

Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth
Through Niitsi'powahsin (Speaking Blackfoot Language)

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, 1991

Master of Education, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, 2004

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin, begins with the premise that Indigenous language learning can improve youth well-being. Niitsi'powahsin is speaking the language of the Blackfoot people. Niitsi'powahsin is a powerful means of connecting to Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing). This research explores a method for Blackfoot youth to improve their well-being while learning values-based Niitsi'powahsin. Blackfoot Elders and Knowledge Keepers chose a Niitsitapia'pii value and offered an accompanying values-based Niitsi'powahsin language lesson. Each recording included an introduction, values-based language lesson, and related story (personal, traditional, historical). The audio-recordings were used to create podcasts. For Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers, this was a new way to combine Niitsi'powahsin language lessons, Niitsitapia'pii – values-based learning, and storytelling. The voices of the Elders and Knowledge Keepers are shared in the podcasts, additionally responses to questions are written in this dissertation. Upon completion of the language podcasts, Blackfoot youth were selected to listen to and respond to the podcasts. Their responses to the podcasts are shared thematically in the dissertation. Blackfoot youth responses were overall positive however, the technological aspect of the podcasts required improvements such as sound quality. It is the intent of this Indigenous language revitalization research to provide a method for Blackfoot youth to connect with language – Niitsi'powahsin – in a way that would explicitly teach a Blackfoot value in the larger context of Blackfoot storytelling.

Keywords: Blackfoot language, Niitsi'powahsin, values-based, youth, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous, language revitalization

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Niitsi'powahsin Glossary of Terms

A

Aakoka'tsin – Circle camp of Blackfoot Sundance

Aapiisaahmahkaan – Running Wolf; Blackfoot name

Aamskaapiipiikani – Blackfeet people; Blackfeet Reservation (Montana)

Akaaninaamskaakii – Former Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle Holder (female)

Aisstsiistsii Aahkoinnimaan – Backside to the Fire Medicine Pipe

Aip'staaki – Takes Food to Share; Blackfoot name

Akiikina – Listens to Spirits; Blackfoot name

Apotsipiikani – Piikani people; Piikani Reserve

Asaan – red ochre; used as paint in Blackfoot ceremony

Awakasina – Deer; Blackfoot name

I

Ikiisstsanopataa – All Listening; Blackfoot name

Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa – Creator; that which gives us life

Itoomitao'too – First One There, Blackfoot name

Inihka'simi – naming a child; naming a person

Ipisowaahsa – Morning Star; son of Natosi and Kokomikisomm

Isstsstsato'si - One Who Owns Horses with Cropped Tails, Blackfoot name

K

Kaaahsinnooniksi – Grandparents (our); used interchangeably with Omahkitapiiksi

Kainai – Blood people; Blood Reserve

Kaawa'pomaahkaaiksi – those [animals; pl.] that run on the ground/earth

Kipaitapiissinnooni – our [Blackfoot] way of life

Kitawahsinnooni – Blackfoot territory

Kitomahkitapiinooniksi – Knowledge Keepers (pl.)

Kokomikisomm - Moon

M

Maanitapi – youth; young person

Matapiiksi – Humankind; people (pl.)

Makoyohsokoyi –Wolf Trail; Pleiades or Bunch Stars

Miiksimmawootaan – Iron Shield; Blackfoot name

Miikskimmiisookaasim – Iron Shirt; Blackfoot name

N

Naapi – Old Man; Creator

Napi – Man; also known as a trickster; made to show human fallibility

Naammowaasitaa – Cut of Horse’s Mane, Blackfoot name

Naapi Natosi – Sun

Naatowaa’pi – most sacred

Na’a/ninsta/naahs – mother/father/grandparent

Ninnaamskaakii – Thunder Medicine Pipe holder (female)

Ninaamskaiksi – Thunder Medicine People Holder(s)/people (pl.)

Niitsitapi/Niitsitapiiksi – First people; First People; generically used to refer to all Blackfoot people (pl.)

Niitsitapi Awahsin - Blackfoot Territory

Niitsitapiimiiksi – extended family; all my relations; grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins (pl.)

Niitsiitaataapoyii – Standing Alone in the Water; Blackfoot name

Niitsitapia’pii – Blackfoot values and ways of knowing and doing

Niitsitapi Mokaksin – Blackfoot learning and understanding

Niitsi'powahsin – speaking and understanding Blackfoot language

Niitsi'powahsinnini – the words that carry the breath of the ancestors

Nistoowa – me; I

Nistooako'k – I am [identify who you are]

Nistoo/kisto/amo – me, you, they

O

Ookaan – Blackfoot Sundance

Omahkitapiiksi – Blackfoot Elders (pl.); used interchangeably with Kaaahsinnooniksi

Otahkotskina – Yellow Horn; Blackfoot name

Otoi'tsikattoo – stewardship; to look after

P

Piikanakii – Piikani woman, young woman or girl

Piikaniikoaiksi – Piikani persons (pl.)

Pookaaksi – children (pl.)

Pommakssin/Pommakssinni – transfer of knowledge; transfer of language and values;
traditional sacred knowledge transferred between generations

S

Saapo'p – Plume; Blackfoot name

Siksika – Blackfoot people; Blackfoot reserve located east of Calgary

Siksikaitsitapii/Siksikaitsitapiiksi – Blackfoot people (pl.); pertaining to Blackfoot persons
from all Blackfoot tribes

Sooksipaatapiisin – a good life

Soyiitapiiksi – Water beings (pl.); water spirits

Sspomitapiiksi – Star people (pl.); above ones/beings

T

Tsaahkomm – land

Tsiniksin – a story

Nitóksistsi'tsii'p (I appreciate/acknowledge)

To my children: Aakiikina (Talks with Spirits – Larissa) and Ninastako (Chief Mountain – Eric) who always and forever will be my heart and spirit. To my grandchildren: Inaaksinaamaahka (Little Guns – Conner), Miikskimmiisaahkoomaapii (Iron Boy – Emerson), and Miiksimmawootaan (Iron Shield – Elias) for being a constant joy in my life – making me laugh and cry and use all my energy trying to keep up with you. To my family: Donna, Darryll, Jeffrey* *in spirit*, Lorna, Lionel* *in spirit*, Karen, Doyle, Justin and Tanya whose strength and guidance has supported me all my years. And finally, to my grandparents Jack and Missy Crowshoe, because of you I learned to listen in our most beautiful language – prayers, storytelling, everyday conversation, everyday Niitsi'powahsin.

I also wholeheartedly thank my Ph.D. cohort. We supported one another and believed in the work that each was doing. We came from different Indigenous language families across Canada and United States yet found kinship in the language work we do: Charlotte Ross, Ferrin (Yola) Willie, Robyn Giffen, Nicki Benson, Tahohtharátye Joe Brant, Thanyehténhas Nathan Brinklow, and Jacob Manatowa-Bailey. Alongside my cohort, I must thank and acknowledge the exceptional support provided by my Ph.D. committee members who dedicated many, many hours to reviewing my work and (more importantly) encouraging me to continue when times were challenging! Thank you to: Dr. Onowa McIvor, Dr. Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins, and Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn. I also want to thank two other committee members who supported me at the initial stages of my studies: Dr. Edosdi (Judy) Thompson and Dr. Jean-Paul Restoule. I want to thank my Technical Research Assistant – Kristy Eagle Bear (Kainai/Blackfoot) – for assisting me with this project and providing support through technology.

This final acknowledgement and thank you goes to Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers whose participation in this study made it one of the most valuable and rewarding

experiences in my lifelong journey: Shirlee Crow Shoe, JoAnn Yellow Horn, Herman Many Guns, Eric Crow Shoe, and Wallace Yellow Face. As fluent Niitsi'powahsin speakers, they gave their time and knowledge to this research in hopes that our Piikani community – specifically our youth – would find their storytelling and language lessons towards learning Niitsi'powahsin.

Iitoomoohk'tsi (From the Beginning)

My journey of Niitsi'powahsin (speaking the Blackfoot language) began at my birth. Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (Sun/Creator) made an agreement with me to begin life as Niitsitapi (a Real Person) and, upon my birth, I accepted this life. The language of my parents and grandparents flowed around me and through me as a child and I accepted it within my spirit. No matter how many challenges or barriers that were presented to me during my life, Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing and doing) was instilled in my heart from the people who gave/give me life and lift my spirit. I value my life as mother, daughter, sister, granddaughter, auntie, cousin, and friend. This life brought with it the many relationships I hold dear today. My name, Iitoomitao'too (First One There), speaks to my life driven by time. Living through seasons of births, deaths, celebrations, and ceremony, I came to realize that my name allowed me to pursue that which I value – Sooksipaatapiisin (a good life). It is through these relationships that I learned to be a teacher.

Along the way in my journey, three events intersected a few years ago. I started a new position as a senior administrator where I became involved in Piikani language revitalization efforts which in turn led me to meet Dr. Onowa McIvor – a keynote speaker at the *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium 2017*. If it weren't for these three events, I don't know that I would have begun this journey to fulfill my work with Niitsitapi learners. I do owe Dr. McIvor a multitude of thanks for supporting my language learning endeavors. It is because of this work that the term 'value' continued to appear in my heart and spirit as a means to supporting our Niitsitapi youth.

Teaching and learning led me to seek *Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin* which I have committed to in this research. It begins with the premise that Indigenous language learning can improve youth well-being.

Niitsi'powahsin (speaking the Blackfoot language) is a powerful means of connecting to Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing and doing). This research investigates the connection between Niitsitapia'pii and Niitsi'powahsin; whether the well-being of Blackfoot youth may improve while learning values-based Niitsi'powahsin. The possibility of learning Niitsi'powahsin while at the same time strengthening youth well-being bridges language learning and well-being, while accessing traditional knowledge through storytelling and language lesson podcasts. The voices of the Blackfoot Elders and Knowledge Keepers and those of Blackfoot youth are thus shared in this research.

After having determined the values-based Niitsi'powahsin language lesson, each Blackfoot Elder and Knowledge Keeper was audio-recorded for a podcast which included their introduction, values-based language lesson, and a complimentary story (personal, traditional, or historical). The podcasts were then shared with youth. The values-based, language responsive podcasts serve to develop complex concepts for Blackfoot youth as a means of practice and a gateway to entice youth into language. Knowledge is shared between Blackfoot Elders and Knowledge Keepers; one group transferring complex concepts while the other receiving. The podcasts as a modality within this research align themselves with the storytelling methodology as used in Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of knowing and understanding).

Being a student at the University of Victoria attaining a Ph.D. in Indigenous Education focused on Indigenous Language Revitalization allowed me to explore the innumerable Indigenous language revitalization strategies occurring across Indigenous lands and communities. From curriculum and instruction to documentation, from teacher training to policy development, from language immersion to mentor-apprentice programs, Indigenous language revitalization has at its core to inspire all Indigenous persons to engage in language learning as a means of revitalizing our languages, cultures, and traditions (McIvor & Anisman, 2018).

Exploration of strategies led me to believe that creating a values-based, language-responsive resource using traditional Blackfoot storytelling would entice Blackfoot youth to language work. This dissertation allowed me the time and space to share my knowledge on Niitsitapia'pii and to express my style of academic writing through storytelling. The intertwining of academic writing and storytelling/personal narrative allowed me to combine those things I truly believe are important for Niitsitapi to hear. In the style of Indigenous academic storytellers, Dr. Shawn Wilson or Dr. Kathy Absolon, my dissertation uses storytelling to bring Blackfoot ontology and epistemology to the reader and listener in a traditional sense. You will gain understanding at the level you are able to experience at that time and in that setting; understanding may change each time or place that it is read. As with Blackfoot storytelling, the speaker (in my case, as writer) attempts to create an ebb and flow to the story with transitions meant to encourage thoughtful reflection on Blackfoot ways of knowing. Ultimately, this dissertation is written by *us* — for *us*; by a Piikanakii (Piikani woman) for us as Blackfoot people.

Throughout this dissertation you will find Niitsitapi storytelling, and my personal narrative, *italicized* (in block quotes) allowing for a different, and prioritized, voice to come forward. It allows me to show storywork in practise. Stories act like windows and through my stories, one can gain insight and understanding into my Piikani life, the life of my Piikani family, and to my Piikani ancestors. I acknowledge the tremendous storytelling abilities that all Niitsitapiiksi have – their stories are yours and mine to experience. Listen to the podcasts and you will hear the heartfelt stories of my Kaahsinooniksi (Elders) and Kitomahkitapiinooniksi (Knowledge Keepers) as they share their stories with you. I give thanks to Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa for Matapiiksi (people) who have shared in my story. You will notice that Blackfoot terms and phrases are interspersed throughout this dissertation. A glossary of terms is included. It's a way to give back to Niitsitapi as we try to revitalize our language.

Niitsitapiiksi (The First People)

This dissertation is a story of Niitsitapiiksi (The First People), Niitsi'powahsin (speaking the First People's language¹), their interconnection with the universe, and interdependence with one another. It is of utmost importance that Niitsitapiiksi understand how vital Niitsi'powahsin is to asserting one's Niitsitapi identity. Niitsi'powahsin is the keystone to ensuring our Niitsitapi culture is living and breathing – kept alive like a beating heart. Niitsitapi identity, breath, and heart are values that support well-being. This research is grounded in Niitsitapi values.

Niitsitapi is who we are and what we call ourselves. It comes from the beginning of time. Siksikaitsitapii are the Blackfoot People; Siksikaitsipowahsin is speaking the language of the Blackfoot. These words are used interchangeably depending on context. Throughout this research, you will find both terms used.

The word Blackfoot² is derived from Siksika (Sik = black; ika = foot). It identifies a group of people who share a common history, traditional territory, language, and culture. Remnants of the old Confederacy occupy three reserves in Canada (Siksika/Blackfoot, Kainai/Blood, and Apotsiikani/North Peigans; Blackfeet is the American name for the one reservation in Montana, USA (Aamskaapiiikani/South Peigans). The first of these names is how we name one another; the second is how we were named by others. Since ancient times, the homeland of the Piikani Nation straddled the Saskatchewan and Missouri river basins. The

¹ Niitsi'powahsin is a phrase with layered meanings. It is difficult to directly translate into English. I use it here to mean learning to speak the Blackfoot language. In other places the meaning changes slightly, often meaning simply 'to speak and/or understand the Blackfoot language' however there are specific Blackfoot words that would denote the same intent/meaning.

² The first Anglophones to visit our country came from the northeast. Siksika was the branch of the Confederacy that welcomed them, so their name became the convention. Today, Siksika is a First Nation for the Northern Blackfoot located 100km east of Calgary.

Apotsipiikani (North Peigans) lived in the Saskatchewan watershed, whereas their southern kin, Aamskaapiipiikani (South Peigans), lived in the Missouri drainage.

Niitsitapiiksi or Siksikaitsitapiiksi are misrepresented in history. Type in ‘Blackfoot people’ on any search engine and in less than one second, millions of postings appear, showing countless descriptions of who Blackfoot are as a people. Usually, the ethnographic description is of simple, nomadic warriors following the buffalo throughout the plains. In other instances, writers erroneously claim that Niitsitapiiksi originated in the Great Lakes Region and were forced west by their enemies.

At one time, they were feared Plains warriors. Historians believe the Blackfeet, forced out of their ancestral grounds in today’s upper Great Lakes region by white advancement, were one of the first Native American tribes to head West. Though there are several stories on how they received their name, the most plausible is that their moccasins were blackened from the long journey across the prairie to reach what would become Montana. (<https://www.umt.edu/this-is-montana/columns/stories/blackfeet.php>)

Stereotypical interpretations and inaccurate descriptions distort the complex social and spiritual constructs of Niitsitapi that were our customs. These misunderstandings work to diminish our connection to our customary homeland. Many years ago, Piikani Elder Mí’ksskimmiisóka’sim – Iron Shirt (A. Pard, personal communication, n.d.) took offense to the word ‘nomadic’ stating that to him this term meant ‘without purpose,’ a clear contrast to a people whose purpose was clearly defined by our connection to Naapi Natosi (Sun), the universe, the earth and its environmental laws, and to our human and animal relatives.

The History and Background of Piikani

With focus on Piikani, misrepresentation begins with the name itself. For example, interpreting Piikani as Scabby or Splotchy Robe³ or Badly Tanned Hides⁴ follows our custom of naming with mixed humour. Some of the earliest attempts at spelling our name in English were made by fur traders. Matthew Cocking, an agent for the Hudson Bay Company, ventured out to the northern plains in 1774. His journal contains the first attempt to write Piikani with the English alphabet. There are also accounts found of the explorer Fidler (c. 1792) calling this tribe ‘Pekano’ or ‘Muddy Water Indians⁵’ (Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 2002, p. 56) and artist Paul Kane (c.1846) referring to this group as ‘Pay-guns’ (Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 2002, p. 56). Rather than use these interpretations and descriptions from these sources, I will provide an interpretation as told by the voices of Piikaniikoiksi (Piikani people). This is how it was told to me.

Prior to 1818 when the United States border with Canada was created⁶, Piikani was one of three Siksikaitsitapii (Blackfoot) tribes located on the North American plains⁷. Piikani, Kainai, and Siksika comprised what is known as the Siksikaitsitapiiksi (Blackfoot people). Our tribal leadership and government systems along with their spiritual beliefs and customs were the same throughout (Bastien, 2004; Dempsey, 1988; McClintock, 1910). Additionally, our common language was recognized by linguists to be part of the larger Algonquian language family (Frantz & Russell, 2017; McClintock, 1910; Pepion, 1999). Our customary geography indicates that our

³ Piikani Nation. 2022, October 17. In Wikipedia.

⁴ Piikani. 2022, October 17. In the Canadian Encyclopedia.

⁵ Muddy River being the old Piikani name for the Missouri River, so he was referring to the South Peigans.

⁶ November 15, 2022. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/forty-ninth-parallel-feature>

⁷ November 15, 2022. <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/304.html> “1846: U.S. and Britain set 49th Parallel as U.S.-Canada border. The U.S. negotiates with Britain to end a Canadian border dispute. Many Native people on either side of the line wake up in a different country, living under different laws than those they knew the night before. Whole tribes are displaced.”

ancient homeland covered an expansive area from the North Saskatchewan River south to the Yellowstone River. Its western frontier was the Rocky Mountains and eastern border ran through western Saskatchewan into Montana. The Sand Hills and the Cypress Hills were important locations at the eastern edge of the nation. Our ancestors held this vast country exclusively until mid-nineteenth century treaty and peace making (Dempsey, 2015; Hildebrandt, et al., 1996). The Niitsitapi lived a purposeful life maintaining connection to Naapi Natosi (Sun), to animal and plant life, and to land and water. Their values, beliefs, and customs were being passed down from one generation to the next through their most important connection – language. Piikani scholar and ceremonialist, Betty Bastien (2004, p. 5) aptly states:

My own process of connecting to the alliances of Kipaitapiissinnooni (our way of life) started by connecting with Niitsi'powahsinnini [the words that carry the breath of the ancestors] and by coming to know the ancestors through ceremony, offerings, sacrifice, and mediation.

John Ewers (2012) titled his ethnography “The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains” as a tribute to their fierceness. Other writers have noted this characteristic in their books (Bastien, 2004; Dempsey, 1988; McClintock, 1910). However, their strength was unable to withstand the government-imposed policies that diminished their way of life. Despite the various challenges they encountered, Niitsitapiiksi stubbornly resisted the option of assimilation. In Piikani’s current context, resistance continues when situating oneself alongside Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have guided us towards cultural and language revitalization.

Positionality as Piikanakii (Piikani Woman)

I was born and raised in the Piikani First Nation; a community located in what is now Southern Alberta. When I was old enough, I began school in a neighbouring town. I attended

elementary and junior high school there. My experience was a stark contrast to ‘being from the reserve’ and ‘living in town.’ Being from the reserve meant that you were born into a world of colonialism wherein Indian education policy was slow to find alternatives to Residential Schools. Piikani had three Indian Residential Schools: Anglican Mission - Victoria Jubilee Home (1897–1927); Sacred Heart Roman Catholic School (1887-1962); and Saint Cyprian’s Anglican School (1927-1961). When my ancestors settled on the Peigan Reserve (Indian Reserve 147) in 1880, the Canadian government encouraged religious orders to establish missions among the Piikani that would also function as schools. During that time, Piikani parents were breaking federal laws by not sending their Pookaaksi (children) to the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Indian Residential School and Saint Cyprian’s Anglican Residential School. Approximately 50 to 75 children attended each year, over the seventy years these schools existed (Piikani Indian Residential Schools, 2022).

Within the walls of the schools, school staff (priests, nuns, supervisors, and other laypersons) strategically shaped and shifted the minds, hearts, and souls of each student who entered their doors. Numbered like cattle, they were deprived of their Indigenous identities (by means of delousing, cutting hair, dressing in new clothes, throwing away of any personal vestiges). The hope of government officials was that the next stage of their assimilation would ultimately kill the Indian in the child⁸. This was not limited to physical or mental abuses; spiritual abuse was also evident where Indian Residential Schools practised “detachment and disassociation... of these concepts and relationships” (Bastien, 2004, p. 31). Bastien states that these concepts pertained to relationship with “land, animals, time, stars, sun, and to each other.”

⁸ Writer Mark Abley argues that Scott is often misquoted as having said that the goal of residential schools was to “kill the Indian in the child.” Abley instead credits this line to an American military officer. Abley, (2013). *Conversations with a Dead Man: The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott*. D & M Publishers.

The purposeful intent by government and churches to assimilate First Nations people stretched across traditional territories. This was true for handfuls of children taken from their traditional communities and moved where church and government saw fit.

In the early 1930's some of these children were relocated from Northern Alberta to the Sacred Heart Residential School, Peigan Reserve, Brocket, Alberta. Niitsiitaataapoyii (Standing Alone in the Water) – my mother Anne Marie (an orphaned daughter of Cree/English ancestry) – was one of those children relocated and this resulted in her being raised by Catholic nuns from infancy to the age of 17. Like so many Indigenous adult survivors, my mother talked very little about her Catholic residential school years. My mother was an industrious woman who learned the domestic skills taught to her along with becoming astute at reading and writing English. My mother's first language was English (with a little French thrown in by the Catholic priests and nuns). I don't know how she would have communicated with the new students attending this school as their first language was most likely Niitsi'powahsin. I do know that somewhere around age 7 or 8, my mother started being picked up at school by a childless couple – Aip'staaki (Takes Food to Share) and Isstsatsato'si (Tangled Stars/Universe - Gus Weasel Bear) – who would take my mother during non-school days and began teaching her Piikani ways. I believe it was Creator's intervention that allowed my mother to be traditionally adopted by Aip'staaki and Isstsatsato'si. This couple taught my mother how to speak and sign Niitsi'powahsin. This couple connected my mother to an adopted extended family. This couple gave my mother her traditional name Niitsiitaataapoyii (Standing Alone in the Water) as they made frequent trips to Naapi Otahtaayi (Old Man's River) to collect water or to cross on their way to the Brocket townsite⁹.

⁹ Naming Niitsitapi children was related to their environments, often in reference to something that would provide strength or power.

