that may be applied towards a theory of parental participation in their children's preschool education.

The interviews and workshop sessions will be audio recorded. In addition, Rachel Eni Lawrenchuk may take hand written notes.

I am free to withdraw from the research study at any time or choose to omit or refuse any of the information requested.

_____________________   _____________________

Signed   Date

Appendix C

An Interview Guide for Teachers

1. How did you decide to work here?
   What do you like/dislike about your work here?

2. What is parent participation?

3. What issues are involved in parent participation?
   Do you see parents as self motivated/eager to participate or do you feel you need to drag parents to come?

4. What must parents do for their six hours of compulsory parent participation?

5. What do you suggest as ways to encourage a parent to participate more often in the program?
   How would you encourage participation from a parent who seems alienated or hostile towards the program?

6. What things can a parent do to prepare a child for school?

7. How would you describe the program at Oshki-majahitowiin Centre?

8. What is Aboriginal education?
   What is involved in such an education?
   Who is involved?

An interview Guide for Parent Participants

I understand that you have enrolled yourself and your child (children) (insert name(s)) in the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Program and have been here since. . . I would like to learn more about your decision to become involved and your experience, needs and perceptions of the program.

1. How did you decide to start your child in Head Start?

   Possible probes:

      Did you know someone who brought their child here?

      Did you bring an older child of your own?

      Did you hear about it from a neighbour, social worker or friend?

2. Why did you put your child in Head Start?

   Possible probes:

      Do you like a chance to get involved or to

visit with other parents?

Did you feel your child would do better in school?

Did you get pressure from a social worker?

3. What do you do here for your six hours per week help?

4. Do you like what you do here? Why? Why not?

5. Where did you go to school?

   Did you live with your family while going to school?

   Did your parents go to your school to help, like you do here?

6. What do the staff at Head Start expect you to do here?

   Are you able to choose where you would like to help or are you assigned duties?

   Do they offer suggestions or comment on your

strengths/weaknesses?

7. What is Head Start?
   What do they teach here?
   Do they teach the parents as well as the children?
   What's involved in educating the parents?
   Is this Aboriginal education?
   What is Aboriginal education?

8. Do you share your ideas about things children/families can do with the staff?
   (If yes) What have you shared?
   Were your suggestions included in the program?
   (If no) Why haven't you?
   Do you have any ideas for programming?
   Do you feel comfortable going to the staff with your ideas? Concerns?

9. Can you tell me in your own words what 'education' is?

What's included in a full education?

How do children learn?

Possible probes:

Do they learn by example?

Do they need to be given an explanation?

Do they learn through trial and error?

Or by observation?

10. Tell me a bit about your home and your child's space in it.

Where does he/she sleep?

How is the room organized?

Where are his/her clothes and toys placed?

Does he/she share a room? With whom?

Where does he/she play?

What does he/she play with?

Does your child have toys?

What kinds of toys?

Do you make toys?

Does the child have a play area? Explain.

11. Who does your child like to play with?

    Possible probes:

    With you?

    With other children?

    Brothers? Sisters? Neighbours?

12. What is the most important thing you want your child to learn?

13. Who else helps you in caring for and in teaching your child?

14. Do you plan to help at school when your child is in kindergarten, elementary school?

    Do you feel your help in the school will be valued/appreciated? By whom? How?

    What is most important to you in terms of getting involved?

15. What are your dreams, goals for the future?

    In the best of possible worlds, where do you see

yourself in five years? Ten years?

Appendix D

Outline for Workshop One

1. Discussion of the participatory action research process.

   Becoming a cohesive group

   The educational and research process

   What are the benefits? To the self, the community?

2. Review of handout (summary of the interview responses).

3. Choose a participant to record notes on the flip chart.

4. Profile of a Head Start Parent:

   What does the Head Start parent look like?

   What is she doing now?

   What is her five year dream?

5. Breakdown of roles, eg., parent, Aboriginal woman.

6. Discussion on the parenting responsibility:

   Ups and downs in parenting, what are they?
   Resources and supports? Who do you turn to?

7. Beyond Parenting, a discussion of personal needs, fulfilling goals for the self and family and empowerment.

   How do you take care of yourself, your needs?
   What percentage of your time is spent parenting?
   Other roles, responsibilities? How do you balance these roles and responsibilities?
   Can your family benefit from a more developed you?