My father's residential school experience was similar in that he attended an Indian Residential school in the early 1930's. He received his schooling at St. Cyprian's Anglican Residential School where he learned domestic skills such as animal husbandry, farming, and some cooking tasks (like baking). My father's traditional name was Saapo'p (Plume), but he was also known as Edward Crowshoe. My father's first language was Niitsi'powahsin; he spoke fluently to his parents, siblings, and extended family. He held very close to him the relationship with his maternal uncles and his paternal grandmother. My father's visits to these relations meant that we, as children, were in tow and developed attachments to extended family. My father's connection to his own parents was the link we children had to storytelling through language. It was his mother who steeped us in story and language through our childhood and well into adulthood.

My paternal grandfather Jack learned to read, write, and speak English at the Victoria Jubilee School for Indian Children; my paternal grandmother Missy did not attend an Indian Residential School. These experiences shaped their lives. My grandfather would listen to a transistor radio or (once available) a static, black-and-white television and through these his English grew. He prided himself on his ability to converse in English to family, neighbors, and local businessmen; English was a language that he wanted, even expected, all his children and grandchildren to learn. However, he maintained a balance of Niitsi'powahsin and English throughout his life switching back and forth effortlessly to deliver his thoughts. Niitsi'powahsin was my grandmother Missy's preferred speech as she spoke little English; only single words as needed to convey meaning to a grandchild, but not enough to make sentences or phrases. I give my grandmother Missy credit for many things in my life – most importantly Niitsitapia'pii (our customary ways, and connection to the universe, all earthly beings, smudging, prayer, storytelling) all conveyed through Niitsi'powahsin.

Unlike for my older siblings, Niitsi'powahsin is not my first language. Niitsi'powahsin was spoken in my home and the homes of Niitsitapiimiiksi (my extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles) daily. I remember hearing it spoken (often when given instructions to do a task or chore) but there was no expectation by my parents or others to speak or converse with them using Niitsi'powahsin. Extending that context to the homes of Niitsitapiimiiksi meant that a listener was created – not a speaker. Unlike my older siblings, I did not learn English by the stern mouths (and hearts) of the Indian Residential school staff. English as my first language was learned in my family home and when starting formal schooling. My older siblings endured a transition from total speaking, listening, and understanding Niitsi'powahsin to reading, writing, speaking, and listening to the English language. A normal day at the Indian Residential school was communicated entirely in English; speaking Niitsi'powahsin was a punishable offence and kept secret from everyone except the best of family and friends.

The Piikani Indian Residential Schools closed in 1961 and were demolished within the year (A. Pard, personal communication, n.d.) but that didn't mean the lingering colonial systems disappeared with the removal of the schools – the damage was done in our family homes and in our Piikani community.

When there is a loss of care, a neighborhood becomes fragile and so do the people in it. The people are still there but the fluid of trust in which they were suspended has been drained away. If things go bad they have fewer people to turn to. If they yearn for a sense of belonging, which we all do, it's not clear where they can find it. From the outside, neighborhoods...may look the same as healthy communities, but the emotional quality is transformed. Care has been replaced by distance and distrust. (Brooks, 2020, p. 270)

My family was challenged by lost connections to the old ways replaced by new religious (Christian) Eurocentric beliefs, capitalist ideals took hold in our Piikani community (i.e.

communal land became individually-owned, and social ills such as alcoholism became rampant). What kept my family going through those times was who we were – a family. I remember hearing stories from my parents and siblings of better times where family relationships were foundational to survival. Families supported and serviced one another and, with visits to their relatives, told stories of challenge and survival, of spirituality and its place in our homes, of ways to better ourselves and stay strong through adversity.

[The spirit] is the piece of you that is of infinite value and dignity. The dignity of this piece doesn't increase or decrease with age; it doesn't get bigger or smaller depending on your size and strength...The [spirit] soul is the piece of your consciousness that has moral worth and bears moral responsibility. (Brooks, 2020, p. 46)

Born of resilience to overcome inter-generational traumas, our recent ancestors used the skills at hand to help improve their lives, including the simple pleasures of storytelling. As with all Niitsitapiiksi, Piikaniikoaksi are storytellers. Stories are rich with lessons of territory, history, governance and leadership, ancestry, kinship and childrearing, values and belief systems, culture, and ceremony. Stories of the Piikani are many and stories are not exclusive to one tribe. The telling of stories was to convey important lessons for Niitsitapiiksi. As a Piikanakii, when asking important questions related to stories, I would often ask those whose years were long and could provide a way to help me know. My late paternal grandmother – Missy – was often this person to share and grow knowledge. I need you, as the reader, to picture my grandmother as she figures prominently in my upbringing.

I came to know my grandmother best during my later teenage years and early adulthood. I was fortunate that my grandparents lived about a five-minute walk from our home through two coulees and by crossing one stream. Most visits to them often required a visit at the kitchen table, usually with my grandmother as she was

the person most often home. My grandmother was in her 60's at this time, long braids, brown weathered face, cotton print dress, thick peach-colored stockings no matter the weather, and black oxford shoes (for winter) or moccasins (for summer). My grandmother smoked cigarettes and drank tea. Once our customary greeting (of a hug and kiss on the mouth – which highlighted a loving bond between grandmother and grandchild even into adulthood) and small talk were completed, my grandmother was compelled to share a story. It could be brought about by a simple question, or her reminiscing of a day gone by. Whatever the reason, a story would ensue, and everyone seated in her presence was the better for it.

Stories of shared ancestry are important to me and have become a means of identifying myself within a global society. Such modes of storytelling, storyworks, narrative inquiry, and storying are, for Niitsitapiiksi, about positionality¹⁰ (Archibald, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; McCarty et al., 2018; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). According to Rosborough (2012, p. 40),

Through the gathering of narratives and focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, narrative research seeks to provide insight into complex experience. In narrative inquiry, subjectivity is acknowledged and self-critical reflexivity is required. The researcher must be explicit about how his or her identity and positioning influence [their research].

Positionality refers to worldviews and is reflective of that vantage point. According to Wilson (2008, p. 54) “Indigenous scholars are in the process of shaping, redefining and explaining their positions.” This is supported by Rigney (1997, as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 54) “Indigenous

¹⁰ The term *positionality* first appears in epistemology; a branch of philosophy that studies how we know what we know. When it was first used in the mid-1920s, *positionality* wasn't describing social and political forces, but simply where things are in space in relation to other things—the nature of their position. (Dictionary.com, December 31, 2022).

peoples think and interpret the world and its realities in differing ways to non-Indigenous peoples because of their experiences, histories, cultures, and values.” Thus, positioning myself as a Piikanakii (Piikani woman) informs this dissertation and the perspective I express.

Piikaniikoaksi (Piikani People)

Piikaniikoaksi are proud people who are strong in their beliefs and practises. A common language and kinship with relations in other Siksikaitsitapii tribes were strong enough to thrive even when communications weren't easily transmissible and government officials discouraged travel between communities. An example is that through the lineage of my paternal grandparents, I have relatives in Aamskaapiipiikani, Kainai, and Siksika. Relationships are easily recognized when asked “What’s your last name?” and in reply I would state that my grandfather is “Crowshoe” and my grandmother is “Yellow Horn”. All those related to “Crowshoe or Yellow Horn” would speak up and say, “I’m related to you.” These relationships grow through shared interests in kinship, territory, language, culture and ceremony, song and dance, recreational activities and hobbies. While some relatives are prominent in our lives, others take minor roles but are still important to who I am as a Piikanakii. These are the relatives I heard about during those times:

My father’s paternal grandmother - Iikiisstsanopataa (All Listening) also referred to as Old Lady Buffalo – was the keeper of knowledge for our family. This is an important name as it shows that, in speaking, everyone around her would sit and listen to her imparting knowledge. She was the keeper of the Small Thunder Medicine Pipe which vested her with healing powers made true through the power of daily smudging and prayerful reverence to Creator to support to persons in need. Visits to her home was a time to hear the language, learn protocols and rules,

interact with extended family, and playtime. As this happened quite frequently, in Ikiistanoopataa's home or other family members' homes, it created routines connecting me inextricably to life in Piikani. My last memory of my great-grandmother was visiting her as a teenager with my cousin and her welcoming us to sit down for tea and an apple. A few years later she passed away at 107 years of age.

My father's paternal grandfather – Awakasina (Deer) also referred to as Willie Crowshoe – was not often mentioned in our home thus I cannot say too much about him.

My father's maternal grandmother - Akiikina (Listens to Spirits) died soon after giving birth to Missy, who then went to live with her auntie Mrs. Little Leaf. Akiikina visited my grandmother once in a dream. My grandmother was a young girl and Akiikina was helping around a cook tent while the men harvested a grain field. Akiikina did not speak but affectionately welcomed my grandmother to her. That was the only time my grandmother saw her mother.

My father's maternal grandfather was Otahkotskina (lit. Yellow Horn) given the English name of Tom. He was the second last hereditary chief of the Piikani and a keeper of knowledge. I was told he was kind-hearted man, a diplomat who valued the voices of the clan leaders.

Piikani Maanitapi (Piikani Youth)

I humbly asked Creator to help me on my research journey. As you have read, my learning journey began in childhood, situated among multi-generational family members whose guidance

directed me as I became the Piikanakii (Piikani woman) I am. This path destined me to 30+ years of educating children and youth using my skills gained in the western education system. During this time, I also became a Ninnaamskaakii (Thunder Medicine Pipe bundle holder), learning new ways by following the sacred trail through ceremony. As these two pieces intersected and became intertwined, I found myself thinking of the western educational curriculum and how it was failing to fully support the spirit of our Pookaaksi (children).

From this experience I re-oriented my intent toward supporting Piikani language and culture activities. My focus shifted to Piikani youth and their need for socio-emotional supports based in Niitsi'powahsin (Blackfoot language) and Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot way of knowing). Questions began to arise about the connection between Indigenous language learning and youth well-being. Thinking historically, how did Omahkitapiiksi (Blackfoot Elders) teach youth¹¹ to be 'well'? Furthermore, what role did Niitsi'powahsin play in youth well-being? To address these questions, my research methodology is rooted in storytelling, which is the essence of Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot learning and understanding). Our oral tradition is our way of learning; it emerges from the heart, is steeped in our values, and conveyed through our language. For this reason, I rely on Indigenous/Blackfoot scholars whose voices broadcast the importance of storytelling as methodology.

¹¹ For this research the term "youth" means persons between 12 – 18 years of age.

Niitsi'powahsin (Speaking and Understanding Blackfoot Language)

Purpose of Research

The purpose of my research was to explore *Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin*. It begins with the premise that Indigenous language learning can improve youth well-being. Niitsi'powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot language) is a powerful means of connecting to Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing). This research explores the possibility of Blackfoot youth improving their well-being while learning values-based Niitsi'powahsin. Each Niitsitapia'pii value and the accompanying values-based Niitsi'powahsin language lesson was chosen by the Blackfoot Elder and/or Knowledge Keeper specifically for Blackfoot youth to engage with by means of podcasts.

To explore values-based and language-responsive Niitsi'powahsin and whether it supports youth well-being, I had to research definitions (i.e., values-based and language-responsive) and whether these definitions supported youth language learning. 'Language-responsive' differs from, but can be a component of, the term 'culturally-responsive' found when I was researching Indigenous peoples. Language-responsive is defined as: 1) learning about the language through or while learning the language; 2) sharing the language as relational whereby an Elders and Knowledge Keeper is choosing to share and a youth is choosing to receive, and 3) focusing on positive aspects of the language where it has a purpose and an outcome. My definition of well-being delves into experiences and accompanying stories from our Elders (Kaaahsinnooniksi) and Knowledge Keepers (Kitomahkitapiinooniksi).

To explore resource development which entices youth to engage with language learning and well-being was the foundation of this study. This was undertaken by interviewing five Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers who shared stories imbedded with Niitsitapi values and created values-based language lessons. These interviews were audio-recorded in preparation to

be shared as language learning podcasts. The values-based storytelling and language learning podcasts are geared towards youth (aged 12-18 years of age). Four Piikani youth were invited to listen to the podcasts and reflect upon their experience. This immersive language learning endeavour used Piikani context as its foundation to impart the situational knowledge of Niitsitapi people.

Research Questions

My research, titled, *Niitsitapia 'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin*, begins with the premise that Indigenous language learning can improve youth well-being. It is founded on culturally-responsive data that suggest improving well-being can lead to positive returns on cultural experiences (Aguilera & Lecompte, 2008; Barnhardt, 2014; Lee, 2009; Lee & Cercerer, 2010). The development of a language resource that would entice youth to engage with language work is discussed within my research.

In discussion with Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers, I researched what values are beneficial for youth learning to speak the Blackfoot language and if they support youth well-being. My definition of language-responsive learning is learning *about* the language *while* learning the language. Since Niitsi'powahsin is not a common means of communication among Niitsitapi, language-responsive learning would support values-based ways of knowing and understanding. My approach for determining well-being is derived from life experiences and accompanying stories shared by our Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who used storytelling to engage students in language learning grounded in local-context or situational knowledge of our people. Storytelling, as a form of Pommakssin (transfer of knowledge), is a Niitsitapi value. According to Bastien (2004, p.102), transferred knowledge is “a process of transferring spiritual knowledge through an intricate and complex system of kinship relations....

knowledge itself has spirit that is transferred in the relationships between the knower and the known.” With this as a premise, I set out to answer the following questions through my research:

1. What values are beneficial for youth learning Niitsi’powahsin (speaking Blackfoot language)?
2. How do Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers experience and express values-based, language-responsive Niitsi’powahsin?
3. How can Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers use storytelling to express values-based, language-responsive learning as transferred knowledge?
4. How might the expression and experience of values-based, language-responsive Niitsi’powahsin storytelling shared by Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers support youth well-being?

As you listen to the podcasts (audio-recorded interviews) and read the discussion transcript, you will find that the Elders and Knowledge Keepers answered these questions through the introduction, storytelling, or discussion segments of the podcasts.

Significance of Research

Niitsitapiiksi (the First People) have a strong and intricate connection to Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa (Sun/Creator); a connection and interrelationship that was severed by colonizing settlers and their Indian Residential Schools. The significance of this research project is its response to historic traumas which led to the current mental, physical, and spiritual health crises, conspiring to undermine our ways of knowing. Covering the breadth of Indigenous language revitalization strategies is not within the scope of this dissertation. This research project is meant to entice youth to engage in language learning through a values rich strategy guided by

stories, dreams, and discussions. Additionally, it is hoped that the project outcomes may lead youth to understand language engagement as a positive health factor.

Currently, Maanitapi (youth) are increasingly susceptible to engaging in activities that lead to higher rates of school dropout, teen parenthood, and unhealthy relationships which may lead to negative behaviours in adulthood (Ames, et al., 2015; Snowshoe et al., 2015). In completing this research, the impact of social issues (such as alcohol abuse and related deaths, violence, accidental opioid or drug related deaths, suicides, and grief and loss) was discussed by both youth and Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

As Maanitapi (youth) manoeuvre 21st century learning resources and tools that support new ways of understanding, language learning educational programs, resources, and technology are considered. Niitsi'powahsin needs to expand to include speaking and understanding, beyond the most common methods of written curriculum within language-as-subject approaches. Using the strengths of storytelling by Elders and Knowledge Keepers as a conduit to language learning may possibly be the beginning of podcasts that aid in recognizing the nuances of speaking. The results of researching *Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin* are:

1) Elders and Knowledge Keepers support for the development of values-based learning, thereby influencing Maanitapiiksi (young people) and helping to increase their feelings of self-worth, self-belief, and enhanced/increased cultural identity; and

2) to renew youth engagement in language learning by imagining and informing new instructional methods when teaching Niitsi'powahsin.

3) Niitsitapia'pii nested in a Niitsi'powahsin lesson allow Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers to provide foundational concepts for language-responsive, values-based education by sharing experiences through storytelling.

The current state of Piikani language work is challenged with balancing revitalization efforts with the current state of health and well-being of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Due to age, health, mobility, and other factors, each year there are fewer and fewer Elders and Knowledge Keepers willing and able to participate in Indigenous language revitalization work. Add to this, that Niitsi'powahsin community language work and activities compete for Elders and Knowledge Keepers to participate, thus limiting the number available to participate in research. Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers have varying comfort levels in the use of technology for recording and speaking in front of others thus technological support is required. Careful thought and attention to these aspects of language work helps support Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Niitsi'powahsin (speaking the Blackfoot language)

Before the beginning¹², we called our language Niitsi'powahsin (real or first people's speech). Our oral tradition meant that a common language was one of the cohesive elements of the Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Apotsiipiikani, and Aamskaapiipiikani) (Bastien, 2004; Dempsey, 1998; McClintock, 1910). Niitsi'powahsin expresses the vitality of a lifestyle that encompasses our relationship with the universe (sun, moon, stars), with the earth (animals, plants, water), with one another (family, tribe), while paying utmost regard to our ceremonial practises and ritual life. Niitsi'powahsin has deep roots on the northern plains and carries the echoes of the first languages spoken by the tribal people who thrived there for over ten thousand years (Kipp, 2000; McMillan & Yellow Horn, 2009; Pepion, 1999).

¹² As told to Wilton Goodstriker by Laurie Big Plume (Spirit and Intent of Treaty 7), "I remember one time when he told that the Christian story always begins with 'In the beginning.'" Our story if we were to write it down, would start with, 'Before the beginning.'

After 1880, when my Piikani ancestors settled on Indian Reserve 147, the Indian Residential School system replaced the home as the incubator of language learning. Our culture, Niitsitapia'pii, and language, Niitsi'powahsin, were seen as barriers to progress. Since assimilation of Indigenous people was the goal of colonialism, children became the target of policy-makers because they had not formed the habits of their Elders (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Throughout the twentieth century, speaking our language while at these schools became a contested activity. It might be called a tool of resistance except that the indoctrination process included discrediting Indigenous cultures and languages. Instructors succeeded in planting doubt in former students that their first language was meaningful or that it provided a substantial bond to Niitsitapia'pii (Piikani Indian Residential Schools, 2022). Upon graduating from school, many former students regarded Niitsi'powahsin as a relic language best left in the past. Subsequent generations of children did not learn it in its entirety (speaking, listening, understanding, and signing) because they accepted that modern people spoke English.

After the closing of the residential schools on Indian Reserve 147 in 1961 (Piikani Indian Residential Schools, 2022), a witnessed decline in Niitsi'powahsin speakers occurred. Piikaniikoaksi no longer heard it spoken in social situations, at community gatherings, or in the home. Kitomahkitapiinooniksi, along with cultural and ceremonial leaders, spent years experimenting with ways to increase fluency among Piikaniikoaksi.

Whereas the home once produced and nurtured language learners, now schools - where children attend daily - have taken on the role of Niitsi'powahsin language learning. Initial attempts to teach children their mother tongue, to learn Niitsi'powahsin in an immersive environment, did see benefits from this mode of language learning (Kipp, 2000; Hohepa & Ngarewa, 2019). These early efforts by language teachers created extraordinary volumes of work

– lessons, words, and their meanings¹³. To this day, they continue to be advocates for an approach to language learning that emphasized the role of mentor, teacher, Elder, and Knowledge Keeper. An example of their early language work (author unknown, n.d.) is captured in Figure 1.

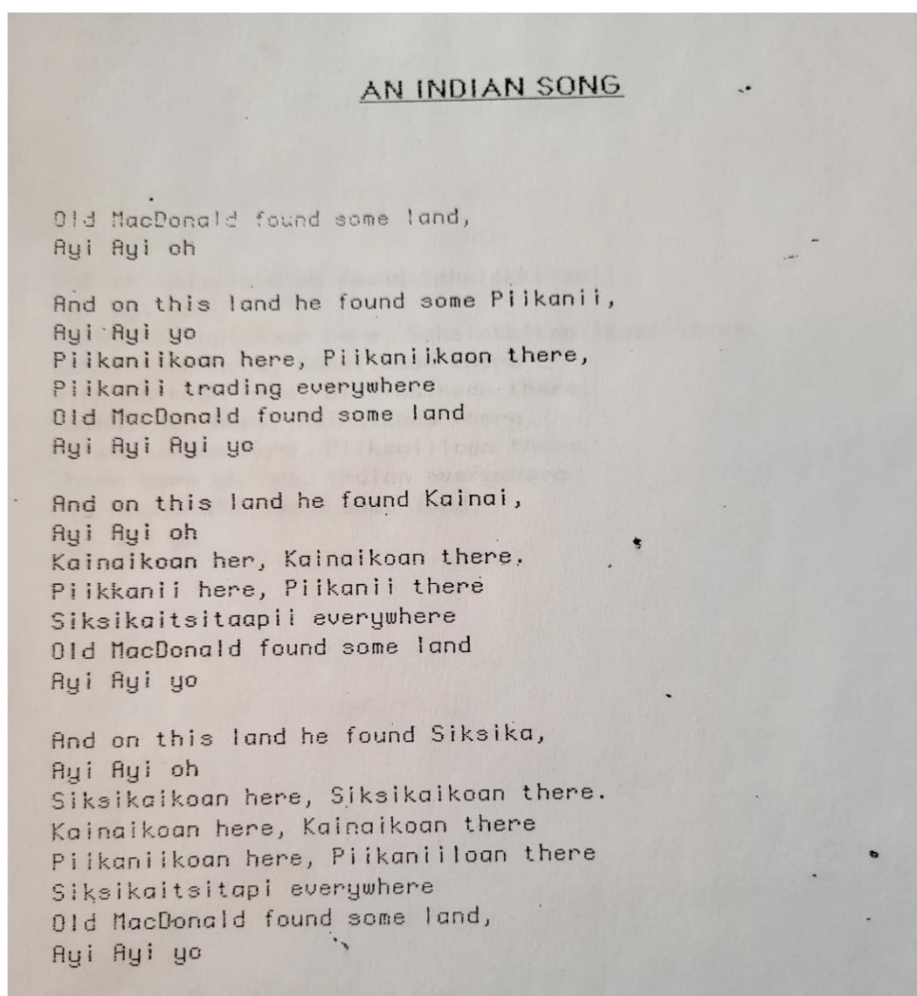


Figure 1 – Alberta Education General Outcome for Language Competence Once tribal schools came under pressure by both community and government to take on the role of producing proficient Niitsi'powahsin speakers, western education became the model for creating curriculum. Having

¹³ These initial volumes produced dictionaries which encapsulated Niitsi'powahsin using various alphabetical spellings based on the tribal affiliation of the writer (including words, their spelling, phonetic sounds/symbols, and word definition/translation).

Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum acknowledged by regional governments stirred immense excitement and gave rise to a new program of studies. Thereafter, the implementation of Blackfoot Language and Culture as a teachable subject within Blackfoot First Nation schools became tangible. This curriculum was authored by English Language curriculum developers with limited consultation from Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Without any precedent to follow, the new curriculum aligned itself with English language learning, including using the Roman alphabet, isolated word learning, memorization, and repetition¹⁴. Niitsi'powahsin, as a school subject, was indistinguishable from English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies on students' report cards.

The new Alberta Education Blackfoot Language and Culture (2010) curriculum leaned heavily on “linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence that students will exhibit” (p. 8). An example of Alberta Education Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum follows (see Figure 2). Teaching any of Alberta Education's curriculum requires years of post-secondary training from a recognized teacher preparatory program. Niitsi'powahsin language instruction required an additional layer of instructional methods. Niitsi'powahsin language instruction required additional knowledge of inherent Niitsi'powahsin language rules where the act of speaking instilled layers of meaning and where understanding the language meant that relationship to others is formed. For Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who have limited instructional experience as outlined by Alberta Education, Niitsi'powahsin language instruction was/is contrary to the ways they learned Niitsi'powahsin. Alberta Education Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum is a superficial form of instruction for second language learning. For example, when teaching 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person perspective it uses random objects taught

¹⁴ Alberta Education's Blackfoot Language and Culture Curriculum adopted Don Frantz' Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Root and Affixes (1989), University of Toronto Press. However, this is not considered to be the definitive work on Blackfoot language/Niitsi'powahsin as each Niitsitapi tribe has the authority to create their own Niitsi'powahsin language dictionary.

sequentially and not in a natural state (i.e., nitomitaam, kitomitaam, na otomitaam – my dog, your dog, that one-your dog). Teaching Niitsi’powahsin in modern schools must begin with a child’s understanding of who they are as Piikani placing Niitsitapia’pii at the centre of their learning experience and fostering their sense of Piikani identity.

General Outcome for Language Competence

Students will be effective, competent and comfortable as Blackfoot speakers.

(Pookaiksi aakaisokai 'tsi 'poyiiaawa.)

(continued)

LC-1 attend to the form of the language

Kindergarten (Twelve-year Program)	Grade 1 (Twelve-year Program)	Grade 2 (Twelve-year Program)	Grade 3 (Twelve-year Program)
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Students will be able to:

a. use the following grammatical elements:

LC-1.4
grammatical elements

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal pronouns (singular):
<i>Niisto, kiisto, na</i> <i>amo, amoi</i> to distinguish and refer to a specific animate (NA) or to an inanimate (NI) noun noun possession form for animate (NA) and inanimate (NI) singular nouns indicating <i>my</i> (1S), <i>yours</i> (2S), <i>his/hers</i> (3S):
<i>Nitomitaam</i>
<i>Kitomitaam</i>
<i>Na otomitaam</i>
<i>Nisoopa 'tsis</i>
<i>Kisoopa 'tsis</i>
<i>Osoopa 'tsis</i> interrogatives, simple questions:
<i>Tsa, tahkaa, takaa, Tsima, tska, taya</i> <i>aa, saa</i> questions using <i>katai</i> (VAI) declarative statement, simple sentences using <i>I</i> (1S), <i>you</i> (2S), <i>he/she</i> (3S) subjects and action words:
<i>Nitaopi</i>
<i>Kitaopi</i>
<i>Na aopiwa;</i> and progressive action words:
<i>Nitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Kitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Na aoyiwa</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>amo, amoi</i> to distinguish and refer to this specific animate (NA) or to an inanimate (NI) noun noun possession form for animate (NA) and inanimate (NI) singular nouns indicating <i>my</i> (1S), <i>yours</i> (2S), <i>his/hers</i> (3S):
<i>Nitomitaam</i>
<i>nisoopa 'tsis</i>
<i>Kitomitaam</i>
<i>kisoopa 'tsus</i>
<i>Otomitaam</i>
<i>otsoopa 'tsis</i> interrogatives, simple questions:
<i>tahka,</i>
<i>Taya, tsa, tahka</i> (VAI) declarative statement, simple sentences using <i>I</i> (1S), <i>you</i> (2S), <i>he/she</i> (3S) subjects and action words:
<i>Nitaopi, kitaopi, na aopiwa;</i> and progressive action:
<i>Nitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Kitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Na aoyiwa</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal pronoun plural forms:
<i>Niistonnaan</i>
<i>Kiistonnoon/kiisto</i>
<i>-wawa</i>
<i>Ostowawayi</i> <i>anna, anni</i> to distinguish and refer to that specific animate (NA) or an inanimate (NI) noun:
<i>Anna ninaawa</i>
<i>Anni soopa 'tsisi</i> noun possession form for animate (NA) and inanimate (NI) plural forms indicating <i>my</i> (1S), <i>yours</i> (2S), <i>his/hers</i> (3S):
(NA)
<i>Niitomitaama</i>
<i>Kitomitaama</i>
<i>Otomitaami</i> (NI)
<i>Nisoopa 'tsisi</i>
<i>Kisoopa 'tsisi</i>
<i>Osoopa 'tsisi</i> (VAI) declarative statement, simple sentences using <i>I</i> (1S), <i>you</i> (2S), <i>he/she</i> (3S) subjects and action words:
<i>Nitaopi</i>
<i>Kitaopi</i>
<i>Na aopiwa;</i> and progressive action:
<i>Nitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Kitaoyi</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i>
<i>Na aoyiwa</i>
<i>aopakiitsskii 'pi</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commands or requests (imperatives VAI) using action words for <i>you</i> (2S), <i>all of you</i> (2P), and <i>all of us</i> (2I):
<i>Miistapoot</i>
<i>Miistapook</i>
<i>Ahkonohkana</i>
<i>yiistapaaop</i> simple sentences using <i>I</i> (1S), <i>you</i> (2S), <i>he/she</i> (3S) subjects and action words (VAI) in declarative statements form:
<i>Nitaanikko</i>
<i>Kitaanikko</i>
<i>Na aanistawa;</i> and progressive action:
<i>Nitaitapo</i>
<i>Kitaitapo</i>
<i>Na aitapo</i> demonstrative pronouns
<i>Anna</i>
<i>Annaak</i>
<i>Amo</i>
<i>Ama</i>
<i>Oma</i>
<i>Omi</i>
<i>Omik</i>
to distinguish and refer to that specific animate (NA) or inanimate (NI) noun |
|---|---|--|--|

(continued)

Figure 1 – Alberta Education General Outcome for Language Competence

Language Learning Differences

Interpreting the term ‘Niitsitapi’ as first/real person, and ‘Niitsitapiiksi’ as first/real people, represents the ‘insider’ perspective of our culture. However, today’s generic usage of the term Niitsitapi applies it to all Indigenous people when it references a broader constituency based on set of shared Indigenous beliefs, customs, and values, with a particular emphasis on a common historical experience. Thus, Niitsitapia’pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing and doing) encompasses the ways of knowing, understanding, behaving, and practising our beliefs, cultures, customs, and values rooted in relationship with the universe. We recognize our kinship with Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa (Sun, Creator; that which gives us life), Sspomitapiiksi (star people), Kaawa’pomaahkaaiksi (those that run on the ground/earth) and Soyitapiiksi (water spirits). Niitsitapia’pii is essential to the existence of Niitsitapiiksi. However, its absence within Niitsi’powahsin as taught in schools¹⁵ fails to support student well-being. As stated by Bastien,

The children of the Siksikaitsitapii must once again learn the sacred ways of their ancestors. Learning the sacred ways is learning the traditional forms of knowing. The children must know where Siksikaitsitapii come from as this is the source of finding one’s places in the universe and knowing one’s relatives. (2004, p. 8)

Learning Niitsi’powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot) cannot simply mirror English language learning. An example is the Kindergarten K5 curriculum ‘I Am Unique’ and the Blackfoot Language and Culture for Kindergarten equivalent ‘Nistoowa (I) or Kistoowa (You)’. Both teach concepts taught about the individual. Unfortunately, Blackfoot Language and Culture Curriculum, is – in essence - an English Language Arts/Social Studies curriculum cloaked in non-relational, isolated Blackfoot words that had little-to-no innate value to the language learner. Alberta Education Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum (2010, p. 28) deems grammatical

¹⁵ As with secular schooling, anything relating to a ‘religion’ is not permitted in Alberta schools. Charter or Catholic schools were permitted to educate religious platforms; First Nations school were not. Therefore, Alberta’s Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum did not address Niitsitapia’pii.

elements such as pronouns (Nistoo/kisto/amo – me/you/they) and interrogatives (questions beginning with ‘how’ or ‘what’) important for a five-year-old child. Whereas Niitsi’powahsin would have children value their relationship (Na’a/ ninsta/naahs-mother/father/grandparent). A curriculum built around Niitsitapia’pii would invest in values-based, language-responsive lessons. It would have as its foundation relationship to family and community addressing the individual’s positionality within a Niitsitapi collective. The first Blackfoot Language and Culture instructors gave their full attention to teaching Niitsi’powahsin to children, but the task was made difficult because the structure that limited Indigenous language teaching was the same one they used to revitalize it. I have immense respect for the writers of this curriculum who, through no fault of their own followed government mandates, created a new Blackfoot language curriculum.

After many years of adherence to Alberta Education Blackfoot Language and Culture curriculum, in 2014 Piikani schools moved Niitsi’powahsin language learning in a new direction. With the support of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Niitsi’powahsin language learning intertwined with cultural activities, thus moving into a sacred space that is closer in spirit to Niitsitapia’pii. This sacred space and spirit are how Niitsitapiiksi (First People) connect their values-based ways of knowing and understanding to all existence; different from Alberta Education curriculum which links well-being to subjects such as health and physical education.

There was no focused effort on increasing the well-being of children and youth – particularly not to improve it through learning an Indigenous language (Still Smoking, 1997). Increased demands to meet the social, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of children became the focus of much discussion and many presentations.

However, the research to fully appreciate the need for Indigenous values-based, language-responsive curriculum in schools as a means of improving the well-being of youth continued to be lacking.

Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot Ways of Learning and Understanding)

Introduction

In this section, I position my 'self' and situate my research within the broader contexts of Indigenous research methods, narrative methodology, storytelling, and Indigenous language revitalization. I discuss how Blackfoot people convey Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot learning and understanding) - their ontologies, epistemologies, and pedagogies through research to the world. I use storytelling as methodology to transfer Niitsitapi Mokaksin (the known) from our Elders and Knowledge Keepers (the knowers) to Pookaaksi (children).

My world began and is framed within the context of Niitsitapi Mokaksin. It is all I've known being born and raised as a Piikanakii (Piikani girl/woman). Growing up I understood that neighbouring Niitsitapi tribes – Kainai, Siksika, and Aamskaapiipiikani – connected me to kinship relationships, land, language, culture, and values. Upon entering school at age six in a neighboring white community, I began learning about a world outside and apart from the Piikani Indian Reserve from which I came. Thus began my formal western education juxtaposed against Niitsitapi Mokaksin of which I address throughout this paper.

My storytelling journey of Niitsitapi Mokaksin occurred each time I stepped into my grandmother Missy's home. She embodied a quiet strength and determination to follow traditional ways as a Piikanakii.

A long time ago, when I was a teenager, my cousin and I had a sleep over at my grandparent's home. It was a treat for both of us to stay with our grandmother. Their home had three bedrooms and the east facing one was always the coldest. The draft was so bad that frost and snow would accumulate on the window frames and sills; you might even be able to breathe out a cold mist in that room! Our grandmother sent us to bed in that east-facing room, under layers of blankets and

quilts. She came to check on us after a few minutes and we were shivering with cold. She told us to wait that she would fix it; she opened a closet door and (much to our surprise) pulled out a buffalo robe, shook it out (she was strong), and sprawled it over top of us. It was funny in the moment, and we all laughed. She told us to sleep, that she would see us in the morning. The weight of that buffalo robe was immense – neither of us moving a muscle throughout the night. My cousin and I laughed in the morning as we were in the exact same positions as the night before. As we woke, our senses became attuned to two things - the smell of sweetgrass and aroma of coffee. This was our grandmother's daily routine – prepare a smudge, make coffee in the percolator over the gas stove (she always said to let it perk 100 times for perfect coffee although I'm sure that she never counted), then return to her smudge and prayer for the day. We could hear her gentle voice coming from her bedroom but moved away from the door as we did not want to eavesdrop on something so personal. I think what we knew, my cousin and I, is that we were included in those prayers asking Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo 'pa for protection and guidance through the day.

My grandmother, through her stories, brought to us knowledge and understanding of Blackfoot ontology:¹⁶ creation - Naapi Natosi and Kokomikisomm; connection to Creator - Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa; knowledge of cosmology – Makoyohsokoyi, Ipisowaahsa; kinship responsibilities and acknowledging familial relationships such as Inihka'simi; transfer of language and values - Pommakssinni; and Otoi'tsikattoo – stewardship of land and animals. Pommakssin – transfer of knowledge – happened primarily at her kitchen table over a cup of

¹⁶ Naapi Natosi – Sun, Kokomikisomm – Moon, Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa – Creator, Makoyohsokoyi – Wolf Trail (Milky Way), Ipisowaahsa – Morning Star, Inihka'simi – giving a name, Pommakssinni/Pommakssin – transfer of knowledge, Otoi'tsikattoo – looking after.

coffee or tea. My grandmother's influence set in us an appreciation of Niitsitapi narratives and storytelling and offering/accepting Pommakssin in countless spaces. Through my grandmother's Niitsitapi narrative and storytelling, my epistemological knowledge was strengthened and then became foundational to who I am as a Piikanakii. I soon recognized this in other Indigenous scholars' journeys.

Indigenous Research Methodology and Methods

Firstly, I acknowledge my predecessors whose time and effort introduced Indigenous methods and methodologies to academic research. In particular, the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori), Bagele Chilisa (Bantu), Margaret Kovach (nehiyaw/Saulteaux/ Plains Cree), Manu Aluli Meyer (Hawaiian), Shawn Wilson (Nehinaw/ Cree), Kathy Absolon (Anishinaabe), Betty Bastien (Piikani/ Blackfoot), Leroy Little Bear (Kainai/ Blackfoot), Patricia Rosborough (Kwak'wala), and Darryl Kipp (Aamskaapiipiikani/Blackfeet) who looked inward to start their process. These Indigenous scholars provided the foundational ontology, epistemologies, and pedagogies to complement their practice and contribute novel approaches to generating new knowledge.

Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, championed to change the *how* and *why* Indigenous peoples' voices were limited:

The effect of such discipline¹⁷ was to silence (forever in some cases) or to suppress the ways of knowing, and the languages for knowing, of many different Indigenous peoples. Reclaiming a voice in this context has also been about reclaiming, reconnecting and reordering those ways of knowing which were submerged, hidden, or driven underground. (Smith, 2013, p. 72)

¹⁷ Smith lists the most common forms of discipline as exclusion, marginalization, and denial.

Thirty years ago, the gate keepers of academia supported and sustained the white perspective, privilege, and power attached to higher education (Bastien, 2004; Chilisa, 2019; Gaudry, 2015; Little Bear, 2000; Smith, 2013). This discussion features Indigenous voices, how they challenged the status quo, and how Indigenous research has developed in the last three decades. Throughout the years, such scholars had the arduous task of building the platform from where the world's Indigenous peoples could tell our stories, share our worldview, and elucidate the methods and methodology in our sovereign voices. They brought significant experience to conducting their investigations and in doing so they amplified awareness and acceptance of research methodologies from outside the mainstream.

Smith began advocating in the late 1990s that Indigenous research and methodologies acknowledge the harm created by colonialist attitudes, values, policies, and practices put in place to re-arrange, re-present, and re-distribute Indigenous knowledge in colonized countries. Indigenous researchers correctly asserted that our ways of knowing were excluded and marginalized in academic research, which at the time was firmly rooted within the framework of imperialism, colonization, and post-colonial eras (Chilisa, 2019; Smith, 2013). Therefore, they had a duty to research Indigenous ways of knowing that in effect would undermine the “positional superiority”¹⁸ assumed by white scholars. Leroy Little Bear, a Blackfoot scholar and professor, declared, “no matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world” (2000, p. 77). Another Blackfoot scholar, Betty Bastien, adds colonialism's primary goal was to alleviate the ‘savage’ and uplift the ‘civilized’ at all levels of government including academic institutions and the research being produced therein (B. Bastien, personal communication, May 2021).

¹⁸ As cited in Smith, 2013 (p. 61), Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, p. 7.

The only antidote to such antiquated and harmful colonial attitudes is advancing the pursuit of new knowledge by highlighting research conducted by and for our communities. Rather than producing research that fit strictly within qualitative or quantitative research methodologies, Indigenous scholars proposed research that was tailored to the questions that mattered to our experience (Bastien, 2004; Chilisa, 2019; Smith, 2013). Others asserted that Indigenous methodologies “can stand on their own” without advancing or referring to western theories in research (Kovach, 2017, p. 230). Chilisa (2019, p. 24) adds that a post-colonial¹⁹ research paradigm, or as Wilson (2008, p. 62) describes an Indigenous research paradigm, allows the Indigenous researcher to express one’s own worldview and, in Chilisa’s instance, a relational ontology, axiology, cosmology, and teleology. Adam Gaudry, a Métis scholar and professor, affirms Indigenous methods and methodologies:

Insurgent research by grassroots academics wanting to undue the ideological foundations established through colonialism policies and practices and to reframe research from an Indigenous perspective... [and adds that] ... engaged researchers make two conscious decisions: they place community concerns above all other in the research process, and they put forward an empowering and decolonized view of the people with who (sic) they conduct research. (2015, p. 244)

Manu Aluli Meyer, a Hawaiian scholar and advocate for Indigenous research methodologies, maintains that Indigenous researchers extricate their thinking from extant eurocentric/western theories by stating, “Here lies the political, social, spiritual, and economic challenge: to fight for a Hawaiian identity in a structure that is set up to assimilate it into a large hegemonic context” (1998, p. 27). The sentiment being that Indigenous people have a right to be

¹⁹ Chilisa, 2020, (p. 9) defines post-colonialism as “the continuous struggles of non-Western societies that suffered European colonization of indigenous peoples, and historically marginalized groups to resist suppression of their ways of knowing and the globalization of knowledge...”

represented in ways that accept our reality and endorse modes of research wherein we situate and recognize ourselves (Chilisa, 2019; Gaudry, 2015; Kovach, 2017; Meyer, 1998; Wilson, 2008).

In this vein, Gaudry (2015) writes that,

Indigenous knowledge is evaluated by Indigenous standards, meaning the validity of knowledge and experience is judged from within its own worldview, not foreign standards...insurgent research possesses a powerful capacity to critique and undermine colonialism by deconstructing its misleading and disingenuous claims. (p. 249)

Indigenous scholars assert their rights to define Indigenous research methods and methodology, in areas of identity, positionality, self-determination, and inherent right to language and culture (Bastien, 1999; Chilisa, 2019; Kovach, 2017; Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2013). Studies of identity, an ability to be vulnerable, a desire for restitution, and an opening to awakenings uphold the following four distinct aspects: 1) Indigenous epistemologies and tribal knowledge systems, 2) theory-principles and their teachings, 3) relational actions sustaining epistemology, and 4) re-storying as how we represent Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2017). Building on a clear commitment to recognize and support diversity, nationhood, intellectual self-determination, explicitly recognize traditional and contemporary values, hold the potential to regenerate or revitalize community dynamics that yield ongoing vitality, allows opportunity for Indigenous voices to transmit their perspectives (Johnston et al., 2018).

As a Piikanakii and doctoral student, I acknowledge that Linda Tuhiwai Smith gave me a greater appreciation of the investment that Indigenous scholars made to move from the margins into the mainstream, given the oppressive academic policies and practices they overcame. The margin is a place of resistance, hope, and survival that amplifies activism and insists advocates to demand a better deal for local knowledge. Indigenous scholars can interpose their ideas about post-colonial ideologies that elevate their ontologies and epistemologies within their work

(Smith, 2013). Overall, “the concept of applying Indigenous research methods aspires to be [a] reconstructive and locative educational and social justice idea” (Pewewardy, 2019, p. 151).

Indigenous scholars are creating substantive alternative academic praxis through research methodologies and a conceptual framework that uplifts their voice by affirming cultural histories.

Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are ‘factors’ to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood. (Smith, 2013, p. 52)

Niitsitapi Mokaksin imbeds Blackfoot ontology and epistemology using Niitsi’powahsin as the tool for delivery. When we introduce ourselves to the world, whether for the first time or the hundredth time, we start with “Nistooako’k...I am”. This phrase embodies a person’s spirit, all actions past/present, and connects the person’s spirit to Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa, and all relations past/present. This simple phrase is one of the most powerful statements as it lays bare all that you are/have been/will be. Indigenous research methodologies do the same when incorporating the history, positionality, situation, values, and beliefs of our scholars since “you came from a place. You grew in a place, and you had relationship with that place. This is an epistemological idea” (Meyer, 2008, p. 219). It confirms “who we are, the values that underpin our concept of self, our perspectives on the world, and our position within it...” (Walter, 2013, p. 45). From our respective vantage points, we can step out of the margins and give commanding perspective to Indigenous worldviews.

Indigenous Storytelling and Narratives

Today the annual Ookaan (Blackfoot Sundance) is happening. It is a gathering place for hundreds of people who share a common value of faith in Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo 'pa (Sun/Creator) to sustain a good life for Niitsitapi. The hundreds of people who attend over the course of fifteen days can be found camped according to clan sites. One is in awe when seeing a hundred tipis circling a 'double tipi' where ceremony of the most importance is being conducted. This ceremony is about prayer, fulfilment of vows, healing, gifting, clan relations, nourishment, and supporting family/friends. One is humbled by the immenseness of the Aakoka'tsin (Sundance circle camp) and the positive energy it brings to Niitsitapi. At the heart of Aakoka'tsin is Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of knowing and learning) and within the 'double tipi' the most intense transfer of language and knowledge is occurring. All the people sitting in the 'double tipi' have transferred rights to participate in this immersive environment and they do so with dignity and grace.

As a supporter, I am in awe of the extreme amount of ceremonial knowledge that the participants gain in a short time. As one participant said, "What you commit to in joining Aakoka'tsin, you receive back exponentially in learning language and ceremonial protocols." (D. Crowshoe, personal communication, n.d.)

In an altered response to eurocentric/western research theories, methods, and methodologies, numerous Indigenous scholars began journeys to self-actualize Indigenous research methods and methodologies by developing their own narrative methodology (Absolon, 2022; Anderson, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Rosborough, 2012; Thompson, 2018).

Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice.... the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance (Smith, 2013, p. 81).

Storywork is a method encompassing seven principles - respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy - related to using our stories and storytelling (Archibald, 2008). Common themes appear when Indigenous people share similar ontologies and epistemologies extending and sharing core values through narrative methodologies. Indigenous narrative/storytelling methodologies honour those storytellers who came before us, respect the knowledge imbedded in story, are respectful of past histories, honor Indigenous oral tradition, and ensure accountability to our ancestors (Absolon, 2022; Anderson, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Rosborough, 2012; Thomas, 2005; Thompson, 2018).

Narrative methodology, and the underlying reflective practise, is often found in educational inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) state “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience.” McCarty et al. (2018), as an Indigenous research ally along with Indigenous colleagues, privileges storywork and the art of storytelling to collect information and to construct explanations. Their work on narrative methodology progresses on the basis that storywork is a first-hand account and storywork is voice which explores and enlightens “resilience, rediscovery, sovereignty, and justice” (McCarty et al., 2018, p. 161). As a Blackfoot scholar, whose lived experience with my grandmother embodied storywork, I am compelled to share narratives of my ancestors.

As we have done thousands of times, my sisters and I sat with our grandmother at her kitchen table. Someone asked her to tell a Napi²⁰ story and she began by stating that some stories are gender specific and can be told only in the presence of the same gender, while other stories are more public and can be told to both genders, and still others are sacred only to be told to those who have sacred rights to the story and the knowledge imparted within.

My grandmother told about Napi – a Blackfoot person who figured prominently in stories that would teach the listener a lesson while inviting laughter at Napi’s antics and continual misbehaviour. As my grandmother said, Napi was ‘human’ with all the goodness and faults every human displays. Napi stories had one objective: to teach us the fallibility of humanity while at the same time strengthening relationship to Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa and Niitsitapi Tsaahkomm – Blackfoot Territory.