8. Where do we go from here?

   Ideas for future programming
   Formation of groups, parent run committees

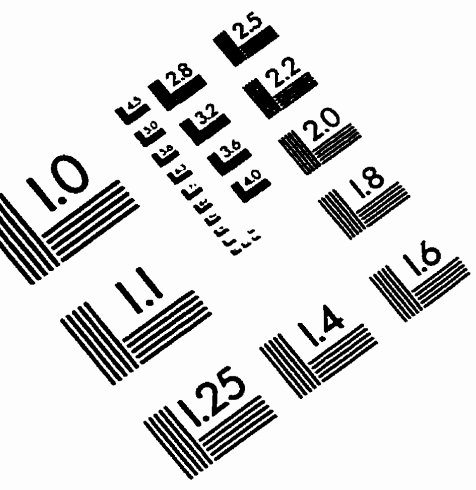
Outline for Workshop Two

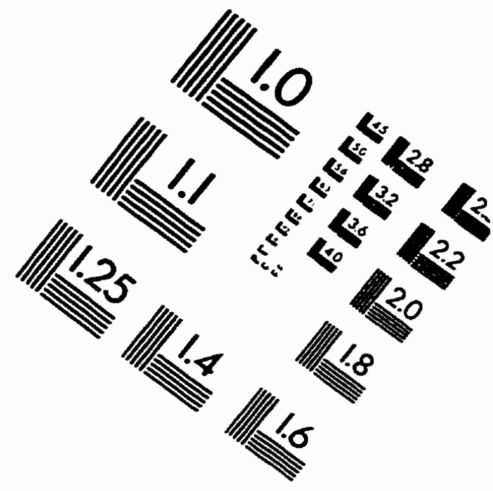
This workshop focussed on building cohesion or group spirit among the individual parent and staff participants. The goal was to have fun, build trust and intimacy among the participants that would carry over into the parent participation program.

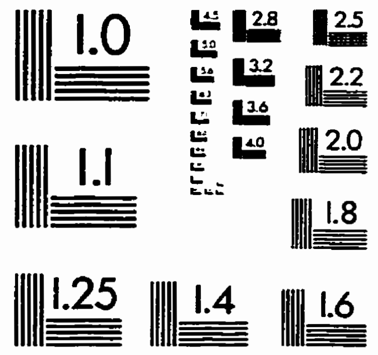
Drama exercises and storytelling were used to attain these goals. The following is an outline of activities:

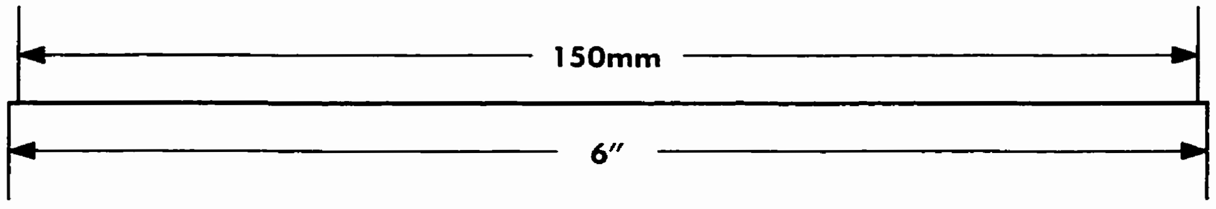
1. Trust exercises
   - The Human Knot
   - Falling Backwards into the Circle
   - Lifting the Middle Person
2. Imagination Walk Around the Room
3. Movement Exercises
4. Breathing and Vocal Exercises
5. Stretching and Relaxation
6. Storytelling

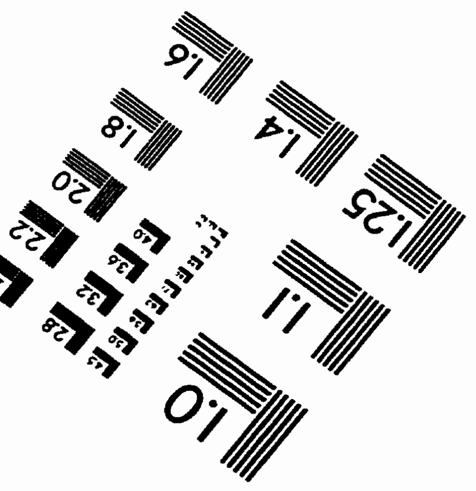
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)











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