My grandmother looked around her kitchen that day, told us to check other rooms, and to make sure doors were closed so that no one could hear her tell the story. We knew this was going to be a gender specific story... ‘Napi was at the river when he saw...’

Niitsitapi (the First People) ontology is the ongoing relationality and accountability between our Creator, the storyteller, and the audience. “[S]tories are enfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awaken, and honor spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead, it focuses on processes of knowing” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 77). Processing our ways of knowing means defining an

²⁰ Bastien (2004, p. 89) – The stories of *Napi* are stories of teaching. *Napi* taught people “two sacred precepts” to be faithful to Natosi and obedient to natural laws.

Indigenous research paradigm in which ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology center the scholar's voice and is an act of awakening, privileging, responding, and being inclusive of Indigenous narratives (Shirley & Angulo 2019; Wilson, 2008; Thomas, 2005).

Robina Thomas, a Salish scholar, adds "I was calling my research methodology storytelling. But whatever a methodology is called, what is most important is that it is rooted in my traditional ways of knowing and being" (2005, p. 192).

Indigenous narrative methods and methodologies focus on Indigenous research and establish core constructs which support Indigenous sovereignty as found in Indigenous narratives of sacrifice, resiliency, survival, vision, identity, belonging, honorable intention, accountability, validation, and ethics (Tsinnajinnie, et al., 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2019; Wilson, 2008).

For Niitsitapi, each core construct is obtained through Pommakssin (the act of transferring knowledge) where, according to Wilson (personal communication, January 22, 2020), "knowledge has agency and is brought alive through narrative." Establishing and maintaining this assertion are Blackfoot scholars Betty Bastien (2004), Darrell Kipp (2000), Leroy Little Bear (2009), Duane Pepion (1999), and Dorothy Still Smoking (1997) who affirm that Pommakssin through narrative storywork connects us to our ancestors and ways of knowing Blackfoot ontology, epistemology, and pedagogies. According to Bastien (2004) and Kipp (2009), ontology is the fundamental premise of the nature of reality, the nature of being, and the nature of knowledge and, for Blackfoot people, is grounded in relationality/relationships. Little Bear (2009, p. 11) adds that "how we come to know in essence, is a methodology or a validation process" and is validated through "actual experience, stories, songs, ceremonies, dreams, and observations". Kainai/Blackfoot scholar, Gabrielle Lindstrom (2020, pp. 119-120), expresses:

I offer a personal narrative of resilience that draws on my experiences as a Blackfoot woman along my journey.... In doing so, I conceptualize resilience from a uniquely

Blackfoot perspective that also holds a deeply human relevance... I have discovered that these threads are woven into my personal narrative and made tangible through the act of storytelling.

Indigenous research methodology and methods that support storytelling or personal narrative can occur in person or when using technology (i.e., audio-recordings and podcasts). Podcasting, as a technological method and in alignment with traditional Niitsitapi oral storytelling, creates audio-recordings that take a deeper look into specific topics (i.e. Indigenous language revitalization).

Podcasts as a Language Learning Tool

As a primary method of research in this study and as Indigenous youth maneuver 21st century learning that support new ways of understanding, the following is a discussion of podcasts as one of the current trends in educational programs, resources, and technology.

The potential benefits of technology for language teaching are many: its capabilities for providing learners with authentic and enhanced linguistic input, pushed linguistic output and individualized instruction, and enabling learners to work at their own pace and engage in collaboration are just a few. (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2020, p. 5)

Early computer-assisted language learning focused on building vocabulary and grammar. Seen as being innovative and user-friendly, it allowed the language learner flexibility to progress as per their proficiency level. Word-based tutorial format was the standard computer-assisted language learning application. Their limitations quickly became apparent because “L2 [second language] vocabulary learning requires systematic recycling of new items at optimal intervals, recontextualization, memory support to promote recall, and production and feedback opportunities.... In vocabulary learning, multiple meanings of high-frequency vocabulary need to be addressed” Levy (2009, p. 771). This is often the case when learning Niitsi’powahsin

where the range of vocabulary, grammar, and structure expands often and quickly with limited feedback or interaction with proficient speaker creating challenges for a beginner speaker.

Computer-assisted language learning includes podcasts. Podcasting²¹ as a method uses the internet to distribute information on current topics (i.e., Blackfoot language revitalization). Podcasts topics are easily searched on the various search engines (i.e., Google) which makes them attractive to the user. With the wealth of research on Indigenous language revitalization being created on a myriad of topics, Indigenous language revitalization podcasts are but one means – an extension — of sharing Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of knowing and understanding).

Podcasts fall into the realm of self-regulated learning whereby a person maintains both cognitive (learning grammar and structure) and affective skills (how do I feel about learning a new language; what is the motivation behind learning a new language). This has the potential to increase and enhance the learner's use of technology. "The SRL [self-regulated learning] affective learning dimension is critical for learners... [since]...the affective component contributes at least as much and often more to language learning than the cognitive skills" (Stern et al 1983, p. 386). Niitsitapiiksi (Blackfoot people) consider this skill to be of utmost importance in language learning. Depending on how you feel, the tone of your voice, your willingness to participate, your interaction with others are keys to learning Niitsi'powahsin. There is general agreement that technology is at the forefront in learning a new skill. Indeed, mobile technology is here to stay in most, if not all, learning environments. Therefore, learning to use technology effectively requires self-direction and affective skills.

²¹ Podcasts are "a digital audio file that can be taken from the internet and played on a computer or a device that you can carry with you." (Oxford Dictionary. Jan 23, 2023. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/podcast?q=podcast>)

The concept of a “third space pedagogy” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999) resonated in our study as we observed social interaction in the regular classroom learning space shift when new resources, such as laptops, and the freedom to play with them during podcast project time became available. Gutiérrez et al. (1999) defined third space pedagogy as “a classroom community of difference that uses multiple mediating tools and makes use of all the spatial, cultural and linguistic resources of its participants” (p. 287). In this interpretation, the emphasis is on leveraging students’ semiotic resources to scaffold them into school literacies and also to challenge and broaden “what counts” as school literacies (Moje et al., 2000). We acknowledge that the concept of third spaces as sites for students to negotiate and resist colonized identities (e.g., Bhabha, 1994) may also have resonance here. (Smythe & Neufeld, 2010, p. 492).

Research has shown that technology is a valuable learning tool. For youth learning language the viability of combining the two requires consideration. Could a Niitsi’powahsin podcast combine Indigenous ways of knowing, storywork/storytelling, and Indigenous language learning in one method? Podcasts, as a learning resource, allow the listener to hear extended and in-depth conversations on thematic topics.

Another interesting concept pays attention to podcasting as a learning tool to increase listening comprehension and vocabulary in high school students (Saeedakhtar et al 2021). This research focused on English second language learners and whether their second language learning would improve if listening individually (Group 1) or as a pair (Group 2). Research results concluded that peer-peer listening resulted in substantial improvement in second language learning; discourse with peer on vocabulary, grammar, word usage and meaning increased. The authors noted that improvement included “the extent to which learners find using a tool

effortless. As reflected in the responses given to the questionnaire, participants of the current study found podcasts as an easy tool for learning” (Saeedakhtar et al 2021, p. 12).

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Conclusion

Whether in-person or through technology, when Niitsitapi hear the voices of our ancestors, the methodology itself is Pommakssin – storytelling as a transfer of knowledge. Tahltan scholar Edōsdi Judy Thompson (2018) theorized this in her research when she coined the phrase voiceability²² as “methodology that is grounded in the voices of my Ancestors, Elders, and co-researchers” (p. 2) where readers can “hear” our voices (p. 6).

As Nitsitapi, through the act of storytelling, we purposefully guide and enact Pommakssin with and for future generations. In this dream story, I ask you to hear my voice as it validates all the aspects of Pommakssin:

I dreamt of a ghost – not a spirit – as the ghost was mischievous and somewhat malevolent. As a Blackfoot person, I have come to know that I can talk to ghosts and spirits and give them instructions. In this dream, Miiksimmawootaan (Iron Shield - my youngest grandson) was in the room with me and as I began tending to the bedtime rituals of Miiksimmawootaan, the ghost became more aggressive in approaching us. I instructed the ghost to leave the room and to not bother us which the ghost refused to do. Instead, the ghost moved with stealth across the room to Miiksimmawootaan, slid under his bed, and reappeared on the other side as a slithering snake. Instinctively, I grabbed my grandson and ran out the room all the while calling on the spirit (a more benevolent name) of Aapiisaahmahkaan - Running Wolf - to help.

My family believes that upon awakening from an unpleasant dream, one must retell it to a family member to ‘get rid of’ lingering negativity. Secondly, it is

²² Thompson, E. J. (2018, p. 6) Tahltan voiceability – similar to readability or the ability to read with ease, voiceability allows the readers to ‘hear’ our voices.

the responsibility of the dreamer to “do something about it”. Within days, I contacted a Blackfoot ceremonialist – member of the esteemed and sacred Blackfoot Horn Society – and asked for help. It was decided that we would have an Offering Sweat for my grandson where a child’s Offering was made of freshly cut willows, hide, cloth, sage, and tobacco. This Offering would be a gift to Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa for continued good health and safety for my children and grandchildren – but specifically for Miiksimawootaan. On the day of the Offering sweat, the menfolk prepared the sweat (Blackfoot women do not participate in Blackfoot sweats) while the womenfolk prepared the meal. Starting and ending with ceremonial prayers, everyone attending had their faces painted with Asaan (holy paint), listened to our holy songs, and received holy blessings for the days to come.

This dream story and unfolding activities embodies Pommakssin – transferring the knowledge of dreams and interpretations, kinship to Elders and family, holy rituals, sweat lodge, songs, face painting, using our holy names, food preparation, and gifting. It validates “Nistooako’k...I am”. This is Niitsitapi Mokaksin – it is my narrative and my way of knowing. I am a Piikanakii, who transfers Blackfoot ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy to my children, my family, and to you as the reader and listener of my story.

Pommakssin (The Process of Transferring Knowledge)

Introduction

As a Piikanakii (Piikani woman), I am privileged in that I learned skills in childhood and continued to develop them throughout my lifetime. My favourite is reading, which I have loved since childhood. It has brought to me the ability to travel while seated in a school library, to explore cultures other than my own, and most recently to acknowledge my ancestral/Indigenous heritage. Within this chapter, I share a transfer of knowledge with you from those closer to my home, Niitsitapi Kitawahsinnooni (Blackfoot territory). I am fortunate that I have met, in-person, some of the writers of the literature I choose to share with you as their writing advances Blackfoot ways of learning and understanding; other writers align with a broader knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding. The selected literature builds the foundation of what this chapter intends to capture which is my Piikani axiology, ontology, and epistemology; academic words that help the reader to understand Piikani values, concepts, and ways of knowing. For Blackfoot people, transfer of knowledge, whether oral or written, is vital as it contains our axiology, ontology, and epistemology. This section of my dissertation introduces you to important Indigenous writers while transferring knowledge on themes such as Blackfoot creation, Pommakssin (transferred knowledge), storytelling, dream-telling, culturally-responsive learning and language, Indigenous methods of learning language all within the larger context of how children learn.

Percy Bullchild (Aamskaapiipiikani/Blackfeet) Elder is the author of the influential book *The Sun Came Down* (2005). In it he tells one story about the creation of our world. He relates how Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (Sun/Creator) created our world: Sspomitapiiksi (above ones), Kaawa'pomaahkaaiksi (those that run on the ground/earth), Soyitapiiksi (water spirits),

and Matapiiksi (humankind). It is one version of our origin story representing who we are as Niitsitapi (First People). (This story is in *italics* as with other Blackfoot storytelling.)

This story is about a lone spirit that lived in this spiritual place before there was a world or any kind of life. As he lived on and on, at one time it dawned on him that there was something amiss from this lonely life of his. There was an emptiness in his heart. Somehow! He must fill that empty feeling.

This spirit was full of strange, mystic, and supernatural powers. He could do anything he wanted to do. He could transform into anything. There wasn't anything he couldn't do.

Death was nil to him, ever was his life. He has been alive from ever and will continue to live forever. Even to this day this supernatural and mystic being is still very much alive, and all of his mystic and supernatural powers are with us, among all of his creation of life. Life is given to all of us humans and to all of his creations on this earth and life is very abundant in Creator Sun's world today.

The sun came down and abided with his children in many instances to talk with them, to teach them certain things they must learn to use or do, and to give advice to them of how to survive the many treacherous things in this world he created for them. (Bullchild, 2005, p. 3)

In sharing his story of our creation, he transfers his knowledge to us, which is made meaningful only if the recipient is prepared to understand the essential aspect of that knowledge. Is it Pommakssin (the transfer)? Is it the relationship built between the known and the knower(s)? Or is it the Indigenous perspective of a creation story? What is at the heart of Pommakssin (the transfer of knowledge)?

According to Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt (2002), initiates²³ or new members to sacred cultural activities or ceremonies take on these responsibilities:

By going through giimaks'inn or poomaks'inn transfer rite, an individual obtains the rights to use certain abstract and physical manifestations. These are songs, stories, and the handling of the specific sacred material [which] the keepers are responsible for taking care of one of the Creator's gifts and for using this gift for the survival of their community. (p. 31)

Hence, this transfer or transmission of knowledge is “a process of transferring spiritual knowledge through an intricate and complex system of kinship relations.... knowledge itself has spirit that is transferred in the relationships between the knower and the known” (Bastien, 2004, p.102).

Academics agree that the most important aspect of Pommakssin is to benefit children (Bastien, 2004; Kipp, 2000). Some propose that “one of the most powerful rationales for language revitalization is understanding the dangers facing Indian children disconnected or disenfranchised, from their tribal heritage” (Kipp, 2000, p. 3). Others maintain that “since language embodies the connections, relationships, and responsibilities of Niitsitapi alliances, children must be taught orally, and the search for the understanding of life must be maintained at

²³ “A person who is undergoing or has undergone an initiation.” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>)

the relational level” (Bastien 2004, p. 125). I share this next story as it refers to Naatowaa’pi, the most sacred, as one of the most genuine, heartfelt, benevolent gifts to children:

Aisstsiistsii Aahkoinnimaan – Backside to the Fire – is a medicine pipe bundle. The keepers of these sacred bundles are called Ninaamskaiksi. Back in 1987, I was asked, along with my husband, to become keepers of this bundle in order to maintain good health for our nephew Naammowaasitaa – Cut of Horse’s Mane. It was not an easy decision as it meant adopting a ‘new life’ including adhering to strict ceremonial protocols.

Aisstsiistsii Aahkoinnimaan was meant to be with us for many years and during that time Blackfoot ceremonialists and knowledge keepers initiate Pommaksin through Niitsi’powahsin. I attended hundreds of ceremonies before, during, and after this time growing my knowledge of ceremony and use of language. I can sing all the songs and am privileged in ‘opening’ bundles as the Akaa Ninnaamskaakii (former bundle keeper - female). More importantly, and with continued privilege, is that I have invited my children and grandchildren to participate.

The immersive use of Niitsi’powahsin at sacred ceremonial bundle openings allows them use of their Blackfoot names (direct connection to Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa), have their faces painted (that Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo’pa will recognize them), and to acknowledge and affirm connection to Niksookowaaiksi (all their relations).

In effect, words have spirit, spirits are in family, and family has value therefore words and language are relational, ethical, and powerful. As one Cree Elder and knowledge keeper aptly said “Ethics in Indigenous worldview is the pipe. The pipe watches the way we walk because the pipe sees what you’re doing and may impact grandchildren now and in the future” (K. Lewis, personal communication, November 18, 2019).

For Niitsitapiiksi (the First People), their commitment to Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot learning and knowing) extends beyond ontology and epistemology to capture a participatory and experiential pedagogy (Bastien, 2004; Little Bear, 2009; Kipp, 2000; Pepion, 1999). Niitsitapi Mokaksin is based on relational alliances using ancestral and tribal languages to impart knowledge and understanding to children by Elders and Knowledge Keepers (Bastien, 2004; Little Bear, 2009). Thus, “[y]ou cannot leave the education of your children simply to those whose purpose and knowledge base are different than our own and expect children to grow up and follow the path of your ancestors” (Pewewardy, 2019, p. 153). Languages provide the context for Indigenous people to start a practice of hearing our stories and knowing our language as a foundation for self-identity (Shirley & Angulo, 2019). Additionally, “language and ceremonies are the essential foundations from which they [children] can begin to understand and experience anew the philosophies, principals and social and normative systems of our ancestors and the ancients” (Bastien, 2004, p. 26). Indigenous language and culture are inextricably intertwined.

Culturally-responsive and Language-responsive Learning

Culturally-responsive learning is a term that educators use to define an approach that addresses the ethnic or cultural diversity of students. As this is my profession, I knew of the concept as it was an expectation in the community in which I worked. For example, when

teaching concepts of sky science (sun orbit, moon phases, constellations), I would tell old stories and Siksikaitsitapi names to explore the world of science from a Niitsitapi (the First People) perspective. I encountered a global understanding of culturally-responsive learning while attending Indigenous education conferences where I first heard Puebloan scholar, Gregory Cajete (1999), use the term ‘culturally relevant’ to indicate that learning science can be done within an Indigenous framework of knowledge. Later I met Hopi scholar Sheilah Nicholas (2009), who used the term ‘culturally-responsive’ to show how her Hopi community embraced their own cultural norms and practices with the intent of passing them to the next generation. Current scholarship promotes incorporating culturally relevant and/or culturally-responsive learning into community endeavors (Barnhardt, 2014; Hermes, et al., 2021). Emerging interests in Indigenous culture are being exemplified in communities where ‘cultural connectedness’ is viewed as the pathway to a good life (Crooks et al., 2017). A prime example of culturally-responsive learning is the WSÁNEĆ people of British Columbia who asked the question of “what is the knowledge of most worth” and discovered that knowledge associated with land, territory, Elders, SENĆOŦEN language speakers, places names, history, stories, ceremony, sense of belonging and identity is of most worth (Swallow & Bay, 2008, p. 274). In exploring culturally-responsive learning within Niitsitapi Kitawahsinnooni (Blackfoot territory), Niitsitapi scholars relied heavily on our ways of Niitsitapia’pii and how that would translate into everyday living (Bastien, 2004; Kipp, 2000; Lindstrom, 2020; Little Bear, 2009; Pepion, 1999; Still Smoking, 1997).

For decades, Niitsitapi have known that cultural continuity and/or resurgence is vital for our people – it is the life force and the heartbeat of our communities. The discourse on stabilizing Indigenous languages is a chronic discussion in our community, so the increase in culturally-responsive learning promotes a greater focus on language revitalization. Our Elders and Knowledge Keepers acknowledged that culture and language should walk hand in hand. With

this insight, they became grassroots activists along with community language instructors, scholars, and academics to address language revitalization efforts. “This objective supports the desire of Kaahsinooniksi [our Grandparents] who had expressed the need to begin teaching children the language and felt the desire to see them begin thinking in the way of Siksikaitsitapii” (Bastien, 2004, p. 6). Furthermore, “the reconstruction of these ways of knowing must begin with how Siksikaitsitapii understand the world, that is, their ontological stance” (Bastien, 2004, p. 3). Given the global nature of this endeavour, Indigenous people across the globe are focused on the same goal of language revitalization. In response to this concern, the United Nations adopted a resolution to observe the years 2022–2032 as the Decade of Indigenous languages. Across the world, it supports projects dedicated to saving the linguistic heritage of humanity (United Nations Resolution A/74/396, 2019).

A foundational premise of *Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin* research is that Indigenous people have the “inherent right to learn, use, transmit a language of heritage and birth”, furthermore, that language reclamation is more than returning to an ancestral language, rather “language and voice distinguish agency, personal belonging and responsibility” and “establish resiliency, rediscovery, sovereignty, and justice” (McCarty et al., 2018, p. 161). A planning principle is that language is not isolated from Indigenous issues of sovereignty and self-determination, rather “language issues [are] always people issues” (McCarty et al., 2018, p. 31). Indigenous language revitalization, reclamation, and sustainability captures two ideologies: the sovereign right to language (to help heal the past and bring forward to the present all the truths and realities of a strong and powerful group of people) and self-determination (which is responsibility by Indigenous communities to build a strong identity and plan for long term tribal language commitment). Upholding the notion that revitalizing our languages cannot occur without basic tenets of sovereignty, and self-

determination as a keystone concept, Indigenous people anticipated that use of their tribal languages would be enhanced through culturally-responsive learning. According to some writers, this is a situation Indigenous tribes were exploring:

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest by Blackfeet people in their own culture and tradition. Some evidence of this is demonstrated by the Blackfeet Community College's founding mission statement which includes language that addresses "educational advancement and cultural preservation" of the Blackfeet nation (Blackfeet Community College Catalogue for 1996-1998, p. 12). In addition, the Blackfeet Community College in 1990, reflecting a service area need, changed the Native American Studies curriculum to Blackfeet Studies. This change process is probably a manifestation of the cultural revitalization effort that has some of its roots in the social revolution of the United States..."

(Pepion, 1999, p. 32)

Indigenous language activists, whether contemporary language warriors or traditional grassroots tribal members, often assert that revitalizing, stabilizing, and renewing Indigenous languages is "a cornerstone of tribal sovereignty" (Treuer, 2020, p. 20). He continues that "many think the language is nice or pretty – like a song of a bird in the forest" (p. 24) however this analogy of a bird chirping atop a high tree, means our people can only hear it and appreciate it, but little else.

There's a sense that the forest and especially humans don't depend on that sound for anything; it doesn't fill bellies or help people lead longer, healthier, happier lives. But nothing could be further than the truth. Physical, mental, and spiritual health are deeply intertwined. There is no way to improve our health without taking a full, holistic approach.... we need to decolonize and re-indigenize every we do. This is where real healing will come from. And

again, the language is a powerful tool in the arsenal for such an undertaking.

(Treuer, 2020, p. 24)

Truer's perspective conveys the connection between culturally-connected learning. Conversely, exploration of language-responsive learning literature shows it is largely void of specific mention of the larger context of culturally-responsive learning. Whereas language-responsive learning addresses *how* language learning occurs, culturally-responsive addresses the *why* of language learning. My approach to language-responsive learning relies on:

1. Learning *about* the language *while* learning the language;
2. Sharing the language as relational – Elder and Knowledge Keeper is choosing to share the language and a learner is choosing to receive the language; and
3. Focusing on the purpose of language learning where it has positive outcomes related to well-being.

The concept language-responsive learning in the context of revitalization research is near non-existent; rather, reference to it is found in subject-matter research. Focused on subject matter (i.e., mathematical linguistic competence), research in language-responsive learning focused on subject-matter and how students gained fluency in learning difficult terminology (Wessel & Erath, 2018). As it pertains to academic subject-matter, language-responsive learning has been ongoing for the last four decades framing future curriculum design and pedagogy (Prediger, 2019). However, there is insufficient literature applying to language-responsive learning which, at its core and in accordance with Nitisitapi Mokaksin, is to be holistic, to transfer knowledge, and to be purposeful.

Siksikaitsitapii Elder and Knowledge Keeper Participants

From the beginning of my educational journey, I wanted to ensure that Siksikaitsitapii Elders and Knowledge Keepers had the opportunity to share stories of who they are – who *we* are – as Niitsitapi (the First People). Piikani Elder Allan Pard connected storytelling to critical thinking asking the listener to be active during storytelling.

In the Blackfoot way, critical thinking is tied to story telling and metaphor used in the learning process. The elders' teaching methodology causes the learner to analyze information for meaning. Pard talked about elders speaking in "parables" and the many years he spent listening to the teachings before he could synthesize and understand the information. (Pepion, 1999, p. 128)

The methodology of storytelling, storyworks, and storying is the foundation of how Siksikaitsitapiiksi transfer knowledge to one another.

I have always enjoyed listening to our Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers tell stories – especially the ones told through Niitsi'powahsin. The ebb and flow of the language, the peaks and valleys of the sounds, the facial expression and hand gestures that the Elder uses to convey meaning of who we are as a people. This lifelong connection influenced me in my teenager years and helped me stay grounded as I manoeuvred towards adulthood. I remember a time when my Grandmother was scolding a relative for, what she considered, to be a poor choice made. When my Grandmother glanced at me, I knew the scolding was also meant for me as a way of indirect learning through her language and expressive character. It is because of this Grandmother – Granddaughter relationship that I set forth in my lifelong learning journey to always connect that which I hold dear – Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers. In starting this research *Niitsitapia'pii – Improving Well-Being in Blackfoot Youth Through Learning Niitsi'powahsin*, two things were critical: firstly, Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers had to

be prominent in my research and, secondly, that I seek to find what language learning could connect them to our Niitsitapi youth.

Once I decided that Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and youth, were the two target groups in language learning with whom I could connect through storytelling. I laid out an research plan that would incorporate storytelling based on Niitsitapi values, and could include mini language lessons, to be shared in podcast form. The final aspect would be to have youth review the podcasts and provide their insight and feedback on content and structure.

Therefore, I invited six (in total) Siksikaitsitapii Elders and Knowledge Keepers to be interviewed. To select the six Elders and Knowledge Keepers, I made the decision to include these factors:

- Elders or Knowledge Keepers interest in language revitalization;
- Elders' or Knowledge Keepers' ability to participate (determined by time, travel, stamina); and
- Balance of genders (both female and male).

I acknowledge that I have worked with all these Elders and Knowledge Keepers with whom I have strong relational ties within cultural, language, and ceremonial spaces. It is because of this relation that I can ask them to share values-based Niitsi'powahsin resulting in storytelling and language lesson work. (Youth participant recruitment is discussed in the *Maanitapi (youth) Engagement* section of this paper.)

Siksikaitsitapii Protocols

Niitsitapiiksi (the First People) have protocols which require engagement from the outset when wanting to connect with Niitsitapiiksi for purposes other than social or casual interactions. Engagement has factors that start at the most basic (i.e. offering tobacco or gifting) to the

advanced (i.e. often related to ceremony and offering of ceremonial practises). For this research, I balanced the protocols of engaging Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers with the requirements of western academia. Wilson (2008) honours the connection between relationship and reciprocity as it relates to research:

While forming all these relationships, you can understand the responsibility that comes with bringing a new idea into being (or articulating/making visible an existing one). The new relationship has to respect all of the other relationships around it. Forming and strengthening these connections gives power to and helps the knot between to grow larger and stronger. We must ensure that both sides of the relationship are sharing the power going into these new connections. Without this reciprocity, one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other. (p. 78)

This research allowed me the opportunity and privilege to re-connect with Niitsitapi Elders and Knowledge Keepers from my First Nations community. The selection of the Siksikaitsitapii participants was/is relational. All six Elders and Knowledge Keepers were previously known to me through the Niitsi'powahsin language work they do for the educational organization where I am employed, through community language activity, and also kinship ties to me through ancestral lineage.

Engaging Piikani Kitomahkitapiinooniksi (Elders and Knowledge Keepers)

Engagement with Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers was conducted both individually and as a group. First contact with each individual participant was by telephone providing them with an overview of the research study. Each participant asked clarifying questions such as: how long the research would take, length and type of story, length of phrases, target audience, and distribution of recording. Each participant was asked during this phone call if they wanted to continue to the next phase which would be a group meeting to provide further

details about the project. Of the six Elders and Knowledge Keepers that were asked to participate, all six readily agreed to continue to the next engagement session which would provide the overview of the research.

Two engagement sessions were scheduled to support the Elders and Knowledge Keepers needs. These group engagements were in-person and conducted off-reserve (from the Piikani First Nation) in a neighbouring town utilizing a hotel meeting room. This site was convenient for Elder and Knowledge Keeper travel. All had previously visited this site for other activities. The first of the engagement sessions was attended by three male Elders and Knowledge Keepers; the second of the engagement session was attended by three female Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Participants were greeted and provided with comforts (i.e. food and drink). As per Siksikaitapii protocol, one Elder was offered tobacco then asked to bless the activity so that positive outcomes occur for Siksikaitapii youth. As the participants knew each other and had greeted one another prior to convening in the meeting room, At the start of the group sessions, as per Siksikaitapii protocols, I asked the Research Assistant to introduce herself. Introductions are relational whereby kinship is acknowledged and just like the letters behind a person's name in western academia, a person will introduce their credentials (meaning relationship to grandparents, attending post-secondary, receiving degrees, previous experience working with and recording Elders and Knowledge Keepers). I acknowledged my relationship to the participants as a local educator focusing on Niitsi'powahsin language revitalization and that I had the opportunity to work with them previously on language revitalization activities. Introductions are a means of establishing relationship and trust between two or more people. I asked for them to listen as I read aloud (in English) the oral consent letter. Each participant was asked individually if they offered oral consent choosing to continue with the research. I assured the Elders and Knowledge Keepers that while I acknowledge my kinship and professional

relationship with each of them that it should not interfere in their decision to participate in the research.

These group sessions were approximately four hours in length. They allowed time for a presentation so the Elders and Knowledge Keepers could visualize the format of the recordings and subsequent podcasts. The PowerPoint slides (sample below) were simple yet provided enough information to Elders and Knowledge Keepers so that they would know the process of further engagement:

Presentation Slides (Shared in Appendix A)

1. Purpose of Research (Slides 1 & 2 content):

- a. I want to research what **values** are beneficial for youth who are learning to speak *Siksikaitsipowahsin*.
- b. I want Piikani youth to **learn Blackfoot phrases** that require thoughtful action.
- c. I want Piikani youth to **hear stories from Elders and Knowledge Keepers** that relate to that value.
- d. I want Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers to **‘stay in the language’** throughout the audio/video recording.
- e. I will use values, Blackfoot phrases, and stories to create an audio-recording which will be used in a podcast.
- f. Podcasts will be available on the internet for all Blackfoot people to use.

(See Appendix B for the podcasts.)

2. Value: Aispommotsii’yop – To be helpful (Sample Lesson Plan)

- a. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) nisskaan – I’m going to help my friend.
- b. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) niksista – I’m going to help my mother.

- c. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) ninna – I’m going to help my father.
 - d. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) naahs – I’m going to help my grandmother or grandfather.
 - e. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma pookaak – I’m going to help this child.
 - f. Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma Omahkitapii – I’m going to help this Elder.
3. Sample Storytelling – What story can youth listen to that supports Aispommotsii’yop? Siksikaitsitapii/Kainai Elder and Knowledge Keeper, George First Rider provided example of Aispommotsii’yop²⁴
4. Final Product – A podcast to support Piikani language revitalization, each Elder and Knowledge Keeper was asked for 2 things:
- a. Create 10 phrases using your value of choice.
 - b. Tell a story based on your value. This story will be audio recorded. The recording can be any length from 10 – 30 minutes.
 - c. The phrases and story will be combined to create a podcast.
 - d. This podcast will be placed on the internet for all to access.
5. Provided two podcast examples focused on Indigenous language revitalization:
- a. Huff, F. (Host). (2023, February 9). Voices from the Land: Indigenous Peoples talk language revitalization – Felicia Huff [Audio podcast episode]. In *Voices from the Land: Indigenous Peoples Talk Language Revitalization*. PodBean.
<https://voicesfromtheland.podbean.com/e/voices-from-the-land-indigenous-peoples-talk-language-revitalization-felicia-huff/>
 - b. Duocher, S. (Host). (2022, April). The Cree Language Challenge w/ Skye Durocher [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Comeback Podcast*.

²⁴ Siksikaitsitapii/Kainai Elder and Knowledge Keeper, George First Rider provides example of Aispommotsii’yop in his story *Hard Buffalo Stone* (First Rider, 2010, November 30. *Hard Buffalo Stone*. Blackfoot Digital Library Digitized Collections. <https://www.blackfootdigitallibrary.com/digital/collection/bdl/id/1360/rec/23>)

https://open.spotify.com/episode/20durVAVIDc91jY2wIL3Dn?si=iY1eL5AFS_-BOFwcBBjwUQ

6. Elder and Knowledge Keeper Questions to be discussed throughout the research:
 - a. What values are beneficial for Piikani youth?
 - b. How do Elders and Knowledge Keepers express values-based knowledge?
 - c. How do Elders and Knowledge Keepers use storytelling?
 - d. How does values-based storytelling benefit youth well-being?

At the end of this group engagement, each participant was asked if they were willing to continue with the research. This was to confirm their consent in participation and to notify them that the recordings of the ensuing discussion would start. Five of the six Elders and Knowledge Keepers confirmed their participation in the research with one Elder taking more time to put thoughtful consideration to the request.

The following discussion was captured using both audio and visual recording equipment²⁵. The Elders and Knowledge Keepers were asked to ‘stay in the language’ as much as possible. At this point, Elders and Knowledge Keepers were asked to formally introduce themselves and to respond to the PowerPoint slides. The final slide with Elder and Knowledge Keeper questions remained visible on the projector screen until the end of the engagement session. In this same session, participants were notified of the next phase of research.

Determining Values

The value of Aispommotsii’yop (to be helpful; to help) was selected as an example (during the mentioned PowerPoint presentation) because of its frequent use at home, school, and

²⁵ Audio recording and editing tools used were (1) Zoom H2N Audio Recorder; (2) Audacity and (3) Podcast recording editing software was Adobe Audition. Video recording tools used were (1) Canon Camera EOS Rebel TSI and (2) Zoom H2N.

in community. The next step in the research was to have the Elders and Knowledge Keepers decide on a value they wanted to share; secondly, to practise the ten (or more) Niitsi'powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot language) language phrases using this value; and, thirdly, to choose a complementary story (either of personal experience or Siksikaitsitapii ancestral knowledge).

After searching Piikani websites and unable to find a complementary Siksikaitsitapii story to accompany the value, I chose to search the University of Lethbridge Blackfoot Digital Library. I listened to approximately five stories before finding the story entitled *Hard Buffalo Stone* by George First Rider which tells of a Blackfoot encampment and how they helped one another find buffalo. Two sample podcasts, not related to Siksikaitsitapii language learning were provided to the participants as examples of how other Indigenous language learning (nêhiyawêwin Cree and Anishinabek/Ojibwe) is shared.

Doing this research made one thing clear – there is almost no Siksikaitsipowahsin language learning specific to Piikani on the internet. The two existing, accessible internet sites are *Piikani Paitapiiyssin Language App* developed by Piikani Child and Family Services and *Blackfoot Dictionary/Language Atlas* developed by the University of Lethbridge. Accessing archival material was not within the scope of this research project. The reaction from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers to a podcast that could be accessed nationally seemed quite exciting for the two groups.

This one Elder who did not initially agree (requesting more time to consider) was approached by telephone a second time (five weeks later), with the hope that they would consider participating and to ask if there was anything that the researcher could do to accommodate their needs or address their indecision. The second time the Elder still did not confirm their participation, but they did ask for assistance to find a Niitsitapi value that they were

comfortable with. After this lengthy telephone conversation where the Elder told many stories and explored what the value could be found in the story, I did attempt to find a value to support the story and communicated it to the Elder (was later agreed upon by text).

For the recording sessions, Piikani First Nation venues were sought out for ability to host Elders and Knowledge Keepers and, more importantly, whether the space allowed for good sound quality. Two on-reserve entities with suitable spaces were identified but when asked neither could accommodate this request. Thus, the recording sessions were accommodated by the University of Lethbridge at an off-campus site. This site was made available upon request and was approved due to an established relationships with University of Lethbridge staff when working on previous Indigenous language revitalization collaborations. This site is recognized for its central location in a neighbouring city (Lethbridge, AB), its accessibility for Elders and Knowledge Keepers (short distance walking, parking, elevator accessibility, kitchen, lounge chairs, tables, and washrooms), and sound quality for audio and visual recordings.

Making Recordings

When Elders and Knowledge Keepers were informed of date, time, and venue, they were given the choice to record with another Elder or Knowledge Keeper (two people per recording session) or if they preferred to record alone. Four of the participants chose to be recorded with a partner (allowing for Niitsi'powahsin conversation prior, during, and post interview). One Elder chose to be interviewed individually. (While the partners were able to clarify lessons and stories, this Elder required little reassurance that they were doing a great job and on the right path.)

Although the Elders and Knowledge Keepers had previously been recorded for Niitsi'powahsin language work, they did ask for clarification on how their recordings would change into and be used as a podcast. Clarification was requested numerous times, and the researcher

reassured/encouraged the participants that they were doing well with the recordings. Their reticence to record was allayed when told of the ability of recording and editing devices to ‘clean up’ recordings for end/final use. Once their concerns were alleviated and preferences accommodated, the venue bookings were made accordingly allowing for 1.5-2 hours per participant.

Upon arrival at the venue, and as per Niitsitapi custom, Elders and Knowledge Keepers were made comfortable with food and drink. One Elder was offered tobacco and asked to bless the activity (values shared, stories told, and lessons to be learned). Elders and Knowledge Keepers were presented with the four sections of the interview and recording: 1) formal introduction, 2) lesson phrases, 3) Niitsi’powahsin story, and 4) story (translated using English). The participants were provided with flexibility to record in any order they preferred. The participants were encouraged to indicate when a recording pause was needed (to repeat, to restart, to practise, or for health break).

After finishing these four sections of the interview and recording process, Elders and Knowledge Keepers were interviewed by the researcher in a semi-formal conversational style for podcast formatting (i.e., some questions were predetermined by interviewer; some interviewer responses were based on the interviewees discussion). Each interview was reviewed by the interviewer and research assistant where editing of pauses, stops, silences, or correction of language terms was made. Each of the interviews were submitted to the research assistant who organized for podcast structure (introduction, storytelling, language lesson, and discussion). The research assistant also added sound clips throughout the audio-recording (i.e., drum music). The finished product was a podcast ready for sharing. In addition, portions of each podcast were translated to English to be used in the dissertation. As per Niitsitapi protocol, each Elder or Knowledge Keeper was given an honorarium for their participation.

A final note was that one Elder did not complete his recording in the allotted time; the Elder required more time to refine his thoughts of the value he wished to communicate. Of all activities, this created a deep sadness in me knowing that an Elder and Knowledge Keeper was making their best effort to try to have me understand the value, yet I could not fulfill that. Unfortunately, because of sudden illness, a fourth recording session with the same Elder could not be scheduled to complete his Siksikaitsitapii value and accompanying story.

Technical Support

Each Elder or Knowledge Keeper was audio and video-recorded; however, for the purpose of this research, only the audio-recording was edited for public use. The technical aspects of recording both audio and visual was essential in podcast development. The technical audio and recording skills of the Research Assistant, along with the experience of working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, was invaluable to completing the recordings. The ability to record and edit the interviews led to a clean and polished version of the interviews eliminating/removing sound interference and the frequent starts, stops, pauses, and reiterations by each Elder and Knowledge Keeper. Having a third-party technical research assistant allowed me to listen to the audio recordings at leisure. In doing so, the repetitious nature of listening to recordings allowed me time to develop the tempo of the final product. It also allowed me to recognize specific moments which addresses Niitsitapi values, how they pertain to youth, and their relation to Niitsitapia'pii. The post interview editing was done in collaboration with the Research Assistant over several in-person and on-line sessions.

The engagement and resulting interview sessions were of utmost important in this research. Each Elder and Knowledge Keeper gave of themselves their time, knowledge, and personal knowledge of Piikani working towards sharing the importance of Niitsitapi values leading to Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot ways of knowing and being).

Conclusion

Each Niitsitapi Elder and Knowledge Keeper was selected for the knowledge and commitment to Niitsi'powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot language) language revitalization work they do within our Piikani community. They are extremely committed to ensuring that our Niitsi'powahsin language is continually at the forefront of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Relationship between myself and the participants was essential for successful transfer of knowledge. Acknowledgement by relatives both living and 'in spirit' was welcomed as I moved through the steps of this research.

I had a dream last night. It was of my great-auntie Taakinaam (Elsie Crow Shoe). She was a younger sister to my grandfather whose caring nature flowed throughout our very large clan. I met her at an event where many other Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers were gathered. As I entered the room, the Elders and Knowledge Keepers welcomed me with greetings and hugs acknowledging me joining them as a new Elder. I was surprised yet so honoured to be joining them. The Elder activity was to create a scrapbook using photographs of family. I told Taakinaam that I had pictures of her family – her late husband Sinopao'tokaan (Fox Head /John Yellow Horn seated, with late daughter Gladys standing to his side her hand affectionately placed on his shoulder). Another picture showed her late son Walter gathered with a group of young men showing his great smile center row. The last picture was of her late son Sonny, a formal picture standing in his regalia looking strong and steadfast. When I shared these pictures with Taakinaam, she gently outlined each person's face with her finger smiling the whole time. She gave me a hug and expressed how grateful she was in seeing her family. Her

actions and this dream told me that my ancestors are here to support me. I acknowledged my ancestors the next morning when I smudged, asking for strength, safety, and productivity as I moved forward with my language work.

The second dream I had occurred a few days later. My dream involved Miikskimmiisookaasim – the late Elder, Knowledge Keeper, and Ceremonialist Allan Pard – who was known to share cultural values through storytelling. Prompted by someone’s thought or question, he was known to be observant, thoughtful, and give lessons without formal request. Every moment was a teachable moment in his eyes. Today he entered my dream so very glad to meet me and my family. In talking with us, he was interrupted by the excited voices of a weather event happening outdoors – a whirlwind or tornado perhaps? In walking with him, he repeatedly told us to pay attention to the weather that it would help us to understand what was happening in our world. This dream meant a number of things: it is related to the upcoming Ookaan (Sundance ceremony) that would be occurring this summer, to the weather as it relates to climate change, and being told to pay attention to what is around us at all times. The last one was significant as it was the value chosen by an Elder during interviews. My dream interactions with Miikskimmiisookaasim are welcomed as he always offers a meaningful lesson for life.

As stated, Niitsitapiiksi (the First People) have a traditional territory and, within this territory, have developed their ways of knowing, of relating to their world, and connection to spirit by means of language. Their journey through the seasons was met with anticipation as each season brought with it the ceremonies that were meant to renew and revitalize. We are on a journey to

revitalize our language, culture, and ceremonial practices amid historical colonization, government assimilation, systemic oppression, and current opioid crises in our communities (Crowshoe, 2021; Kai & Lujan Bevacqua, 2020; LoBianco, 2018). Piikani Omahkitapiiksi (Elders) share their journeys with us through Niitsi'powahsin, storytelling, and the values imbedded within.

Ikaitapiitsiniksin (Telling Old Stories)

Niitsitapi (the First People) are gifted storytellers. Our stories are laden with information which the listener is asked to derive as much or little as needed at the time. As the listener, we are required to listen with intent and purpose showing responsibility and care for the words imparted to us. This responsibility is to honour the storyteller, their story, and allowing for time and space for understanding to occur. Wilson (2008) shares the reasons time and space are important to Indigenous people.

The space and therefore the relationship between people or between people and their environment is seen as sacred a key concept within many Indigenous peoples' spirituality. By reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share. And this bringing things together so that they share the same space is what ceremony is about. This is why research itself is a sacred ceremony within an Indigenous research paradigm, as it is all about building relationships and bridging this sacred space. (p. 87)

In my younger years, I didn't have the patience to sit and listen often missing crucial elements in the story in my eagerness to move onto something new. Not only did I miss the teachings I also missed the invaluable time spent with family – grandparents, parents, all my relatives. If I could tell my younger self one thing, it would be: Isstsiik! Listen! Iitsi'poyiit! Speak Blackfoot! With the continual forward movement of time and space, the urgent need to revitalize Niitsi'powahsin is at hand. I have learned that each time an Elder or Knowledge Keeper tells their story, I have the responsibility to try to understand which of the many values they deem important enough to share. I learned that listening is an active part of storytelling and I was tested throughout the interviews conducted with Siksikaitapii Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

The Elders responses are *italicized*, acknowledging the Niitsitapi storytelling style highlighted throughout this paper.

Soowatsiitaapitaopii – Sitting Behind Eagle Tail

The first Elder, Ceremonialist, and Knowledge Keeper that shared his story was Soowatsiitaapitaopii (Sitting Behind Eagle Tail – Herman Many Guns). He is the namesake and ancestor of the great Piikani Chief who was at the signing of Treaty No. 7. He is the grandson of Piikani Elder, Knowledge Keeper, and ceremonialist Sissiinaaki (Cecile Grassy Water-Many Guns) whose knowledge of our sacred ways continues within our community today. Soowatsiitaapitaopii is the third of his names; one given in childhood (Otahkaksissipistaan - Otter Staff), one given during youth (Maanikapinna – Bachelor Chief), and his current adult name. These names grounded him in Piikani ancestry and the importance of naming and age customs leading to a strong physical and spiritual identity and sense of belonging. Soowatsiitaapitaopii is a believer of Niitsitapia’pii (ways of knowing and believing), ceremony, and our transferred right system. He believes that to understand our communities, rules and protocols of our Niitsitapi ways need to be learned. He continues by stating that in present day, we need to value and protect Pommakssin (transferred rights). His grandparents were his greatest teachers who acknowledged, encouraged, and taught the value of Pommakssin using Niitsi’powahsin as the means to convey that which is invaluable. Soowatsiitaapitaopii (personal communication, March 8, 2023) states “There must be a commitment to do this work, to share and endorse the work, to make it real, and make it powerful.”

Omai’taksin – Believing

Soowatsiitaapitaopii chose the value of Omai’taksin (Believing) as it relates to our old stories, our ancestors, and the beginning of time. This value was given to humankind by

Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (Creator) to show the laws of life yet to also know it as a gift of life. According to Soowatsiitaapitaopii, Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa made known the rights and wrongs of life and, in doing so, would show Matapiiksi (humans) that believing in values would help you not stray away from Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot ways of knowing and doing). When not believing and taking a different route in life, sometimes a simpler route, Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa would provide teachings and show why choices could be done in the interest of personal good.

Soowatsiitaapitaopii tells a story of a Maká'pssiwa (he who is bad) who was angry and frustrated with the tribe who made fun of his mistakes. Choosing to ignore Niitsitapia'pii and to retaliate against his people, Maká'pssiwa devised a plan to satisfy his negative feelings. His plan was to starve the tribe by hiding the Inii (buffalo) and to keep the food it provided to himself. Each day the deceitful man would transform himself into a white crow and fly west to where the Inii were hidden. One day Maanitapi, a young man who cared for his people and saw them starving, became curious of the Maká'pssiwa and followed him out of the encampment. Through three separate observations, Maanitapi saw Maká'pssiwa turn himself into a white crow flying over hills and rivers eventually landing on the mountainside. Maanitapi followed the white crow the first time staying in his human form. The second and third time, Maanitapi transformed himself into an animal each time; first a beaver then a deer observing the goings on of the white crow. On the third time, when he had transformed himself to a deer laying dead on the mountainside, the white crow came to land on this food source where Maanitapi grabbed the white crow by his legs as he transformed back into a human. Maanitapi took Maká'pssiwa to his tipi lodge, tying the white crow by the center straps overtop the fire

pit. Maanitapi built up the fire, adding sage as he told Maká'pssiwa of the gifts and teachings of Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa. Wanting to know the exact location of the hidden Iinii, Maanitapi continued to fuel the fire with wood and sage eventually choking the white crow into speaking the truth. In resisting the gifts and teachings of Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa, the white crow turned the color of the black smoke and was told that for generations to come, his kind would be recognized as black crows for their trickery and deceitful ways.

The Iinii were released for all the tribe to share. Matapiiksi came to know the value of honesty, to be truthful, and not to be selfish. These are the values that Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa gave us to believe in as it was all created for humankind.

Soowatsiitaapitaopii on Omai'taksin

How does storytelling help our Maanitapiiksi (young persons)?

Storytelling gives young people the proper guidance, a better choice in life, and provides direction as they journey through life. Maanitapiiksi can help themselves and each other, if they listen to what they are taught and put into perspective to better understand Niitsitapia'pii. Truth-telling, honesty, not being deceitful, not using trickery are a result of Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa power.

Does the value of Omai'taksin have an innate spirit?

When Matapiiksi tell a story, everything is learned through our spirit. Our spirit is what helps guide us – that's where our moral values come from. At the onset of our creation, where Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa gave everything spirit, that spirit was in all things – human beings, animals, birds, water, trees – it was given so that it helps connect us and helps us stay focused on our beliefs and values within the parameter of what is bad and what is good. Your spirit is always ahead of you, your spirit is always forewarning you, and if you keep you spirit intact you become whole. You can use your better judgement in the things that you do to move on in life.

In earlier discussions, you stated that language is time and place sensitive or specific. Can you talk about that?

There are so many different levels of our language. The spiritual language is used as a teaching tool to make sure that you are connected to yourself as a human being – that is your spirit. After the spiritual language, there are earthly things where there are many different forms of the language. In the physical form of people, time and place and how its supposed to be [are connected]. It is how people interact, so it connects to the other side of you – your spiritual side and it imbeds in your mind and it gives you better judgement and understanding. There are words that are very specific to how you use the language and how you communicate with groups.

There was a way of talking to society²⁶ members. There was another way to talk to family. Or another way to talk to some other group that you weren't familiar with. When

²⁶ Society – belonging to a group of people who believe in and practice Niitsitapi ways whether it be spiritual, ceremonial, or cultural (ie. warrior).

the old people talked to us, passing [stories] on from generation to generation, they made us feel a part of [belonging]. They would specifically call on you to be part of something. Through the language you are being taught, you are being referred to, often by gesture that made you be a part of something. That's why our Blackfoot names are very important. A child's Blackfoot name was referred to make the child feel part of the family or part of a group or with friends. Hoka! Niiskaani Pooksapoot! Hey my friend, come here! The gesture, the tone of voice made you a specific person with a specific name that connects you to that individual who is calling your name. Kind gestures – kind words. [The words expressed] I'll teach you – these are the steps.

There are many ways of easy communication; bringing yourself to [youth] is connecting to them. How you want someone to learn the language comes together in pieces. All of sudden it's all together and that how language comes together.

Discussion on Omai'taksin

As is the way with most Ikaitapiitsiniksin, there are layers of information bestowed upon the listener to interpret in ways that are meaningful to them. As heard in the story, pretending to be someone you're not has underlying consequences. The negative transformation to become something other than oneself takes effort; there is a hidden self that is observable by others. Transformation is both a positive and negative aspect of this story and the listener is free to ask which is important. The aspect of the story when the young man was being deceitful and hiding the Iinii may ask: Is this representative of our lives today? Does the Iinii disappearing represent our Niitsitapia'pii way of life disappearing? Does it mean that our ancestral connection to Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa is disappearing? Through careful observation, the story's protagonist –

Maanitapi – transforms to help Matapiiksi and in doing so is helping humankind to show truthfulness, honesty, and compassion to others. In the story, when the white crow is turned upside down, is this a metaphor for our young people? Has their world been turned upside down, creating confusion in their lives? According to Soowatsiitaapitaopii, connecting to spirit will support Maanitapiiksi [young people] future. By accepting the values that you are taught, and the spirit imbedded within them is where it all starts - it is the beginning point of a journey. Young people may miss being taught values, miss being connected to others, miss the stories which give foundation to becoming Niitsitapi (a real person).

Sookskiina – Big Face Chief

The second Elder that shared his story was Sookskiina (Big Face Chief - Wallace Yellow Wings). This name was given to him as a young boy by his namesake and medicine man - Sookskiina. As the medicine man drummed and sang, Sookskiina transferred his name to Wallace following Pommakssinni (transfer of knowledge). The medicine man then adopted Wallace as a grandson.

The younger Sookskiina never adopted his namesake's ability to heal, nor did he use the ceremonial ways that Sookskiina saw him use to help his people. Sookskiina died shortly after giving this name to Wallace. Sookskiina, as he is still known today, is a survivor of the Indian Residential School system. He experienced tension and conflict between Christian teachings and Niitsitapia'pii so had deep-seated inner struggles on the healing ceremonies he saw as a child. Sookskiina tells stories of his life and always being a helper and a worker.

The Indian Residential School experience was traumatic for Sookskiina; he considers it fortunate that his parents decided that life away from the school would be best. His parents moved him to what is known as the Piikani Timber Limits, a distance far enough away from the

intrapersonal²⁷ conflicts that had developed in his spirit. This change of place offered him solace as his parents began teaching him new ways to see his world.

Kitaakspoomm – I will help you

Sookskiina chose the value Kitaakspoomm (I will help you) showing that no matter your upbringing, the interpersonal or intrapersonal conflicts, the abuses and traumas suffered by the hands of others, it is the responsibility of an individual to be helpful to those in need. The first instance of helpfulness was offered by his namesake – Sookskiina – when giving the name to Wallace starting him on a journey of gifted protection through traditional Niitsitapi naming protocols.

Sookskiina also shared stories of his upbringing. He talked about helping Omahkitapiiksi with household chores. This was a value that was given to him as a young person as he helped those who lived around him especially those who lived alone. As is traditional custom, he was offered payment of food (meat and bread).

Sookskiina on Kitaakspoomm

For Sookskiina, being helpful at a young age turned into being a good worker as he got older. Sookskiina admits being impacted by his time at Indian Residential school. It scarred his physical, mental, emotional, but mainly, his spiritual self. He was confused in his beliefs as they crossed between Niitsitapia'pii and Christianity. As he grew to a young man, Sookskiina felt there was no place for him in his community, so he left to go find work and with that came alcohol abuse. Distance, time, and work would eventually provide a landing spot for Sookskiina. It was then he found the value in Kitaakspoomm (to be helpful) as he reached out to do language

²⁷ “Religious and spiritual struggles can take many forms, including ... intrapersonal struggles (doubts about the truth of one's faith)” Julie et al. (2014).

work in the community. Sookskiina shared a personal story about his younger life (italicized below).

When I was young boy, I [had] Niitsitapaitapissinni around me. I knew I could help. I helped an old lady named Piiksi around her house. I helped her. I helped her bring wood and chips to her house. I didn't haul water; I was too young. My mother and father asked me to help. I would bring tobacco to an old lady who liked to smoke. I had to finish what I was doing. I always helped. I was recognized for it. Although I liked to play there were not a lot of toys around. The more I helped, the more I was told to help the old people.

This old lady lived a little way from us. I think she was related to my Dad. I know here by her Blackfoot names. We used to make sure she had wood in the house. I would also see her sitting on the floor. Not much furniture at that time. She'll cook bannock and put syrup on it. Everybody had those big cans of syrup those days – that was our sweets those days. If there was no syrup, she'd dip that bannock in sugar. That was our pay. I didn't expect anything. She would thank us for coming and bringing wood and chips (kindling) to make fire. I pitied that old lady. She was so kind. I don't know what happened after we moved to Timbers. She passed on. These are my memories, my childhood. That's where my work begins.

I went to school at this time. I understood and spoke Blackfoot. I could speak and understand English. I wasn't stuck. If older people wanted something, I could help them. There were two stores. I remember going to the store and an old woman came in. She needed help interpreting. She needed help finding a can of tomatoes and the word she

used was 'ihk'ini'i. Sookskiina knew the word as being a fern with little red berry on it. The old lady repeated it over and over again – adding that it was in a can. Sookskiina and the storekeeper kept trying until they found the can of tomatoes. He learned that new word and never forgot it.

We moved out to the Timber Limits. Adventure. I go work with my Dad. I ride the big wagon “Give me the lines, I want to learn how to drive the team”. I think I made a mistake starting to work at 10 or 11 [years of age]. My friends would come to ask me to play but my mom would tell them I was working. I made a mistake; I started logging when I was just a kid. I learned how to use the horses, how to work them, how to drive them. I tried to help my dad. He said I wouldn't have to stay at Indian Residential School when we moved to the Timber Limits. I was depending on my hard work to bring me out of the school.

I was fortunate to have Sookskiina share a personal story about being helpful. It was my intention to continue this interview as he wanted to convey to the listener more of his work ethic and life in general. However, Sookskiina encountered health issues which put a stop on any upcoming sessions. I, along with the other Elders and Knowledge Keepers, were saddened by this as we looked forward to hearing from him in the future.

Inaaksipistaakii – Little Owl Woman

The third Elder that shared her story was Inaaksipistaakii (Little Owl Woman - JoAnn Yellow Horn). She is the daughter of Piikani's last hereditary chief – Sinopao'tokaan (Fox Head – Chief John Yellow Horn) and Taakinaam (Woman - Elsie Crow Shoe). She is from the

Niitait'skaiksi (Lone Fighter) and Kaamstaaniksi (Buffalo Chip) Clans. It is through her ancestral lineage that JoAnn is firmly rooted in Niitsitapia'pii. Being raised in a home where cultural values and traditional practises were foundational, JoAnn's daily activity was to be seated next to her parents as they spoke Niitsi'powahsin to their children, family, friends, and community. JoAnn was fortunate to spend time with her grandmother, Iikiistaanoopa'ta (All Listening) and the many relatives and visitors who shared endless stories with one another. Although many of these persons have passed, their spirits and voices have been a guiding force in Inaaksipistaakii life journey. Niitsi'powahsin provided her many opportunities to engage with community and landed her as a long-term employee at the Napi's Playground Elementary School as the Blackfoot Language Instructor. Inaaksipistaakii has been instrumental in teaching Niitsi'powahsin to Piikani children and youth.

Aokakio'sit – Be Aware Of

Inaaksipistaakii (Little Owl Woman – JoAnn Yellow Horn) chose the value of Aokakio'sit (Be Aware Of) to support Maanitapi (youth) as they begin their journey into adulthood. Aokakio'sit is a command – a word meant to convey affirmative action. Inaaksipistaakii speaks of our current community contexts where Maanitapi are overloaded with information resulting in exploration and experimentation – both positive and negative. The phrases chosen by Inaaksipistaakii are meant as advice or warning for Maanitapiiksi to follow in everyday circumstances, to encourage them to be watchful, to listen so that they may look after themselves, their families, and their friends.

I was raised in a traditional home. My parents spoke Blackfoot all the time; they practiced our ways. They lived our ways as Blackfoot people. They followed ceremony,

they did a lot of cultural activities. [My father and mother] told us to listen and to watch – to watch so you'll know what's going on, you'll know what's happening, you'll understand. [My father and mother told us] to listen when you're being spoken to or when you're in a group – always listen. When you listen, you'll start to understand what is happening and what is being said. It was a really strong traditional upbringing I had. My parents did go to Indian Residential School; they were one of the people that left who continued their language - kept their language. They hardly spoke English. Blackfoot was always heard in our home – everyday. They were involved in our ceremonial ways and in our traditional ways. They always told us to be aware of everything around you, be aware of yourself, be aware of your family. I chose to talk about Aokakio'sit - being aware - so that our young people may understand it and help them build a better life for themselves. If they really understand what the word Aokakio'sit meant, it goes back to your identity and you can't just teach the language alone away from our ways. We were gifted with this language and the language is what sets out our way of life. I feel young people really understood the meaning of Aokakio'sit – to be aware- it would help them begin to understand themselves and their purpose in life and to help them live a healthy life.

Inaaksipistaakii on Aokakio'sit

Inaaksipistaakii shared a personal story about learning, listening, watching, and being explicitly told by family members to be aware of everything that is around you. She learned to be cautious about things that could cause danger. In this next section, Inaaksipistaakii is asked questions regarding her interview and the chosen values. Her answers are italicized.

How do you feel our ancestors showed Aokakio'sit?

Aokakio'sit - I think they lived it. They lived it by example. It goes back to empathy and compassion for each other, how it was taught to each other, how they practiced it in those days. We didn't have the conveniences that we have today so they had to be aware of their surroundings when they went hunting or picking berries or when they were gathering or even with the weather. This is how they lived it – to be aware.

I was recently around my two grandsons (one a teenager and one aged four) and we were in a new and different environment with many people around. Without knowing the word – Aokakio'sit – I was trying to teach them to be careful and to be watchful around other people. I told the teenager 'Put your phone down, watch what's going on around you, be aware of your environment – the people, the cars, the area we're in. When we're in a group of people, look for me, keep me in your line of vision.'

Do you think with just one act of Aokakio'sit it will last a lifetime?

This value is so important I think it will. I always remember with my siblings, my mother would tell us this word and that is this word is so important to me as a value. She would always say Aokakio'sit – be aware – of each other, always know where each other are at, phone each other, always ask where are you going? When are you going to be back? Those are the things when I think back from that time when I was little till now. That's why I always associate Aokakio'sit with family – to be aware of your siblings, know where they're at, know what's happening in their lives. If you weren't aware of them how would you know they're going through something. To me, that's a term Aokakio'sit to know what you're doing, to know what everybody's doing at all times. Once you

understand what they're going through you can help them. You can help them whether they're sick, need medical attention, having a hard time in a relationship, provide support or resources, to provide help in some way. That's why this value is important to me; it's been around me and my siblings as teachings from our parents.

I believe that Aokakio'sit is imbedded within all other values: empathy, to have pity, compassion, to protect, to be helpful, to be caring. Those other important values seem to be imbedded within Aokakio'sit. It is very important for our young people to hear.

Do you feel that Sooksipaatapiisin (a good life) or Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot ways of knowing and understanding) is available for everyone for all Matapiiksi?

Yes. I think so because we have a lost generation right now and we all know about the drugs that are around. I think there's a gap and within that gap is where the lost people are. I think if they knew who they are, knew their language, understood Niitsitapi Paattapi'powahsin (our Blackfoot language and way of life) they would become whole again. Right now they're not. There's something missing. I think it's attainable when we understand that our language was gifted to us, that the language has a lot imbedded within it, and knowing that we can't separate them [language and ways of knowing]. Once you start to understand, it will help you become a whole person....so yes, I think it's attainable.

Discussion on Aokakio'sit

Within minutes of our initial engagement session, Inaaksipistaakii chose the value of Aokakio'sit. She was steadfast in her belief that this value, as taught by her parents, allowed strong kinship relations to develop with siblings and extended family members tending to one

another. I can imagine her parents questioning her in a stern way; I not knowing this was the loving, caring, concerned hearts of a mother and father who wanted their daughter to make good decisions based on what she knew and saw in her environment. In today's world of electronic communication, short exchanges of abbreviated words, Matapiiksi may not hear or understand the true intent of the questions being directed to them: Where are you going? Who are you going with? What are doing? What time will you be home? Aokakio'sit - to hear and speak the word is actionable. The speaker expresses *concern* when requiring the listener to see and think about the people, spaces, and time they are committing to. The speaker is also expressing love of the person when saying Aokakio'sit; caring enough to ask the questions and accepting answers from the listener.

Misamiinisskim – Long Time Buffalo Stone

The fourth Piikani Elder and Knowledge Keeper that shared her story was Misamiinisskim (Long Time Buffalo Stone – Shirlee Crow Shoe). Shirlee's Naahs (grandmother) Ikiisstsanopataa asked another Kipataaki (Old Lady) Ninaamsoy'yisataaki (Sacred Holy Cutting Woman – Melanie Pard). Ninaamsoy'yisataaki told of her involvement with Ookaan (Sundance) and other bundles of which each contained an Iiniskimm (buffalo stone). This old lady Nihskimmkaasin (gave a name to) said that the name long time buffalo stone would be a good name, smudged, and prayed for Misamiinisskim to live to be an old lady.

Niitsi'powahsin – Speaking and Understanding Blackfoot

Misamiinisskim chose the value of Niitsi'powahsin as the means and the methods for youth to begin knowing our Piikani language, culture, and way of life. In 1984, a group of Piikani cultural leaders, educators, and family members asked Misamiinisskim to teach

Niitsi'powahsin as part of Piikani cultural revival. Knowing what to teach and how to teach was a challenge in teaching Blackfoot language. Simplified greetings (Hello. How are you? What is your name?) were lessons within a school system. Resources were sought after including appropriate teaching pedagogies. Encouraged by Piikani community, she along with her colleagues, focused on language work as a means of reviving cultural identity in school aged children and youth. In this next section, Misamiinisskim shared a personal story about her language journey, the advocates and writers she met along the way, and a great example of how children learning language can be used in adulthood. Her answers are italicized.

I'm going to share a story about my teaching career as a Blackfoot language teacher. I started in 1984. I was approached by the late Allan Pard who was the Director of the Old Man River Cultural Center. He asked if I would teach Blackfoot language because there was an interest. There was a part of his programming included cultural revival and included the Blackfoot language. The classes were in the evening in at the cultural center. It moved to many places by ended near the school in a portable. I didn't know what to teach or how to teach. I have a journey of the first people that enlisted and wanted to learn the Blackfoot language. I taught them the basic Blackfoot language. While I was there, we came across language lessons developed by the Blackfeet Community College. Developed by Ed Little Plume. He wrote out these Blackfoot lessons of a greeting which were very basic (Hello. How are you? What is your name?). I'm not really sure where he devised this system. I have a feeling it was part of a school curriculum to help him – an aid to help him write Blackfoot lessons.

Because we were so eager to teach the Blackfoot language, we wanted to know what other resources were there to help us. It had numbers and colors. Today I look at it and that is not the way we were taught Blackfoot language at home. The intent was to teach Blackfoot language but the way it was taught by copying a basic conversation [was] simplified. It was a long journey.

Misamiinisskim on Niitsi'powahsin

In 1984, pedagogy surrounding Blackfoot (as per curricular name) was to teach Blackfoot in both an oral (iitsi'poyi - speaking) and written (sinaaksinni - writing) way. Misamiinisskim, as a fluent and proficient speaker, was asked to work for the Piikani people in language learning. Sorting through the expectation of western pedagogies and curriculum development was difficult and long. As referenced by Misamiinisskim, the way to teach Niitsi'powahsin was often at odds with how language was taught and spoken in her home. Influenced by Sinopao'tokaan (Fox Head), Misamiinisskim accepted the challenge to work on Niitsi'powahsin. Forty years later, Misamiinisskim shares this about Niitsi'powahsin: ***Niitsi'powahsin is a value***. Just as love, humility, empathy are values independent of each other; Niitsi'powahsin is a value unto itself. However, imbedded within Niitsi'powahsin (speaking Blackfoot language) is strength, guidance, relationship, and integrity along with love, humility, and empathy (to name a few). It can be a measure of one's own cultural identity (or 'cultural revival' as said by Misamiinisskim).

Nitaaksikiowai'piiye – Lone Charger

The fifth Piikani Elder and Knowledge Keeper that shared his story was Nitaaksikiowai'piiye (Lone Charger - Eric Crow Shoe). He experienced many trials on his way to helping people with their alcohol addiction, loneliness, hurting, and grieving.

Nitaaksikiowai'pii'yi's paternal uncle - Apoohsyoyis (Weasel Tail - Joe Crow Shoe; commonly referred to as the Old Man) was influential throughout his lifetime, inspiring him to follow a journey of sobriety. Nitaaksikiowai'pii'yi's work is witnessed by his ancestors and he is proud to come from a strong family that continued to survive. Nitaaksikiowai'pii'yi retired from his work in addiction prevention then moved to work within the school systems to continue teaching culture and language helping Piikani children to learn Niitsi'powahsin and our way of life.

Kaamotsii'piis (To Survive)

Nitaaksikiowai'pii'yi chose the value of Kaamotsii'piis (To Survive). He chose to bundle several values together showing Matapiiksi (humankind) different ways to develop their identity. These values included: relationship, prayer, faith, respect, to make effort, identity, honor, acknowledgement, humility, gratefulness, responsibility, and listening. Nitaaksikiowai'pii'yi is a firm believer that Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa offers our youth a path how to be Niitsitapi (First People). This is an excerpt from his story.

I mentioned a very special person in my life, in my upbringing – Apoohsyoyis (Weasel Tail - Joe Crow Shoe). Apoohsyoyis saw my life way down the road, how my life was going to be which I did not see because I was so [bound] up in all the negative things that were happening to me. He saw a value, a richness in me. The Old Man conditioned me, transferred a lot of values to me, a lot of rituals of our culture and ceremonies. What is Man said. Today is when you start using them.

One of the things the Old Man talked to me about was faith and belief. Aatsimoyihkaan – prayer and belief. Believe in yourself, believe in Creator, the blessings and in the

prayers. That is the thing that's going to open the doors for you to have good things in your life. The other thing he talked to me about was love. Love one another. Love yourself.

He also talked about respect. Respect all the Elders that are in ceremonies, all the Elders that are teaching you. This way you are going to start finding ways of respecting your identity and your ways. Respect those teachings.

Iiyikaakimat – try hard; don't give up. Everyday [think to yourself] try hard; don't give up. Iyistiik! Listen. If you listen that I show you are going to find knowledge and get to know knowledge. You will get to know wisdom.

That is what the Old Man talked to me about. These are the values that the Old Man left me. There was a lot. The one [value] that stood out to me when I sobered up and opened up that bundle [given to me by Apoohsoyis] was my identity as Niitsitapi. All these things the Old Man transferred were values. As a young guy, I was fifteen years old then, I didn't put them into action until I was thirty-five years old. I started a different chapter in my life. Those values are the ones that help me start healing. They helped me understand the life that was chosen for me by Creator. Today, I honor that Old Man and all the Elders that are part of my life. I respect them and give thanks to them. The Old Man said "Ainiiyi'tsi'p. Be grateful, be thankful! You've got these gifts!" What I see today is that we have gift that we don't recognize.

I think a smile, a hello 'Oki!', asking a person how are you doing – these are gifts. The Old Man said "Ainiiyi'maa Matapiiksi – appreciate people. Give thanks to people that

acknowledge you". I think young people need to get to know how to start acknowledging Niitsitapi – Siksikaitsitapii. I have to acknowledge my forefathers that were so special, those that had transferred rights, I truly respect them.

One of the things we should be daily is being humble; be humble to Creator's creations. The trees, the people, the water, the stars, food, moon, sun, morning star. Tsaahkomm Kipataaki - acknowledge mother earth she feeds us, clothes us every day. Have gratitude for the life you are in today. This is your journey. You have to know how to conduct yourself and use these tools; this responsibility is my connection to this day. If I use prayers, it's going to make my day happen. These things are given to you and you have the responsibility to have a good journey.

Nitaaksikiowai'piiyi on Kaamotsii'piis

Nitaaksikiowai'piiyi shared a personal story about kinship to Apoohsoyis (Old Man), encouragement by Elders, and a journey towards Niitsitapiissinni (to follow the way of the First People). He stated that when you are in relationship you are mindful of the other person; relationships are reciprocal (an act of giving and receiving). As a Piikani Elder and Knowledge Keeper, Nitaaksikiowai'piiyi adds by looking at the past it informs one's future; to share values-based knowledge with youth may positively impact their lives. In this next section, Nitaaksikiowai'piiyi is asked more questions regarding knowledge sharing, values-based learning, and its impact on our youth.

How do you share knowledge with a young person and how do you know that they have received it?

It's just like a ceremony. When we're teaching our children [young people].

Aatoowaapsi. The thing about this is what I see for myself is that you are practically transferring our language to them [children/youth people.] When we transfer something to somebody it is all the protocols that we follow to get to the point where our Elders recognizes Amo Soaysikakikmaat Kaahsksi Apommowaa – That child/youth is trying hard; I am going to transfer them something. This Spring I will be transferred the sweat lodge (after receiving other sacred ceremonial items and practises). I'm on that trail.

Those Elders saw and felt what my life was about now. Iikaa'taminaas.

Kitaasskaonnoitaapii. It's the strongest – your faith and belief with you - and you share it with people. You don't show it; you share it through your prayers. Atsimoyhkaan. All the values that we share. Every day Old People use Iiyiikaatimaak – Try hard! All people will wake up and know to try hard. Just like the Old Man gave me these things.

Sometimes as young people we bury it but we always come back to it. So when the Old Man gives me things and transfers me Nitisipissinni Niipaatapyssin so now all the things I open them back up and I start believing and share it with all the people. That's something I wanted to share with everyone.

Do you feel Niitsitapia'pii is attainable for all Matapiiksi?

If it was brought to us in a humble, caring, loving way that is how we are going to bring it to our soul our spirit. If we plant a seed, that is how we are going to start using it. We have Elders to help us maintain it and to help it grow. It's all about growing.

How do you think Omahkitapiiksi (Elders), Kaaahsinnooniksi (Grandparents) would see the hope we can give our young people?

Our Elders see our young children today. Through their [Elders'] beliefs, faith, smudge, and prayers, that they [young people] will understand and get to know that things are going to change. Our Elders can't predict whether it will work or not. [They] have faith and belief that there will be success. That's where our children will prosper. Our Elders use a lot of patience to move forward and we have to have that patience towards our young people.

Do you think the stories we tell our young people are important?

Our stories from the Elders are very powerful. There is a lot of meaning. The way they bring that story out – the young people can actually 'feel' the story. So when they go through that they are absorbing it - being real about it. Their experiences were never written. It's all oral. So when our Elders' speak and tell us stories and teaching, it come from the heart. That's what makes it so powerful.

It is very important for our young people to hear personal stories about overcoming hardship.

Understanding that someone in your life saw potential in you, saw that your journey could result in this – good things would happen to you. You are now in a good place with family and children. You can relate to experiences that our young people are having now.

Can I just leave you with something? Look at today. We cannot blame them [our young people] for what they are going through. There are different people [around them] that relates to why they are like that. I shared a little story about myself. We cannot blame our

children for their struggles about their culture, their identity. We just have to be grateful that we are here; that we know and understand how we got here. That's what will share with our young people.

Discussion on Values-Based Niitsi'powahsin

Niitsitapi attach great importance to the relational knowledge shared with them by their Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Found within these interviews is reference to the word *bundles*. Bundles are considered a sacred means of connection between Niitsitapi and Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (Creator Sun). In traditional contexts, bundles given by Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (holding gifts of songs, stories, protocol, and rituals) were bestowed to Niitsitapi through Pommakssin. These transferred rights, specific protocols, and instructional methods are meant to be followed for Sooksipaatapiisin (a good life) to occur. In current context, the meaning could be interpreted literally as bundle of sacred items or figuratively as knowledge items to be kept together and shared as needed. The Elder and Knowledge Keeper interviews are the latter and allow values-based Niitsi'powahsin to be bundled together as language lesson, story, and interpretation for Maanitapi (youth).

Maanitapi (Youth) Engagement

As a teacher of our young people, I had decided early in my research that youth would be at the heart of my research. There appeared to be an absence of interest emphasizing the needs of Maanitapi (youth) and I felt they were often overlooked in discussions on Indigenous language revitalization. Maanitapi participation in this research was essential as they are the intended audience for values-based, language-responsive learning and the intended podcast audience. The first few sections of this segment of my dissertation addresses additional (second) language learning as it relates to youth specifically. Following this is a discussion about podcasts as a storytelling tool and finally the outcomes of the youth podcast listening activity.

Second Language Acquisition

My introduction to literature on second language acquisition started with Lightbown and Spada's (2013) *How Language is Learned*. This book provides the reader a comprehensive overview of theories and research into second language acquisition and provides the reader with flexibility to incorporate or combine theories and skills for application in various settings. In such a linguistic environment "language acquisition is possible because of children's general cognitive capacities and the base number of opportunities they have to make connections between the language they heard and what they experience in their environment" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 28). Lightbown and Spada (2013) provide the reader with developmental stages of second language acquisition and language learning within different domains (family/home to schools to community settings).

Recent literature may take formative scholarly research and adapt it for present day models. One experiment studied children acquiring language by recording natural language processes, irrespective of information or instruction on how children learn sounds, words,

sentences, and meaning (O'Grady, 2005). Second language acquisition literature attracts researchers to classrooms and communities wanting to understand how language is learned.

Exploration of How Youth Acquire Second Languages

Researching the literature on youth language acquisition is not easy as there appears to be a gap in research between child and adult second language acquisition. Youth language acquisition research may be given minimal time and space within children's developmental research (Ochs Keenan, 2016; Philp et al., 2008). Research may offer models and methods but does not fully explain or provide in-depth research on the process of youth acquiring language. Offering foundational information on first/second language acquisition does not commonly focus on youth, but Lightbown & Spada (2013) get the reader closest to information on youth second language acquisition.

Language researchers attest that children acquire a first language through developmental sequences and that extraordinary language learning occurs from infancy to pre-school and throughout school years. "Learning to read gives a major boost to metalinguistic²⁸ awareness. Seeing words represented by letters and other symbols on a page leads children to a new understanding that language has a form as well as a meaning" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 13). According to these researchers, impressive language growth occurs during school years (ages 5-12 years) due to growth in reading skills but there is not similar research focused on older students ages 13-19. Further observations of children's second language acquisition saw two types of contexts: (1) natural acquisition where children are immersed in language and (2) structure-based acquisition where language learning is based in vocabulary and grammatical rules with considerable emphasis on reading and writing.

²⁸ Metalinguistic – the ability to treat language as an object (i.e. defining a word, knowing what sounds make up that word)

Second language acquisition models, methods, and learning conditions elaborate on children's language learning. They primarily focus on early school years, studying language learning in the classroom including: grammar translation approach; language exposure through listening/reading; task based/content-based language instruction focused on conversation; teaching linguistic structures according to developmental ability; and natural language learning with adequate exposure (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Second language acquisition models and methods are grounded in learning English (or English as a second language), are literature based, and require extensive reading ability, a skill that may have shortcomings when learning in an Indigenous oral tradition.

Generally, when addressing characteristics of second language acquisition in older children, discussions consider personality, motivation, identity, learner beliefs/attitudes, learning aptitude, learning style, and age. The following discussion on age caught my attention as I seek information on youth second language acquisition:

[The] Critical Period Hypothesis is that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning.... older learners may depend on more general learning abilities – the same ones they might use to acquire other kinds of skills or information. It is argued that these general learning abilities are not as effective for language learning as more specific, innate capacities that are available to the young child. It is most often claimed that the critical period ends somewhere around puberty, but some researchers suggest it could be even earlier. (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, pp. 92-93)

As students get older, second language acquisition may require additional and prolonged time requirement, introduction to advanced and complex language usage, or special instructional

methods in response to lack of motivation by the learner (possibly due to inability to achieve levels of competence or fluency). During their language learning journey, youth as second language learners may encounter minimal exposure to the new language, hear only simple vocabulary and grammar, and may find it discouraging when interacting within their own social context (peers, teachers, family). To increase exposure, vocabulary, and motivation in youth seeking to learning a second language, changing the models, methods, and learning conditions may be necessary.

Second Language Acquisition Models and Methods

Just as Niitsitapi position themselves within their traditional Niitsitapi Kitawahsinnooni (territory), so do Indigenous peoples throughout the world. As I look in each of the four directions, I see Indigenous people developing their own models for second language acquisition and looking to schools as the primary spaces to fulfill language learning and teaching goals. An Alaskan model brings Elders and students together through storytelling and comprehensible input²⁹ (Marlow et al., 2013, p. 18). It uses the Yu'pik language to repeatedly tell a story, with each iteration providing more context (i.e., props). In a modern setting, the teachers use customary storytelling to make the activity more comprehensible for the student.

A second Alaskan model describes place-based education, where a camp experience reintegrates Alaskan native people's knowledge systems into the school curriculum. This camp experience is part of a three-week course, which is meant to “restore a traditional sense of place while broadening and deepening the educational experience for all students” (Barnhardt, 2014, p. 1). One goal of this program aspires to provide an immersive experience in which new speakers find their voice to communicate in the language. The environmental setting is thought

²⁹ Comprehensible input – refers to a language that a learner can understand; comprehensible in part because of tone, gestures, context, prior knowledge and/or experience.

to inspire the students to gain confidence in learning to speak and retain the words and phrases they hear.

In the Innuuqatigii/Inuit model of language revitalization, developing an educational connection between present and past “helped reinforce the Inuit identity of children and future generations” (Innuuqatigii, Inuit Curriculum, 1996, p. 3). At the forefront of Innuuqatigii language learning is repetition, practise, and progression with added instruction of facial and body expressions along with tone of voice.

The Australian Victorian School of Languages has a model for heritage language³⁰ education which: describes the advantages and disadvantages of ‘high-stakes’ language learning, where instruction is formal and assessed for advancement to post-secondary institutions, and offers instruction in 41 languages (Willoughby, 2018). Participants in heritage language learning may have an intrinsic motive as they want to learn a heritage language to reinforce a cultural heritage. Other heritage language projects are also found, such as that in the UK school system that broadens the scope of language learning to include “a more differentiated and organic way and for wider ecological and ideological factors to be taken into account” (Anderson, 2017, p. 251). This model references a flexible language learning environment that is inclusive, multi-cultural, cross-curricular, and content/task based. The creation of content and language integrated curriculum, task-based language teaching, and project-based learning resulted in multi-dimensional and interwoven language learning activities with a balanced approach to teaching grammar while learning language (Anderson, 2017; Reinhardt, 2017).

Located on the traditional Indigenous lands and waters of western Canada, there are several language revitalization models that are in a building stage. As a model to revitalize Kwak’wala and Haida Gwaii language, Cranmer et al. (2019) developed a niche approach to

³⁰ Heritage language – refers to a minority language usually learned at home or community.

language learning and creating the conditions to produce bilingual youth. Music, lyrics and the beat of Indigenous hip-hop, gives substance to a contemporary form of language use. This allows young people to make sense of their ancestral language in their own way. They also gain a new appreciation for the colonial history, including Indian Residential schools, that resulted in loss of language.

Indigenous language communities, such as Ojibwe (Hermes, et al., 2021) and SENĆOTEN (Jim, 2016; Sampson, 2014; Swallow & Bay, 2008; Underwood, 2017), also strive to set up an immersive experience. They employ multi-modal language learning, coupled with instruction on traditional lands, places, and spaces, and incorporate storytelling as means of creating rich contexts for student learning. One lesson began with forest walks where bilingual students from immersion schools participate in 20-minute walks with Elders. There is no focus on topics, instead the everyday storying emphasizes the Ojibwe language as a kind of “intergenerational sense-making” (Hermes, et al., 2021, p. 2). Auto-ethnography was used to capture their *SENĆOTEN* adult second language acquisition journeys. They observed its relevance to children/youth second language acquisition that is rooted in the cultural values and language learning activities as taught by community members (Jim, 2016; Sampson, 2014; Swallow & Bay, 2008; Underwood, 2017).

On the Atlantic coast of Canada, the Foundation for Mi'kmaw Language Curriculum (2015) developed a model where language learning is based on developmental stages that include Poquikinu'tsmasit (Beginning/Novice), Kijka'nenk (Surviving/Basic), and Kisil'nui'sit (Socializing/ Intermediate) ensuring connection between language and culture. “Consciousness and identity are at the heart of Mi'kmaw language.... Promoting the understanding and expressions of Mi'kmaw worldview using the Mi'kmaw language is crucial in students' comprehension of this guiding principle” (Foundation for Mi'kmaw Language Curriculum, 2015,

p. 2). With its mandate to promote curriculum development, The Foundation for Mi'kmaw Language Curriculum references competencies and outcomes for Mi'kmaw second language learning is learned in the school classroom.

For Indigenous communities, these models may be important to persons involved in language revitalization activities. They all recommend community engagement, use of Elders for intergenerational transmission of knowledge, use of fluent speakers, language learning through content/task/place-based activities that are founded on values, beliefs, and attitudes, with goal of creating strong indigenous identities.

From language acquisition research to meaningful Indigenous contexts, a noticeable gap exists within research and models: that of how youth acquire a second language. Difficulties arise in language revitalization efforts when there is little research being completed on how youth acquire a second language. Currently the norm for second language acquisition research is to address second language learners' characteristics (i.e., intelligence, language learning aptitude, learning styles, personality, attitudes, motivation) and not *how* they learn language (Ignace, 2016; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Ochs Keenan, 2016; Philp et al., 2008).

Research is needed to address whether second language acquisition in the younger learner is different from that of older children and adolescents (Philp et al., 2008). The authors state that developmental stages align with divisions of schooling: preschool (2-7 year olds), middle childhood (7-11 year olds), early adolescence (12-14 year olds), and later adolescence (15 years and older). They add that the critical period hypothesis suggests that phonology³¹ be introduced for preschool whereas morphosyntax³² can be deferred until early adolescence. Language interactions must consider adolescent language use at home, with peers, social networks, and

³¹ Phonology – the study of sounds and their symbols

³² Morphosyntax – the study of the structure of words and how they create sentences

school settings. Technology-based resource development benefits instructional outcomes (Galla, 2019).

Conversational competence through repetition between child-child and child-adult interaction is one area that has yet to be fully investigated. In this scenario, children will repeat utterances addressed to them until they understand its meaning, which develops into more spontaneous and complex utterances. Furthermore, repetitive utterances may lead to children latching onto repetition as an “early device for participating in discourse and use this device to perform novel communicative tasks” (Ochs Keenan, 2016, p.30). As with adults, children will also use communication checks to ensure that their repeated utterances are appropriate and understood. The author concludes that children are “underrated as communicators” and that cross-utterance repetition is a means to acquire language.

Students ages 5 to 19 who represent bilingual and multilingual language comprehension use ‘second-order processes’ of responding (writing, speaking, reading) in the dominant language (i.e., English). This is a different ability than students using ‘first-order processes’ to represent (i.e., drawings, collage) or demonstrate language learning (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2018). Testing the efficacy of ‘first-order processes’ requires students to interpret their representation in the non-dominant, Indigenous language. “It offers a medium through which they [students] can negotiate and project competent identities in academic areas.... students can take more risks communicating their learning, communicate across languages, and come to regard their peers as capable...” (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2018, p. 68). Other techniques for language learning rely on “presentation, performance, publication, [and] display” (Anderson, 2017, p. 249). New and innovative ways encourage Indigenous people to re-invest in traditional ways of language learning and acknowledging their cultural values.

As principal writer of the First Nations Language Curriculum Building Guide (2016), Marianne Ignace acknowledges that Indigenous languages-as-subject³³ are often in competition with academic subjects and not given due credit for establishing “cognitive development, literacy, self-esteem and cultural connections” (p. 8). She affirms that the goal of Indigenous language learning is communicative competence: oral proficiency, high-frequency vocabulary (recommending 250 words per year over 8 years of schooling). That might include an authentic context to develop good listening and speaking skills at the very beginning of language learning. Unlike some researchers who find a critical period for language learning exists between early childhood and adolescence, Ignace maintains that older youth and adults can still gain very good fluency, even if they begin learning later in life. Amongst language researchers and instructors, the recommended amount of time required for children, youth, and adults to attain fluency varies (Ignace, 2016, p. 25). Research on First Nations languages suggests that the recommended time to attain fluency “commonly fall[s] within that most difficult category.... requiring 1000-1200 hours annually to achieve fluency” (Ignace, 2016, p. 10). Regrettably, few communities commit the time required to produce fluent speakers in family, in school, or in the larger community. The next question to be considered is what Indigenous communities can do to ensure their languages, cultures, values, and attitudes are kept intact in preparation for the next generations. How should Indigenous schools, as representative of the community, effectively design Indigenous language and culture programs to ensure Indigenous language concepts and pathways to language learning are being met?

Creating a place for Indigenous education “requires more than simply substituting one body of knowledge for another in a conventional subject-based curriculum – it requires substantial rethinking of not only what is taught, but how it is taught, when it is taught, and who

³³ Language-as-subject – usually refers to academic learning of a specific language (i.e. English or French); this would include phonology, morphology, syntax, and grammar.

does the teaching” (Barnhardt, 2014, p. 5). Taking this into account in the development of a new language curriculum and instruction framework for Indigenous schools may be a considerable task, but it is achievable with the support of community, Elders, language speakers, school staff, and vested stakeholders (i.e., universities, governments). Our Aamskaapiiikani (South Peigan/Blackfeet) colleague and language activist, Darrell Robes Kipp, bluntly remarked, “There is no handbook on how to save your tribal language, so you figure it out” (Peigan Institute, 2021). Of course, motivating and creating interest, and fluency among young learners of Indigenous languages requires resourcefulness and modern technology.

Discussion

As a result of Indigenous youth engagement within community, Indigenous youth are now identifying culturally-responsive learning as a way of changing historically ineffective language and culture programs (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Williams & Tracz, 2016). Culturally-responsive learning is more than infusing Indigenous language and culture perspectives into community activities (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010); culturally-responsive learning includes explicit goals of supporting multilingual and multicultural practices in community, a reform of pedagogy, and a shift in community climate and cultural values (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017). As part of community, educational establishments whose purpose is to serve Indigenous youth should be prioritizing Indigenous youth perspectives into curriculum. Culturally-responsive learning while at school should bring Indigenous youth into the discussion of how language learning should occur at the same time strengthening youth identity (Williams & Tracz, 2016). The role of Indigenous youth within their Indigenous communities is revitalized and reclaimed through Indigenous wisdom, values and practices (Hare et al., 2011). Culturally-based and culturally-

relevant learning provides a context for Indigenous youth to connect to their Indigenous identity. Spiritual ceremony is a means to learn their Indigenous language (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2011; McCarty & Lee, 2014). To create a world of Indigenous language warriors, culturally-relevant models should connect to culture and should inform Indigenous youth on ways to address decolonization (Hare et al., 2011; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017).

With the values, attitudes and learning intentions of Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of learning and understanding), second language acquisition methods, models, and learning conditions are useful for school-aged Indigenous language learners. Current literature can inform effective program and curriculum design in teaching Niitsitapi language concepts and lifeways. With emphasis on Blackfoot youth, developing new technology-based language learning models such as podcasts supports increased knowledge in areas of Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) storytelling and Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of knowing and understanding). The conceptual framework and content in the creation of values-based, language-responsive storytelling podcasts may encourage Niitsi'powahsin language learning during and after the podcast.

Maanitapi Recruitment and Podcast Listening Responses

The selection and recruitment of the four Maanitapi participants was/is relational as I know all participants personally. The four Maanitapi were previously known to me as former students (now young adults) through Niitsi'powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot) language classes, through community language activity, and all have kinship ties to me through ancestral lineage. Through email, I invited each youth to participate. Once the invitation was accepted, I sent the consent form, engagement questions, and podcasts (1 long; 1 short) to the youth participant. All interactions were by electronic means.

The following are questions given prior to the listening portion of the podcasts. Maanitapi were asked to make comment on some or all the questions.

1. After viewing the podcast(s), what connection did you feel to the podcast? What connection did you make with what the Elders and Knowledge Keeper was sharing?
2. What did you see as being positive about the podcast(s)? What is an area that required improvement?
3. What could be improved about the podcast(s)?
4. What type of marketing and sharing strategies do you think would help promote these podcasts to Indigenous youth?
5. Do you have any other thoughts/concluding comments?

The following themes were drawn from Maanitapi responses. Responses for Questions 1 and 2 are bundled together and address values-based, language-responsive learning.

Connection and Relationship

All the Maanitapi (youth) participants addressed a connection and/or relationship to family, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, community, spirit, animals, natural resources, storytelling. Maanitapi shared that family history and ancestral lineage was extremely important to connecting to all other beings in their world. Through their family, Maanitapi made strong connection to Elders and Knowledge Keepers whose messages they kept close to their hearts. One Maanitapi stated that the teachings of the Elders and Knowledge Keepers are significant because a youth may not have parents or grandparents in their home (or in close proximity) to provide valuable guidance. What stayed in one Maanitapi's heart is that "Elders want to see a good life come to you."

Identity

Maanitapi were adamant that the Elders' and Knowledge Keepers' storytelling and values-based language learning provided context affirming their identity as Niitsitapi (the First People). Ancestral lineage and family names were prominent in the responses. Maanitapi stated that their Blackfoot names provided a way for Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa (Creator) to recognize them as Niitsitapi. One such Maanitapi did not want their identity being formed by the hurts, pains, and intergenerational trauma created by Indian Residential Schools. This Maanitapi stated that these layers of trauma could be alleviated by acknowledging the Blackfoot ways of knowing and thinking. This Maanitapi also accepted knowledge as a means of survival for a collective Blackfoot people. They also acknowledge the foresight by our ancestors to know the importance of transferred rights in relation to ceremony, name-giving, and storytelling.

Awareness

Maanitapi acknowledged and accepted that from past choices (sometimes in negative form), they gave closer attention to the value-based stories of Elders and Knowledge Keepers. By acknowledging disconnection to Niitsitapia'pii, one Maanitapi stated that feelings of loss and poor mental health had occurred. This feeling was lessened by connection to the story where a Maanitapi had lost their belief system. An awareness was created of their own personal circumstance and to reconnect with family and friends as positive supports nestled in a safe environment. What I, as the researcher, found remarkable within this Maanitapi loss of identity, was still being able to show compassion towards the Indigenous collective (i.e., Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women).

Recognition

Maanitapi believe it is time for them to be recognized as Niitsitapi. Maanitapi also believe it is time for Niitsi'powahsin to take its place beside other Indigenous languages by being

recognized throughout the nation. They want the outside world to welcome, recognize, and acknowledge Niitsitapi ways of knowing and believing. A different form of recognition is way of learning. Maanitapi shared that the way Elders and Knowledge Keepers told their stories (Blackfoot to English in smaller interchanges), allowed for increased understanding of Niitsi'powahsin as the translation and transition between the two languages was a quicker process.

Responses for Questions 3, 4, and 5 are bundled and allow Maanitapi to comment on the method of learning (listening to a podcast) and how it could be shared with other Maanitapi (included Niitsi'powahsin podcast's influence on their language learning journey).

Mini-Language Lessons

Based on the story that Elders and Knowledge Keepers were sharing, mini-language lessons were developed to support Maanitapi in their usage of Niitsi'powahsin. These Niitsi'powahsin mini-language lessons began with the value. Each values-based sentence by the Elder and Knowledge Keeper was spoken in Blackfoot then repeated in English. Maanitapi stated that listening for phrases helped hold attention to the podcast and having the word deciphered help to remember the word. Elders and Knowledge Keepers who provided a deeper or extended definition of the word support Maanitapi in their remembering the words. One Maanitapi wrote that in-person language learning is sometimes not a reality "You almost need to have learning our Blackfoot culture and language as a full-time job; that is the only way I can think of it as working in today's world."

Podcasts as Technology

Maanitapi stated that podcasts are a helpful learning tool and are convenient to listen to while walking, driving, or at home. They stated that technology is in our lives therefore we should use it as a means of learning. However, some Maanitapi found the podcasts longer than 45 minutes didn't hold their attention; the longer ones could be shortened to address this. Maanitapi again acknowledged that not all youth have Elders and Knowledge Keepers at hand making this method of values-based, language-responsive learning necessary. Accessibility to language learning through podcasts is good as some Maanitapi listen to podcasts throughout the day. As one Maanitapi stated "I consider it my modern-day tipi teaching." Podcasts recognizing Blackfoot people and the stories they tell to be a vital connection to language and to have our stories captured and available is important. Overall, Maanitapi stated that the podcasts were well done including the introductory and background music included. They added that the recordings were clear at most times but made comment regarding the volume changing throughout one recording; while it may have good sound quality using headphones, without headphones the sound was low and volume needed readjustment.

Maanitapi stated that social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, QR codes, Spotify) are good ways to promote the podcasts with the public. Other means of promotion would include tribal newspapers (print and online) or linking it with other developed language learning applications already in use. One Maanitapi brought to attention the use of logo stickers that would represent the podcast which could be distributed by the podcaster. Maanitapi recommended developing a YouTube page which would allow interaction between youth and the podcaster with possibility of developing a Blackfoot speakers' community.

Maanitapi made additional or other comments based on their experience of using in-person and technology as a means of connecting to Niitsi'powahsin and Niitsitapia'pii. Maanitapi considered seeing the Elder speak in-person is best, watching a video of the Elder next

best, with listening as an acceptable means of language learning. Whichever means is chosen to share Niitsi'powahsin, having Elders and Knowledge Keepers share stories is "vital" to Maanitapi wishing to connect with Niitsitapia'pii. As one Maanitapi said "I think more stories like the ones in the podcasts should be spoken because youth can learn new ideologies and values in an educational but interesting way."

One Maanitapi felt that the interviews were too scripted and wanted a more natural conversation between the Elder or Knowledge Keeper and the interviewer in keeping with the traditional ways of connecting and engaging between two people. Another Maanitapi liked the podcasts but wished there was an accompanying transcription³⁴ so that it could be followed while listening. Maanitapi asked whether there was a possibility of sharing video³⁵ of these same stories and mini-language lessons. Maanitapi were grateful for this language learning opportunity and felt that podcasts are an important tool for youth.

My research was intended as a pilot supporting Maanitapi (youth) in improving their well-being while learning language. According to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016), research suggests that at-risk youth acquire more benefits from experiential or active learning. Does listening to podcast imbedded with values-based, language-responsive learning fit into this category of experiential or active-learning? I would argue it does as it requires Maanitapi to search and find, select, and then listen to the podcasts. Additionally, connection to family-based and individual-based activities may counteract negative elements of a youth's life and support feelings of positivity and well-being (Greenberg & Lippold, 2013). Thus values-based, language-responsive Niitsi'powahsin podcasts offers Maanitapi a flexible means to language learning. This mode of language learning provides Maanitapi access to Niitsi'powahsin when and as needed.

³⁴ A verbatim transcription of the interviews was not part of this research but may be added to the podcast in the future.

³⁵ Video-recording of these interview was done simultaneously as the audio-recordings. However, the intent of this research was to podcast these interviews.

The development of values-based language lessons for youth, firstly by pre-teaching words that they will encounter in story, and secondly by discovering Niitsi'powahsin through storywork, encourages immediate use of Niitsi'powahsin language phrases. As the podcast developer, I felt the most valuable insight was when Maanitapi expressed phrases such as:

“After listening to the [Blackfoot] phrases, I believe I can say them correctly”

“To be able to hear Piikani Elders speaking Blackfoot and sharing stories is such a gift that this podcast provides.”

Aakokakiaanistsiiway (Giving Advice for the Future)

Throughout the years working in education, I have had the privilege of engaging with Niitsitapi (the First People) Elders and Knowledge Keepers as they advance Niitsitapi Mokaksin (Blackfoot ways of knowing) and Niitsi'powahsin (speaking and understanding Blackfoot language) within community. On the way to developing Sooksipaataapiisin (a good life), it is through their vision that Niitsi'powahsin knowledge and content, relationships, and sacred teachings occurred.

As a result of events that sparked negative attention (community violence involving youth and young adults) and positive response (community elementary and junior/senior high school implementing an Indigenous centred character-building program), Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers gathered (June 2017) to discuss Niitsitapi values they deemed important for our community. Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers gathered to translate non-Indigenous values to Niitsi'powahsin by adding, expanding, and enhancing other relevant values from Niitsitapia'pii.

Niitsitapi Mokaksin, the way of learning and understanding the world through Blackfoot perspectives, aligns itself with Indigenous research methods and methodologies. Indigenous epistemologies are participatory, relational, transformative, and support culturally-responsive practise such as Pommakssin (transfer of knowledge). Indigenous research methods and methodologies are a means of resistance, self-determination, and sovereignty. In their efforts, Indigenous people are placing their own ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy at the forefront creating powerful narratives in and for academic/non-academic communities. This is significant for present day Indigenous people as it means *I can be both Indigenous and scholarly*. Does this signify a reconciliation between academic institutions and Indigenous scholars? Not yet.

Indigenous scholars are still required to manoeuvre through academic requirements and prove that Indigenous methods and methodologies honour Indigenous knowledge and understanding.

Niitsitapi narrative and storytelling is supported by and through Indigenous research. Indigenous research methods and methodologies were born from a place of struggle and resistance to the colonial/eurocentric/western ideologies and their narrative which placed Indigenous people in the margins of humanity. In the books and articles I have read, one thing remains true: Indigenous research must be reciprocal. Indigenous research about Indigenous peoples should benefit Indigenous peoples. Through Niitsi'powahsin, Blackfoot people call on Indigenous researchers to embrace Niitsitapi Mokaksin permitting the researcher “to nurture and nourish Indigenous knowledge and to open decolonizing spaces so that as Indigenous researchers we can acknowledge the many facets of knowledge bestowed upon us by different people with the expertise they have” (Smith, 2013).

Meyer (1998), a Maori language speaker and researcher, shows how principles of Indigenous ways of knowing support language revitalization (to which I comment from the perspective of a *Piikanakii*):

Spirituality and knowing – the cultural context of knowledge (p. 22): For Niitsitapi, cultural context of knowledge was traditionally found in ceremony and in some homes; Indian Residential Schools³⁶ did much to destroy Niitsitapi axiology, ontology, and epistemology.

Cultural nature of the senses – expanding notions of empiricism (p. 22): For Niitsitapi, this too was lost during the era of Indian Residential Schools; the ability to live with and on the land and to develop all five sense was admonished by church staff.

³⁶ Indian Residential Schools were boarding schools developed by the Canadian Government to systematically assimilate Indigenous peoples into the predominant white society (Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Indian_residential_school_system, May 28, 2021)

Relationship and knowledge – the notion of self through other (p. 23): This concept was/is strong with Niitsitapi. Kinship was fought for as a means of saving family members from the harmful effects of Indian Residential Schools; today, as young people come into ceremony, they form a strong bond of relationship and kinship to their ceremonial family.

Utility and Knowledge – the ideas of wealth and usefulness (p. 23): Niitsitapi learn for the sake of learning and understand for the sake of understanding. *Iistiiyiik* – listen to everything and *Aokakio'sit* – be aware as one day you may need the information.

Words & knowledge – the idea of causality in words (p. 25): This principle is deep-seated with Niitsitapi; the belief that words are so powerful that you can hurt someone and, if not used carefully, can rebound and hurt the speaker (or speaker's family).

Body/Mind Question – alternatives to the illusion of separation (p. 26): At first glance, this was a difficult principle to align with Niitsitapi ontology and epistemology, however, the best example is “*Nistoowako 'k...*I am.” Niitsitapi align their spirit by first telling *Naapi Natosi/Iihtsipaitapiyo'pa* who they are. This puts relationality at the core of our existence. The mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual power is sought through *Pommakssin*.

Niitsitapia'pii epitomizes the differences between Indigenous epistemologies and eurocentric/western worldviews. Niitsitapi concepts of truth, reality, values, are renewed through

Niitsitapi Mokaksin. In the words of Siksikaitsitapi Elder Herman Yellow Old Woman “Culture is strong but we cannot preserve it without the language. Are we in control when our children aren’t speaking the language? We can do more, and we don’t do enough. Given to me at home and in community. We are taking action at all levels” (personal communication, May 31, 2021).

Language reflects the philosophical system of a people. Niitsi’powahsin evokes and describes the relational perspective of Niitsitapiiksi and is a mirror of the sacred world of the Niitsitapi. Niitsitapia’pii is the Niitsitapi life; it is the world of the sacred – a world that is called into being by the people’s words. Language holds the knowledge, the content, and the relationships that constitute the sacred way of life, the “good heart” of the people (Bastien, 2004, p. 128).

Indigenous scholars understand that language is an action, allows for reflexivity, connects humanity to purpose and meaning, creates consciousness, transmits knowledge and culture, is a repository for collective knowledge including the ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy of Indigenous peoples (Bastien, 2004; Little Bear, 2009; Kipp, 2000; Pepion, 1999; Still Smoking, 1997).

Darrell Kipp (2000, p. 7), colleague and scholar from Aamskaapiiikani (South Peigan/Blackfeet), provides a powerful context to language revitalization when he states, “our languages can serve us to the end of time, because they were with us in the beginning of time”. Indigenous languages connect Indigenous people to their ancestors and contribute to the building of their conceptual and theoretical frameworks (Bastien, 2004; Chilisa, 2019).

We have an inherent right to our Piikani/Blackfoot language. We have the inherent right to our traditional Piikani/Blackfoot culture. This is guaranteed to all Indigenous peoples through the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action along with the United Nation Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples. “Language learning takes time and practise

and through time will build strong, creative identities for Piikani children and community members” (Peigan Board of Education, 2021, para. 1).

The power of Niitsi’powahsin and values-based language learning may become the greatest influence on youth well-being in our community. Language can define our experiences. Too often the language heard in our communities is that of grief and loss, suffering and violence, pain and anguish. If we are to change the narrative language to a positive one filled with stories and lessons of Niitsitapi Mokaksin, would it then change how our communities see their world?

We know that the world will be a much different place when our children become adults and take responsibility for our community. We must now decide what we want our children to know and what traditions to carry from our ancestors (Peigan Education Committee, as cited in Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, 2000, p. 11).

My research aims to create change in our Piikani community. With the support of Piikani Elders and Knowledge Keepers who introduce values-based language learning from their current and ancestral knowledge, Maanitapi (youth) participate in Pommakssin (transferred knowledge) that encourages, elevates, and supports those willing to listen. The Late Piikani Elder Allan Pard states that learning through traditional storytelling is full of parables; lessons that require one to search for meaning and, when found, can gain knowledge from. With focus and attention paid to Maanitapi, values-based Niitsi’powahsin may lead them to Sooksipaatapiisin (a good life).

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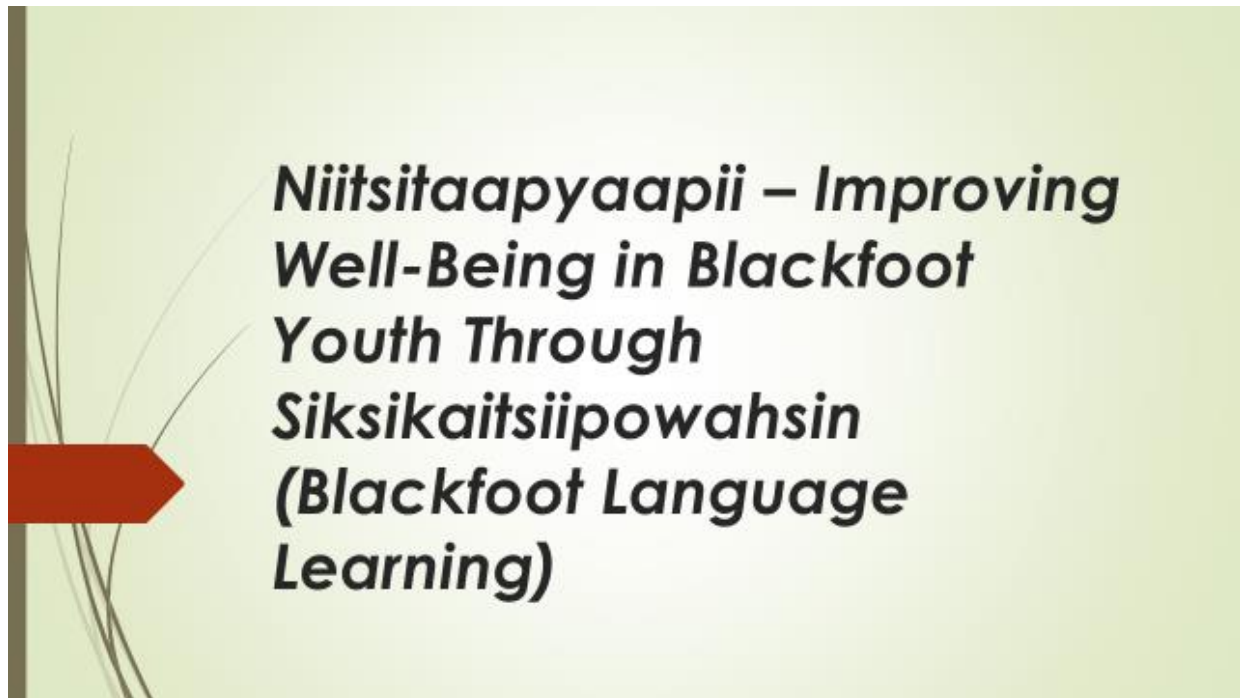
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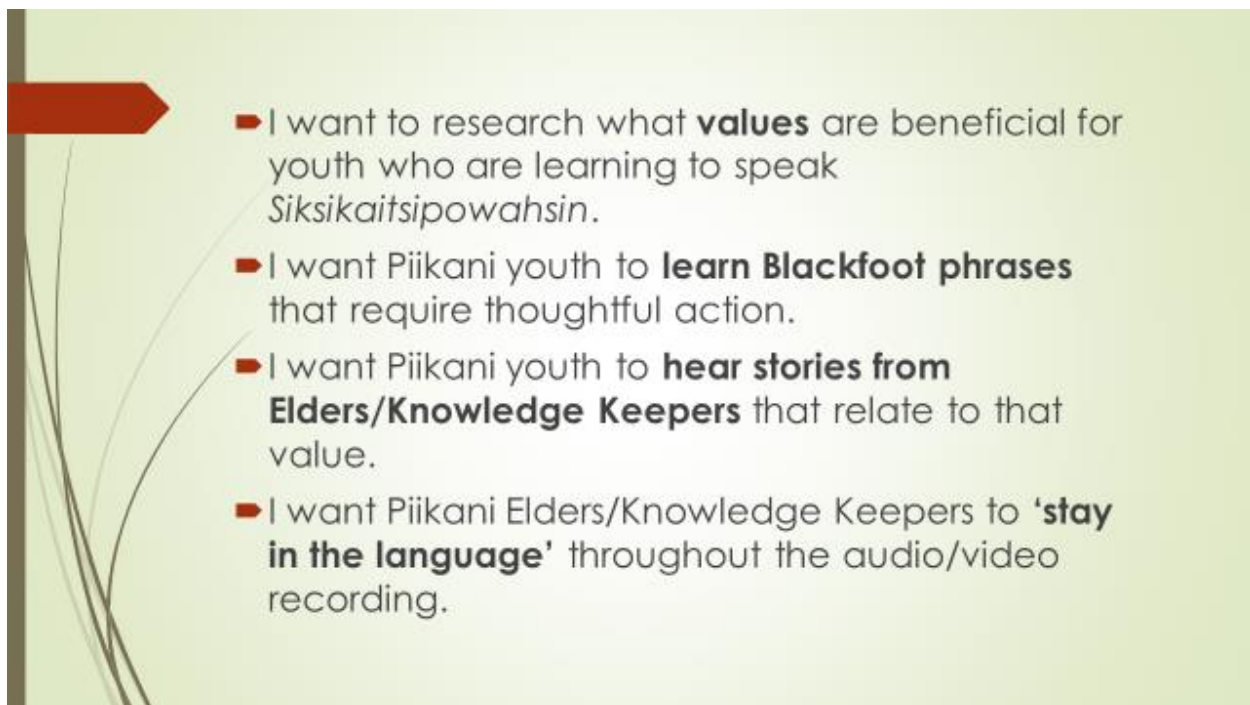
Appendix A

Presentation Slides – First Engagement Session with Blackfoot Elders and Knowledge Keepers


Slide 1



Slide 2




Slide 3



- ▶ I will use values, Blackfoot phrases, and stories to create an audio-recording which will be used in a podcast.
- ▶ Podcasts will be available on the internet for all Blackfoot people to use
- ▶ An example of each will be provided:


Slide 4




Value – Aispommotsii'yop

- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) niskaan – I'm going to help my friend.
- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) niksista – I'm going to help my mother.
- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) ninsta – I'm going to help my father.
- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) naahs – I'm going to help my grandmother or grandfather.
- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma pookaak – I'm going to help this child.
- ▶ Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma omahkitapiik – I'm going to help this Elder.

Slides 5 & 6



- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma sahkoomapii – I'm going to help that boy.
- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma akiikoan – I'm going to help that girl.
- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma aissksinima'tstohki – I'm going to help this teacher.
- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma aisokinaki - I'm going to help this doctor.
- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma iyinnakiikoan - I'm going to help this policeman.
- Nitaakspoomowaa(wa) oma ???? - I'm going to help the ceremonialist.



- Nitsspommowaawa naahs –
I helped my grandmother or grandfather.
- Nitsspommowaawa niksista – I helped my mother.
- Nitsspommowaawa ninsta – I helped my father.
- Nitsspommowaawa niskaan – I helped my friend.

Slide 7

Storytelling – What story can youth listen to that supports aispommotsii'yop?

- George First Rider gives information the [Hard Buffalo Stone](#)



Slide 8

Final product – A Podcast

- To support Piikani language revitalization, each Elder/Knowledge Keeper will be asked for 2 things:
 1. Create 10 phrases using your value of choice.
 2. Tell a story based on your value. This story will be audio recorded. The recording can be any length from 10 – 30 minutes.
 3. The phrases and story will be combined to create a podcast.
 4. This podcast will be placed on the internet for all to access.
 5. This is an example of a podcast.

Slide 9

Indigenous Language Revitalization Voices from the Land

Anishinabek/Ojibwe - [Voices from the Land](#)

nêhiyawêwin Cree - [Reclaiming Our Language Challenge](#)



Slide 10

Elder/Knowledge Keeper Questions

- What values are beneficial for Piikani youth?
- How do Elders/Knowledge Keepers express values-based knowledge?
- How do Elders/Knowledge Keepers use storytelling?
- How does values-based storytelling benefit youth well-being?

Appendix B

Podcast Link and Screenshots of each page

<https://crowshoelisa.podbean.com/>

The screenshot shows a web browser window with two tabs: 'Publish Episode > Niitsi'powahsin' and 'Niitsi'powahsin (Blackfoot Lang...'. The address bar shows 'crowshoelisa.podbean.com'. The PodBean logo is in the top left, with a search bar and 'Share' and 'Follow' buttons. The main heading is 'Niitsi'powahsin (Blackfoot Language Learning) and Youth Wellbeing'. Below the heading is a paragraph: 'Niitsi'powahsin is speaking the language of the Blackfoot people and is a powerful means of connecting to Niitsitapia'pii (Blackfoot values and ways of knowing). This podcast introduces the listener to values-based language learning through the storytelling and language lessons as shared by respected Blackfoot Elders.' Below the text is a 'Listen on:' section with a circular icon containing a green play button.


The screenshot shows a web browser window with two tabs: 'Dashboard > Niitsi'powahsin (E)' and 'Wallace Yellow Face - (Sookskina...'. The address bar shows 'crowshoelisa.podbean.com/e/wallace-yellow-face-sookskina-big-face-chief/'. The PodBean logo is in the top left, with a search bar and 'Share' and 'Follow' buttons. The main heading is 'Wallace Yellow Face - (Sookskina - Big Face Chief)'. Below the heading is a paragraph: '4 days ago'. Below the text is a 'Likes' section with a heart icon, a 'Download 2' button, and a 'Share' button. The episode cover art shows a silhouette of a teepee against a sunset sky with the text 'Niitsi'powahsin Blackfoot Language Podcast Hosted by Lisa Crowshoe - Pikanaaki'.

Dashboard > Niitsi'powahsin (B) x Eric Crow Shoe (Nitaaksikiowai' p x +

crowshoelisa.podbean.com/e/eric-crow-shoe-nitaaksikiowai-piiyi---lone-charger/

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4 days ago

Eric Crow Shoe (Nitaaksikiowai'piiwi - Lone Charger)

Likes Download 3 Share


Type here to search 1°C 6:18 AM 11/8/2023

Dashboard > Niitsi'powahsin (B) x Shirlee Crow Shoe (Misamiinissk x +

crowshoelisa.podbean.com/e/shirlee-crow-shoe-misamiinisskim-long-time-buffalo-stone/

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4 days ago

Shirlee Crow Shoe (Misamiinisskim - Long time Buffalo Stone)

Likes Download Share


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Dashboard > Niitsi'powahsin (B... x Herman Many Guns - Soowatsii x +

crowshoelisa.podbean.com/e/soowatsiitaapitaopii-sitting-behind-eagle-tail-herman-manyguns/

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4 days ago

Herman Many Guns - Soowatsiitaapitaopii (Sitting Behind Eagle Tail)

Likes Download 1 Share


Type here to search 1°C 6:21 AM 11/8/2023

Dashboard > Niitsi'powahsin (B... x JoAnn Yellow Horn - Inaaksipista... x +

crowshoelisa.podbean.com/e/joann-yellow-horn-inaaksipistaakii-little-owl-woman/

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4 days ago

JoAnn Yellow Horn - Inaaksipistaakii (Little Owl Woman)

Likes Download 1 Share

Type here to search 1°C 6:22 AM 11/8/2023